COMMUNICATING THE REALITY OF DATING
IN CHILDFREE, HETEROSEXUAL, PROFESSIONAL
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO NEVER MARRIED

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ABSTRACT

Communication related to the dating experiences of childfree, heterosexual, and professional African American women who never married were examined. Using an interview research method prescribed by Irvin Seidman, a sample of six women from this demographic participated in two separate in-depth interviews. The first interview covered career, family, and dating; the second addressed marriage, children, and parenting. Results generated three primary themes from across the data sample impacting this dating lifestyle: stable parental marriage examples, a career that enables singleness, and skepticism about marital happiness. Additionally, three secondary themes were identified from parts of the sample: a lack of the right partner, a lingering desire for children and spiritual/religious doctrine. The findings were theoretically aligned with the social construction of reality, whereby communication from a group of individuals sharing an experience establishes their situation’s authenticity versus upholding the perceived understanding held by society. Practical implications of depression, interracial dating and stressors offer additional understanding of this study. Further research through a larger study sample, as well as applying social learning theory through secondary analysis to examine modeling of the sample’s long-term parental marriages provide additional opportunities from this investigation. Furthermore, new research offering an African American male response to data, topics regarding emerging adults and a subsequent examination of a similar LGBTQ demographic may provide an interesting comparison in light of newly-legalized marriage
equality. In all, this research addressed and accounted for current limitations in existing literature on this subject matter.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the late Crystal Lorraine Dewberry, my best friend of 25 years. You were a true intellectual, purveyor of knowledge, and natural teacher. Your passing in my first month of doctoral study inspired me to stay the course during many challenges I faced in completing this program of study. In taking the path that should have been yours, I honor you!
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<td>CHAPAWN</td>
<td>Childfree, heterosexual, African American professional women who never married</td>
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the realm of couple communication, discourse surrounding the dating lives and intimate relationships of African American women with African American men are often underreported, misinterpreted, or marginalized. Lived accounts and true testimonies from African American women regarding these complex love encounters are most often limited or omitted in research (Banks, 2011). Very little is being examined regarding the current growth, particularly among childfree, heterosexual, professional African American women who never married (CHAPAWN) especially for those who are also over 35 years old. Increasing numbers of these women within the single population alerted us to a fascinating phenomenon surrounding their options in dating, along with their potential for marriage and family. The pool of available men leave nearly two-thirds of women, ages 20-29, and a third of women 30-44 unmarried (Glick & Lin, 1986). Moreover, the combination of higher rates of African American female education and income, along with growing incarceration and substance abuse of African American men resulted in 25% of African American women who may never get married (Dixon, 1998; King, 1999; Yeakey & Bennett, 1990). However, the growth in this particular group could marked a trend where personal choice supersedes traditional domesticity and a need to fulfill societal expectations. Regardless, the conversation about this developing phenomenon was ripe for attention. Such discourse should include the voices of these women reflected in academic scholarship. This clearly omnipresent issue deserves to be
addressed directly through the voices, (CHAPAWN) are significantly facing these challenges.

Discourse on this subject matter is particularly lacking in communication scholarship. Tanfer (1987) asserted that over the last 25 years, postponing marriage has become an emerging trend among never-married women. But, when examining this issue among African American women, the discussion seems to be more apparent in media broadcasts. For the most part, academicians have lagged behind news programs such as ABC’s Dateline and CNN’s Black in America, which have profiled this dating demographic in their news and featured programming. Therefore, given the current marital opportunities for professional African American women, as well as the current void that exists in the literature, awareness and a more clear understanding of dating within the CHAPAWN population is important.

The Phenomenon

Historically, intimate relationships between African American men and women have faced a peculiar set of circumstances. Staples (2007) argued that from the time of slavery in the United States, African American females have generally not depended on the economic resources of their African American male companions. Instead, these intimate relationships had been based on emotional investment, as no financial resources were available to African American women from African American men during the era of slavery. This resulted in a “unique trajectory of African American male-female relationships” (Staples, 2007). Dixon (2009) affirmed that a shift in power between genders began to emerge in the post-slavery United States within the African American male-female union. Over time, the shift weakened and diminished these partnerships. The shift prompted two key realities: the first being the independence and career prosperity of African American women, secondly, the employment
instability of African American males. As such, African American women moved from human capital to becoming productive individuals acquiring skills, building occupational knowledge, and securing education (Becker, 1964). However, these advances did not necessarily translate to gaining marriage potential.

The Yale University Study by Nitsche and Bruekner (2009) reported that African American women are twice as likely to never have been married by age 45, and twice as likely to be divorced, widowed, or separated as White women. It is estimated that among the 42% of African American women who are currently not married, almost 30% never will marry at all (Banks, 2011; Nitsche & Bruekner, 2009). As women rise in professional and economic ranks faster than men, African American women are the least likely to be advantaged by marriage in terms of shared economics in a domestic partner (Banks, 2011). The argument for female economic independence suggests that the reasons for shifts in marriage rates are primarily based on changes to women’s financial incentives to marry (Farley & Bianchi, 1987). For instance, African American career women have done better than their White female counterparts by attaining professional positions and income levels at a faster rate, constituting a larger portion of the African American professional community, and more than White females hold in the professional world overall. Herein exists an inference that African American women may have lower marriage rates because the economic incentives to marry are lower than those of White women (Lichter, LeClere, & McLaughlin, 1991). Moreover, there may be more than three million African American women without an available or desirable mate in the United States (Staples, 2007). Yet, few examinations have sought to identify other factors contributing to the lived dating experiences of these women. Such factors warranted an exploration into the dating experiences among
CHAPAWN. By exploring the dating lives of these women, an authentic awareness from their experiences can provide more insight into how they communicate about their experiences and identities.

Never-Married African American Women

Clarifying the dynamics of their single status remains important, as this “never-married” sector of heterosexual, childfree and professional African American women face numerous dating complexities. Never-married adults overall comprise a unique sub-group of the single population, as their experiences may differ from those previously married; they are more likely to define being single as a long-term lifestyle (Cockrum & White, 1985). Single women were often judged as less feminine, less loving, less nurturing, less sexually attractive, and more selfish. Oftentimes they are represented as possessing strong, independent personalities with anti-marriage positionalities (Cockrum & White, 1985). Alternatively, singlehood might provide a lifestyle choice for women to facilitate achievement and occupational accomplishments (Cockrum & White, 1985). As it relates to never-married African American single women, Washington and Newman (1991) supported the notion that African American women may prefer to remain single than to settle for a less than equal African American male partner who may not satisfy their emotional needs. Bedard (1992) agreed that single people gain happiness from their social networks and from acquiring financial resources to support themselves instead of relying on fulfillment from their marital status. For that reason, many “African American women are likely to remain single” (Washington & Newman, 1992, p. 32).
The African American Professional Woman

Understanding professional status allows for building a connection between occupational endeavors and dating among CHAPAWNs. As early as the 1960s, African American women had more median years of schooling, and by age 25, were earning more college degrees than African American men. In fact, they were earning 60% of graduate and professional degrees, awarded to African Americans, one-third of which were doctorates (Epstein, 1973). With an emerging African American middle class, parents possessed the financial resources necessary to insist that their daughters pursue education with the primary goal of obtaining a professional career (Gilkes, 1982). As the 1980s approached, African American women were beginning to break new professional ground, and unlike their predecessors, they worked for personal fulfillment instead of mere survival to maintain the family and/or community (Bell, 1990). Also at this time, researchers found that African American women outnumbered African American men in college two to one (Allen, 1988). By the early 1990s, there were seven million African American women in the civilian labor force who made up five percent of all workers, 12 percent of all female workers and fifty percent of all African American workers (Hughes & Dodge, 1997).

The added burden of negative stereotypes, (i.e., mammy, jezebel, African American matriarch) of African American womanhood offered more complexities (a “double whammy” really) to the budding professional identities of African American career women (Gilkes, 1982). However, the 1990s also ushered in the era of the “new African American woman,” who perceived her career as a vital component of life and personal identity. Bell (1990) notes this shift in identities for African American women:

… for African American career women of today, professional identity is a gratifying part of their core identity. As a group, they are career-oriented women who devote a tremendous
amount of time and energy to establishing their professional identities. They are keenly aware that having a career is a lifelong endeavor, often requiring rigorous training and continuous development (p. 459).

Therefore, professional and career endeavors as a focal point of living became a marker for modern African American women.

With a new primary emphasis on education and careers, modern women became less focused on marriage. With the surge of college-educated women, the prototypical act of marriage, once common to heterosexual women in the 1950s and 1960s at a 90% rate, was no longer the norm. As Goldstein and Kenney (2001) suggested, “this educational crossover, which occurs for both African American and White women in recent cohorts, suggests that marriage is increasingly becoming a province of the most educated, a trend that may become a new source of inequality for future generations” (p. 506). Despite the mark of those with professional and educational acumen, getting married has become less attainable for those particular African American women. So, the contemporary never-married, professional African American woman was not only college-educated and career-oriented, but has transformed her educational status and work into a distinct lifestyle of her own. Yet, the lifestyle of professional African American women exuded independence, opportunity, and individual identity, ironically, but tended to undermine these women’s dating opportunities.

**The Professional African American Man**

Over time, African American families sent their daughters to college while their sons worked, creating more educated African American women than African American men (Dixon, 2009). But before 1960, the pursuit of bachelor degrees earned among African American men was higher than that of African American women at 1.3% to 1.2%, respectively
(Jackson, 1971). After events of the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Movement, workplace and educational settings became more diverse. In 1970, African American men barely led African American women in earning bachelor degrees, 1.9% to 1.8% (Jackson, 1971). By the 1980s, college educated men and women worked in similar occupations (Black & Juhn, 2000). As such, many more African American men and women than ever before held degrees and worked in professional level jobs. Thus, an era of the thriving African American middle class emerged where salaries of African American men and women closed the income gap with their White counterparts (Smith & Welch, 1989).

Despite the financial and economic boom of the 1990s, there were fewer African American professional men than professional African American women in the career sector from the previous decade (Black & Juhn, 2000). African American men began to experience higher unemployment and incarceration rates while they represented smaller numbers on college campuses (Banks, 2011). This period gave way to a decline of employment and professional status among African American men due to a rising demand in occupational skills and fewer opportunities for them to attain college education (Moss & Tilly, 1996). More African American men were experiencing intermittent employment and sporadic job loss. This affected their financial ability to maintain long-term relationships with African American women (Dixon, 2009). At the millennium, as African American men faced diminishing life prospects, widespread unemployment, high incarceration rates, and substance dependency, their availability for African American female counterparts became scarce (Gordon et al., 1994). Apparently, the number of professional African American men to professional African American women is unequal; leaving fewer partner choices for the CHAPAWNs.
**Existing Romantic Relationship Research**

Hughes, Morrison, and Asada (2005) reported that general research regarding relationships often focuses on basic issues facing couples, such as such fidelity, spending time together, and the love life/work life balance. Some researchers felt that such a trend falls short of examining dating as a social phenomenon (Surra, Gray, Cottle, & Boettcher, 2004). The study of dating is defined as “an investigation of properties and phenomena that characterize the nature of romantic heterosexual and homosexual relationships, and the factors that affect relational properties” (Surra et al., 2004, p. 54). The factors surrounding relationships are a key element in understanding the contours of a relationship’s function and longevity, especially across ethnic cultures.

Regarding the discourse of relationships between African American women and African American men, research had traditionally been pathology-centered, which tends to characterize their conflicts and problems against that of European-American heterosexual relationships (Bell, Bouie & Baldwin, 1990). Just the same, other studies examining dating between African American men and women focused on the “game” of dating or stresses that each party brings to the union (Aborampah, 1989). Studies rarely sought out each individual’s perspective on the relationship or lived experiences, and have generally neglected the perspective of CHAPAWN altogether. Only a few studies examined how African American women describe their dating situations or how those experiences impact their lives (Chaney, 2011). However, recent research data providing rich content from African American women regarding this issue revealed a remarkable level of insight and vulnerability.

In his notable publication, *Is Marriage for White People?*, Ralph Richard Banks
(2011) presented findings consisting of firsthand accounts and lived relationships experiences from CHAPAWNs and African American male-female couples through interview data. Through the use of interviews, Banks (2011) dissected aspects of couple interaction among the African American male-female relationship including discussing the male partner shortage, state of marriage, being childfree, interracial dating, and marital desires of CHAPAWNs. More specifically, Banks (2011) highlighted relational revelations such as how fear, African American female stereotypes, and issues of self-perception influence these male-female intimate unions (Banks, 2011). Regarding marriage, Banks (2011) found that cultural and educational gaps, marital dissatisfaction, and marry-down relationships primarily affect the ability of African American women to attain or remain in matrimony with African American men. Also, Banks (2011) suggested that African American men often engage in colorism or discrimination against dark skinned African American women, which ultimately leads to fewer marriages and greater challenges in African American male-female relationships. Banks (2011) wrote that resistance to interracial dating on the part of African American women prevents marital opportunities that can exist for them in lieu of diminished marital opportunities with African American men. Banks (2011) developed a comprehensive work with historical, cultural, and experiential relevancy. As a source, this research aptly provided testimony and discussion of couple issues among African American partners that takes existing research to the next level. More importantly, this work provided a path for additional research of its kind. While Banks’ (2011) work contained several responses to dating complexities among African American women, it left an open window in understanding other factors surrounding their dating dilemmas.
The preceding topic overview and subsequent literature review, theoretical connection and investigative data results has been conducted to establish the actual lived dating experiences of CHAPAWNs. Through discussing their environment, contributing factors, lived experiences and desires, a prevalent lifestyle mostly untapped in research and overlooked by society can gain truthful exposure. By understanding the firsthand dating experiences and lifestyle traits among the CHAPAWN group, this examination offered discernment about this subject matter, where authentic representation supplements current research perspectives. Awareness from this study also acknowledged the voices of a group who constructed a life where dating has been at times, daunting and/or difficult.

This research provided a scholarly perspective of dating circumstances of the CHAPAWN population. Through a review of existing literature on this topic, the limitations of those current studies will be identified, which will in essence, validate the rationale for the current study. Thus, the scope of current research on this subject matter was established.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Construction of Reality

The social construction of reality is based, in part, on the work of Alfred Schutz (1932), who established that human situations should be studied through a commonsense interpretation of their social engagements, interactions, and experiences. Berger and Luckmann (1966) expanded these ideas in developing the social construction of reality, suggesting that people’s conceptions of knowledge and reality become the norm. That is, how people were raised, what they learned from school, church, or messages from media are interwoven in daily actions they individually experienced and shared among others. Berger and Luckmann (1966) posited that the social construction of reality develops over a time period when individuals create a social existence that becomes the norm in certain situations. Norms of those events are then universally accepted when others reciprocate and respond to their established concepts or systems. Further, communication was as the conduit through which concepts then become embedded in society. Communication then rendered experiences as knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Pearce (2009) further described social construction as the idea that reality, or what is known in part or whole to be reality, is also the product of people’s own actions. Reality then positioned them to make practical judgments about whether, when, and how a situation may be prevented or changed so that another can emerge. Trenholm and Jenson (2010) wrote that
communication has been the means by which social structures are dictated and maintained. So, without communication, social construction would simply be impossible. Therefore, reality has affected communication and has communication affected reality (Trenholm & Jenson, 2010, p. 54). In effect, “language appears…in the inherent nature of things” and created motion in socializing a construct, like marital pressure, in forming it into conventionality. Berger and Luckman (1966) emphasized that the process of transmission strengthens the reality of a social construct.

The process by which a social construct was produced happened through three steps: habitualization, institutionalization, and externalization through communication (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Accordingly, the habitualization step occurred when people accept meaning of a situation when it occurs within their regular routines (Berger & Luckman, 1966). For instance, marital pressure is a common social construct among single adults who are not married. Single people then accepted such pressure as it becomes regularly applied by work peers or family members who have entered matrimony. So, the expectation of family, friends, and coworkers creates an environment by which single people are encouraged to conform. There, marital pressure was habitualized by its application from peers and family, along with an acceptance by those single persons who simply deal with it as an expectation of how to eventually structure their personal lives.

Institutionalization occurred whenever there is a “reciprocal typification of habitualized actions” (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 52). In other words, when actions within a construct have been simulated by a group of people, like in the case of marital pressure, institutionalization occurs. Furthermore, “typifications of habitualized actions, or institutions, were always shared ones” (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 2) and so, the actions of marital
pressure are habitualized, or regularly applied and accepted. The consistency of those reciprocated actions among people within group, as well as the environment, created institutionalization. Situations like marital pressure exist within an institutionalized world, where they become the norms and habits human communication.

Externalization is referred to by Berger and Luckmann (1966) as the reality that—regardless of any agreement or argument to the contrary of any situation—that external existence of societal conditioning is still there. In other words, it cannot be ignored or wished away. So, due to externalization, single or never-married individuals had continuously faced with marital pressure from various directions, as long as they remain unmarried because marriage tends to be a social expectation within greater society. Externalization is the environmental expectation that societal conditioning and norms placed on individuals, a group of people, or a social situation (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Very simply, people interacted in an externalized world—a place of expectations based on collective societal conditioning. Externalization is a perspective of expectations, held by society in general (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Therefore, individuals must figure out how to negotiate existence in a system of expectations.

