Five Love Languages: Assessment of Marital Satisfaction in African American Couples

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FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES:
ASSESSMENT OF MARITAL SATISFACTION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN COUPLES

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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in

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by
Freddricka Carter Lee
B.S., Louisiana State University, 2017
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Abstract

This mixed-methods study examined marital satisfaction among five \((n = 10)\) heterosexual, African American married couples. In particular, this study examined how acknowledging a partner’s love language (Chapman, 1995) can affect these couples’ level of marital satisfaction. The participants were native to the South and ranged from 26-55 years of age. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data revealed couples were satisfied with their marriages. Although only marginally significant, the findings also revealed acknowledging a spouse’s love language was positively related to higher levels of marital satisfaction. Seven themes emerged throughout the interviews, namely communication; financial stability; understand a spouse’s needs; spirituality and religion; outside influences; society’s view of Black marriages; and room for growth and improvement. In general, the findings reveal that in spite of difficulties, strong African American marriages exist.
Introduction

While there is a substantial amount of research on marital satisfaction (Fye et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2019; Karney, & Bradybury, 2020; Salavani et al., 2020), less studies have examined marital satisfaction in African American marriages. Although African Americans place a strong value on marriage, the rates of marriage among African Americans do not reflect this. According to Chambers and Kravitz (2011), African Americans have the lowest marriage rates in America. In 2019, there were 137,758,000 married couples in the United States (U. S. Census Bureau, 2019). White Americans make up 82% of that total number, whereas African Americans make up only 9% of that total number (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The “disproportionately low marriage rate” among African Americans is the result of multiple factors (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011, p. 648), such as economical changes or cultural changes.

Over time, the reasons for marriage have changed. During the 17th century, the purpose of marriage was to gain capital, construct political alliances, and organize the division of labor (Coontz, 2004). During this time, spousal roles dictated women be homemakers and men be the primary breadwinners for the family (Cherlin, 2014). Eventually, couples began to marry for what Cherlin (2004) calls the individualized marriage, where couples married for love, companionship, intimacy, and more personal reasons. This shift in expectations for “personal and family happiness means it is more difficult for marriages to work” (Dickson, 1993, p. 477). Today, it is common for women to be an active participant in the workforce while being a spouse, mom, friend, sister, daughter, and other roles (Newman & Newman, 2016). According to Geiger and Livingston (2019), 88% of Americans list love as the most important reason to get married, and this shift in the institution of marriage led to divorce becoming more prevalent (Cherlin, 2004). Couples had more freedom in their marriages and no longer felt the pressure to
remain with someone for financial stability. This shift also led couples to view their marriage in terms of emotional satisfaction.

**Problem Statement**

Over the last fifty years, marriages have generally experienced significant changes, such as marrying for personal happiness, the division of labor, and more wives working outside of the home (Burgoyne et al., 2010; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Mariani, 2020; Olson, 1972; Philliber & Hiller, 1983; Sweeney, 2002). Several years ago, Phillips et al. (2012) acknowledged that while scholars know much about the outcomes of African American marriages, we know less about enduring African American marriages. Research tells us that children thrive when they are in a two-parent married home with low conflict (Moore, 2002); therefore, it is important that African American children and adolescents receive healthy marriage models. DeFrain and Asay (2007) stated strong marriages are central to having a strong family. Families are responsible for providing material needs, as well as providing the nurturance and socialization that molds individuals to be able to possess the skills required to have a successful relationship (Perry, 2013). Per Chambers and Kravitz (2011), strengthening African American marriages will not eradicate all problems facing the African American community, but it may help remedy some of these problems.

The purpose of this study was to explore how knowing their love language affects marital satisfaction in African American marriages. This study fills the gap in the literature by exploring perceptions of marital satisfaction in African American marriages. If the results of the study demonstrate acknowledging and understanding one’s love language is an effective way to strengthen marital satisfaction, this intervention can be applied in the professional practice setting to promote and strengthen marital satisfaction—which ultimately strengthens marriages.
Theoretical Perspective

Stinnet and DeFrain (1985) developed the family strengths model, which provided strong qualities of thriving families (DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Dew et al., 2017). These family strengths were commitment, displaying appreciation and affection, positive communication, time spent together, spiritual well-being, and having resiliency with stress and crisis (DeFrain, & Asay, 2007). According to DeFrain (1999), when families are committed, there is no doubt among family members that the family is their priority. Members of strong families express their love for each other often (DeFrain, 1999). Communication is an important factor in any relationship (parent-child, sibling, romantic, etc.). DeFrain (1999) mentioned, “Communication does not always produce agreement” (p. 10), but strong families discuss their differences and attempt resolution or agree to disagree. However, for many Americans the desire to engage in personal activities is so great that it is difficult for families to gather to eat meals together (DeFrain, 1999). This was true in 1999 and may be more valid today with the increase in social media and technology. However, strong families tend to make time for each other and spend more time together (DeFrain, 1999). According to DeFrain (1999), families view spiritual well-being as being connected to each other and “sacred to us [families] in life” (p.11). Resiliency is the last quality of strong families. Concerning this quality, DeFrain (1999) stated “strong families are not immune to stress and crisis…” but “they possess the ability to cope with stress effectively” (p. 11).

Family-Strengths Approach

There are three reasons why a family strengths approach was foundational to this study. The first reason is that the purpose of this study was to assess if knowing one’s love language affects the marital satisfaction in African American marriages, hence creating a stronger
marriage. The next reason was to fill a gap in the literature. Many articles suggest that there is a lack of research on strong African American marriages (e.g. Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Chaney & Fairfax, 2013; DeFrain, 1999; Perry, 2013; Phillips et. al, 2012). Therefore, it was beneficial to conduct a study that focused on strengthening African American marriages by using the family strengths perspective. DeFrain and Asay (2007) mentioned that by focusing on the deficits that families face, researchers often disregard “that it takes a positive and optimistic approach in life to succeed” (p. 3). Lastly, many of the qualities that compose the family strengths model are components of Chapman’s (1995) five love languages.
Review of the Literature

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction relates to a husband and a wife being individually and collectively happy with all aspects of the marriage (Nourani et al., 2019). Nadolu et al (2020) defined marital satisfaction as “An individual’s global evaluation of the marital relationship” (p. 1), whereas Thenmozhi (2015) defined marital satisfaction as an individual’s perception of happiness and support experienced from their spouse. According to Amato and DeBoer (2001), when a marriage is satisfying, the chances for divorce decrease. It is imperative that when one or both members of a couple are no longer satisfied in the relationship that they communicate this to one another. A marital problem addressed has a greater chance of rectification than a problem not addressed. When couples are able to manage their differences, they report higher levels of satisfaction in the relationship (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011).

Marital satisfaction influence by factors such as demographics, health, and spirituality. Bryant et al. (2008) found that gender, race, and socioeconomic status influenced marital satisfaction. Lower levels of marital satisfaction were generally associated with women than men (Bryant et al., 2008). Bryant et al.’s (2008) study reported that among men, education had a negative association with marital satisfaction; but among women, education was unrelated to marital satisfaction. The female participants in this study who were married for less than 10 years reported higher levels of marital satisfaction than those who were married for 21 or more years (Bryant et al., 2008). Conversely, male participants married for 11-20 years reported lower levels of marital satisfaction than those who were married for 21 years or longer (Bryant et al., 2008).

In their study, Fincham et al. (2011) examined the effects of spirituality experiences and marital satisfaction. Couples completed measures to evaluate their spirituality, religiosity, and
marital satisfaction (Fincham et al., 2011). The study revealed married men and women who reported high levels of spirituality also reported high levels of marital satisfaction (Fincham et al., 2011).

**African American Marriages**

Slavery minimized the strength of African American marriage and family life (Pinderhughes, 2002). During this tragic time in American history, it was against the law for slaves to marry, and in states where slaves could marry and did marry, the small amount of freedom they had was stripped away (Pinderhughes, 2002). In regard to this, Lendhart (2016) stated “Marriage, something denied them during bondage, provided both a vehicle for securing other civil rights—such as work, fair wages, or familial autonomy—as well as an avenue through which their overall fitness for full citizenship could be demonstrated or performed” (p. 351). After the abolition of slavery, structural, demographic, and micro-level factors threatened the African American family. According to Lendhart (2016), “research by historians and legal scholars, such as Katherine Franke, suggests that Reconstruction-era marriage laws often functioned more to reassert control over former slaves than to affirm their intimate choices and new status as citizens” (p. 354).

A major structural level issue occurred with the shift in employment for African American individuals (Dickson, 1993). As Cherlin (1998) mentioned “during the 1990-1991 economic recession, African Americans were the only large racial-ethnic group that suffered a net loss of jobs,” whereas “Whites, Hispanics, and Asians each gained thousands of jobs” (p. 149). Research from Cready et al. (1997) revealed the significant effect that being able to provide for one’s family and be the breadwinner of the household has on African American males. When these males are not able to provide financially for their families, they feel as though
they are not ready for marriage and women view them as unmarriageable (Cherlin, 1998; Dickson, 1993). Pinderhughes (2002) found that when African American men have stable employment, they are “twice as likely to marry as men who do not” (p. 273). James (1998) also mentioned that when men have a positive economic stance early in adulthood, they are more likely to marry earlier in life.

A major demographic shift that influenced African American marriages rates is the gender imbalance. According to Dickson (1993), since the 1800s, Black females outnumber Black males, and a significant number of Black men are in prison (The Sentencing Project, 2020). An influential micro-level issue that affects African American marriage rates is the socialization of black girls and boys (Brown et al, 2010; Dickson, 1993). Many Black children are reared in single-mother, female-headed households, which suggests girls reared in these homes may be taught to focus on being independent and self-sufficient (Dickson, 1993; Ridolfo et al, 2013). According to census data, 27.7% of households in the U.S. are single-mother headed households (U.S. Census, 2019). On the other hand, peers or males outside of the home that generally socialize boys may lead to these males developing a hustler or player mentality (Dickson, 1993). Both of these forms of socialization have the ability to have a negative influence on marriage.

Black men and women are trying to establish and maintain healthy, stable relationships, but they face difficulty in doing so (Dickson, 1993). According to Cherlin (1992), stable marriages still exist among African American couples, but these marriages are rare. There are two reasons why strong African American marriages get little attention. One reason is that many perceive African American marriages in a negative light (Cherlin, 1998; Marks et al. 2008). Another reason is that African Americans are less likely to marry than other races (U.S. Census,
In 2019, there were 112,441,000 White individuals that were married and 11,735,000 Black individuals (U.S. Census, 2019). Compared to White Americans, Black Americans are less likely to marry and less likely to stay married (Dixon, 2009). There are several factors to consider when thinking of African American marriages, including partner characteristics, thoughts about marriage, religion and spirituality, strengths, and weaknesses (Chaney et al., 2016; Fincham et al., 2011; Kelly et al., 2013; King & Allen, 2009; Marks et al., 2008; Moore et al, 2021; Perry, 2013).

**Ideal Partner Characteristics**

In order for researchers to understand African American marriages, it is critical to understand what African Americans seek in a potential spouse (King & Allen, 2009). However, save for a few exceptions (Best et al., 2015; Chaney & Francis, 2013), few studies have examined mate selection among African Americans. In Perry’s (2013) study, African American males described characteristics of reliability, honesty, trustworthiness, and consistency as making their ideal partner attractive. Strength or a strong woman was another characteristic that men associated with the ideal marriage partner (Perry, 2013).

There is not much research on African American women’s ideal partner characteristics; however, according to King and Allen (2009), African American women seek partners who have the same level of education and occupation as themselves or higher. In their research on monogamy, Best et al (2015) revealed African American women desire their partner to have a nice physical appearance and respectful personality. Thus, African American women believe that they deserve a partner who works just as hard as they do, has the ability to maintain financial stability, is physically attractive, and is kind and respectful. (Best et al., 2015; King & Allen, 2009).
Attitudes toward Marriage

Many factors influence African American men’s attitudes toward marriage, such as age, financial stability, and experiences from peers’ marriages (Harris, 2011). Perry (2013) revealed that men who were 25 or younger had less favorable attitudes toward marriage compared with men who were 26 and older. Lincoln et al (2008) also found older, financially stable males were more in favor of marriage. One possible reason why younger men are not as involved in purposefully trying to maintain the quality of the relationship or showing interest in marriage could be due to the lack of experience, competence, and confidence. Men whose financial earnings were low displayed less favorable attitudes toward marriage than those whose financial earnings were middle class and higher (Perry, 2013). Men whose parents were not married or were married and divorced showed less favorable attitudes toward marriage than those whose parents were married (Perry, 2013).

In contrast to the attitudes that males have toward marriage, King (1999) revealed mixed findings in African American women’s attitudes towards marriage. Participants who had higher levels of education and income had more positive thoughts about marriage compared to those with less education and lower incomes (King, 1999). Renee (2018) shared similar findings—African American women with high levels of education are more likely to marry than those who have less education. According to King (1999), older participants were more likely to have positive attitudes towards marriage and negative attitudes from younger participants could be due to the lack of opportunities to witness married couples interacting. Furthermore, unmarried women expressed their career was more important than having a successful marriage (King, 1999). In contrast to King’s (1999) findings, the African American, married, career women in Barnes’ (2015) research discussed how they balanced career, motherhood, and marriage.
Religion and Spirituality

Over twenty years ago, DeFrain (1999) associated spirituality and religion with family strengths. African Americans are renowned for their high religiosity and there is a significant association with religion and marriage (Kelly et. al, 2013; Marks & Chaney, 2006). Perry (2013) found religion and family of origin had a major influence in African American men’s thoughts toward marriage. Vaterlaus et al. (2015) found spiritual guidance was a high priority in African American marriages. Religious activities (i.e., prayer and church attendance) provide a safe haven for many African American families (Chaney, 2008a; Fincham et al., 2011). Religion is one of the fundamental values of the African American community (Chaney, 2008b; Fincham et al., 2011). Historically and today, many African American families turn to religious institutions to receive help during troubling times (i.e., paying bills, food assistance, etc.) (Nelsen & Nelsen, 2014; Pollard & Duncan, 2016). The same is true as it relates to marriage among African Americans. African American couples in enduring marriages generally reported frequent church attendance, praying often, and believing their faith was important (Moore et al, 2021; Phillips et al., 2012).

Strengths and Weaknesses

Although African Americans are least likely to marry, these families have several inherent strengths. Over four decades ago, renowned Black scholar Robert Hill identified five strengths of the Black family, namely strong kinship bonds, work orientation, adaptability of family roles, achievement, and religious orientation (Hill, 1972). In the decades that followed, various scholars began to focus on the strengths of African American families (James, 2020; Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993; Marks et al., 2008; Pollock et al, 2015; Royse & Turner, 1980) instead of examining them through a lens of pathology (Moynihan, 1965). Research in this
area has found communicating with family members or a religious leader during times of trouble (Vaterlaus et al., 2015) and prioritizing family needs (Cowdery et al., 2009) as strengths of the African American family.

Scholars have identified two factors that contribute to the instability of African American marriages. The first factor relates to the gender imbalance, as there are considerably more African American women than men (King & Allen, 2009). In 2018, there were over 1,000,000 more African American women than there were men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Furthermore, 22 million African American women comprise 52% of the total African American population compared to 21 million African American men who comprise 48% of the African American population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). One of the main reasons for this is the high death rates of African American men, which is twice that of African American women (King & Allen, 2009). The second factor relates to the lack of marriageable African American men (Bridges & Boyd, 2016). Men who are not viewed as marriage material are typically plagued with criminal records and a lack of financial resources (Bridges & Boyd, 2016; King & Allen, 2009). The millions of Black men in prison also greatly diminish the number of available African American men (King & Allen, 2009, The Sentencing Project, 2020).

**Gary Chapman’s Five Love Languages**

In his book titled *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*, Gary Chapman (1995) provided five phenomena that can strengthen the satisfaction in a marital relationship. Chapman (1995) called these phenomena the five love languages: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. Chapman (1995) proposed that every individual has an emotional love tank and that this love tank fills when spouses speak each other’s love language. Chapman (1995) claimed that a greater level of
satisfaction can be achieved in relationships if a spouse knows what act of love makes their spouse feel most loved (Bunt & Hazelwood, 2017). Egbert and Polk (2006) mentioned partners could merge the application of love languages. For example, if one individual’s love language is quality time and the other spouse’s love language is acts of service, the couple can spend quality time together by performing these acts of service (Egbert & Polk, 2006). Chapman’s (1995) love languages relate closely to characteristics in the family strengths model, specifically displaying appreciation and affection, positive communication, time spent together (DeFrain, 1999).