A social structure, like the single population, has embodied different constructs. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), a social construct like the dating phenomenon that was investigated in this study “takes the form of stories and that these stories bear the imprint of the language in which they are told and of the histories/biases/rhetorical choices of the persons who tell them” (p. 3) and are also “an orientation, a set of practices, or a set of themes” (p. 5) by those experiencing them. As such, single people negotiated those norms through how they chose to approach their marital status. The social construction of reality, or
the meanings that are taken from these situations, arise in part from the realities of a group of individuals’ everyday lives.

The dating lives of childfree, heterosexual, African American, professional women who have never been married (CHAPAWN) present a mostly-ignored dilemma in research. Social awareness of this lifestyle is required to address those challenges. As noted in Chapter One, dating challenges of this group were disregarded, overlooked, or marginalized within current research literature. Women of this group should be allowed to communicate how such challenges impact their personal lives, family situations, and the larger community.

Theoretically, social construction showed relevancy in offering an understanding in the process of meaning made about this particular dating phenomenon, but a reality that women of this group experienced, especially by way of communicating about their experiences.

Of course, the social construction of reality has been more complex than just highlighting what is real. It reveals a relationship between self and society. These women shared a common social identity “that defines the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other categories (‘us’ vs. ‘them’, in-group vs. out-group, us women, those men, Whites, African Americans, etc.”) (Turner et al., 1994, p. 1). As members of a community who have the same cultural/ethnic dating complexities or situations with their male counterparts, CHAPAWN were commonly connected by these experiences. Turner et al. (1994) concluded that “the self can be defined subjectively as (through) social collectivity” (p. 2).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) pointed out that these realities are intersubjective, which is to say that an individual or group’s meaning of a situation to some extent depends on the meanings of others. In other words, humans cannot escape that their communication
environment plays an influential role in their lives. Wilden and Hammer (1987) concurred that opinions about situations were impacted through social conditioning from birth through family, school, media, and popular entertainment, along with personal experiences and informed decisions by individuals directly involved. Face-to-face interaction and language manifest realities that were then directly or indirectly experienced by society. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Face-to-face communication is also reciprocal and susceptible to interference from others (p. 54). Face-to-face communication is the method by which everyday reality can be negotiated or challenged; language creates meaning for how individuals and people come to know about their life situations.

The study of the social construction of reality seeks to distinguish between what of a situation is real, and what of it is ideal, or how it becomes manifested through societal conditioning. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966) everyday life has been manifested in society through knowledge or by simply knowing what norms, situations, or expectations exist. Pearce (2009) explained that since knowledge is produced through social interaction (i.e., communication), social constructionists tend to argue about the source by which knowledge originates: is it those people who claim to live a situation authentically (real) or those who have helped to cultivate (ideal) its existence?

As this group of women experience the same dating issues, situations or challenges individually, understanding how they authentically experience them is important in relation to how they are understood by others, and how their experience can be studied by researchers. While individuals within the CHAPAWN group have varied lived experiences, communicating those experiences creates a shared voice, one that establishes “real” factors regarding the situation they have in common. Through their communication of these dating circumstances,
the larger society gains a more accurate awareness of their dating lives versus what members of said larger society may view, read, or learn from others. Therefore, the process of social construction of reality can help explain this study’s participant lifestyle experiences. For example, when others (who were unaware that CHAPAWNs often forego marriage for career gain and have a disproportionate number of possible marital mates) communicate assumptions about CHAPAWNs, such knowledge may become accepted information (Banks, 2011; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). There, the goal of social construction was to understand the communicative process that reflect the constructed reality these women are actually living in the face of norms established by larger society. As the CHAPAWN were a substantial sector among singles understanding this, social construction allows this information to become shared knowledge for those not living the experience.

In relation to dating as a social construct, a relationship between how the phenomenon was experienced and how has been perceived in current or previous research sets the theoretical tone. However, existing scholarship placed this dating phenomenon in the context of being a social shortcoming versus a personally informed choice (King, 1999). The social construction of reality can offer a greater awareness of and understanding about how this dating situation has collectively resonated in the lived experiences and lifestyles of the CHAPAWN group.

Thus, the usefulness of the social construction of reality in this study can help support the dating phenomenon among the CHAPAWNs in two ways: one by understanding the self-identification of those who experience it, and by how dating is parlayed by this group through interactions with others. Furthermore, the importance between this theoretical framework and the subject matter is how CHAPAWN group members perceived the larger society to view this
phenomenon, how they shaped or resisted that societal perception, and what role individual/collective agency and communication played in clarifying their position. In other words, this framework has analyze what these women perceive as the constructed reality of this phenomenon and how they were involved in the process of this evolution. Essentially, this communication-based theory was used as a lens to understand social construction (product) and the perpetuation of those living the phenomenon (process).

**History of Singles**

Historically, a notable minority of the overall population have been single. Yet, for the first time since 1976, the single population in the United States outnumbers those who are married (Li, 2014. Given this current social reality, it is important to note that society’s perceptions of singles have changed. During the 19th century, singles were generally viewed by members of society as deviant, untrustworthy, social misfits (Spreitzer & Riley, 1974). However, at the turn of the century, in the United States and Europe singlehood was viewed as a respectable alternative to marriage for women if they were willing to serve a larger (Chambers-Schiller & Chambers, 1984). The emerging culture of singlehood during that time period offered more freedom for women who were sometimes viewed as social outcasts (Chudacoff, 1999). After the Great Depression from 1945 and 1964 people entered marriage younger than ever before as a means of gaining happiness and stability after experiencing those years of joblessness, poverty, and deep financial oppression (Rindfuss, Morgan, & Spicewood, 1988). Through the 1960s people were defined in terms of their relationship to marriage, as adulthood became synonymous with marriage and parenthood (Stein, 1975). Sociologist George Mead (1967) concluded that, “the good life is defined as marriage…any living arrangement is wrong that may make any marriageable individual forego marriage” (p.
Mead’s words subscribed to the prevailing negative attitude of the moment, one that viewed singlehood as deviant behavior for so-called normal adults. However, social changes of the late 1960s and 1970s ushered in a reinvention of singlehood.

Social change ignited a new existence for singles in the 1970s. The works of Margaret Adams (1978), Marie Edwards and Eleanor Hoover (1974), and most notably Peter J. Stein (1975, 1976, 1981) re-examined singlehood as a meaningful and multi-dimensional lifestyle in its own right. Stein (1975) firmly identified this new view held by single people as a right or choice, whereby they could meet their personal need for human growth and interpersonal relationships. This research marked singlehood as a social phenomenon inspiring dissatisfaction with traditional marriage (Stein, 1975). Most, there were more single people then ever by the 1970s, making singlehood a non-stigmatized life choice.

There were a large array of factors that attracted individuals to the lifestyle. For example, Stein (1976) asserted that marriage restricts self-realization and limits involvement with other relationships while singlehood affords individuals greater freedom of choice and autonomy. He further acknowledged the factors drawing people away from marriage and toward singlehood. Furthermore, Koropeckyj-Cox (2005) reported that negative attitudes toward singles declined by 1976 and marriage was regarded as optional: therefore singlehood became a permanent life choice for many during this era. Ironically, at the height of the 1980s Cold War, the single population generally had a favorable attitude about marriage, yet the vast majority of young people remained single longer than their parents (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). At this time, marriage was once again embraced as a gateway to happiness with “moral and patriotic overtones” (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005, p. 93). By the new millennium, singlehood was generally more common for men than women being impacted by high divorce
rates or deceased spouses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In the past, being married was a status symbol, a valued accomplishment that a couple had personal and economic prosperity (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). Cherlin (2004) agreed that marriage, once the standard above singlehood and a sign of conformity, has now become the capstone and marker of prestige. Koropeckyj-Cox (2005) affirmed that individuals still believe being single is the appropriate alternative to marriage when personal or economic stability is not achieved or the right dating partner is not found.

**Types of Single People**

Although singlehood has been less stigmatized than in the past, the status of being never-married still remained ambiguous, marginalized, and subject to labels. For instance, never-married singles are susceptible to stereotypes like being too old to marry or having failed to attain marriage (Rubenstein, 1987). But in fact, the never-married segment of the United States reports satisfaction in terms of family, social support networks, and dating partners (Allen & Pickett, 1987). Given the many lifestyles engaged in by individuals who are not legally married, key studies offer a number of single-types that can more positively and accurately describe sectors of never-married singles.

In response to the 1970s massive “coming out” of the single population, Stein (1981) identified four categories of singles based on the attitudes of single individuals: voluntary/stable singles, involuntary/stable singles, voluntary/temporary singles, involuntary/temporary singles. Although single people moved between these categories throughout life, a single person’s satisfaction and overall well-being depends on perception (Stein, 1981). Voluntary stable singles tended to be single by choice and generally satisfied with their decision (Stein, 1981). Involuntary stable singles tended to be dissatisfied with the
singlehood, such as single college-educated women who are challenged in finding a suitable mate and have trouble adjusting to permanent singlehood (Stein, 1981). Voluntary temporary singles were not opposed to marriage, but do not prioritize marriage to the same degree as involuntary singles (Stein, 1981). Involuntary temporary singles were never-married individuals who are actively seeking a mate or previously married people, like widows and divorcees (Stein, 1981). These categories created diversity within the single population. For the never-married sector, single life reflects a conscious choice to remain independent (O’Brien, 1991).

Researchers have contested designating certain types within the single population. Spreitzer and Riley (1974) agreed with Stein’s intention to characterize singles, but saw difficulty in categorizing various types of singlehood as many individuals single status is fluid. Conversely, DePaulo and Morris (2005), have redefined the singles’ types as proposed by Stein (1981):

..singles include myriad types of people—those who never marry, those who marry and divorce, those who were married and lose a spouse to death, those who never formed a sexually committed relationship in the first place by choice, and those who never formed a sexually committed relationship due to lack of opportunity (p. 135).

These categories showed connections between all forms of singlehood. Overall, the research on single types in this population reflected comprehensive aspects of attitudes, circumstance, and marital desire. And, to be sure, understanding such desires among single women re-directs this focus.

Singlehood & Women

Regarding women, Watkins (1984) argued that singlehood allowed for opportunities
and roles not available to mothers or married professionals. The increase of educational and economic opportunities made it more feasible for women to support themselves, thereby decreasing the economic and social necessity for marriage (Watkins, 1984). However, studies on childlessness suggest a strong societal pressure on women to marry and become mothers (DePaulo & Morris, 1995). Although some studies have suggested a negative stigma attached to single women (Faludi, 2009), other studies have validated the experiences of single, independent, career women as well as those who assume the roles of caregiver, parent and godmother (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). Overall, the literature omits accounts of lived experiences by CHAPAWN, and barely discusses singlehood within the context of race and gender.

**Singles’ Diversity Trends**

Watkins (1984) emphasized that women best benefit from being single, however trends of singlehood along other gender and racial lines among heterosexuals is somewhat scarce in the literature. That literature posited that 90% of all singles will have experienced marriage during their lives (Connidis, 2001). In a study of single college-educated women, Bronzaft (1991) found that two thirds of the White and Hispanic female respondents intended to collectively attain marriage, career, and start a family. However, another study emphasized that the percentage of single White women had doubled among 20-24 year olds, and tripled among 25-29 year olds from the 1980s to the present (Tanfer, 1987). In a study of native-born Chinese American and Japanese American singles, Ferguson (2000) found that they were discouraged from the traditional marriage roles of their mothers, lacked available Asian partners and felt pressure to attain advanced degrees, which ironically led to them feeling free to marry outside of their racial/ethnic group. While this sub-group of Asian women had
higher rates of singlehood than their Caucasian counterparts, research supported that
singlehood is steadily climbing among Asian and Hispanic women, respectively, despite their
strong familial ties (Ferguson, 2000).

Yet, the largest increase of singles, especially those never-married, occurred among
African Americans – rising from 32% in 1975 to 44% by the millennium (U.S. Census, 2000).
Research revealed that singles among African American and White American communities
strongly differ. Single African Americans marry later and have higher separation/divorce rates
than White Americans, spending more of their lives being single then their Caucasian
counterparts (Engram & Lockery, 1993; Norton & Moorman, 1987). Research has also
demonstrated that African Americans have lower rates of marriage and are less likely to be
married compared to white men and women (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). Moreover, these
demographic trends have created a context in which marriage is no longer the norm among
African Americans (Tucker & Taylor, 1989). Particularly for African American college-
educated women, for whom marriage is valued but not necessarily compatible with their
expectations, research has noted a high rate of singlehood (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). Beyond
the commonly discussed issues of economic disparity, mismatched education levels, and a
lack of suitable mates, Bell (1990) recognizes that other issues lead college-educated African
American women toward long-term or permanent singlehood.

**Cultural Relationship Attitudes**

Cross-cultural theorists have identified cultural and ethnic differences in their discourse
on couple attitudes toward dating (Dion & Dion, 1993; Hatfield & Rapson, 1993). On one
hand, a pioneering study examining culture’s impact on intimate partnerships confirms that
men and women of various cultural and ethnic groups seem to possess similar attitudes and
behaviors (Doherty, Hatfield, Thompson & Choo, 1994). Yet, Chaney and Monroe (2011) revealed that African American couples, particularly those in cohabitation, value the day-to-day aspects of growing together as a couple and more than the physical excitement that is typical in romantic relationships in general. Other issues of differing cultural attitudes within African American intimate partnerships indicate contrasts in feminine identity within dating. Regarding beauty, the literature also suggests that African American women are more satisfied with their bodies than White women, who generally value a slender physique (Chaney & Monroe, 2011). This designation indicates that African American women are not necessarily subscribing to overall societal norms when defining their role in intimate partnerships, but are carving out their own lifestyles. Therefore, cultural factors are likely to play a key role in dating attitudes in CHAPAWNs.

**Challenges of African American Couples**

Earlier studies such as *The Negro American Family* by W.E.B. DuBois (1908) noted how structural factors like imbalanced gender ratios between African American males and females have affected marriage from as far back as 1840. From the 1970s until 2003, available African American females began to outnumber African American males by sheer number (Dixon, 2009). Today, this gender imbalance is also attributed to the high incarceration rates of African American men (Dixon, 2009). Labor and income are other structural factors affecting African American couples. Scholars have noted that persistent unemployment, under-employment or sporadic employment of African American males undermines their viability in marriage and relationships (Staples, 1999).

Several years ago, Fry and Cohn (2010) noted that when evaluating mates, economic stability is more important to African Americans than to any other ethnic group. This data
helps to explain why, at every income level, African American men are substantially less likely than their White counterparts to be married; it also affirms the idea that economic stability is a concern for African American men in pursuit of a prospective wife, since little financial support is available like with parents or extended families of Caucasian couples (Banks, 2011). Related to this, Chaney and Monroe (2011) emphasized that “African American women more easily remain unmarried or choose an alternate status, such as cohabitation, until they meet men who are their economic equals, or alternately leave a marriage or relationship in which they are dissatisfied” (p. 657). So, as African American men become more economically marginal, African American women faced a limited pool of equitable marital mates.

**Dating Desires**

Recent findings (Thomas & Barrie, 2012) revealed that CHAPAWN possess a strong desire to eventually be married, but a discussion surrounding this specific issue is only now emerging in academic research. Only a limited sector of that research has attempted to draw rich data that supports their feelings and experiences accompanying such desire (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993). Edin and Kefalas (2005) found that low-income African American women possess a great desire to marry, but their male counterparts are not marriageable because they are unemployed, have been incarcerated, or possess a strong addiction to drugs and alcohol, which usually makes them violent. Even in this case, research also falls short in revealing firsthand experiences of how this issue impacts these women directly. But even in doing so, it is necessary to establish the dating phenomenon of CHAPAWN as a basis.

**African American Male Mates**

The deficiency of marriageable males for CHAPAWN creates another structural threat
that impacts dating ability. The African American population in the United States has the lowest ratio of men to women of any group in recent history (Adimora & Schoenbach, 2005). Dixon (2009) referred to this special situation affecting African American females as a “marriage squeeze” (p. 33). While some African American women marry successful African American male peers, the bulk of professional African American women remain unmarried or marry a less-educated man, diminishing the pool of marriageable men as a whole (Banks, 2011). Helm and Carlson (2013) wrote that African American women who want a male partner of the same race should expect to spend at least part of their life alone and become self-sufficient. Banks (2011) also affirmed that while this same condition may not affect other groups of women, the irony for African American women is clear: their hopes of marriage are bolstered by their successes, but are undermined by the shortcomings of African American men.

African American women who found marriageable mates are also educationally mismatched more than any other group. Banks (2011) found that a majority of college educated, professional African American wives had working-class husbands with less education. As such, these professional African American women and their working-class African American husbands often embody different cultural orientations as well: the women represent an increasing part of the American mainstream, while the men appear as a stereotyped symbol of disadvantaged African Americans (Banks, 2011). Harknett and McLanahan (2004) suggested that an inversion exists between perceived partner availability and relationship quality. According to Helm and Carlson (2013), the deficiency of marriageable African American men led to relationships lacking commitment from the men. African American women then “settle for less and like what they settle for, even less”
(Franklin, 1984, p. 145), which set the stage for lowered levels of self-esteem, happiness, and satisfaction.