**Words of Affirmation and Couple Communication**

Words of affirmation is one way to express love. This consists of utilizing positive words and compliments to build a spouse’s self-esteem. Couple communication refers to couples sharing thoughts and feelings with each other (Jones et al., 2018). Chapman (1995) provided several types of expressions that can affirm: encouraging words, kind words, and humble words. Chapman (1995) used the example of a husband telling his wife that she was an “excellent writer” (p. 43). These words encouraged her because she spent years becoming a writer. Chapman (1995) described kind words as tender and genuine, depending on the tone in which a couple says them. For example, “I love you” can be an “expression of love” but if phrased as a question “I love you?” can cause tension between the couple (Chapman, 1995, p. 45). Chapman (1995) described humble words as making “requests, not demands” (p. 47). When one makes a request of their spouse, it affirms the spouse’s “worth and ability” (Chapman, 1995, p. 48). There is a link between couple communication and relational outcomes, specifically behavioral communication (Jones et al., 2018). Stronger communication skills are associated with stronger relationship satisfaction (Carlson et al, 2020). In certain cases, words of affirmation can reinforce behaviors or actions that one would like to continue receiving, specifically in the division of
household labor (Carlson et al., 2020). On the other hand, couples can use words to redirect and bring attention to areas that one individual may deem needs changes.

**Quality Time**

Quality time is when a partner gives their undivided attention to the other partner. In describing quality time, Chapman (1995) lists several factors to consider such as togetherness, quality conversation, learning to talk, personality, and quality activities. Quality time can be a difficult display of love for most people because it requires an individual to focus solely on one’s spouse with no distractions. Many find quality time difficult because it is not their love language, or they have the day-to-day responsibilities of life overshadow their need for quality time with their partner (Hughes & Camden, 2020). Contemporary married couples can fall into this trap with the consistent push for social media, having different hobbies, and different schedules, etc. Couples with children should be intentional for making time for their spouse. The responsibility that comes with taking care of children can easily lead a couple to lose sight of their marriage. Quality time is not a regular feat that comes into a relationship; it has to be designated and intentional.

**Receiving Gifts**

Receiving gifts is a visual symbol of love and is common in romantic relationships (Chapman, 1995; Komiya et al., 2019). Gifts consist of different shapes, sizes, and prices and can be appreciated even if the gift is not large or cost a lot of money. For example, if one cannot afford a fine dining experience, one can simply prepare a candlelit dinner at home. Many love crafts or handmade items because they show that the giver put time into it and they designed it with the recipient in mind. Purchased items, on the other hand, also bear the same consideration of taking time to put into the selection, and there is an appreciation for the sacrifice of money. A
gift can do wonders for a relationship (Komiya et al., 2019). Gift giving shows that one’s spouse is paying attention to details during the couple’s day-to-day interactions. Komiya et al. (2019) found that periodic gift giving positively relates to commitment among married and unmarried couples.

**Acts of Service**

Acts of service is the expression of love by doing something that one’s spouse would like them to do (i.e., mowing the lawn, washing dishes). If acts of service are one’s primary love language, then the key to having that love language fulfilled is to make a request, not a demand (Chapman, 1995). Acts of service are very critical to relationship satisfaction, especially marriages (Carlson et al., 2020). Acts of service are rooted in sacrifice and consideration. Even though many men and women work outside the home, when the workday concludes, it is a societal expectation that the wife cook; clean the house; tend to the children; and be sexually intimate with her spouse. This additional work is what Sociologist Alie Hoschchild referred to as “the second shift” (Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2020; Hoschchild, 1990). All of these duties typically take place while the husband gets to unwind from his day. A husband stepping in to provide assistance with the cooking, cleaning, and entertainment of the children can help tasks complete faster and with less strain on the wife, which can lead to greater marital satisfaction (Carlson et al., 2020). Acts of service, regardless of which party performs it, refers to anything that alleviates pressure from the other and shows that the marriage is a partnership and not a one-sided affair.

**Physical Touch**

The last love language Chapman (1995) provides is physical touch. Physical touch is a longtime, proven act of communicating emotional love that is not always sexual (Chapman,
Research has found there is a strong connection between sexual satisfaction and relationship quality (Sprecher & Cate, 2004; Stanik & Bryan, 2012). Touch is a powerful sense that can build or break, comfort and reassure (Hughes & Camden, 2020). When a marital relationship is sexually satisfying, this is a benefit of marriage; however, sexual dissatisfaction is a cost of marriage (Stanik & Bryant, 2012). Physical touch can be a reinforcement that assures support. For example, something as simple as a pat on the back, kiss on the forehead, or holding hands can communicate depths of love. Physical touch gives a transfer of energy that brings solace in situations from minor to dangerous.

**Summary of the Literature**

Spouses have certain roles and responsibilities that they should adhere to advance the growth, protection, and development of their marriage. DeFrain (1999) stated that marriages are central to the family. Therefore, society should strive to strengthen all marriages, especially marriages among African Americans because they have the “lowest marriage rate of any racial and ethnic group in America” (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011, p. 648). It is possible that marriages can be stronger by learning and acting upon a spouse’s love language. This review has discussed several factors that affect marital satisfaction in the African American community. Rigorous research on the five love languages and marital satisfaction can contribute to understanding how to build strong African American marriages. If couples can be satisfied with their marriages, the family is more likely to maintain a state of equilibrium concerning their roles, and thus produce a positive home environment.

**The Present Study**

This study explored African American marriages through a strengths-based perspective. As previously mentioned, there is a plethora of information about the outcomes of African
American marriages (Phillips et al., 2012), but we know less about enduring African American marriages (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the literature and inform professionals who want to promote strong marriages in the African American community. The following questions were foundational to this study:

1) What are African American couples’ perceptions of their marital satisfaction?
2) How might acknowledging the love languages of their spouse affect the satisfaction of married African Americans?

Furthermore, the researcher formed the following three hypotheses:

a) Couples would perceive their marital satisfaction positively after applying the love languages to their marriage for two weeks.

b) Couples EMSS scores would increase after applying the love languages to their marriage for two weeks.

c) Couples would report higher levels of marital satisfaction after applying the love languages to their marriage for two weeks.
Methods

Research Design

This study used a one-group pretest-posttest mixed-method design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach allowed the researcher to gain insight on the subject, make a meaningful contribution to the academic literature, and provide recommendations for future interventions.

Sample

To qualify for participation in the study, couples must have met two criteria. The first criteria was that both individuals must identify as African American. The second criteria was that the couple be a married, heterosexual couple. The age range of the participants ($n = 10$) in the study was 26-55. All of the participants identified as Christian. All of the participants had at least some college education with the highest education level being a Master’s Degree. Additional demographic information, such as the length of time married, number of children, number of marriages, parent demographics, and the primary love language of each participant are provided in Table A. To protect their identity, the names of all participants were changed.
Table A. Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Time Married</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th># of Marriages</th>
<th>Parent demographic</th>
<th>Love Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>9.5 months</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Acts of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>9.5 months</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Acts of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Words of affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawn</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Acts of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Acts of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>1 biological, 3 stepchildren</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Physical touch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Words of affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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The researcher used nonprobability sampling. Specifically, this study used purposive sampling because the couples must meet criteria to participate in the study. This study used snowball sampling whereby the researcher recruited 10 participants (five married couples). Because this was a mixed-methods study and the interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed, the period did not allow for additional participants.
Procedure

Recruitment

The participants were obtained through a snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling allowed the researcher to locate participants who were able to refer African American married couples who they thought would be willing to participate in the study. Prior to the start of the study, the researcher spoke with family, coworkers, church members, and other acquaintances about the research study. Some of these individuals mentioned they might know couples who were interested in participating. The researcher received contact information from three couples. The researcher contacted each of the couples and briefly discussed the purpose of the study and the tasks associated with participation in the study. All of the couples said that they would like to participate and that the research could send them additional information, including the consent form via email. The researcher also asked each couple if they would recommend other couples who may have been willing to participate. Two of the couples provided contact information for an additional couple. The researcher contacted those couples and briefly discussed the purpose of the study and those two additional couples agreed to participate as well.