**Dating Alternatives**

These lackluster levels of satisfaction accepted by African American women result in complicated intimate unions. Since African American females experienced scarcity in available African American men, the men have become better able to dictate relationship terms that challenge acceptable standards; women then feel pressured to do more than they are comfortable by overlooking indiscretions (Banks, 2011). In this instance, frivolous sexual encounters become a commonplace behavior accepted by women who feel they have must adapt to a script that benefits men (Bogle, 2008). Regnerus and Uecker (2010) found that when male companions are scarce, men hold the balance of power in relationships. Women are led to believe they will not be treated well, and thus, accept nonexclusive and/or uncommitted intimate interactions. Banks (2011) suggested when African American men are in short supply that they can negotiate terms undermining exclusivity. Chaney (2011) emphasized that in African American male-female relationships, each partner is expected to give and receive support from one another. However, as African American male partners are scarce, they can hold the advantage in a relationship, sometimes leaving African American women at their mercy.

**Mansharing**

The prevalence of non-monogamous relationships has been a topic of discussion in the African American community for decades. Over 25 years ago, Audrey Chapman (1986), author of the first controversial book on mansharing, described the growing predicament of women, willing or not, who at some point has shared a man with another woman. Some
experts believe that eight out of every ten women have at one time shared or are currently sharing a man (Randolph, 1991). Specifically, Chapman (1986) declared mansharing to be shameful as “women feel they can’t consciously accept sharing--they feel better holding on to fantasies about men and romance, even though these delusions tend to set them up for unhappiness” (p. 22). The act of mansharing is hardly uncommon. When ABC’s Nightline went to Atlanta in 2010 to interview successful African American women about their choice not to marry, the women reported a lack of exclusivity as a common barrier (Banks, 2011).

Evidence that African American men maintained long-standing nonexclusive relationships has been supported by scholars. Laumann, Ellingson, Mahay and Paik (2004) authored a seminal study finding that African American men are participating in nonexclusive relationships more and more, but specifically that more educated African American men are even more likely to participate in long-term concurrent relationships than White men. This study also reported that man sharing more prominently involves African American men who are married, engaged, or have live-in partners (Laumann, et al., 2004). In the end, the most desirable African American men – perhaps those better-educated and professionally successful – negotiated shallow relationships with African American women, or female companionship without commitment. Interview data revealed that as these instances continually appear, some African American women feel it is better to accept a shared relationship with an African American male partner than be alone because if they refuse it, another woman may accept it (Banks, 2011). As such, African American women may view nonexclusive relationships as an acceptable option in their dating quandary. However, other options exist for African American women seeking love.
Inter-dating

Interracial dating and marriage offered another option for mate selection among CHAPAWN. The tendency to date or marry within the same ethnic group is thought to influence mate choice, but when severe gender imbalances and a shortage of marriageable mates exist within a race, this option may not seem viable (Curran, et al., 2005). According to recent data, there are more than half a million interracially married African American men, and only 200,000 interracially married African American women (Banks, 2011). African American women are the least likely of all groups to marry across racial lines, where Asians and Latinos are nearly three times more likely than African American women to interracially marry (Passel, Wang, & Taylor, 2010). Intimate segregation, which describes a group of individuals who choose to only mate or marry within their race, is a stark reality among African American women over any other racial group (Bank, 2011).

Historically, African American women were just as likely to intermarry as African American men from 1960 to the 1980s (Banks, 2011). In response to the prevalence of intimate segregation, many evaluators have taken the trend for granted, and “researchers have tended to assume that even the most successful African American women—those with college degrees and good jobs, and who seem to navigate comfortably in most White professional environments—must marry African American men, if they marry at all” (Kaba, 2012, p. 121). Some researchers accused never-married, professional African Americans of self-sabotage through intimate segregation and propose that if one in every five African American women were willing to marry outside of their race, their pool of quality men would increase (Kaba, 2012). However, a marginal position exists for them in dating relationships.
Dating Hegemony

Hegemony not only impacts women of color in social situations, but also exists within their love lives. Dominant social groups confine African American women to an “other” position, marginalizing them through societal structure (Boylorn, 2008). Such marginalization has an impact on the intimate relationships of African American women with African American males. Dominant society controls African-American women through powerful stereotypes related to intimate partnering, such as the asexual mammy image or the oversexed jezebel persona (Boylorn, 2008; Collins, 2000). Jezebels are perceived as hypersensitive, bossy, emasculating, confidently hyper-sexualized and classless. On the other hand, the mammy is perceived as nurturing, self-sacrificing, non-threatening, as well as a warmth that is portrayed through a comical and physically robust exterior (Boylorn, 2008; Collins, 2000; Hudson, 1998). Using a perspective of the “oppositional gaze” and negotiating self-identity with mediated versions in reality television, Boylorn (2008) asserted that African American women are more often misrepresented, misunderstood, and misportrayed through the Jezebel caricature. Yet, Hudson (1998) asserted that regardless of which dichotomy is the focal point, both the Jezebel and mammy images suggest the need for an African American male to be present. In addition, such an assertion implies that African American women socially position themselves, in one way or another, to attract a man. However, this may not necessarily be the goal of the CHAPAWN.

Sutherland (2011) affirmed that portrayal, self-definition, and self-reliance can be explored solely as they pertain to single African American women in society or in intimate relationships. In a study that examined dichotomous stereotypes of African American female professors as “old maids” or “Miss Independent,” Gilchrist (2011) revealed these
academicians rejected these labels from friends and family because it was assumed that they were unmotivated to find love. In other words, although these African American women enjoyed their independence, they did not want others to believe that they had no desire to be in a relationship. One African American female used the following words to describe her feelings:

I am independent, but I’m not “Miss Independent”. Being independent informs that I am self-sufficient, but being ‘Miss Independent’ would suggest that I do not want or need anyone for anything and that is not true. I hope and pray that someone will come into my life, with whom I can share my hopes, dreams, burdens, and finances, but until he comes, I’m holding it down on my own (p. 190).

Chandler (2011) supported similar notions when discussing the “Strong Black Woman Myth” (SBW), a contemporary concept that links historical characterizations (like the “mammy”) to strength and deviant womanhood often associated with African American women. The SBW is viewed as a burden and a threat to productive romantic relationships with African American men. Chandler (2011) further stressed that if an African American woman’s community perpetuates the same myths as the larger society, one might believe these stereotypical images are true representations. These erroneous images may validate the negative perceptions that some Black men have of Black women.

**Womanhood in Dating**

While the phenomenon of single African American women has consistently been theorized by assumed stereotypes, along with partner and relational shortcomings, very little scholarship has examined African American’s sense of womanhood and its possible
connection to dating desires. Although some earlier forms of scholarship associated womanhood with the demonstration of “submissive and sentimental” traits (Williams & Best, 1990), more recent research has focused on the inherent resilience, or strength of Black women. In support of this, manhhood, Beauboef-Lafontant’s (2005) qualitative study revealed that contrary to a subordinated social status, African American women are armed with great prescriptive and descriptive strengths. So, prescriptive strength, which refers to the selflessness of African American women, and descriptive strength, or the humanness of these women, are complementary rather than mutually exclusive emotional states (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005).

More recent research significantly contradicted these early perceptions of womanhood among African American females. In her qualitative study of how African American women defined and described womanhood, Chaney (2011) revealed these women defined womanhood through the lens of femininity versus the common perception as mother, employee, wife, or companion, which is merely a demonstration of earlier perceived womanhood roles. As such, research from the African American feminist perspective has heavily contributed to a re-definition of African American womanhood. Chaney (2011) asserted that African American feminist scholars emphasize that race, ethnicity, sexuality and class collectively influence women’s social worlds and that such aspects are not universal or static. Essentially, the individual, family, and historical experiences of African American women should be told by them to avoid misinterpretation. The noted Black Feminist scholar, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) wrote in African American Feminist Thought that mobility of African American women has been mostly restricted by external definitions and that a self-defined world viewpoint should be used to validate the experiences of these women.
In her qualitative study of womanhood and marriage, Chaney (2011) found that although African American women are independent and strong, they oftentimes struggle in male-female relationships to “let men be men.” With this in mind, African American male mates with less education and fewer economic resources may find that one of the greatest challenges of being in a relationship with a strong African American woman is negotiating who will be the ‘head of the household’ (Chaney, 2011). As it directly relates to womanhood, Chaney’s (2011) findings further revealed that while traditional femininity advocated for workplace upgrades, African American women sought success at work and at home. Basically, when a suitable African American male mate is in place, African American women are happy to relinquish leadership, but if not, are willing to lead a household or family on their own. Clearly, womanhood plays a significant role among African American women in what they can contribute to dating relationships.

**Single or Married**

Getting married did not necessarily dictate the lifestyle choices of CHAPAWN. Generally, this association between marriage and life satisfaction, including well-being and mental health, was actually strongest for men of various races (James, Tucker, & Mitchell-Kernan, 1996; Williams, Takeuchi & Adair, 1992). The quality of lifestyle for CHAPAWN was not negatively affected, as many rely on an extended support system and social network of family and friends (James et al. 1996; Thompson-Seaborn & Ensminger, 1989). King (1999) asserted that these relationships reduce the isolation many CHAPAWN may experience and offers them important social, psychological, and practical support that has been traditionally provided through marriage. Thus, CHAPAWNs maintained lifestyle satisfaction through a strong source of social support.
Cohabitation

Many single African American women are still seeking the fulfillment of companionship that marriage provides. Some, therefore, choose to cohabitate. Although this may not be a choice for CHAPAWN, it is common in African American male-female couples. King (1999) wrote that nonmarital relationships are not effective substitutes for marital relationships. Marital relationships either bind men and women together, reciprocal and meaningful relationships that same-gender friendships and non-marital relationships are unable to replicate, are legally sanctioned relationships between adult men and women offering the most social and economic benefits among societal partnerships, and serve as the initial and primary link between unrelated families (King, 1999). In contrast, Rinelli (2006) asserted that African American couples who cohabitate view it as a long-term arrangement that is suitable for child-rearing, and stay together for at least five years. Chaney and Monroe (2011) found that low-income African American cohabitating couples either immediately embrace plans to marry or are content with the status quo. Moreover, these findings reveal that African American couples in long-term cohabitation were as stable as married African American couples.

Current Study

The above literature review illustrates that numerous relationship traits and external factors can impact dating among the CHAPAWN demographic. These women tend to face varying obstacles such as socially constructed pronouncements of “authentic” womanhood, the lack of a large pool of potential mates, the seeming complications of sometimes holding educational and professional credentials beyond their prospective partners’ reaches, and the ramifications that come with choosing a life of singlehood (in general). The research outlined
speaks to the subject matter yet generally excludes the firsthand experiences of CHAPAWN themselves. The theories discussed in the present chapter can provide a solid scholarly foundation as the present study seeks to understand what the CHAPAWN communicate about their experiences. Interview data gleaned from this study’s participants reveal some specific communicative examples not yet studied in the larger field of interpersonal and relational communication.

This phenomenon validated why this study focused on CHAPAWN who are managing complex dating situations and are creating a unique lifestyle of their own. In addition, by interviewing CHAPAWNs, disparities in existing literature can be highlighted, new directions of research can be forged, and practical applications can be recommended. This qualitative study was based on the methodical modifications determined by Seidman (2006), and responded to the following questions:

1. How do CHAPAWN describe their singlehood?
2. Among CHAPAWN, how is marital possibility communicated?
3. How is the state of being childfree described by CHAPAWN?
4. How do CHAPAWN use stories to explain their marriage and motherhood opportunities?
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Social Phenomenon

The study was conducted to better understand the lived experiences and firsthand communication surrounding the dating lives of childfree, heterosexual and professional African American women who never married (CHAPAWN). This study also related those experiences to the social construction of reality—that what was known about their experiences is a direct result of how and what is communicated directly, from the perspective of these women. As a qualitative method, study of phenomenon intersected well with the social construction of reality. However, this study did not work from formal phenomenology. According to Christensen, Johnson, and Turner (2010), the main objective of this type of study was to create transparency in meaning and structure related to the lived experiences of an individual or group of people surrounding a specific phenomenon (e.g., dating). Essentially, researchers using such methods described commonalities of all who experience a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, studying a phenomenon attempted to understand meanings of human behavior through the eyes of a study’s participants. Similar to formal phenomenology as a research method, this study has set the stage for future research. Moreover, this study presented a qualitative examination of the lived dating experiences among CHAPAWN as a social construct of reality through phenomenological interview research prescribed by Irving Seidman (2006).
Background

In developing social phenomenon for qualitative research, the work of Alfred Schutz (1967) was a basis for the social construction of reality, and also serving as a method of phenomenological interviewing cultivated by Seidman. This method activated focused, in-depth, and life-history interviewing drawn from Schutz’s (1967) phenomenological assumptions. According to van Manen (1990), the basic purpose of phenomenological research has been to attach individual experiences within a particular phenomenon to a universal description revealing its essence. In identifying “lived experiences”, van Manen saw the phenomenon as an “object” of human experience (1990, p. 163). In contrast, Schutz (1967), whose work resulted in creating social phenomenon, asserted that it is never possible to have a perfect understanding of an individual’s experience because to do so would infer entering one’s stream of consciousness firsthand (i.e., by ‘being’ them).

Schutz (1967) explained phenomenon to be “subjective” of human experience; that is, to know the meaning an individual has made from experiencing the phenomenon and putting related behavior into context. The common ground between these two perspectives involved the shared lived experiences of individuals. The view of these experiences are conscious ones and through a common description among those individuals, understanding of the actual phenomenon can occur. Yet, based on the perspective of Schutz (1967), the interviewing of individuals who experienced a phenomenon results in meaning and how they carried out those experiences. Interviewing provided access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby extended a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior (Seidman, 2006).

Interviewing as a tool is commonly used to conduct qualitative research by elevating the discourse of individuals. Seidman (2006) stated that “interview research is an interest in
other individuals’ stories because they are of worth” (p. 24). To be satisfied with formal knowledge and to negate the stories of others is what Siedman (2006) referred to as “anti-intellectual”. This was so because individuals’ stories demanded action through interviewing. “Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action” (Seidman, 2006, p. 24). When a researcher’s goal is to understand the meaning of people’s experiences, interviewing has provided a necessary and strongly sufficient avenue of inquiry. The method is time-consuming and can be expensive. Yet, establishing access, collecting and transcribing interview data before sharing the results was a gratifying accomplishment that shed light on an otherwise unknown phenomenon (Seidman, 2006).

**Interview Research Method**

Seidman (2006) affirmed that interviewing as a method is a powerful way to gain insight into important social issues and to understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues. As a method of inquiry, interviewing has been most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language; it centers the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration. Ostensibly, Seidman (2006) concluded that this research method is deeply fulfilling to researchers who are interested in others’ stories.

Siedman’s (2006) interview method prescribed a three-interview process with directives regarding group identities and style, culminating with a multi-step analysis and data interpretation process. The first of three recorded 90-minute interviews, separated by at least three days, was focused life history revealing family, educational, job, and/or community backgrounds. An interview detailing lived experiences of the phenomenon constituted the second interview and the third interview in Seidman’s method was one of meaning and
reflection, which revealed how the individual views her/his lived experiences in the context through which they occur (Seidman, 2006).

It is important to note that all three interviews prescribed by Seidman (2006) had an individual focus, thus created comprehensive meaning by offering stories framed with a beginning, middle, and end. Although Seidman (2006) prescribed a distinct interview structure, provisions were cited for extenuating circumstances; allowing for amendments in conducting interviews in two separate sittings, versus three, and a variation in days between interviews, or other such adjustments as the situation requires. Seidman (2006) stressed that completing the interview by varying the means was better than no interview at all. “The governing principle in designing interviewing projects might well be to strive for a rational process that is both repeatable and documentable. Remember that it is not a perfect world. It is almost always better to conduct an interview under less than ideal conditions than not to conduct one at all” (Seidman, 2006, p.22).

The analytical process of the Siedman (2006) interview method was a two-step reduction process; the first to develop profiles of study participants and grouping them into sense-making categories, and secondly, marking passages in interview transcripts which were then grouped into categories and studied for thematic connections. Each step occurred in a separate copy of the transcribed interview. In one copy, the initial step of crafting a profile was meant to make data analysis and interpretation achievable; so when a profile could not be created, a vignette was produced with a more limited narrative of a study participant’s experience (Seidman, 2006). The profile was constructed as an extended story or narrative of an individual’s experiences comprised of words from the participant and interviewer, and titled using a pseudonym. The other copy was used for the second step of “marking” and theme
connection. Marking, or labeling excerpts from the interviews that reflected a like or
significant theme is Seidman’s (2006) brand of coding. After the excerpts are categorized and
filed accordingly, the most compelling were produced into emerging themes and interpretive
categories connecting meaning of the participants lived experiences to the phenomenon. With
regard to producing thematic connections, Seidman (2006) warned against forcing excerpts into
categories and subsequent themes, but for the participant’s experiences to guide this step.
Themes were then interpreted by interviewing a number of participants and connecting their
experiences by checking comments of one participant against those of others. Basically, the
goal of the process was to understand how the participants make meaning of their experiences.

**Intent of Interview Research**

The qualitative research study was meant to produce a substantive description and
eventual understanding of the dating issue facing CHAPAWN. This study also exposed the
situations, interactions, and settings that enabled or impacted this phenomenon. Moreover, by
utilizing Seidman’s (2006) interview research method for this subject matter, this study
proposed to reconstruct each participant’s lived dating experiences to explore and present a
better understanding of the phenomenon, which supported or contradicted pre-existing
scholarly discourse regarding this topic. This study also promotes theoretical relativity to lived
dating experiences among CHAPAWN. Finally, this examination sought to show this dating
phenomenon as a social construct of reality from the perspective of the women who
experience it.

Social constructionism coincided with interview research as a method. Berger and
Luckmann (1966) maintain that conversation is a most crucial component in constructing
reality. Conversation was at the heart of interviewing, by which descriptions and information
gathered in this study render a dating reality for CHAPAWN. In each interview conversation with study participants, meaning and understanding, produced reality in their dating phenomenon automatically presents itself (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

**Study Design**

The ideal process to gain an understanding of meanings and circumstances of this under-researched phenomenon came about by adhering to the criteria of Seidman’s method. Participants of the study were recruited through chain referral snowball sampling initiated by pre-selected subjects who met the criteria: childfree, heterosexual, never-married and professional African American women who are at least 35 years of age, and no older than 65 years of age. It was previously determined that women in the participant group tend to marry later than their counterparts of other races, and thus, the youngest age of participation would be CHAPAWNs who were at least 35 years old (King, 1999).

All potential respondents were sent an individual, personalized email invitation (Attachment 1). Once a potential respondent was confirmed to meet the study criteria and agreed to participate in this study, the researcher secured a location and meeting place to conduct each audio-taped in-depth interview. In accordance, the interview protocol reflected Seidman’s (2006) guidelines: at the time of the interview, each respondent was presented with a study description (Attachment 1) and copy of the informed consent acknowledgment form (Attachment 2) and a form requesting a waiver of written documentation (Attachment 4). The participant read the study description, and, if needed, posed any other questions regarding the data collection process which was then answered by the principal investigator. Upon full understanding of responsibilities as a study participant, the respondent read and signed the informed consent form. Before the audio-recorder was activated, each participant identified a
self-chosen pseudonym, by which their data was identified in study results and discussion.

Interview sessions commenced using specified interview questions (Attachment 2). Interviews were scheduled at least three days apart, and covered a three-part arc that included questions on life history, dating background, and future dating desires. Polkinghorne (1989) recommends that researchers interview from 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon. This study met the minimum requirement interviewing six respondents over only two separate sessions instead of the three sessions prescribed by Seidman (2006). Such provisions were not only necessary but supported in this method as an acceptable amendment when limitations exist in executing the study (Seidman, 2006). As such, all three interview areas were still covered within the two interview sessions for each of the six study participants. After completing the interview process of this study’s six participants, a satisfactory degree of saturation was met in that a repetition of responses and experiences were reflected in data offered. Thus, this sample set reflected full and rich data.

In accordance with Seidman’s (2006) process to derive meaning and openness from interview research, a modification of his systematic procedures was deemed necessary. Due to the limitations of time, funding resources, and investigative personnel, a determination that two interview sessions were necessary in order to complete the study in a timely manner. Each of the two participant interviews contained a greater amount of information in order to cover the three-part content arc on life history, dating experiences, and mating desires. Responses in this study became the raw data used in the analysis. Then, the dual-step profiling and labeling process was applied to data. Each of those steps produced two categories of themes, which then produced meaning. Those meanings, as they relate to the CHAPAWN demographic, were compiled into a written description based on their narratives of actual
experiences. The final composite description revealed an overall understanding or essence of this dating phenomenon. The description also uncovered correlation as a social construct of reality. By producing a core understanding of the problem, this qualitative study exposed influential elements that substantiate circumstances and elements within this dating demographic.

**Recruiting**

Seidman’s (2006) model emphasized that interviewing grants access to people’s behavior and an avenue for researchers to draw meaning from communication. However, recruiting participants who are willing to divulge such information proved to be more challenging than anticipated.

Six participants from a large metropolitan city in Southeast Texas and a mid-sized town in Central Alabama were recruited through snowball referrals as locations most accessible by the primary researcher. After being referred, each potential participant was electronically contacted, sent an email with study description and participation invitation, followed by a telephone call when such information was provided. However, six other individuals refused participation due to shortcomings in meeting study demographic requirements or an unwillingness to disclose personal experiences related to dating and/or marital desires. Despite these hurdles, the interviewing process proved to be mostly seamless among other study respondents.

**Collecting Data**

As stated, the process from Seidman’s (2006) method, which prescribed three 90-minute recorded interviews, was reduced to two 45-minute to hour-long audio-recorded interviews with each participant. In order to meet individual comfort levels, study
participants chose the site of each interview. Those locations included residences, work places, and school or public libraries. For all but one participant, both interviews occurred at the same site, at least three days apart per Seidman’s (2006) specification, with only the respondent and the primary researcher present in the designated interview space. As previously stated, in order to protect anonymity, pseudonyms were self-selected by each study participant to identify their data in the study. Designated questions were formulated into two interview guides (Attachment 2) and asked during each interview, respectively. Specifically, the first interview consisted of questions that revealed a descriptions of their job duties and a day-to-day account of their work. The initial interview also inquired about details regarding the participants’ families, such as siblings, parents, and extended family support. The first interview ended with questions pertaining to participants’ experiences in dating situations, especially their take on why marriage never materialized from previous relationships. By the second interview, questions employed then required participants to discuss reasons for never getting married, along with describing any existing desires for having children, and how experiences growing up with their own parents have impacted their current state of being unmarried and childfree. With each participants’ second interview, a comfortable level of rapport was built through the ease and openness of subsequent responses. Depending on individual responses, predetermined or improvised prompts were employed by the primary investigator during one or both interviews to provide clarity and continuity where necessary. To further achieve clarity and thematic derivation, interview notes were taken to notate specific or significant points emphasized by participants during each interview. In all, interviews were concluded over nine weeks of collecting data for the study. No additional interviews or follow-up questions were needed to complete the sample data. This resulting
sample, composed of twelve interviews among six total participants, represented a rich, in-depth, full data set primed for coding and analysis. Fundamentally, this sample adequately offered greater understanding of the lifestyles and accompanying perspectives among CHAPAWNs.

Data Coding

Upon completion of each interview, notes from each of the two individual interviews were placed in a hard copy file created to hold data for every participant. Next, audio-recordings of each interview were transcribed by the principle investigator, who also conducted interviews. In fact, most study participants inquired about who would produce audio transcription, showing more ease and satisfaction with the interview process after learning the primary investigator also served study’s data transcriber. Then, once the entire data collection process ended, three copies of each interview transcript were made for the purposes of coding. In one transcript copy, existing notes from corresponding interviews were used as a guide to identify related data, which were marked and highlighted. In a second transcript copy, participant responses to designated questions that reflected elements of the three-part content were also marked and highlight. The third transcript copy of each interview was used to produce a singular data profile, as presented by Seidman (2006), which represented a comprehensive story reflecting raw data for each study participant.

To precipitate the coding process, a charting structure was used for dissect data profiles for each study participant interview. Siedman (2006) emphasized that there is no right way to share interview data; therefore, the categorization process of charting was substantiated. Using the second marked copy of the transcript, charting consisted of data from each interview relating to three categories derived from marking and highlighting transcripts.
Designated data reflecting the categories of career, family, and dating from the first interview of each participant was compiled in a chart (see TABLE 1). Next, designated data reflecting the categories of marriage, children and parenting from the second interview of each participant was compiled in another chart (see TABLE 2). Data from categories in those charts were then analyzed and compared to the raw data profiles produced from the third transcript copy. In all, the coding process was further simplified as the primary investigator also served as the sole data transcriber and coder for this study.

Analysis of the data was applied from comparing charted data with interview notes and comprehensive raw data profiles. From there, identification of repeated lifestyle traits across this sample population rendered several themes. Primary themes were deemed so by appearing across the data sample. Whereas secondary themes gained acknowledgment from being evident in only parts of the data. However, both sets of themes reflect elements of the lifestyle benefits and issues in dating situations facing members of the CHAPAWN group. Moreover, the findings regarding participant data revealed an overall sample description, from correlating themes that promote meaning and understanding communicated from experiences common among CHAPAWNs.

**Description of Sample**

The characteristics of this study’s sample set presented striking similarities beyond the basic qualities of this demographic. All participants met the criteria of being childfree, heterosexual, African American, professional women who are never-married (CHAPAWN). In earlier phases of planning for this study, the age range became a point of serious contemplation. As it was determined that CHAPAWNs are likely to get married up until the age of 35, when remaining singles became less socially acceptable and whereby marital
pressure was more apparent. Also, by age 35, women who were career-oriented are more likely to secure a strong employment position. While the intended age range of these particular women was originally 35-45 years old, accessibility constraints rendered a slightly older sample comprised of participants ranging from 41 to 61 years of age. In actuality, this age range best coincided with existing literature, which implied that African Americans tend to marry later in life, particularly in their late-20s to mid-30s (Engram & Lockery, 1993; Norton & Moorman, 1987). Thus, this study accessed an optimal sample of participants who have passed that age marker and are situated squarely within the CHAPAWN group status.

Regarding career and economic status, more commonalities were revealed from this sample set. First, each study participant held at least a baccalaureate degree and nearly 20 years of professional work history. Second, all but one participant has attained a graduate degree or has studied at that level. Third, the study’s respondents have reached the income and economic capability to be current homeowners, as in all cases but one, who is currently building her first home. Finally, each participant claimed financial independence, having attained economic stability from their own professional and personal money management efforts. Happiness and/or success at work has played a major role in achieving and sustaining such an economic lifestyle. Although these participants have gained financial autonomy from their families, they held common characteristics regarding family dynamics.

Pertaining to family background, participants in this study held traditional, uniform familial characteristics. For instance, each respondent was raised in a two-parent family with their biological mother and father. Regardless of having several or no siblings, each participant was raised in a family headed by parents who remained married for 25 to 50 or more years. Moreover, no parents of these respondents were ever divorced, and those who
were widowed, never remarried. Between the parents of each study participant, the father served as the primary financial provider. Despite the fact that most respondents had working mothers during part or all of childhood, each father worked to cover most of the family and household expenses. Therefore, family, financial, and household stability in childhood were shared characteristics evident among all participants in this sample.

However, it was location, profession, and a perception of their singleness that presented distinguishable traits among the study participants. Among the six study participants, two lived on opposite sides of the nation’s fourth largest city in South Texas, three reside in a mid-sized West Alabama town, and the last lived in a major Central Alabama metropolitan hub. Between the two South Texas respondents, one worked in financial advising and the other is an insurance company executive. However, the three participants in the West Alabama mid-sized town had similar professions in education of some sort: one was a public elementary school teacher, another was a retired university administrator and the third is a teaching assistant for deaf and visually impaired toddlers. In contrast, the respondent living in a Central Alabama metropolis was employed as a government healthcare agency researcher. Yet, the location of their current lives truly did not hold the influence of geography in this study. Participant accounts indicated that their native cities were the most influential geographical factor. It was those home-base cities that serve as the setting to family environments, upbringing and dating experiences of their early lives which contribute in shaping their current marital status, dating circumstances and lifestyles.

Additionally, as all of these professional and childfree women were African American and heterosexual, not all classified their single status in the same way. Surprisingly, all but one of this study’s participants viewed being single as a temporary situation, with the other
claiming to be single as mostly a matter of choice. However, every study participant in this study concurred that her marital partner of preference must be an African American man who is a believer in God. Moreover, each study participant embraced their current single lifestyle, enjoying the oneness and freedom it provided, contrary to whatever marital desires they may individually possess or previously held in the past. Overall, this sample description reflected participants with shared circumstances overall, implying that CHAPAWN are bonded by common experiences and traits.

**Rationale for Design**

This process of interview research was an appropriate tool to derive meaning from the lived experiences among study participants. Additionally, in-depth interviewing in Seidman’s (2006) procedures and analysis structure were ideal for assisting non-advanced qualitative researchers with producing meaning-based data related to social phenomenon. This study exposed actual experiences from the dating lives of CHAPAWN. This study also shed light on the meaning of their intimate journey in dating African American men, and discussed how life history, background, and environmental circumstances contributed to their experiences.

**Significance of Study**

The CHAPAWN group members faced a dating phenomenon like no other group in America. Not only had marriage become less attainable for these women, but factors like their educational opportunities, professional success, and economic affluence had even posed challenges in their dating relationships with African American men (Banks, 2011). As a social issue, this problem is widely acknowledged using similar themes through news reports and media programming. In academic research, the issue has received only minimal support. Some existing examinations have implied that African American women are unlikely to benefit from
being married (Black et al., 2005; McAdoo, 2007). Thus, room exists for bringing more examinations of this subject matter to light.

As such, this study was warranted for several reasons. First, regarding the realm of communication scholarship, this study examined the relationship between real-life phenomenon against its presentation in academic scholarship. Specifically, such a study gave voice to the African American women who have been perceived as the blame or cause for their own dilemma. Second, this study offered phenomenological clarity focusing on the impact of cultural, relational and interpersonal communication factors related to the CHAPAWN experiences. Finally, this qualitative research study provided support and some contradiction to existing research related to CHAPAWNs.

**Investigator Connection**

As a professionally-inclined, childfree, heterosexual and never-married African American woman, reflecting on my own dating situations with African American men was of key importance to me personally and in my research. Quite frankly, my love life had been somewhat of a disaster by typical standards. I tended to prioritize my professional desires and individual dreams over romantic relationships. Even now, with my parents’ persistent health challenges, my personal relationships remained less important. Dating was always a lower priority—not necessarily my primary concern. And if I did make love a priority, it flopped or failed.

For most of my adult life, my work almost always took me out of town. I would connect with men away from home, finding myself in a series of long-distance relationships. In fact, my first love at 16 was a young African American male I met the summer before he went off to college. That relationship seemed to set a pattern in my relationships, many of which have been with African American men. I find that I am often involved with men who are geographically unavailable on a consistent basis. Subconsciously, I believe this was so the relationship will not interrupt whatever educational or work opportunity I am pursuing; be it grad school, performing on the road as an actor, working on cruise ships, or being a flight attendant. And with that, it seems like the availability of straight African American men in my work or social circles seems scarce or, in the least, difficult to manage given my existing priorities.

So, I never saw the urgency in seeking out a partner or seriously pursuing marriage. I wanted to honor myself, an admitted “free-spirit,” with the ability to pursue whatever crazy adventurous opportunity that came along. For several years, I lived my dream as a working actress where I relied on my accessible flexibility to take an out-of-town gig at a moment’s notice. In my twenties, while living and performing in New York City, I just went with the flow as a few dating opportunities presented themselves.
In my thirties, I was trying to find myself professionally and figure out my long-term career path.

The very week I turned 30, I landed in the messiness of ending an off-and-on three year long-distance relationship with an unavailable man, while heading home during a parental health crisis. Dating was hardly on my mind as I permanently moved back to my hometown soon after, and then to Texas the next year.

By age 35, I was back in New York City and found myself in a particularly vulnerable place while working as a flight attendant. I was faced with emotional and professional uncertainty. Maybe it was the failing economy or my pivotal age, but I was feeling unsettled. I then fell into dating an African American male partner from my past, now a divorcee with children, who resided in another city. It was at this moment that I was slapped with a dose of reality: the kind of African American men available in my twenties were long gone, and some of those remaining were undesirable or seemed to come with heavy baggage.

So, as always, I focused on my career.

The next year, I landed in a doctoral degree program. During the first month of classes, my best friend suddenly died. Shock or grief did not provoke me into self-reflection about her death; she too was a never-married, professional and childfree African American woman. She would never fulfill her strong desire for marriage and family. Instead, I reacted by hanging on with the same guy from my dating past. He still lived at a distance, had substantial baggage, financial constraints and held no true desire for a committed relationship.

Early in my studies another never-married, African American, childfree female doctoral student proclaimed that getting a PhD would detract a suitable African American male partner from me. I openly disagreed with her as I personally felt that a favorable African American male suitor would not necessarily be dressed with an advanced degree or suit-and-tie profession. However, I must admit that it made me ponder my future love life. I acknowledged the possibility that I may face rejection in attracting a good African American male partner by virtue of my education. However, I felt she was only repeating what we all were hearing—that highly-educated African American women, with robust salaries along with professional and educational status had trouble finding an African American male mate with complimenting traits. Truthfully, I felt very different. For me, meeting a good African American man does not mean he must have an advanced degree or even a white-collar job. That said, if he was financially stable, and a good match emotionally, I would be open to him.

Since I am the product of parents married for nearly 50 years, and my only sibling is over 20 years married, one may assume that I wanted the same thing--not necessarily so! My sister married her college sweetheart soon after she graduated, as did most of their married friend, from Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs). In fact, many couples who dated at HBCUs went on to get married and were still together. I also attended an HBCU where I observed certain dating rituals. I discovered there is a dating window of sorts that existed in the campus male-female dating dynamic. My senior year, many women at my institution were in the know. They
took to robbing, stealing, and snatching the boyfriends of other women in order to make the ‘dating window’ for a possible husband after graduation.

In observing my parents over the years, it seemed to me that marriage is a choice; one that should be wisely decided with a willingness to stay married. A commitment like that always overwhelmed me. Admittedly, I always wanted to have the professional choices that so many women, particularly African American women, do not always have available to them. I yearned to have as many options in my grasp as possible (e.g., to start a business, to live or work overseas, to change careers). I never wanted to be pushed, pulled or derailed from a career or lifestyle opportunity in the case of an unsupportive mate.