Data Collection

Once recruited, participants received the informed consent and demographic forms via email. [See Appendix A-INFORMED CONSENT] [See Appendix B- THE DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE]. Upon the receipt of the participant’s consent and demographic forms, the researcher emailed participants to schedule a time and date with each married couple to conduct a telephone meeting or an in-person meeting, or Zoom meeting depending on what worked best for the couple. All of the couples chose to have a Zoom meeting. The meetings were audio and video recorded. Couples participated in a collective interview, which allowed the researcher to
observe the couples’ interactions and social cues. Some of the observed cues were smiling at each other, touching each other on the arm in gesturing for that spouse to speak or answer a particular question, and staring in awe at the response of the other spouse. During each meeting, the researcher conducted a short interview to assess each couples’ perception of their marital satisfaction. [See Appendix C-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS]. Prior to each interview, the researcher emailed the Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale – Shortened Version (EMSS) [See Appendix E- EMIRATI MARITAL SATISFACTION SCALE—SHORTENED VERSION] and the link to Chapman’s (1995) “Love Language Test”. [See Appendix D-THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES TEST].

Each individual completed the “Love Language Test” (Chapman, 1995) during the Zoom meeting. Upon the discovery of the primary love language, the couples were urged to apply this information to their marriage for the next two weeks (specifically, 14 days) at least twice a week. Some couples completed the EMSS during the Zoom meeting and others completed it once the meeting ended. All of the couples returned the EMSS responses via email after the Zoom meeting. Two weeks after the initial meetings, the researcher contacted the couples via email to have them complete the post-EMSS. All of the couples completed the post-EMSS and emailed their responses back to the researcher.

**Primary Love Language Application**

Applying the love languages to marriage meant that couples would take the time to identify their love languages through Chapman’s (1995) “Love Language Test” and articulate that love language to their spouse. This in turn shed light on the needs of the spouse and created a responsibility of the other party to accommodate. The application of the love languages resulted in altered behavior and consideration to support the emotional needs of each spouse. The
model was set for it to be a dyadic exchange as both parties worked on satisfying their spouse’s love language.

**Measures**

*Marital Satisfaction Interview*

A brief, seven-question dyadic interview occurred at the start of the Zoom meetings. The questions were open-ended and allowed the participants to provide detailed responses. The researcher created the interview questions to assess participants’ perception of their marital satisfaction. [See Appendix C].

*Love Language Test*

One of the measures used was Chapman’s (1995) “Love Language Test”. Although a best-selling book for over 20 years, there has been little empirical research using the model (Egbert & Polk, 2006). The online measure consists of 30 items that determine an individual’s love language and upon completion, automatically generates an individual’s primary love language. Each item contains two statements. The individual taking the test must choose which of the two statements he or she agrees with more. Examples of the items include, “I like taking long walks with you;” “I like it when you give me gifts;” “I like to hold hands with you;” or “I like to go places with you;” “I feel loved when you tell me how much you appreciate me;” or “I feel loved when you enthusiastically do a task I have requested.” Egbert and Polk (2006) found Chapman’s (1995) love languages have the potential to be a “valid, usable instrument when tested with a larger sample” (p. 25). [See Appendix D]

*Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale – Shortened Version (EMSS)*

The second measure was the Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale – Shortened Version (EMSS) (Dodeen & Al-Darmaki, 2016). This seven-question rating scale examined a couple’s
marital satisfaction. The measure utilized a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Examples of the items were: Making efforts to listen to each other, my spouse is sensitive to my emotional needs, and satisfied with the intimate relationship. This test had “high construct validity and internal consistency reliability estimates” (Al-Darmaki et al., 2016, p. 1703). [See Appendix E]

**Analytic Plan**

Once all interviews were conducted and the pre- and post- EMSSs were received, the researcher analyzed and compared the results of the pre- and post- marital satisfaction scales by using paired samples t-test to estimate the mean differences in pre and post EMSS scores. The researcher also evaluated marital satisfaction based on the perceptions that participants gave about satisfaction in their marriage during their interviews. First, the interviews were transcribed. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher coded the interviews using themes that were generated based on the five love languages and the EMSS responses. The unit of analysis used to analyze the transcriptions was commonly used words and phrases that were mentioned across all of the interviews. Once the interviews were coded, the researcher compared the responses from the interviews to the responses that were given on the pre- and post- EMSS and created themes.
Results

Qualitative Phase

The following question guided the qualitative phase: What are African American couples’ perceptions of their marital satisfaction? To assess couples’ perceptions of their marital satisfaction, couples participated in a seven-question interview. The average length of each interview was approximately thirty minutes. The interview consisted of questions asking the couples to rate their marital satisfaction on a numerical scale, areas that could use improvement, the effect of outside influences, changes in marital satisfaction, length of marriage, and thoughts on African American marriages in society today.

“Let’s Straighten It Out” (Communication)

Fifty percent of the participants (30% of the women; 20% of the men) stated that communication was a huge factor related to marital satisfaction. When asked how their marriage could improve, Claire said:

“I always say communication can always be better because it's like the biggest thing in marriage. So communication can always be better.”

(Claire, 26)

Claire’s husband stated that at the end of the intervention, he hoped to see communication improve within their marriage.

When asked the same question, another couple responded by saying communication in their marriage could improve:

“I'ma say communication.”

“Yeah, I was just literally thinking the same thing myself communication, we need to work on that.”

(Sean, 30 and Crystal, 41)
“Money, Money, Money” (Financial Stability)

Several of the participants mentioned finances affected their marriage. One participant mentioned financial stability could improve within his marriage. He also mentioned financial instability had a negative effect on the communication in the marriage.

“Yeah, finances, because I mean like last year we both uh were furloughed, you know, and so that like took a total or hard bearing on our financial stability... of course, it weighs on the marriage because for me not being able to work that financial peace all, it weighed in on our communication because I'm kind of battling depression. I don't really want to talk. And so for my wife being a more emotional person who wants to talk and it kind of took a bearing on us because I wouldn't say she took it personal, but I can see where it would have been taken personal.” (Paul, 35)

Another participant stated that financial stability was a significant area in which his marriage needed improvement:

“That does definitely plays a part...this financial issue that it does cause a marriage. It’ll cause a wedge in the marriage.” (Sean, 30)

This couple also mentioned finances as being an area of their marriage that could use improvement:

“Like doing finances together just being on the same page in every aspect of marriage. True. Rather than you know me and you, we go back and forth some time with the finances...and just being more open when it comes to doing finances, listening instead of shutting you out.” (Denise, 30 and Shawn, 28)

While the other couples mentioned that financial stability was something that could improve in their marriage, one couple mentioned finances in a different aspect:

“...I always was brought up in a home where, you know, irregardless of who's making what or how much you're making, you put those funds together and you make it happen you and you put it together. Y'all come to the table and y'all decide, you know, how are we going to spend this money. But to me to dismiss anybody that is willing to, you know, to go to work to put forth an effort to provide for them for their family until they can perhaps.” (Noonie Cat, 53 and Cowboy, 53)
“Smooth Operator” (Understand a Spouse’s Needs)

When asked how their marital satisfaction has changed over the years of their marriage, one couple responded by saying that they are still learning each other:

“We’re still trying to like learn each other, you know, um always I think you have to figure out how to learn you mate. You know what makes them happy. What, ticks them off, you know. Uh, I mean, we’ve been married a long time, but you still be learning stuff 31 years later.” (Cowboy, 53)

When asked what they hoped to have gained at the end of the intervention, one participant responded with the following:

“A better understanding of what each other needs.” (Rudy, 39)

“Pray Together-Stay Together” (Spirituality/Religion)

Two of the five couples mentioned spirituality as having a significant influence on their marriage. One couple mentioned that praying and reading the Bible more was something that could improve in their marriage:

“And I can do a better job leading like praying together like reading the Bible together....It's like we we want the same goal, but we want to accomplish in two different ways...I can do better lead in prayer and Bible study and just being more open…” (Denise, 30 and Shawn, 28)

Another couple mentioned that religion played a significant role in their marital satisfaction and the longevity of their marriage:

“Why a lot of people don't last, you know, you got to talk man, you got to pray together.” (Cowboy, 53)

“It's probably more of a spiritual journey as well. Even though religiously, you know, we've always even we grew up in a church as kids. It's a, you know, it's just what we did.” (Noonie Cat, 53)
“Mind Your Business” (Outside Influences)

Three of the five couples mentioned that outside influences had an effect on their marital satisfaction. Two of those couples specifically mentioned the positive effect their families had on their marriage:

“Both of us do come from strong family backgrounds...with both parents in the house and so Even though my parents’ marriage and his parents’ marriage because I do feel like I grew up, you know, literally, his were much different from ours.” (Noonie Cat, 53)

“Yeah, I do think that they play a big part because like he said too, I want to talk about it on the flip side with having parents who are both married. Like my parents are married, have been for a while. His parents have been married for a while. So I think the standard of their marriage has helped us see you know like more so, like, what, what can I say? Like it makes you fight for your marriage because when you see how long your parents have been together. It's like you when you can see that somebody can make it encourages you to do the same.” (Claire, 26)

“Uh I say it influences a lot. Just because we started off with having family heavy involved that was even how we even met. Uh, her and my sister are best friends. I think you know that uh through the wedding, but that's what kind of made it ought was because I kind of thought I could skate on through the relationship was skate on through communication sometimes just because I could. Kind of depend on my sister to, kind of, say hey, you know, pitch this to her, tell her this and that. So that kind of got in a way and kind of made problems along the line. Uh. A little bit later. So I say, uh. Yeah, it plays a big part.” (Jeff, 29)

One participant mentioned how family may not always have a positive influence on their marital satisfaction:

“A lot that definitely does it a lot because it’s best for us to have our own you know place not surrounded by a lot of family because it's a lot of naysayer especially, you know, on both sides. Like, you know, if, like, they may know that person in my family. My family feel like they know me a lot and so I feel like you know they have to protect me. By all costs, against my wife or whatever altercation, we may have so it's best for us to even have our own space to find it you know just basically to just live life for us. Instead of, you know, having somebody behind our back try to, you know, shadow us. To try to oversee us to see what it is that we’re doing all up in our business and everything. Um, and for us to have our private time, you know. Of course, we're married so and it’s just two people, not the outsiders, so that does play a factor.” (Sean, 30)
The other two couples mentioned that outside influences did not have a significant impact on their marriage:

“I don't...for me it doesn't play a major part in it the marriage. Outside influences.” (Rudy, 39)

“...we don't really let outside influences...We don't at all. That's something that was important from the beginning though...cause we see each of our like our parents, they have, they own you know Issues and stuff like that. So we don't want, you know, just want to do our own thing and not try to follow up behind what they're trying to do. (Denise, 30 and Shawn, 28)

“Keeping Up with the Joneses” (Society’s View of Black Marriages)

When asked about their thoughts on the portrayal of Black marriages in society today, one participant mentioned competitiveness:

“There's underlying need to compete. You know, everybody wants to be goals, you know, let's get this. Let's get that and truthfully, they're behind doors suffering in silence and so I think people need to just alert that just learn to appreciate their spouse for who they are and appreciate their marriage for what it is. So, and eliminate the need to compete, like, you know, people used to say, trying to keep up with the Joneses and the truth of the matter is the Joneses broke, too. You know they trying to survive. They're trying to keep their head above water. And so I think there's a lot of needs to compete out there.” (Rudy, 39)

Other participants mentioned specific issues between Black women and men that may deter them from marriage:

“I think that society looks at Black marriages as not being a marriage because a lot of black women been through too much. They don't want to be married no more as well as black men don't want to step up to the plate to be married, they just rather shack up so it’s looked down upon to some people. But when I see Black marriages and Black love it makes me smile and happy because we are very loving people. We just got to get our mind trained to get out of the mentality that everybody else sees us in.” (Crystal, 41)

“There are a lot of uh strong marriages that still exist in the African American uh community...Here lately, what you have seen is that They have a lot of I'm going quote my hands like this independent Black women. And educated black women that sometimes uh the way that they're presenting. It doesn't make the, the African American man I'll say want to draw near them. Intimidate them. Sometimes it frightens them away.” (Noonie Cat, 53 and Cowboy, 53)
One participant mentioned the recent trends of Black marriages:

“It's funny, because I think nowadays; they're starting to promote more like you know like I have the saying black love black excellence. So like that's becoming a thing, but um at first society really didn't put a good view of black marriages out there because, you know, a lot of times from the black community, you didn't really see like it took us a while to kind of get back to a place where even now, young people are getting married so. I feel like the society kind of put a negative connotation on marriage for, you know, black people because it always show us like having babies out of wedlock or you see a lot of single family homes and you know the dad leaves and the mom having to raise a child by themselves. So on the black side; you kind of saw a lot of that as it pertains to like poverty and not really having like, you know, like living, kind of like what privileged almost, you know, because you kind of see that on the white side like they have the house the car, the family. The kids who go to these you know great schools and all that, but the family dynamic in the black homes is a little bit different. But I can say with our generation is kind of like it's changing that dynamic because you are starting to see more young black couples, you know, getting married and kind of putting that putting a good perspective out there about marriage now.” (Claire, 26)

One couple mentioned the rarity of Black marriages:

“Black marriages are viewed as um, like long lasting black marriages are viewed as rare. I know that for a fact Black marriages. People don't think that Black couples stay together that long. You don't have, I mean, I guess in the public side, you don't have many examples. True of strong black marriages.” (Denise, 30 and Shawn, 28)

“Grow to Glow” (Growth/Room for Improvement)

When asked the question “On a scale with one being the lowest and ten being the highest, how satisfied are you currently with your marriage?” three of the couples responded with a numerical value, but they also stated that there was room for growth:

“I will say, Hmm, seven and a half, because I know there's always room for growth.” (Claire, 26)

“I mean, no marriage any marriage. And that's why I wouldn't say our marriages is a ten because I feel like there should always be something that you're striving for, you know, once we get our finances straight then we should be….you should always be striving to maybe not perfect, but better some area.” (Rudy, 39 and Paul, 35)

“I say me...9. It ain't no 9. It is. No, you ain’t giving us no room to grow. It ain’t no 9. It is a 9, yeah. No, it’s not. Babe you still got a whole point to grow. A point. I need a ‘lil more room. I got a lot more growing to do. Well how satisfied are you? I'd give us like a seven or an eight. You said nine, that's like perfect. No ain’t nobody got no nine. That's
not perfect. I still got. I say, okay, eight and half to make you happy...Nine is. It's I ain't that good yet bruh.” (Denise, 30 and Shawn, 28)

Quantitative Phase

The quantitative phase was guided by the research question: How might consistently acknowledging the love languages of their spouse affect the satisfaction of married African Americans? The Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale-Shortened Version (EMSS) is a questionnaire that assesses a couple’s marital satisfaction (Dodeen & Al-Darmaki, 2016). The questionnaire measures the kindness to a spouse, attractiveness to a spouse, sensitivity to emotional needs, efforts in listening to each other, conflict resolution, fair treatment, and intimate relationship satisfaction.