Previously, I did not believe that a prospective African American male partner of the same education and occupational orientation was put off by an accomplished African American woman. Yet and still, this was confirmed to me during a late night conversation with my sister’s husband, while I was deep into writing a paper for a doctoral course. As always, he jokingly asked, “When do I get a brother-in-law”? This particular night I told him that he may not get one, especially since I heard getting a PhD made me less of a catch. Then, he dropped the boom! My college-educated brother-in-law admitted to me that he intentionally worked extremely hard in technical sales for a major communications corporation to ensure he earned more than my sister—an environmental engineer who was earning upwards of $75K annually at the time. I was stunned and shocked by his admission! Without further explanation, I fully understood the challenge African American men have in being partnered with African American women who are educationally, professionally, or financially more successful.

Now, in my early forties, I have wondered if my desire to maintain choices has blinded me from seeking out a fulfilling love life with an African American male partner. As my parents collectively battle health issues and decreasing mobility, I moved back to Texas in support of them. I felt that my single status has my family perceiving a sense of selfishness on my part. I still want to exercise options coinciding with my chosen lifestyle, outside of them. That being said, as I have watched my parents grow older and less healthy, I think about what my personal life would be like if they were gone. Where would my family foundation exist? Over the years my family also included close single friends who functioned like an extended family. But now, several of them have transitioned into marriage.

I have always been open to dating good guys, even if they are not African American. However, I am certain that if I agreed to marriage, having an African American husband is my first choice. While I do not actively pursue or plot for a marital partner in any way, I sometimes wonder if that possibility is still out there for me.

I must say though, I will always move forward with my plans as a proud career-oriented, never-married African American woman with no kids—one with opportunities to make my dreams come true whether single, married, or attached. There does exist one certainty: I will always choose being single now, and in the future, especially if my overall happiness may be undermined or compromised.

Regarding lifestyles of these women with African American men, the key element of this study was firsthand accounts—such as the reflexive passage above. Presenting a reflexive
account eliminated any pre-understandings by the primary researcher and prefaced the richness of revelations in subsequent data collection (Finlay, 2008). By including this reflexive passage, familiar insights resulted from the researcher’s related stance intermingled with awareness, data analysis, and social critique (Finlay, 2008). Moreover, the inclusion of this reflexive statement enhanced the significance of this study. It provided a reason, relevancy and connection in examining this investigation. Therein, exists an insight that was related, yet, relegated by the study’s actual protocol. However, the study focused on data offered by participants; for it was their experiences, insights and perspectives that held ultimate value in creating a lived reality. In all, this qualitative study revealed direct descriptions, narratives, and truth-telling of the lived relational experiences among CHAPAWN participants which maximized impact of this subject matter. This rich data also provided clarity, depth and understanding of this dating lifestyle.

To establish this study’s focus, the primary investigator/author self-identified as being a member of the CHAPAWN group and provided a reflexive statement prior to collecting data. While acknowledging a relationship to the topic, this step counteracted researcher bias, as previously stated, and allowed for a source of initial insight in rendering subsequent data. Nevertheless, the focus of this study rested the actual data collected from CHAPAWNs who offered more than just a simple overview of their lives. These study participants not only divulged meaningful descriptions, honest feelings and open responses to predetermined interview questions and prompts, but provided transparency and engagement. Through rendering great revelations about their careers, family backgrounds, dating experiences, and marital/parent desires, awareness of the dating perspective among CHAPAWNS was offered.

At the point of conducting interviews, this investigator not only communicated such a connection to the study’s focus, but also acknowledged the intent of ascertaining participants’
lived experiences and perspectives on dating, marriage, and children through interview data and firsthand accounts. All participants were told that the purpose of this study was to fulfill final requirements for a doctoral degree program in communication studies. After interview protocol was executed and data collection occurred, responses were then transcribed and analyzed. Ultimately, themes, descriptions and an analytical discussion resulted from raw data to gain understanding of how the dating lives of CHAPAWNs unfold.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

To best understand the dating lives of CHAPAWNs in this study, coding and analysis of responses from in-depth interviews provided great description, powerful insight, and substantive examples of their dating lives. Responses to interview data was pertinent in this particular investigation. Not only did interview data offer informative support, but essentially, this data presented firsthand accounts, real-life experiences and background from CHAPAWNs themselves. A collective representation of this in-depth interview data rendered key responses to the research questions posed in this study.

Describing Singlehood

The first study research question asked how CHAPAWN described their singlehood. Initially, every CHAPAWN participating in this study designated themselves as a temporary single. Such an assessment assumed, that in time, marriage will likely be a life occurrence for them. Based on study findings, Chloe, Sasha and Tiger were involuntary temporary singles, having each professed the strongest degree of marital desire, each acknowledging marriage as a future outcome for their lives. However, Amethyst, Joyce and Fannie Lou are found to be voluntary temporary singles whose description of singleness coincided with having less of a priority due to their eminent career focus. Through Stein’s (1981) categorization of temporary singles, this study supplied an equal balance of participants who described their singleness according to each of the two categories.
Strikingly, participants in this sample described opposing perspectives regarding their descriptions of being single. Respondents who are classified as involuntary temporary singles communicate ideas revealing a motivation to move from singleness to marriage. Chloe’s statement, “I believe that I will be married” established her future plans, and explains “I have not found a guy—I believe that when you are asked to be married, you’ll know.” Tiger’s affirmed that “I expected to get married” and further elaborated saying, “it’s gonna happen one day, because I haven’t given up—my dreams are still there.” Sasha requested that “I would like to get married,” and declared her marital desire which is dually supported when she claimed “I want that connection--I want somebody that I can communicate with, I want somebody who can be my best friend.” These three participants presented a collective view that marital desire is a prevalent thought and a pursuit among them. In this way, these three respondents presented the mainstream expectation that getting married is a life goal to naturally be achieved. Whether striving or assuming that marriage will happen their future, this faction of the sample was not settled in being single, and looked forward to their individual futures of being married.

On the other hand, those participants classified in the voluntary temporary category maintained a viewpoint of being situated in their singlehood. Joyce declared being “happy with life now” and asserts “I am happy with my singleness, simply because I am not anxious for anything.” Fannie Lou, who self-assessed as a “runaway bride” on three different occasions, is the most unwavering in her satisfaction with being single boasting: “There’s nobody in control of me…I can be a loose cannon.” Fannie Lou asserted that she was “happy being single,” confirming that she was “content with my singleness.” Amethyst, recently retired after decades of a 60-hour work week was very settled saying “I feel very satisfied” and further elaborated that “I am ready just to be, and adventure, and move and do and go experience life.” In collective
opposition of the aforementioned views, this side of the sample reflected women who not only embrace their single status, but possess few regrets from singlehood. Although never they are married, this sector of the sample possessed a positive contentment and welcomed acceptance that singleness has brought to their lives. Unlike the other half of study participant views, these respondents have no unmet expectations of marriage, or a presumed sense of happiness being married may offer.

Much like the rhetoric and composition of political parties who share opposing views, study participants on both sides of this particular issue revealed paradoxes that call into question their collective viewpoints from each side of the issue; to either prepare for marriage or relish in being single. Although three participants, Amethyst, Joyce and Fannie Lou were CHAPAWNs representing contented singleness, some contradicting data within this perspective exists among them. Joyce offered, “I see singleness as temporary because I believe God gives you the desire of your heart--I do have the desire to be in a relationship.” While this response did not negate happiness with being single, it implied a desire, coinciding with the three involuntarily single study participants in the sample who were seeking a partner to eventually marry. While this is a singular contradiction of the collective view, it indicated a possible subliminal marital desire existing just beneath the surface of CHAPAWNs who express or portray a strong exterior of contentment in singleness.

Just the same, contradiction existed among the study’s involuntary temporary singles who present a collected desire and expectation of future marriage. Chloe confessed, “…to say that I’m yearning to have someone in the house with me 24/7 is not me.” Therein existed yet another contradiction of perspective. Instead, she indicated a deeper satisfaction with her singleness that may be stronger than her response of marriage expectation. Again, this singular contradiction of
marital desire suggested a greater sense of satisfaction with being single. This slight contradiction implied that being acclimated to living as a single person subconsciously creates long-term singleness. Moreover, such an effect can undermined martial potential, especially among career-driven CHAPAWNs who have dedicated their lives to work success, leaving them less-likely to transition into marriage.

Although opposing views of seeking marriage and being contented in singleness were equally represented in this study’s data, they are not absolute. Much like positions of extreme opposition, this data represented dissenting opinions on both sides. Such variation offered a sense of milder or moderate positions in how CHAPAWNs in this study described their singleness. In all, this data suggested a sense of duality among study participants’ description of their singlehood. Despite the inclination for participants to initially designate themselves, a simple explanation of their singleness was unjustified. In actuality, singleness among CHAPAWNs participating in this examination showed a complexity of responses, intermingled with emotions, undiscovered desires and firm expectations, all of which implied a staunch satisfaction with their current status, or most certain desire that despite long-term singleness, marriage was still a possibility within the CHAPAWN group.

**Marital Possibility**

The second research question described how CHAPAWN view their possibilities of getting married. Participants in this study discussed marital possibility through acknowledging a lack of diversity access in partners at work, finding the right person, and disappointment in being unmarried. Firstly, as the work environment played a major role in the lifestyles of CHAPAWN. Study participants acknowledged that their professional settings heavily hindered marital possibilities, despite the professional and financial opportunity offered -- as indicated in the
major study theme of career-enabled singleness. Even though work can be a primary avenue for
meeting a potential spouse, CHAPAWNs seeking a potential male suitor at work were especially
disadvantaged due to a lack of male diversity. Collectively, study participants professed that few
African American males exist in their work environments, but the massive presence of White
males at work provided abundance in potential partner availability for women of other races who
seek them. Chloe explains, “Where I work right now, out of 50 people I work where there is not
a single African American male. I just got a new district manager from Chicago…he’s African
American—that’s the only African American male.” Her comment specifically established how
a lack of diversity in men at work led to being a poor resource for meeting a potential spouse.
Regarding the lack of male diversity at work, Sasha asserted, “its only one guy there.” She
further discussed how in spending much of her time working a full-time and part-time position
simultaneously, the ability to meet African American males is virtually nonexistent. Just the
same, Tiger mentioned how women, especially White women, outnumbered the men on her job
as an elementary teacher; and the few African American males in that work setting were often
same-sex oriented. Moreover, Fannie Lou added, “In my circles, I’m normally the only African
American female. I rarely see African American men.” Again, support for the lack of diversity
within the career setting among study participants was also apparent in the healthcare
environment where Fannie Lou works. As such, the lack of African American men in work
settings among CHAPAWNs prevented the same accessibility of potential spouses from which
women of other races gain benefit.

Secondly, communication about marital possibility among CHAPAWNs researched in
this study were reflected through their inability to meet the “right” or best-suited partners. A
major theme discussed from within this study’s data, participants not only cited their inability to
meet African American men in daily settings, but claimed their dating experiences have left vacancy in connecting with the best-suited and most appropriate African American male partner to date and/or eventually marry. Joyce was most emphatic in asserting this point of view: “I could be married if I just wanted to be married, but it has to be the right guy. I just have not met that right person. Now lately, I haven’t met anybody because my head has been down doing my own stuff. But back then, I was out and about dating, going places and meeting guys. I’m way past that. It just has to be the right person.” Here, Joyce discussed that her busy job and writing pursuits now occupy the time she previously gave to the dating scene. Therefore, her current lifestyle provided a clear guideline she has established; the right person must be present for her to contemplate the possibility of marriage. Fannie Lou attested, “the men that are in my age group are locked up in jail. The pool is smaller.” She referenced her long-term singleness at age 52, leaving fewer eligible African American men to date, let along meeting the right person. Fannie Lou also pointed out that many unmarried African men in her age range are incarcerated, which further denies their accessibility to become marital partners. Similar sentiments were offered by Amethyst, 62, in regard to discussing the absence of the right African American male partner. She asserted, “Mr. Right is more a Godsend to me. You look for someone who potentially has retirement or some kind of financial stability because you are looking toward retirement.” After a lifetime of being single, Amethyst, a 62-year-old recent retiree, emphasized that as she is transitioning into retirement, she is void an eligible African American male partner who possessed a solid long-term financial future financial. Regarding meeting the right person, Chloe based her response from a previous relationship with a partner she later learned was married by saying, “I don’t want a part of no man, because they are getting all of me.” In this instance, Chloe not only offered reckoning of her past with this firm stand, but asserted that in
order to fulfill her martial desire, an African American male partner must be available in marital status, emotionally and physically. Therefore, not meeting the “right person” presents an obstacle CHAPAWN women in this study revealed as a reason for not being married or gaining marital opportunity.

A third manner by which participants in this study discuss marital possibilities is by expressing feelings of loss as marriage has yet to occur in their lives. Sasha, 41, testified, “I really thought I’d be married by now…have kids by now. I’m kind of sad for me. Most of my girlfriends are married and have kids”. In her response, Sasha confessed that she expected to be married at this current age and phase of her life. Her longing, disappointment and regret was apparent in this statement. Similarly Tiger admitted, “Some days I feel like I’m giving up. Every now and then, you get a glimmer of hope. As time went on I thought I might as well give up. But then, you have those good days where you meet someone and think, maybe it will happen.” Tiger clearly expressed her longing to be married and the disappointment she has experienced as a single women seeking matrimony. Despite wanting to abandon her marital desires, Tiger’s strong desire and hope to be married remained.

**Childfree Status**

The third research question in this study asked CHAPAWNs to describe their childfree status. In their descriptions of being childfree, CHAPAWNs participating in this study hold two opposing views: while one half of study participants discussed a strong desire to have children, the other half of this sample wholly embraced a childfree existence. Tiger, 41, Sasha, 43, and Chloe 46, were the only study participants to affirm the idea of having children. Tiger and Sasha, the youngest study participants, maintained fading and limited fertility, respectively.
Chloe, the only participant to ever physically approach motherhood, also discussed the possibility of parenting alternatives.

In each case, these study respondents presented some variance of affirmation regarding the possibility of having children. Tiger declared, “I wanna to have a baby even though it’s almost too late.” In this case, Tiger acknowledged that her age and biological capabilities may undermine her desires, yet, she still maintains hope to have children. However, Tiger was adamant about having children within the auspice of marriage by declaring: “Marriage comes before motherhood. I really want that. I want a husband, then a child.” Sasha described her fading fertility from the perspective of loss, by stating: “It’s hard when you think that you might not ever have a child, or ever get to experience that feeling. It’s so depressing.” In this example, Sasha was somewhat mourning the loss of her fertility and subsequent ability to physically bear children. Yet and still, she too claimed to be unwilling to pursue motherhood without a husband, emphasizing the challenge of raising children as a single parent. Sasha further testified that if marriage with her current male partner materialized, she holds interest in having children, stating she would want to “try and have a child” with that potential marital partner. Sasha added: “It would be fun to have a girl”, and “it would add something to life.” Here, Sasha discussed that while she holds limited fertility, children are not necessarily out of the question, especially if she married her current boyfriend. But overall, Sasha only viewed the possibility of having children with a spouse.

Chloe, who experienced miscarrying a child, still speaks of having children in the future. She responds: “I can’t have kids, I mean if I could, I would. There are times when I don’t feel grown up because I don’t have any kids. I know my life would totally change.” Her comment implied that having children may be a possibility, as she later mentioned the option of adopting
or being a foster parent. By making predictions about a life with children, Chloe further offered a sense of possibility of having children in the future. However, in discussing the prospect of having children, she did not specify having a husband as co-parent, leaving the idea of single parenting as an option. Chloe, Sasha and Tiger, represented one-half of the sample examined in the study, each of whom affirm the possibility of having children in various ways.

However, the other half of the data sample in this study revealed a starkly contrasting perspective in being childfree. Amethyst, Joyce and Fannie Lou, the older participants examined in this study, discussed their childfree status through acceptance, embrace and choice. When working prior to retirement, Amethyst discussed how being a childfree and single professional was necessary for her work/life balance. While working a grueling 60-hour-a week, 24-hour on-call work schedule and caregiving for parents, particularly a wheelchair-bound mother, Amethyst indicated that being childfree was a necessity, saying: “I had so many responsibilities with my job and as an only child with my parents as they aged, until I didn’t really see where I could put anything else on my plate.” This comment explained how being childfree in the prime of her professional life was a clear advantage to Amethyst who also supported her parents’ care. However, Amethyst admits attempting to get pregnant for the sake of her parents: “When I was 38 years old, I really tried to get pregnant, more or less for my Mom because I wanted her to experience having grandchildren.” Despite admitting to an attempt of motherhood out of family guilt, Amethyst corroborated that having children would have been a burden during her prime working years. Principally, Amethyst’s state of being childfree was a necessity of extreme work demands and caregiving responsibilities.

Regarding her childfree status, Joyce embraced a lifestyle without children. She was emphatic about being in such a position by declaring: “I’m not trying to have babies and be tied
down. I have a lot of nieces and nephews. I have forty-one. So, that’s enough, that’s enough!”

Here, Joyce implied that her role as an aunt to a huge host of nieces and nephews, takes the place of parenting. She was clear that by not having children of her own, she could move freely through her life and career pursuits. As such, Joyce embraced her status as a childfree, professional woman.

Similarly, Fannie Lou described her childfree status, not just through embrace, but as a definite choice. She claimed: “I had the opportunity to be married and have children. I decided I didn’t want it.” In this instance, Fannie Lou discussed her childfree status to be a choice; one that she has held long-term. In her descriptions of having children, Fannie Lou said, “Kids suck the life out of you,” and further professed that “with kids I would have been depressed.” Clearly, Fannie Lou is supporting her long-term choice to be a childfree woman. She later expressed that having children would be too stressful, despite her tough exterior. Essentially, Fannie Lou described being childfree as not just a choice, but the appropriate situation regarding her personal disposition. Contrary to the other three existing study participants who shared a desire for children, these three respondents discussed how their childfree status existed out of necessity, or as a celebrated and deliberate choice in pursuit of career-based lifestyles.

**Stories of Marriage and Motherhood**

The final research question of this study asked how stories provided by CHAPAWNs were used to explain their marriage and motherhood opportunities. Regarding marriage and motherhood, participants in this study used stories to accentuate how their overall lived dating experiences. Particularly, the stories offered supplemental meaning and greater understanding of lifestyles inhabited by these women. One story told by Amethyst revealed the negative impact professional success holds in the love lives CHAPAWNs:
The thing that is most challenging for me is that all the women in my family, just in one family; where all the women are not able to marry and have children. This is what bothers me… I cannot figure it out.

According to Amethyst, all but two of her first cousins were CHAPAWNs, highly educated with successful careers that include world travel, corporate perks, and elite status. As daughters of siblings, all were reared in two-parent homes and a close-knit extended family. She professed that each of them, amidst their professional and financial good fortune, have never married or had children, despite actively dating. Furthermore, Amethyst classified that this consistency of successful female cousins with no husbands or children is a “family curse.” While this story seems ironic and dramatic, it emphasized the commonality of this dating issue faced by CHAPAWN. Moreover, Amethyst’s story offered support, and explained how widespread this population of women may extend, and how deeply there existed a connection between CHAPAWN and traditional African American families.

The traditional African American family was apparent in this study; an ever-present resource among CHAPAWN participants. Every respondent confirmed being raised with her biological parents in stable family households. Their stories expressed colorful descriptions of how strong family interplay and parental examples shaped their perceptions and expectations for marriage. Particularly, several participants told interesting stories about their fathers’ influence; most fathers served as models as these CHAPAWN women seek male partners.

Chloe revered her father, a military man and strong provider. She not only heeded her father’s advice in establishing a solid career before marriage and children, but she also patterned her strong work ethic and career success after him. Chloe particularly credited her father with providing a good example of a how an African American husband and father should behave both
emotionally and financially – a standard she maintained for any future marital mate. Chloe recalled: “I always looked up to my Dad and thought he just walked on water. He was just so patient and everything. My Dad needed to love me and show me how to be adored, and show me the right way to be cared for and protected.” Specifically, Chloe credited her father for having taught her how an African American male partner should treat her and the manner in which he should conduct himself as potential father. It was by her own father’s example and influence throughout her life that Chloe set the standard for any potential African American male spouse with whom she may build a life.

In the same manner, Tiger spoke about how watching her parents’ be married, helped her understand how spouses working together through challenging situations can accomplish stability and successfully raise children. Tiger described:

They always worked hard. I don’t think they told us a lot of things but, my parents both worked hard. They both put their money together and they both built things. And they both wanted things. They had a desire to want more. I saw that change over time—yes, they didn’t have a great marriage all of the time, but they never gave up on each other. So, you see that example, (wondering) how can you find somebody like that.

Tiger discussed how her father worked alongside her mother to keep together an imperfect relationship. Tiger further emphasized that observing such honorable behavior from her parents, structures her own expectations in various dating situations and serves as a cue in knowing if a partner held similar marital qualities.

Joyce also told a related story that reflects the omnipresent stability of within her family; and a possible reason as to why strong marital ties exist among her 10 siblings and their spouses. Joyce spoke of her mother warning a sister’s fiancé about how he would treat her daughter:

One of my bro-in-laws, asked for my sister’s hand in marriage. My Mom said, you know what, when I come to see her, I wanna see her in the same condition. Meaning she didn’t need him beating on her. “If you feel like you gotta do that, then you need to bring her
back home, because we’re not gonna have that.” None of my brothers-in-law have ever, I didn’t think they would anyway, tried any of that kind of stuff.

Essentially, such feedback from her mother has been beneficial, as all of Joyce’s siblings married young and held stable families with their original spouses. Even though Joyce’s career and personal life was contrast with her siblings, it is apparent that her mother’s advice and support regarding her children’s marital opportunities contributed to their matrimonial happiness. As such, Joyce was affected regarding her own partner choices by being cautious about entering marriage. Each of these stories not only enhanced the background and detail of dating experiences among study participants, but provided nuances in understanding how CHAPAWNs view and approach the idea of marriage.

**Major and Minor Themes**

Data rendered from two in-depth interviews conducted with the six study participants produced three major themes: stable parental marriage examples, career-enabled singleness, skepticism of marital happiness. These themes were revealed across this sample through examining dating experiences, career and family impact experienced by CHAPAWNs. Interview excerpts presented not only showed connection of the theme among study participants, but showed similar, or in some cases, differences in supporting how the theme exemplifies certain aspects and/or issues CHAPAWNs face through lifestyle and dating experiences. Each theme represented an aspect of data that was shared in most or all of participant responses. In the case of each theme, participants offered examples, accounts, or stories which particularly emphasized how elements of the theme relate to their individual lived experiences as a CHAPAWN. Moreover, major themes derived from this study’s data are experiences common to most study participants, and are a contributing factor, element, characteristic or situation connected to understanding the overall dating lifestyles of CHAPAWNs.
Stable Parental Marriage and Family Settings

The most noticeable theme appearing in this data was the strong examples of marriage and family stability that existed in each participant’s background. As previously mentioned, each respondent was reared in a family with their biological parents who had long-term marriages and never divorced, or re-married, even where a spouse was deceased. The presence of a strong marital bond was the impetus within this theme – demonstrating stability and a solid relationship model for each participant. No matter their desires regarding marriage and family, participants in this study used their parents’ marriages as a guide, a standard, or model in shaping their lives and individual dating aspirations. Such a reference was indicated in each participant profile. As a 46-year old Chloe, a financial planner in South Texas clearly described how her upbringing in a military family in Pine Bluff, AR set precedence for her regarding marriage and family:

A man has to ask you to get married… you had to say yes, and then you took on his entire family. That’s how marriage was to me, that’s the way I saw it. I never believed in having kids outside of marriage. It was, you go to school, get your degree, you find a man, you get married. That’s it! My Dad was like, okay, “I want you to have a career first”. He would say, “They’ll come, they’ll come.

In this instance, Chloe acknowledged that a standard was established by observing her parents’ relationship and heeding her father’s advice, which shaped her expectations of how work and family life should develop. Her reverence for her father, along with his words, served as a premise to which she is adhering. She emphasized that the example of a strong, yet dynamic, marriage and family life she observed growing up shaped her understanding of marriage and family should evolve. Chloe noted that such a process is one that she intends to duplicate in her own life.

This experience was similarly evident in the family background of Joyce, 49, an insurance company executive in the same South Texas metropolis. While being reared in a rural
Arkansas town, Joyce revealed that the example of her parents is the doctrine of marriage that she upholds:

My parents were more about showing than telling. I don’t remember a lot of sit down conversations. And I just saw my Dad as provider. I mean he just worked, always working, always brought the money home—gave it to my Mom so she could handle the house. So, my Mom was a strong women, jovial woman. And, my Dad was as well. They were giving no matter what. I just saw how they behaved. It’s almost like that’s what I wanted so I’m not gonna settle. If I wanted to be, just married, I could be. But, it’s more than just saying the word, that I’m married. I wanna be happy along with that. And so, I guess I just saw what not to do.

Here, Joyce also referenced how her parents’ marital relationship acted as a standard by which she has regards her possibility of becoming married. Particularly, Joyce emphasized the effective collaboration of how her father’s role as a provider and her mother’s role as the household manager left a strong impression on her of how a couple successfully works together. Their productive interactions and behavior modeled for her the kind of marriage she may someday attain. She recalled that such behavior is the basis of her expectations if she were ever married. Joyce clearly confirmed that she is unwilling to compromise their example of a marital bond just for the sake of attaining marital status. Therefore, she chose to remain single, unless she can experience the same type of marriage her parents held.

Tiger, 42, living in a small West Alabama is employed as an elementary teacher communicated that her parents’ marital interaction served as an influential example while growing up in the village of Port St. Joe, FL:

My parents grew up poor. We grew up poor, but they never told us we were, ‘cause they always worked hard. They both put their money together and they both built things. And they had a desire to want more. Yeah, so, it was like, okay, will I ever find somebody that wants more out of life? It’s been hard you know, because everybody is satisfied with one thing. And I saw that change over time. Yes, they didn’t have a great marriage all of the time, but they never gave up on each other. You see that example...so how can you find somebody like that? It’s hard to find that kind of person when you’ve seen somebody who is always with their family.
In this case, Tiger not only described the mutual exchange she witnessed in the marriage of her parents, but she also acknowledged their ability to remain together amidst challenges. She detailed how her parents not only worked together, grew as a couple with similar desires but strived toward a greater life for their own family. As a result, Tiger also acknowledged the difficulty in finding similar traits in a potential mate of her own. She specified that such an example is what she grew up learning, but questioned the ability to duplicate similar marital harmony in her own love life, especially that of building a life together with a potential spouse. Again, her recollection of early family life indicated a sense of how a stable, successful parental marriage serves as blueprint for her own possible future marriage.

Amethyst, a 61-year old retired university athletic administrator, reared and living in the West Alabama city, was extremely transparent in discussing how her parental marriage and family stability was a core trait from her childhood family life, one that she currently values:

I grew up with a mother and father. My parents were married 48 years when my mother passed away. Both my parents worked. We were not rich by no stretch of the imagination. I grew up in a middle class family. I was in the sixth grade when we moved into the home that my parents would buy. The home, we were in until my mother passed away. So, I had a very stable upbringing. I didn’t grow up not knowing if I was going to go back to the same place or not. I had stability, food, clothes, everything. We were the first African American family in the subdivision. But, I had no siblings, I am an only child. I did not know a lifestyle of not having a father present, and not having a mother present.

In this instance, Amethyst offered details of her parents’ long-term marriage, and how she grew up as their only child, ingesting their marital example. She gave implicit details of how her parents’ economic resources allowed them to own a home, and garner a steady stream of resources for living. She clearly described how the stability of her life growing up is not just fact, but a source of pride for which she seems to still cherish and respect. Here, Amethyst was projecting how her stable background is what she came to learn regarding marriage and family.
Sasha, a 43-year old working as a deaf and blind teaching assistant in the same West Alabama city, concurred with having been raised among a stable parental marriage and family environment. She detailed how her family environment and parents’ long-term marriage offered a strong example:

My parents have been married for 50 years. I am an only child. I do have a “play” brother …who my parents took underneath their wing. My mother is very Independent, even though her and my father are respectful of each other. She bought what she wanted. My mom bought the groceries, she did the household stuff, but she didn’t pay the bills or anything, he took care of that. But she paid her own bills that she made herself. My mother is very talkative, where my dad is very quiet-- goes with the flow. I never heard them arguing or anything like that.

Sasha discussed the steady parental marriage and family setting in which she was raised. In addition to her parents’ long-term marriage, her family unit was strong enough to include a male from their community who was raised in her family as a brother and son, respectively. The uniqueness in Sasha’s description regarding her parental marriage example was how their contrasting personalities produced marital harmony within their relationship. She also emphasized her father’s role as provider, and her mother’s independent nature. Sasha’s discussion of her family corroborated the theme of her being raised in a stable family environment with a strong parental marriage.

Fannie Lou is a 52-year old CHAPAWN living in a Central Alabama metropolitan hub working as a government healthcare agency researcher. Raised in Brooklyn, NY, Fannie Lou verbally documented how her family stability derived from extended family members in close range to her family, and a strong marital relationship between parents who were polar opposites:

I’m from New York. I came from a two-parent home. My mother was a nurse and my father worked as a production analyst for IBM. I have two older siblings, brothers. I’m the youngest of three children. We were evenly spaced apart…two, four, six years. We grew up in a home, not the projects, but a home in Brooklyn. My grandfather owned property. So, we lived in his home. My grandparents lived in the floor below us. An aunt and uncle lived on another floor. Across the street,
my aunt and her family. Even thought my immediate family is small, I grew up around a lot of ... relatives. At 15, my father moved us to North Carolina, his home state. I graduated high school in North Carolina. My mother died prematurely of colon cancer. They were married 25 years when she died. My father never remarried. My father had ten siblings. My grandparents were married, and had many siblings. It was an interesting disconnect between the two of them. My mother was this Catholic woman who was this radical liberal. My father, was protestant, and a very conservative Republican. So, it was an interesting dynamic in that household.

Here, Fannie Lou concisely described the extended-family environment of her early childhood. Not only was she raised with a mother, father and two siblings, but the presence of her extended family members, who lived in very close proximity offered uniformity in their familial stability. The most interesting detail of Fannie Lou’s description was that her parents had strongly opposing socio-political views, but their connection as a couple was so solid Fannie Lou’s father never remarried in the decades after her mother’s passing. Although they were a couple with dichotomous perspectives, the contrasting mix created a strong family dynamic offering stability and strength within their family, further supporting this common trait among CHAPAWN participants. Thus, family stability with long-term parental marriage examples was a relevant theme shared among CHAPAWN participants in this study.

Career-Enabled Singleness

Another prominent theme reflected among this study’s participant profiles was the central role career and professional pursuits have played in the dating lives of these CHAPAWNS. As these highly professional women aggressively pursued their careers, variably, work success impacted their choice, ability or availability in dating African American men. Amethyst stressed how her extreme job demands enabled her single status:

When I was in the midst of my career and my mother was living and in a wheelchair...between my work and caring for her, I could only see where having marriage would have been an added burden. I had worked so much, morning, noon, day and night, weekends, there was really not an opportunity to meet people.
Although she is now retired, Amethyst, emphasized how her workload dominated most of her time. With that, she indicated that work disabled her ability to meet possible mates or regularly date. Amethyst suggested that her career in college athletics was a round-the-clock assignment, only allowing time to care for her parents, specifically her mother who required a wheelchair. Particularly, Amethyst pointed out that marriage would have been a burden added to the enormous responsibilities she held at work and in caregiving for her parents. Amethyst indicated how the overwhelming demands for her job negated her ability to have a regular love life during the many years she worked in university sports. Based on the details of her account, Amethyst’s former work role undermined her ability to pursue an active love life.

Chloe repeated similar experiences in the way of an imbalanced work life with dating. Chloe’s previous job demands prohibited her access in meeting African American men, or regularly dating due to an intense work environment and heavy job responsibilities:

Until I moved, I was with a national retailer for twenty years. I was always the only female manager, assistant manager with my peer group. Most of them were men, either White…some of them were married… so it was always this colleague thing. And because I was always the only female, I was always isolated. The downside with that retailer is that it consumed so much of my time that I didn’t have family time, I didn’t have any time. It was all the company’s time because of my work ethic.

Chloe asserted how her previous long-term position left her feeling isolated in regard to dating, as her retail management position was demanding and time-consuming. It left Chloe with no time to pursue a personal life outside of work. In that position, Chloe worked in a male-dominated environment, yet, any men she encountered were either married or White, both of which were not dating options for her. While in that position, which covers the bulk of her professional career, Chloe maintained a mostly inactive dating life. Certainly, Chloe’s account
echoed support regarding career-enabled singleness brought on by professional demands apparent in this group of CHAPAWNs.

Sasha also recalled similar accounts regarding the impact of work in connection with her dating life. However, in this instance, Sasha specifically highlighted that her work environment lacked other single people for interaction, or men to possibly date:

I think it’s because of my work environment. I work with all White women. And just now we’re starting to get African American women in there. It’s kinda like there’s people my age there, but they’re married and they have kids. It’s no single people there. It’s only one guy there.

Sasha is certain to point out how work was not a source for dating or socializing with other singles, especially those who are African American. Here, Sasha acknowledged how her work environment has a shortcoming of dating opportunities, which often occurs through work. Basically, Sasha provided support from her accounts that her work setting encouraged her single status, instead of being a source to potentially change it.

Tiger added another dimension of how work impacts her dating life:

Who I work with every day are not many of African American people. So, the few African American men that I ever saw were mostly gay. So, there wasn’t a lot of choices as the other races. They have lots of choices it seems like.

In this response, Tiger proposed that the lack of available men in her work environment, especially those who are African American, play a role in her ability to meet potential partner. Here, Tiger is implied that since there are very few African Americans present in her work environment as a teacher, therein exists one less outlet toward connecting with a male partner. Unlike any other study participants, she specified the presence of gay African American men in her occupational environment, but only as a way to support the lack of dating opportunities there. Thus, these findings also implied that as a single African American woman of professional and
social prominence, Tiger had limitations regarding exposure to potential marital partners around 
her professional setting, a theme similarly conferred by experiences of other study participants. 

As an assistant vice president at an insurance company, Joyce held a completely different 
take on how her job has enabled her single status. She prescribed that the contrasting demands 
of her work/life circumstances, required an African American male who is versatile:

I just need him to be down-to-earth and compliment what I have going on. 
If I need you to put your hat on going backwards and go to a football game-- put 
your jersey on, your tennis shoes, let’s have fun! If I need you to go to the 
symphony with me because my manager invited me, I need you to put that tuxedo 
on, and let’s roll. I need you to be able to do it all, just like me. Be down-to-earth, 
but (like me) I can act the part wherever I am…I just have not met that person.