Table 1 shows the frequency results for the pre-EMSS. According to the table, there are no missing values. The mean response for the statement “My spouse is very kind to me” was 3.5; the minimum response was 2 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “I am attracted to my spouse” was 3.9; the minimum response was 3 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “My spouse is sensitive to my emotional needs” was 3.5; the minimum response was 2 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “Making efforts to listen to each other” was 3.5; the minimum response was 3 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “Working hard to resolve our problems” was 3.7; the minimum response was 3 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “Treating each other fairly” was 3.4; the minimum response was 2 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “Satisfied with the intimate relationship” was 3.4; the minimum response was 3 and the maximum response was 4.
Table 1. Frequency Table from the Pre-Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of participant</th>
<th>My spouse is very kind to me</th>
<th>I am attracted to my spouse</th>
<th>My spouse is sensitive to my emotional needs</th>
<th>Making efforts to listen to each other</th>
<th>Working hard to resolve our problems</th>
<th>Treating each other fairly</th>
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</table>

Table 2 shows the frequency results for the post-EMSS. According to the table, there are no missing values. The mean response for the statement “My spouse is very kind to me” was 3.6; the minimum response was 3 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “I am attracted to my spouse” was 4; the minimum response was 4 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “My spouse is sensitive to my emotional needs” was 3.6; the minimum response was 3 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “Making efforts to listen to each other” was 3.8; the minimum response was 3 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “Working hard to resolve our problems” was 3.9; the minimum response was 3 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “Treating each other fairly” was 3.6; the minimum response was 3 and the maximum response was 4. The mean response for the statement “Satisfied with the intimate relationship” was 3.5; the minimum response was 3 and the maximum response was 4.
Table 2. Frequency Table from the Post-Test

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Post My spouse is very kind to me</th>
<th>Post I am attracted to my spouse</th>
<th>Post My spouse is sensitive to my emotional needs</th>
<th>Post Making efforts to listen to each other</th>
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A paired t-test (Tables 3 and 4) was run on a sample of 5 married couples (10 married individuals) to determine whether the intervention was effective at improving participants’ marital satisfaction at a significance level of $\alpha=.05$. 

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31
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<td>.13333</td>
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<td>3.9000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.31623</td>
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</tr>
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Table 4. Paired Samples T Test

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Table 4. Paired Samples T Test

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<td>.56765</td>
<td>.17951</td>
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</table>

Table 3 revealed the mean of the pre-test statement “My spouse is very kind to me” is 3.5, while the mean of the post-test is 3.6. The results show the mean of the post-test scores is higher than that of the pre-test scores. In addition, the result of Table 4 paired samples t-test show that the significant value (Sig.) of the means of pre-test and post-test assumed is higher than the level of significance (.591 > 0.05). After consulting to the hypothesis, this result fails to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, there is no significant difference between the means of the pre-test and the post-test.

Table 3 revealed the mean of the pre-test statement “I am attracted to my spouse” is 3.9, while the mean of the post-test is 4.0. The results show the mean of the post-test scores is higher than that of the pre-test scores. In addition, the result of Table 4 paired samples t-test show that the significant value (Sig.) of the means of pre-test and post-test assumed is higher than the level of significance (.343 > 0.05). After consulting to the hypothesis, this result fails to reject the null
hypothesis. Thus, there is no significant difference between the means of the pre-test and the post-test.

Table 3 revealed the mean of the pre-test statement “My spouse is sensitive to my emotional needs” is 3.5, while the mean of the post-test is 3.6. The results show the mean of the post-test scores is higher than that of the pre-test scores. In addition, the result of Table 4 paired samples t-test show that the significant value (Sig.) of the means of pre-test and post-test assumed is higher than the level of significance (.678 > 0.05). After consulting to the hypothesis, this result fails to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, there is no significant difference between the means of the pre-test and the post-test.

Table 3 revealed the mean of the pre-test statement “Making efforts to listen to each other” is 3.5, while the mean of the post-test is 3.8. The results show the mean of the post-test scores is higher than that of the pre-test scores. In addition, the result of Table 4 paired samples t-test show that the significant value (Sig.) of the means of pre-test and post-test assumed is higher than the level of significance (.081 > 0.05). After consulting to the hypothesis, this result fails to reject the null hypothesis. Based on these findings, there is a marginal significance level between the means of the pre-test and post-test.

Table 3 demonstrated the mean of the pre-test statement “Working hard to resolve our problems” is 3.7, while the mean of the post-test is 3.9. The results show that the mean of the post-test scores is higher than that of the pre-test scores. In addition, the result of Table 4 paired samples t-test show that the significant value (Sig.) of the means of pre-test and post-test assumed is higher than the level of significance (.168 > 0.05). After consulting to the hypothesis, this result fails to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, there is no significant difference between the means of the pre-test and the post-test.
Table 3 revealed the mean of the pre-test statement “Treating each other fairly” is 3.4, while the mean of the post-test is 3.6. The results show that the mean of the post-test scores is higher than that of the pre-test scores. In addition, the result of Table 4 paired samples t-test show that the significant value (Sig.) of the means of pre-test and post-test assumed is higher than the level of significance (.168 > 0.05). After consulting to the hypothesis, this result fails to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, there is no significant difference between the means of the pre-test and the post-test.

Table 3 demonstrated the mean of the pre-test statement “Satisfied with the intimate relationship” is 3.4, while the mean of the post-test is 3.5. The results show that the mean of the post-test scores is higher than that of the pre-test scores. In addition, the result of Table 4 paired samples t-test show that the significant value (Sig.) of the means of pre-test and post-test assumed is higher than the level of significance (.591 > 0.05). After consulting to the hypothesis, this result fails to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, there is no significant difference between the means of the pre-test and the post-test.

While none of the values is statistically significant, the results of the paired sample t-test for statement 4 of the EMSS showed marginal statistical significance. All of the mean values for the Likert scale responses increased slightly. Although the values were not statistically significant, the most significant increase in mean values was for the statement “Making an effort to listen to each other.” In the pre-test, the mean value was 3.5 with a standard deviation of .707 and in the post-test; the mean value was 3.8 with a standard deviation of .422. In conclusion, there is little statistical evidence that consistently acknowledging the love languages of their spouse increases their marital satisfaction. Two known factors could contribute to this finding.
First, the sample size is small, resulting in little statistical power. Second, in the pre-EMSS, for the most part, the couples were already satisfied with their marriages.
Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this one-group pretest-posttest mixed-method study was to explore how knowing their partner’s language affects marital satisfaction in African American marriages. This chapter includes a discussion of major findings as related to the literature on African American marriages and what implications may be valuable for use by professionals seeking to promote the strengthening of marital satisfaction—which ultimately strengthens marriages. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, areas for future research, and a brief summary concluding the research.

This chapter contains discussion and future research possibilities to help answer the following research questions:

1) What are African American couples’ perceptions of their marital satisfaction?
2) How might consistently acknowledging the love languages of their spouse affect the satisfaction of married African Americans?

The theoretical perspective chosen for this study was Stinnet and DeFrain’s (1970) family strengths model. The family strengths mentioned in the model were commitment, displaying appreciation and affection, positive communication, time spent together, spiritual well-being, and being resilient during stress and crises (DeFrain, & Asay, 2007). These family strengths are similar to Chapman’s (1995) five love languages, specifically words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch.

Several family strengths emerged as themes in this study, specifically communication and having resiliency with stress and crises. Based on self-reports from the couples in this study, they did not believe that their communication had reached a peak level. Stated another way, the couples who mentioned communication issues agreed there was room for improvement and
growth in their marriages. Furthermore, communication does not assume Black married couples will agree on every aspect in their relationship. Concerning this, DeFrain (1999) wrote, “Communication does not always produce agreement” (p. 10), but strong families discuss their differences and attempt resolution or agree to disagree. These couples demonstrated resilience because they placed more emphasis on resolving problems than focusing on the areas in which they disagreed.

In his work, Perry (2013) found men on the lower end of the economic spectrum were less favorable in their attitudes toward marriage; however, the findings of this study differed in a noteworthy way. Two of the male participants in this study mentioned finances in self-reports. Although the males in this study mentioned financial instability, they still reported high levels of marital satisfaction. One of the couples mentioned that after returning from their honeymoon, the husband lost his job and this placed their family in a financial crisis because they had to rely on a single income (the wife’s) to support the family. This particular husband also mentioned that he and his wife do not always agree about the finances, yet they generally work toward the same goal of financial stability. Another male participant mentioned the global coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic led to a furlough for him and his wife, and this disrupted their “financial peace” and led to their financial instability. This disruption not only caused communication issues, but also added stress to their relationship. Although this added stress could have led to the demise of their relationship, this couple was able to manage the stress and find ways to cope with the circumstances they were facing at that time. DeFrain (1999) stated that “strong families are not immune to stress and crisis…” but “they possess the ability to cope with stress effectively” (p. 11). These couples illustrated their effectiveness in managing stress and coping during times of financial instability.
In support of previous works, this study found that although there is less knowledge on the inner workings of African American marriages, satisfying African American marriages do exist. Couples in this study mentioned the current trends of Black marriages and Black couples having greater visibility in today’s society. Moore (2002) stressed the significance of children being in a two-parent married home and Perry (2013) mentioned that families should provide the nurturance and socialization that molds individuals to be able to possess the skills required to have a successful relationship. All of the couples in the study came from two-parent households and two couples specifically mentioned how their parents’ marriage positively influenced their own marriages. Stated another way, for these Black couples, the representation of a strong marriage in the home matters.