Joyce indicated a staunch difference between her more casual social life and the environment of 
work that often lends itself to formal, classy affairs that often accompany the lifestyles of 
corporate executives. Here, Joyce was not speaking of work in the sense of being a channel, or 
lack thereof, for dating, but implied that a suitable African American partner must be flexible in 
his social abilities to meet the needs of her upscale work life, while also dwelling in her down-to-
earth social settings. She was not advocating her lack of dating opportunities, but more 
specifically, access to the kind of African American men who present the same social and 
professional flexibility that she possesses. Joyce’s response spoke to how her work setting 
impacted who she dates versus being a source of access to available African American men. As 
such, this particular account enhanced the notion that not all CHAPAWNs face the same 
challenges with the same perspective. Yet, each of these experiences supported the apparent 
theme of career-enabled singleness, although differently, but relevant to the dating lives among 
CHAPAWNs.
Skepticism of Marital Happiness

The last major theme permeating across this data sample was a sense of skepticism toward happiness in marriage revealed in data responses. Participants in this study were challenged with the idea of marriage, in that, most spoke of hesitancy in entering marriage, especially as veterans of singleness.

Amethyst spoke to a true sense of her skepticism that married people are actually happy. She described her own observations of marriage and recalls a lesson about marital happiness she was taught by her parents:

To be honest, marriage frightens me. I see so many marriages…I see so many couples who are still together, but they’re so unhappy, or they’re going through horrible divorces. One thing my mother did tell me about marriage is that you’re gonna put up with something. You just have to decide what it is you’re gonna put up with.

In this instance, Amethyst implied that her reluctance about marriage is born from the unhappiness she has observed in the marriages among her peers. Moreover, she admitted how the skepticism and doubt she carries causes her a fear of being married. Ironically, Amethyst substantiated this point by referring to the marital advice offered by her mother, that acceptance of relational shortcomings is a reality in marriage. More than likely, the idea of making such a compromise also enhanced the marital fear accompanying Amethyst’s skepticism--believing that marriage may truly not a happy life.

Chloe also offered a clear perspective of skepticism of marital happiness. Here, she also drew out this theme through referencing such observations of marriage among her peers:

I’ve been around people that have not had what I had…they have the marriage, they have the kids, they have all of those things and I see how fu**ed up their life is because they went into those situations, because of wanting material things or not wanting things that are truly designed for them, and they’re unhappy. I truly believe that I can do bad all by myself.
In this response, Chloe addressed her understanding and feelings of how marriages can become unhappy through observing the experiences married peers. Yet, in her case, she directed the burden of marital unhappiness on the couples themselves, citing that they became unfocused in their relationships. Chloe was quick to acknowledge that instead of accepting that kind of unhappiness in a marriage she may enter, her preference is to remain single.

Joyce asserted that the fidelity of a possible spouse fuels her beliefs about unhappy marriages:

They cheat so much. You just don’t trust ‘em. So, I honestly have this wall like built up, with an expectation that the shoe was gonna drop at some point. They’re gonna cheat, so just get ready. I don’t snoop around, I don’t look for it. It’s gonna show right up in our face. So when it happens, I’m done.

In this passage, Joyce not only suggested a belief that men are likely to be unfaithful in relationships, but she clearly sets a firm boundary in tolerating such behavior. She asserted that her expectation of a cheating partner is innate, and implies that infidelity of a mate will likely exist in marriage, leading to unhappiness. Joyce also emphasized that her assumption of possible marital infidelity puts her at an emotional distance in terms of connecting with men. Thus, her doubts of an overall happy relationship provided a massive skepticism that marriages are happy.

Initially, Sasha referred to the comments she is offered by married people about entering matrimony:

It’s funny, they (friends) ask me why I’m not married, and they will then say, “Aw, it’s not all that it’s cracked up to be. Take your time”. They give me that kind of advice. I just say that I haven’t found anybody yet.

While this response did not directly parlay a sense of marital skepticism that Sasha may possess, it is indicative of possible marital unhappiness voiced to her by married peers. However, Sasha later offered a stronger sense of her own skepticism in recalling the marital unhappiness experienced by a close friend:
Another friend of mine, her and her husband separated, they one that had the child. They are back together. Last time I talked to check-in, she said, "Girl, it was for my sanity". She said because her "little boy is happy, I’m happy. I get my time, I get to go get my hair done", she said, “its our normal”. It was hard being by herself. I’m like, “What about you and him, how are y’all?” (Friend said:) “We’re still working on that. In the meantime, I have my freedom.

Sasha recalled the experience her friend encountered by returning to her husband after financial hardship during a period of separation. Sasha clearly indicated in this account that this example of marriage is a less than happy one, as confirmed through her friend. In this instance, Sasha supported the aforementioned notion that marriage involves an acceptance of relational shortcomings. Here, her sense of skepticism is more implied in that she later indicated that being in an unhappy marriage is less than an optimal marital situation, one she would not knowingly choose.

Fannie Lou, by far, made the strongest statements regarding her skepticism of being happy in a possible marriage. Specifically, she dictated that her life without marriage is a better fit and less stressful:

In marriage you gotta contend with the good and the bad, and I’m not willing to go with the bad. I can do good by myself. I don’t need the stress of somebody else’s mess! Marriage is over-rated. I respect the tradition… I would not be here if it were not for marriage.

Despite her position, Fannie Lou offered honor for the institution of marriage, admitting that is was the foundation of her own family background. Yet, she was adamant regarding her status as a never-married, childfree woman. Fannie Lou firmly voiced an unwillingness to embrace marriage, and dismisses the value of marriage in her current life. In particular, Fannie Lou specifically deemed marriage to be “over-rated”. Her comment is fierce in that while she respected marriage, she discounted the strong value generally regarded toward marriage. Clearly, Fannie Lou was not only voicing skepticism of marital happiness, as she is addressed the
viability that marriage in general. From her viewpoint, marriage was a liability, especially in
pursuing the lifestyle she currently maintains. Apparently, CHAPAWNs interviewed in this
study share a common skepticism that being married does not automatically render happiness.

In all, data from interviewing six CHAPAWN study participants rendered three major
themes: stable parental marriage examples, career enabled-singleness, and skepticism of marital
happiness. Each represented a major category across data of this study regarding family
background, dating, and marriage within this group of CHAPAWNs.

Three minor themes resulted from this examination of CHAPAWN. These particular
findings were relevant in portions of the data sample versus across the study as a whole; usually
occurred between two to three participants in this study. While not as prevalent, these secondary
themes still maintained salience in understanding contributing factors in the lived dating
experiences among the CHAPAWN group.

Finding the Right Person

While not supported across the sample of this study, several participants cited that a
contributing factor to their single status the absence of meeting, connecting with or dating
the right person. Regarding this minor theme, the right person for each participant discussing
this characteristic differed. However, these participants were referring to an African American
male partner who is the best-suited, most complimenting, and personally appropriate for their
individual needs, that has yet to appear as a possible love contender in their lives.

In one instance, Joyce particularly described her individual definition of who the right
mate is for her. She described, in detail, how the right partner for her should interact with her
family, in work-related settings, and in general encounters:

Can you just give me somebody who’s kind, respectful, who can compliment
me in every way? I need for you to hang and communicate with my family. I
don’t need you to stand in the corner, with your nose turned up like you’re too
good to be here ‘cause I’m from Arkansas. I mean come on! So, that’s one thing,
just down-to-earth. It doesn’t matter if it’s the shoe shine guy, or if it’s the CEO. I can
talk to any of them, it doesn’t matter to me. I don’t care who it is. I can communicate
with anybody and would expect him to be able to do that as well. Nobody is beneath me,
I don’t want him to behave that way.

Here, Joyce emphatically described the right mate for her to be someone whose own
professional, financial or social status does not prohibit them from being socially acclimated to
her large southern family. She offered this same requirement in a potential suitor in regard to
their social interaction with people in general. Joyce implied that although she is a corporate
executive, an ideal mate is a man who can intermingle in that work setting, as well as have a
“down-to-earth” comfort with relatives, friends, and people in general. Her stance is that the
right love mate will maintain the same social fluidity that she shares with people regardless of
status or professional standing. Joyce contended that a male suitor who can accommodate both
facets of life will be an ideal mate, but has yet to appear in her love life.

Amethyst mimicked a similar point regarding finding a mate who complemented her
previous career in college athletics. In this way, she was referencing how her career required a
possible spouse or male partner who fully-supported her professional setting:

It was majority males, and there is a certain sense of comradery and touchy-
touchy, feely-feely kind of things. People that work in that business know that,
but someone who is a mechanic at Sears that you’re married to may not
understand it, and my misinterpret it.

Amethyst, was also explaining how her professional setting required her to be matched with a
partner who was not intimidated by her all-male work environment. She described that a
probable mate working a blue collar position likely holds a different set of occupational social
rules. Amethyst implied that her ideal partner needed to be open to the constant, but platonic,
physical interaction that surrounds a male-dominated college sports scene. Amethyst insinuated
that such a caveat has been challenging in her dating life, especially during the many years she worked in university athletics. And for this reason, the absence of this particular mate aided in her long-term single status.

**Lingering Desire for Children**

Despite the higher age range within this study sample, several participants discussed their existing desire to be mothers, and bear or raise children. While this desire was not apparent across the study’s sample, as a minor theme, it addresses aspects of motherhood in relation to the CHAPAWN population. The youngest women in the study, who still have capability of bearing children shared the strongest sentiments about having children. Tiger, is 41 years old, alluded to potential regret she was developing regarding her ongoing desire for children:

I will feel bad that I’ve never had a baby, ‘cause I would like to experience that… to see how I can impact a kid of my own. Other than that, I’d be fine with my life… I wanna have a baby even though, it’s almost too late.

In this response, Tiger revealed a positive desire to still have children, especially after spending nearly two decades as a teacher and being in her early forties. Tiger acknowledged that her biological capabilities were reaching the limit, but also asserts her intention of bearing and raising her own children. However, she clarified that desires of parenthood will not negate her standards of marriage and family:

Marriage comes before motherhood. I really want that. I don’t want to be a statistic as people say. I hear about it all the time. When people, say, “Oh, she had her baby before she got married”. I really don’t wanna hear that. It could have happened, but I didn’t want that. I want a husband, and then a child.

Even with her desire to have children, Tiger declared that she wanted to be married before having children. In other words, she sought the complete picture of a traditional family, not just motherhood alone. Although Tiger held a definite desire to have children, she was unmoved by her familial requirement: to uphold the standard established from her upbringing. Tiger’s desire
to have children was guided by the strong example of her parents; that she would be in a marriage of her own before raising children.

Sasha voiced a sense of regret if she pursues marriage and does not have children. Even then, she too acknowledged that bearing children may be a biological impossibility. Yet, she admitted her overwhelming desire for having her own children, including the fact that a potential spouse has fully raised a child, she exposed a fear that gaining parenting opportunities may be capable of her control. Sasha discussed the idea of having children within the structure of marriage:

If it worked out with me and him (current guy), I don’t really think he would like to have another child, ‘cause he’s already had one who graduated high school. I think part of me would be okay with it. But, I guess part of me would like to try. And then, I don’t know if I’d be able to have a child.

Like Tiger, Sasha spoke of having children with a possible marital partner. Yet, again, she discussed concern about two looming issues—her inability to bear children and the possibility of having children with her current mate; who has raised a grown daughter. This point reflected the issues of marriage and family that exist for never-married women who approach the possibilities of being married and having children for the first time, much later in life. Yet, her account reflected a positive reaction regarding plans for motherhood among CHAPAWN in this study.

Chloe, the only participant to disclose having taken steps toward motherhood, still considers becoming a parent. She discussed that raising children is a challenging job, but one that she is still open to accepting:

I have entertained the thought of actually adopting. Oh, let’s say, maybe a child going to kindergarten. I probably think now, more realistically, around the 3rd & 4th grade. But, that would require a lot of psychological testing. I would prefer doing that on a foster care basis—because I firmly do believe that I have the capacity to do those things. I see too many children that are in foster care, and I’ve seen people out there that make less money than I do, and have less means than I do, and have shown
compassion for children. And these children today are having to make adult decisions and do adult things. I could do that if, if need be.

In this case, Chloe discussed her openness to becoming a parent, even if not in the traditional manner. Instead of a desire to bear children from a marriage, Chloe spoke of the possible foster parenting or adoption. While she made no mention of marital status in reference to fulfilling a parenting role, the Chloe supported the notion that motherhood and raising children is still on her the mind, even though her ability to biologically bear children is no long available. As such, Chloe’s account signified that parenting may still be an option in the realm of lifestyle possibilities for her.

**Church and Spiritual/Religious Doctrine**

Throughout interview data in this study, participants discussed their own spiritual or religious beliefs in reference to dating and marriage. In some instances, it was referred to as a requirement for a future marriage, or in others, a trait that a potential mate must possess. As a theme, spiritual and religious doctrine was a relevant and substantial connection to encounters of dating and intimate relationships experienced by several CHAPAWNs participating in this study.

Chloe referenced church and religious doctrine in two ways. After establishing that her previous work long-term environment prohibited her from meeting eligible African American male partners, she cited church as the next best resource for meeting such suitors among CHAPAWNs:

The only place besides work is church. I mean, and I’m not saying that all Black women go to church, but that’s the second common denominator of where women assemble, besides the workplace. You know, you can go to clubs… after age 30, really the club scene is like, uh, “get away from me.

In this instance, Chloe referenced church as being a primary place where African American women have a good possibility of meeting eligible African American men. Along with Chloe’s disclaimer that church is not always an aspect of life for all women of color, she affirmed church
to be a place of massive gathering, and acknowledged the atmosphere of church as one of a very few places CHAPAWNs can expect to have contact with the kind of African American men in which they seek to establish dating relationships.

Secondly, Chloe referenced religious faith when describing characteristics of an ideal man that she would choose to marry in the future:

He has to not necessarily go to church, but, he has to have a faith and belief in God. I do prefer a Christian man. I want a Christian man”. And, if we don’t have God as the center of our lives… he’s the one that has to be spiritually fed.

In describing the type of African American male she desired to marry in the future, Chloe offered that such a man should carry a spiritual faith in God and maintain such a doctrine in his life. Here, she asserted that as she is a woman of faith, she requires to be married to a man who has a similar doctrine. Chloe was sure to establish that even if he does not actively participate in a church or is affiliated with a religious group, she required that her marital partner to be a man of religious faith. Essentially, Chloe was emphatic about partnering with a man who believes in God.

Joyce spoke similarly of religious faith regarding a dating partner. In her case, she offered a plea of sorts to the universe—calling for specific characteristics in the kind of man she prefers:

Can you just give me somebody who’s kind, respectful, and who can compliment me in every way, including his spiritual life? He has to believe in Jesus Christ. I am not gonna go into a relationship unequally-yoked like that.” I’m just, I don’t have desire for that.

Dialectically, Joyce’s response presented itself like a prayer call; in that she was asking it as a universal question. In it, she requested that a potential dating or marital partner possess beliefs, not only in Jesus Christ, but maintain a doctrine of faith. Joyce described that a possible male dating partner with no religious or spiritual beliefs was an unequal match to her. For Joyce, the
disposition of religious faith was an essential requirement for any man who she seriously dates or may consider marrying in the future.

In describing an ideal mate, Fannie Lou also offered a belief in God to be an abiding personal characteristic within a potential male partner. However, in her case she specifically assessed that such a mate be actively involved in a church:

He definitely has to be a religious man—religious and spiritual, recognizing that Jesus is Lord, and Savior of the world. That’s really important to me, having a church home.

In her response, Fannie Lou was not just mirroring the sentiments of other CHAPAWNs in this study regarding a requirement of religious faith in a potential male partner. She specifically discussed that such a suitor have involvement in a religious community and/or be a member of a church. Fannie Lou discussed this factor as an important aspect in her life—that a future partner or spouse be a church-going man of religious faith. Moreover, a few honorable mentions regarding this theme also existed. In naming characteristics, of her ideal mate from A-Z, Amethyst labeled him to be a “believer in God.” Just the same, Sasha characterized her ideal mate as being “God-fearing.” Regardless of being a place to meet or having a place in the minds and lives of potential mates, CHAPAWNs in this study discussed the presence of religious/spiritual beliefs and church to be a major requirement for the African American men who they date or may potentially marry. As such, the prevalence of this connection among several participants gave it thematic status in this study—one that represents an important element in their dating activity and overall lifestyles.

Overall, data responses from CHAPAWNs interviewed in this study propelled three secondary themes: finding the right person, a lingering desire for children and a religious/spiritual doctrine in a potential spouse. Each of these minor themes represented
findings associated with partial segments of the study’s sample. Finally, presenting these secondary themes provided additional understanding of core expectations and prominent realities within the dating lives of CHAPAWNs.

In addition to presenting desires, expectations and shaping the dating lifestyle among CHAPAWNs, each of these themes offered substantive support in responding to the study’s research questions. The major and minor positioning of each theme was totally irrelevant regarding this particular relationship. Moreover, each theme further offered a connective response to specific research questions by enhancing the data. Thus, the role of study themes added credibility to the rich data in this study.