Vaterlaus et al. (2015) mentioned that African American men and women stated that spiritual advisors and family members were notable resources during marital crises. Similar to the findings of Vaterlaus et al. (2015), all couples in the current study identified as Christians and mentioned they could rely on their spirituality and family members to be an asset during marital hardships. One participant specifically mentioned the key to a long-lasting marriage is praying together. Another participant mentioned marriage was a “spiritual journey.” These couples believed their spirituality and religion were significant factors that contributed to the satisfaction of their marriages.

In his popular tome, Chapman (1995) suggested every individual has an emotional love tank that fills when spouses learn how to speak each other’s love language. He also affirmed individuals could have greater satisfaction in their marriage when they practice the actions that make their spouses feel most loved and appreciated (Bunt & Hazelwood, 2017; Chapman, 1995).
Learning one’s spouse is a continual process and one couple made this clear when they shared that even after 30+ years of marriage, they are still trying to “learn each other.”

**Interpretation of the Findings**

As expected, the concept of understanding each other and communication within the marriage was a primary theme across all five interviews. In some way, each couple mentioned the importance of communication on marital satisfaction. As the findings of this study highlight, knowing, acknowledging, and incorporating a spouse’s love language into daily interactions positively relates to increasing marital satisfaction. Although the marital satisfaction was high for all of the participants at the beginning of the intervention, once the love language was identified marital satisfaction slightly improved across all domains.

Chapman (1995) mentioned the love language of one spouse might not align with the love language of the other spouse. Surprisingly, two couples had the same love language. Chapman (1995) also mentioned that when the love languages do not align, obstacles could arise. For example, if one spouse’s love language is words of affirmation, a massage may not be as fulfilling as hearing the words, “I’m proud of you!”

Perry (2013) mentioned that men whose parents were not married or were married and divorced showed less favorable attitudes toward marriage than those whose parents were married. All of the participants of this study had parents who were married and from the statements of the participants, their parents were in successful or satisfying marriages. Based on the analysis from Perry (2013), this could be a possible reason for the participants’ favorable attitudes toward marriage. Pinderhughes (2002) argued women are more concerned about having financial security, whereas men’s expectations for the marriage are lower than the expectations of women. During the interviews for this study, the opposite seemed to be the case for several
couples. There were men who first mentioned being financially stable and all of the males appeared to be interested in the intervention and investing in their marriage. Despite Pinderhughes’ (2002) belief that “the state of African American marriage is regarded as grim and expected to get worse” (p. 273), the findings from the current intervention revealed there are satisfying African American marriages. Granted, these results are not generalizable for an entire population and have limitations, but there is a need for current research to evaluate if Pinderhughes’ (2002) belief is still accurate.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. The first limitation was the small sample size. There were only ten participants in this study. While this small sample size provided exceptional qualitative insight, a larger sample could have potentially provided significant quantitative findings. Egbert and Polk (2006) found Chapman’s (1995) love languages have the potential to be a “valid, usable instrument when tested with a larger sample” (p. 25). The second limitation was that all of the couples were satisfied with their marriage at the beginning of the intervention. When asked the question “On a scale with one being the lowest and ten being the highest, how satisfied are you currently with your marriage?” the lowest numerical response was a seven. The third limitation was that all of the couples were native to the South. This recognizes the findings may have been different if couples were from another geographic region, or if couples were from different geographic regions. The fourth limitation is there no way to measure how couples can apply the love languages to their marriage. Specifically, since there was no follow-up interview, the researcher was unable to inquire about the application methods of the love languages. The final limitation is that there was a short time frame for the couples to apply the love languages to their marriages. According to popular belief, it takes 21 to 30 days to
develop a habit (Clear, 2014), yet research reveals it can take an individual 18-254 days to form a habit (Lally et al., 2010). The intervention period for this study was only 14 days, which may not have been enough time for the participants to form a habit of applying the knowledge of their spouse’s love language to their day-to-day interactions within their marriage.

In spite of these limitations, this study has notable value. For one, knowing one another’s love language gave couples a better understanding of the needs and desires of their spouses. The couples were also able to interact with each other and answer questions that they may not have necessarily thought about before or that they may not have mentioned to each other prior to the interview. For academia, few research studies have examined Chapman’s five love languages (Bland & McQueen, 2018; Eckstein & Morrison, 1999; Egbert & Polk, 2006; Hughes & Camden, 2020). To my knowledge, this study is the only research study that has coupled Stinnet and Defrain’s (1985) research-based family strengths model with Chapman’s (1995) popular opinion five love languages and also examined the two with only African American married couples. Therefore, this study has provided a new, insightful perspective to the literature.

Implications

The main aim of this research was to acknowledge African American spouses’ perceptions of their marital satisfaction and to address if using Chapman’s (1995) five love languages could increase couples’ marital satisfaction. Although there was no statistical significance in the findings of the paired sample t-tests, one should not ignore the findings from the qualitative analysis. The qualitative analysis revealed that African American couples could have satisfying marriages; but there are still issues that arise within these marriages. The most prevalent issues that couples within this study mentioned were communication, financial instability, and understanding a spouse’s wants and needs. Considering couples’ responses from
the interviews, counselors, spiritual advisors, and other professionals could consider using concepts from Stinnet and DeFrain’s (1970) family strengths model along with Chapman’s (1995) five love languages to develop initiatives which promote communication, financial stability, and understanding a spouse’s needs and wants.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Several areas for future research on specific factors pertaining to marital satisfaction in the African American community could add to the findings in this study. For one, a qualitative study could lead to greater understanding regarding the role that financial instability plays in the marriages of African American couples. This is important as several participants’ associated financial stability with higher levels of marital satisfaction. Future research can also examine how unexpected events such as a pandemic, family illness, death, or loss of income place stress on Black marriages. Future research can use a quantitative design with a larger sample size, which could obtain statistical significance. In addition, to assess the effects of the intervention, the exclusion of couples highly satisfied with their marriages may have a different dynamic. Lastly, for the purpose of future research, the utilization of a random sample may allow the results of the study to be generalizable for an entire population of African American married couples.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to explore African American marriages through a strength-based perspective to determine couples’ perceptions of their marital satisfaction. The foregoing chapters presented a review of literature portraying African American marriages. The study examined how acknowledging the love language of their spouse affects the marital satisfaction. The research questions were examined through a mixed-methods approach. The qualitative
research question utilized semi-structured interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for more in-depth insight into the personal experiences of the couples’ marital satisfaction.

The findings of the intervention were not surprising. Despite the findings from previous research studies examining African American marriages, the findings of this study revealed African Americans have successful, satisfying marriages. All of the couples in the study mentioned areas in which their marriages could improve, but that did not equate to not being satisfied overall. More research on African American marriages could help in shifting the narrative from negative to positive.

This thesis contributes to the existing literature by providing evidence that satisfying African American marriages do exist. The principle qualitative findings indicated that the participants of the study perceived their marriages as satisfying. In fact, more research has examined strong African American marriages (Marks et al., 2008). The current study is noteworthy because it not only examined African American marital satisfaction, but also included the application of Chapman’s (1995) five love languages. The principle quantitative finding of this study, though not statistically significant, revealed that when Black married couples applied the five-love-languages method to their relationships, there was an increase in their marital satisfaction.
Appendix A. Consent Form

1. Study Title: Five Love Languages: Assessment of Marital Satisfaction in African American Couples

2. The purpose of this study is to assess the marital satisfaction of African American couples’ relationships and assess if the marital satisfaction changes upon use of Chapman’s (1995) Five Love Languages. The study will be conducted online through Zoom or in-person (whichever option works best for you) and you will spend approximately one hour completing an interview about how you perceive your marital satisfaction, the Five Love Languages quiz, and a brief questionnaire about marital satisfaction.

3. The benefit of this study is to increase positive awareness to African American marriages.

4. This study will be audio and video recorded.

5. Inclusion criteria: You are eligible to participate if you are legally married and identify as African American.

6. Exclusion criteria: You are ineligible to participate if you are not legally married or do not identify as African American.

7. There are no risks involved in participating in the study.

8. The following investigators are available for questions about this study: Freddricka Lee (225) 719-3886 or fcarte4@lsu.edu or Dr. Cassandra Chaney (225) 578-1159 or cchaney@lsu.edu.

9. Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.
10. Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

11. This study has been approved by the LSU IRB. For questions concerning participant rights, please contact the IRB Chair, Alex Cohen, at 225-578-8692 or irb@lsu.edu.

12. The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. By continuing to this survey, you are giving consent to participate in this study. Your information or biospecimens collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, may be used or distributed for future research.

_____ Yes, I give permission     _____ No, I do not give permission

Subject Signature: _______________________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________________________________
Appendix B. Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age
   18-25 ______
   26-35 ______
   36-45 ______
   46-55 ______
   56+ ______

2. Gender
   Female ______
   Male ______
   Prefer not to specify ______

3. Race
   Black/African American _____
   White _____
   Asian/Pacific Islander ______
   American Indian/ Native American _____
   Other ______

4. Ethnicity
   Hispanic _____
   Non-Hispanic ___

5. Marital Status
   Single _____
   Married _____
   Widowed _____
   Divorced _____

6. Religion
   Please Specify ________________

7. Education
   High School Diploma ______
   Some College ______
   Bachelor’s Degree ______
   Master’s Degree ______
   Doctorate Degree ______
Appendix C. Interview Questions

1. How long have you been married?
2. On a scale with 1 being lowest and 10 being highest, how satisfied are you currently with your marriage?
3. In what ways, if any, do you think your marriage can be improved?
4. How do you think your surroundings (family, friends, and societal standards) influence your marital satisfaction?
5. How has your marital satisfaction changed from when you first married to now?
6. What are your thoughts on the way that African American marriages are portrayed in society?
7. What do you hope to gain from participating in this study?
Appendix D. The Five Love Languages Test

Read each pair of statements and circle the one that best describes you.

1. I like it when you hug me.
   I like to receive notes of affirmation from you.

2. I feel loved when you give me practical help.
   I like to spend one-on-one time with you.

3. I like taking long walks with you.
   I like it when you give me gifts.

4. I feel loved when you hug or touch me.
   I feel loved when you do things to help me.

5. I feel loved when I receive a gift from you.
   I feel loved when you hold me in your arms.

6. I like to hold hands with you.
   I like to go places with you.

7. Visible symbols of love (gifts) are very important to me.
   I feel loved when you acknowledge me.

8. I like it when you tell me that I am attractive.
   I like to sit close to you.

9. I like to receive little gifts from you.
   I like to spend time with you.

10. Your words of acceptance are important to me.
    I know you love me when you help me.

11. I like the kind words you say to me.
    I like to be together when we do things.

12. What you do affects me more than what you say.
    I feel whole when we hug.

13. Several inexpensive gifts mean more to me than one large expensive gift.
    I value your praise and try to avoid your criticism.

14. I feel close when we are talking or doing something together.
    I feel closer to you when you touch me.

15. I know you love me when you do things for me that you don’t enjoy doing.
I like you to compliment my achievements.

16. I like for you to touch me when you walk by.
    I like when you listen to me sympathetically.

17. I really enjoy receiving gifts from you.
    I feel loved when you help me with my home projects.

18. I like when you compliment my appearance.
    I feel loved when you take the time to understand my feelings.

19. I feel secure when you are touching me.
    Your acts of service make me feel loved.

20. I appreciate the many things you do for me.
    I like receiving gifts that you make.

21. I really enjoy the feeling I get when you give me your undivided attention.
    I really enjoy the feeling I get when you do some act of service for me.

22. I feel loved when you celebrate my birthday with a gift.
    I feel loved when you celebrate my birthday with meaningful words (written or spoken.)

23. I feel loved when you help me out with my chores.
    I know you are thinking of me when you give me a gift.

24. I appreciate it when you remember special days with a gift.
    I appreciate it when you listen patiently and don’t interrupt me.

25. I enjoy extended trips with you.
    I like to know that you are concerned enough to help me with my daily task.

26. Kissing me unexpectedly makes me feel loved.
    Giving me a gift for no occasion makes me feel loved.

27. I feel loved when you tell me how much you appreciate me.
    I feel loved when you enthusiastically do a task I have requested.

28. I need to be hugged by you every day.
I need your words of affirmation daily.
Appendix E. Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale – Shortened Version EMSS

Name:

On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) rate your responses to the questions listed below.

1. My spouse is very kind to me. ________
2. I am attracted to my spouse. ________
3. My spouse is sensitive to my emotional needs. ________

4. Making efforts to listen to each other. ________
5. Working hard to resolve our problems. ________
6. Treating each other fairly. ________
7. Satisfied with the intimate relationship. ________
Appendix F. IRB Approval

TO: Lee, Fredericka Carter
LSUAM | Col of HSE | Social Work
FROM: Alex Cohen
Chair, Institutional Review Board
DATE: 04-Dec-2020
RE: IRBAM-20-0715
TITLE: Five Love Languages: Assessment of Marital Satisfaction in African American Couples
SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial Application
Review Type: Expedited Review
Risk Factor: Minimal
Review Date: 03-Dec-2020
Status: Approved
Approval Date: 03-Dec-2020
Approval Expiration Date: 02-Dec-2021
Expedited Categories: XXXXXXX
Requesting Waiver of Informed Consent: No
Re-review frequency: Annually
Number of subjects approved: 10
LSU Proposal Number:

By: Alex Cohen, Chairman

Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the
individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/research

Louisiana State University
131 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
O 225-578-5833
F 225-578-5983
http://www.lsu.edu/research
## Appendix G. Tables

### Table A. Participant Demographics

<table>
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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Time Married</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th># of Marriages</th>
<th>Parent demographic</th>
<th>Love Language</th>
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<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>9.5 months</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Acts of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Some college</td>
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<td>Acts of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>3 years</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Words of affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawn</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>3 years</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>39</td>
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<td>Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Some college</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Physical touch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Words of affirmation</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
<td>Words of affirmation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noonie Cat</td>
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<td>53</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Two-parent married household</td>
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<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Quality time</td>
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Table 1. Frequency Table from the Pre-Test

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<th>My spouse is very kind to me</th>
<th>I am attracted to my spouse</th>
<th>My spouse is sensitive to my emotional needs</th>
<th>Making efforts to listen to each other</th>
<th>Working hard to resolve our problems</th>
<th>Treating each other fairly</th>
<th>Satisfied with the intimate relationship</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>3.5000</td>
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<td>.31623</td>
<td>.70711</td>
<td>.52705</td>
<td>.48305</td>
<td>.69921</td>
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Table 2. Frequency Table from the Post-Test

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<th>Sex of participant</th>
<th>Post My spouse is very kind to me</th>
<th>Post I am attracted to my spouse</th>
<th>Post My spouse is sensitive to my emotional needs</th>
<th>Post Making efforts to listen to each other</th>
<th>Post Working hard to resolve our problems</th>
<th>Post Treating each other fairly</th>
<th>Post Satisfied with the intimate relationship</th>
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<td>4.0000</td>
<td>3.6000</td>
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<td>Post</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Std. Error Mean</td>
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<td>Working hard to resolve our problems</td>
<td>3.7000</td>
<td>10</td>
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Table 4. Paired Samples T Test

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
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<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Pre Satisfied with the intimate relationship - Post Satisfied with the intimate relationship</td>
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References


U. S. Census Bureau. (2019). *Selected social characteristics*.


VITA

Freddricka Carter Lee was born in Zachary, Louisiana. She began work as a social service analyst for the Department of Children and Family Services – Child Support Enforcement after receiving her bachelor’s degree from Louisiana State University. In search of gaining a deeper understanding of children and families, she decided to attend graduate school. She plans to receive her Masters this May 2021. Upon completion of her master’s degree, she will further pursue her career aspirations and explore other avenues of opportunities.