**Singlehood Theme**

In the first research question, CHAPAWNs described their singlehood. By doing so, findings revealed that study participants generally identified themselves as temporary singles; half as involuntary or actively seeking marriage, and the other half being voluntary where gaining a marital partner was not a priority. In addition to these singlehood revelations, career-enabled singleness, as a theme, further enhances understanding of the CHAPAWN singleness nature. It was found that work demands among CHAPAWNs and the lack of diversity in male coworkers to become potential partners existed. As such, the ever-present professional environments of study participants conversely enabled their singleness. Thus, CHAPAWN study participants did not just signify a state or status in being single, but this particular theme offered additional information as to why these women were possibly unable to meet a potential marital partner. In other words, career-enable singleness provided an answer to why CHAPAWNs in this study face singlehood as a daily reality.
Themes of Marital Possibility

CHAPAWN study participants described their marital possibilities in response to the second research question. Within the data relating this point, study participants described that accessibility of potential mates, availability of partners, and partner suitability were some circumstances that denied them opportunities to possibly get married. Here, study data created the situation surrounding marital possibilities of CHAPAWNs, however, a few study themes elaborated on the reasons for the existence of such marital potential. Two themes, marital skepticism and finding the rate partner, both related to issues surrounding less marital potential among study participants. More specifically, these themes reflected prohibiting factors, or limitations reflected in CHAPAWNs discussion of marriage opportunity. In actuality, both of these themes served as reasons, in addition to descriptions, for why marital possibilities among CHAPAWNs had a lesser standing in their lives. Ultimately, each of these two themes explained why marital potential among CHAPAWNs in this study was not perceived as their right, but a choice shaped via caution.

Childfree Themes

The third research question addressed the childfree status of CHAPAWNs in this study. Data surrounding participant description of their childfree status reflect a dichotomy. Half of them viewed being childfree as a choice related to work demands or lacking a desire to parent. The other half of study participants acknowledged that their childfree status was due to unfulfilled parenting desires. One study theme, a lingering desire for children, directly represented the latter. While this theme only related to part of the sample set, it offered supplemental explanation surrounding the childfree state of CHAPAWNs participating in this study. This theme counteracted the assumption of choice, and established that a childfree state
has occurred in some CHAPAWNs by default. As such, those who desire to have children, revealed a marriage prerequisite, and thus, remain childfree. This particular point, best relates to the other theme connected this research question. Those participants who desired marriage before children, and even those participants who were deliberately childfree showed a connection through religious doctrine or strong sense of spirituality. Even with opposing parenthood desires, it was the background of church, and religious/spiritual beliefs that served as a foundation for both sides of the parenting issue among CHAPAWNs. Specifically, a religious/spiritual doctrine was determined in study data as a standard among most participants, in that religion dictates a traditional structure of family. Thus, those study participants who desire children have that standard, and those who embrace their childfree status, did so for the reason that their religious/spiritual requirements for a marital partner and family base are left intact by their choice of the lifestyle alternative. Relating to this specific research question, both these themes provided background relating to the childfree status of these women and offered an overall reason as to how the absence of parenthood responsibilities exist in the lives of CHAPAWNs participating in this study.

**Themes to Motherhood and Marriage Stories**

The last research study question sought stories from participants that addressed CHAPAWNs various marriage and motherhood opportunities. Regarding this inquiry, participant stories about a generational family curse of CHAPAWNs, strong husband examples from their fathers, positive marital interaction from parents, and family support of strong marriages were divulged. One influential theme across the data set and apparent from these stories was a strong parental marriage and family setting among CHAPAWN study participants. This theme was at the core of CHAPAWN lived dating experiences and backgrounds. It not
only radiated from these stories, but showed relevancy to other study themes. This theme of stable parental marriages and family settings recognized that CHAPAWNs in this study had strong upbringings and were raised to not only achieve professionally, but attain the highest level of life satisfaction outside of work. These stories reflect how the example of family, or impact with their parents, has framed their views of how their own potential marriages and family should evolve. This theme explains why CHAPAWNs have maintained such a status in their current dating lives, especially since duplication of the family and marital environments they were raised in had yet to manifest in their own lives. Overall, study themes enhanced the responses to this study’s research questions, by expanding the explanation and understanding that of how and why the factors surrounding the dating lives of CHAPAWNs exist.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This examination into the dating lifestyles of childfree, heterosexual, African American, professional women who have never married (CHAPAWN) generated rich data, and produced findings that addressed responses from research questions posed and related themes discussed in the previous chapter. Most importantly, this robust data alluded to a particular understanding of how CHAPAWNS have shaped their lives regarding career endeavors, family and their dating complexities, and supports how CHAPAWNs perceive and respond to opportunities of marriage, children and parenting. Moreover, this study data served as a catalyst in understanding how the limited existing research attempts to discuss this lifestyle phenomenon. Additionally, this data provided support in discussing how CHAPAWNs’ perception of their dating experiences construct a previously untapped reality in academic scholarship, and thus, an examination connecting study data to social construction of reality as a theoretical framework. Overall, the data from this study offered an improved awareness of the background, response and perception CHAPAWNs present as members of a populated sector of single people through scholarly acknowledgement of their journey.

In discussing how CHAPAWNs participating in this study described their single status, data from this investigation revealed that all participants initially assigned themselves the designation of being temporary singles, according to Stein’s (1981) four categories of single-types. As Stein (1981) further prescribe that this category consists of involuntary temporary singles, or those actively seeking a marital partner, and voluntary temporary singles who hold
marriage as less a priority. Although all study participants readily identified with being temporary singles, further examination of their responses reveal greater connection with Stein’s (1981) sub-categories of temporary singles; three participants being involuntary single and the other three respondents as voluntary singles. Yet and still, the data regarding this particular inquiry was hardly a clear delineation. As participant responses revealed, the desires of those classified as voluntary temporary singles collide with the descriptions of involuntary temporary singles, and vice versa. Joyce, a voluntary temporary single, divulged her desire to be married, although her lifestyle is solely focused on her career pursuits. Similarly, Chloe’s acknowledgment of being settled and comfortable with her lifestyle somewhat detracted from her designation as an involuntary temporary single. Despite this data’s alignment with Stein’s (1981) ground-breaking research category classifications, study data shows that CHAPAWNs cannot be clearly categorized. However, data regarding this point presented information that is not present in existing research. Bulcroft and Bulcroft (2013) asserted that current literature is very limited in offering firsthand data from the CHAPAWN group that supports explanations of their dating desires. Even with this study, discussion surrounding the dating and marriage desires of CHAPAWNs were only beginning to emerge (Thomas & Barrie, 2012). Moreover, the literature mostly glossed over this particular subject, objectifying low-income African American women, and not considering how professional African American women with higher financial resources impact the nature of their singleness (Eden & Kefalas, 2005). Essentially, this study revealed that existing research can offer some classification in understanding their single status, but failed to connect marital desires of CHAPAWNs to long-standing categories of singles established in existing literature.
Regarding a connection to theory in this study, CHAPAWNs established their own position. Social construction of reality created understanding of what actually occurs versus what is assumed or established through a societal source (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As participant responses contradicted the structure of established singles’ categories in research, the testimony of their actual feelings, desires, and descriptions became a truth-telling. According to Pearce (2009), when verbal communication has been used to construct an aspect of reality, a social construct is born. Therefore, CHAPAWNs participating in this study claimed ownership in producing their own descriptions of being single; that the nuances of their single status cannot necessarily be clearly categorized through established research.

With regard to learning how CHAPAWNs discussed the possibility of marriage in this study, data reveals these women experience a lack of diversity among male coworkers, feel the absence of “the right person,” and disappointment in being unmarried. Robust and dynamic data responses from participants in this study shaped understanding that an overall unavailability of African American male partners for the CHAPAWN group were at the root of their dating challenges. Responses like: “where I work there is not a single African American male”, “I just have not met the right person,” and “you meet someone and think, maybe it will happen” are direct data examples offered by CHAPAWNs that reflect real-life support regarding their limitations of marital opportunity. Despite the scarcity of existing research about the dating dilemma facing this population, a term from the literature that described a long-term timeframe whereby African American women remain single, the “marriage squeeze,” is relevant to this portion of the data (Dixon, 2009). As study participants ranged in age from 41-61, other related existing literature further elaborated that never-married African American women should expect to remain single for at least half of their lives (Banks, 2011; Helm & Carlson, 2013). In
actuality, the smallest gaps in research regarding this phenomenon was filled by literature that speaks to partner lack, high levels of non-marriage rates and relationship disadvantages among never-married African American women (Banks, 2011; Chaney, 2011; Dixon, 2009; Regnerus & Uecker, 2010). In general, current academic research seemed to lean toward discussion of shortcomings regarding marriage and dating in single African American women, like CHAPAWNs, instead of understanding their experiences and feelings relating to these challenges. This is likely due to the habit of research studies who viewed single women in negative ways (Fauldi, 2009). However, Koropeckyj-Cox (2005) reported that individuals believe the choice to remain single is valid when personal economic stability is not achieved or the right dating partner is not found. Moreover, Goldstein and Kenney (2001) suggested that although marriage was becoming a province of the most educated, getting married has become less attainable for professionally inclined African American women who cannot reap the benefits. The literature posits that for African American college-educated women, a high right of singlehood was now the norm since marriage is not compatible with their expectations (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). Banks (2011) summarized that for African American women, hopes of marriage are enhanced by their education and professional status, but is affected by the shortage of African American men. These exceptions in the literature were a few sources to support the position among CHAPAWNs who are only open to a marriage with a quality partner. These data examples supported the inaccessibility of potential marital partners and subsequent disappointment add a dynamic of lived accounts where current research merely focuses on external circumstances. Yet and still, existing literature seemed to be in alignment with participant data regarding this inquiry, in that, both present support of CHAPAWNs having fewer opportunities to meet, date or marry African American male partners.
In examining this inquiry of minimal marital opportunities among CHAPAWNs participating in this study, through a theoretical lens, elements regarding social construction of reality were present. Berger and Luckmann (1966) asserted that the human environment, as well as the individual, produces lived reality in understanding social phenomenon. This point called into play the role of interpersonal communication within social construction. Just as experiences shared among a group of individuals must be verbalized in constructing reality, the interplay of the environment and the phenomenon was influential. As these CHAPAWN study participants reported a lack of access to potential African American male partners at work, or exposure to ideal matches, the influence of work and social environments surrounding them is highlighted. Trenholm and Jenson (2009) emphasized that through interpersonal communication, social interaction is dictated and maintained. Therefore, as CHAPAWNs interacted within their professional settings and work environments, a consistency in limited access to potential partners was likely to continually challenge their dating opportunities; surely affecting marital possibilities.

In examining the response study participants offered in describing their childfree status, a dichotomy is reflected. Half of study participants held the desire to potentially raise and bear children, while the other side of the sample are deliberately childfree. Opposing views on this topic within the CHAPAWN group was directly related to age, work and lifestyle choices. Sasha and Tiger, who were still within childbearing age, affirm a desire for children before they lose fertility; both of whom, were emphatic about being married before having children. At age 43 and 41, respectively, these women seemed to be holding the traditional manifesto followed by many singles whose goal has been to be married with children; whereas Chloe was considering alternative parenting. Current research supported that a strong pressure among single women to
be married and become mothers is apparent (DePaulo & Morris, 1995). Certainly, this was predicated through the responses of Sasha and Tiger, but in regard to Chloe, current research on single parenting, especially due to its massive presence in the African American community, was abundant. Yet, limitations in existing studies have shown how CHAPAWNs consider their parenting choices outside of marriage.

On the other side of this study’s sample, participants embraced their childfree status. Amethyst, Joyce, and Fannie Lou made the deliberate choice to prioritize their career pursuits over motherhood. Through comments like “I decided I didn’t want it” and “I’m not trying to have babies and be tied down” or “I couldn’t put anything else on my plate” implied that not having children was a choice and necessity. In this sector of study respondents, a sense of satisfaction with work and/or other life responsibilities was priority to becoming motherhood versus holding a longing or loss of parenting opportunities as experienced by CHAPAWNs on the opposite side of this issue. Even from gaps in the literature regarding CHAPAWN dating lives, supported for being childfree is affirmed. Cockrum and White (1985) asserted that singlehood provides a choice in lifestyle for women to facilitate achievement and occupational accomplishments. Although this example references singleness, that same notion of choice correlates that of motherhood among CHAPAWNs. Existing research further elaborated that a childfree existence among CHAPAWN is supported by a network of extended family and friends (Thompson-Seaborn & Ensminger, 1989). From this sector of data, a lifestyle full of independence, opportunity, and individual identity supports the option among CHAPAWNs to negate motherhood, despite their diminished opportunities to date or marry.

In relation to this study’s theoretical framework, the issue of motherhood and being childfree in this study related to established societal conditioning. In social construction of
reality, Berger and Luckman (1966) claimed that over time, individuals created a social existence that became the norm in certain situations. Those, norms then were universally accepted as people reciprocated and/or responded to them. Through this communication, a knowledge of how life “should” be, or is expected to be is present, rendering societal conditioning. As such, the expectation of women to become mothers has been an accepted norm in society. While this norm was supported by correlating data from this study, it was also denounced. As such, CHAPAWN participants in this study communicated that while a desire for motherhood is still relevant, others choose to remain childfree for the freedom of work endeavors and social pursuits. However, this dichotomy is not just an emerging norm for this population of women, the existence of a caveat offered more clarity. For participants desiring motherhood, marriage is the communicated prerequisite. Therefore, CHAPAWN are constructing a reality of specific opposition, whereby those who desired children hope to achieve marriage before motherhood, or otherwise would choose to be childfree. Pearce (2009) added that once a reality has been constructed, individuals can then make practical judgements about how a situation can be changed, upheld or modified. CHAPAWNs participating in this study communicated a reality that being childfree is a definite choice embraced by some, but for others, motherhood remained an option within or outside the structure of marriage.

In regard to opportunities of marriage and motherhood, CHAPAWNs participating in this study used stories to supplement these specific lived experiences in order to extend greater awareness and understanding of this lifestyle. Specifically, in stories offered by study participants regarding marriage, a variety of supplemental information provided added nuances to previously discussed details. Amethyst brought awareness to the effects of a possible “family curse” by which most of her female first cousins were CHAPAWNs, which she deemed to be
more than a coincidence. More likely, this trend within her extended family reiterated the connection between a stable parental and family foundation to the development of CHAPAWNs. This study’s existing connection between CHAPAWNs and a stable family background is further supported by stories from Chloe and Tiger who specifically credited their fathers for providing a strong example of being a good husband and parent for future marital reference. Additionally, that connection also reflected when Tiger spoke to how her parents have worked through challenges, which informed her of a quality marriage. Each of those examples added dimension to understanding the contribution of stable marital examples that provide a base by which CHAPAWNs make dating decisions within their lives.

In correlating this point to the literature, stories about strong family examples were supported. Chaney (2011) asserted that African American women seek success at both work and home. So, when a quality mate is present, these women were willing to relinquish leadership in the way of traditional gender roles. Additionally, these stories help to demystify the burdensome stereotype of the “Strong Black Woman” who were viewed as relationship antagonists by African American males (Chandler, 2011). Moreover, Hill Collins (1990) added that external characteristics, like the education and professional success prohibit these women, particularly CHAPAWNs, to be self-defined from their experiences. Here, existing literature is aligned with participant stories that further elaborated on CHAPAWN lifestyles by providing background information.

Stories told by CHAPAWNs relating to motherhood, also played a supplementary role in understanding their previously stated viewpoints. Sasha’s story about motherhood further elaborated her desire to have children. By recalling how a colleague modified a teaching post to accommodate new motherhood, Sasha discussed being better informed in changing her current
childfree lifestyle when becoming a parent. In contrast, Fannie Lou revealed that her choice to remain childfree throughout life was literally a different story in her youth. As Fannie Lou recalled developing a desire for motherhood from watching televisions sitcoms, her mother’s advice to get educated and pursue a career prevailed. This story shows how the CHAPAWN lifestyle choices, such as motherhood, were often redefined overtime.

As a supplement, the function of self-definition and description from these stories were supported by existing literature. In studying womanhood and marriage, Chaney (2011) explained that self-definitions by African-American women can be contradicting, or start as one perspective, then evolve into another. Therefore, the trait of self-empowerment and self-definition was a determinant in of making choices and deciding lifestyle pursuits within the CHAPAWN population examined in this study.

Truly, it is theory that grounded the effects of stories in understanding the background of marriage and motherhood discussions by CHAPAWNs. Pearce (2009) declared that a social structure embodies different constructs. Accordingly, Berger and Luckmann (1966) posited that a construct “takes the form of stories and that these stories bear imprint…of the histories/biases/rhetorical choices of the persons who tell them” (p. 3). Basically, storytelling created history and background in constructing reality. As CHAPAWNs shared similar dating challenges, perspectives and experiences, these stories created a background and understanding that would not otherwise be known. Here, stories proposed reasons that inform a participant’s specific view of marriage and motherhood. Explanations for the connection between family stability and the CHAPAWN lifestyle was provided through these stories. These stories were also revealed how a friend or mother’s influence can shape motherhood choices in CHAPAWN. From such stories, the description of positive male and father role models helped to
understanding why CHAPAWN women are cautious about the men they may date or consider marrying. Through social construction of reality, the meanings drawn from these stories and situations were a reflection of components that created specific lifestyle choices and circumstances surrounding CHAPAWN women.

Three major themes were present throughout this sample in the dating lifestyles of CHAPAWNs: stable parental marriage and family, career-enabled singleness and skepticism of marital happiness. Most obviously, this theme reflected the strong examples of marriage and family that exist in each participant’s background. As previously mentioned, each study participant was reared in a family with their biological parents who had long-term marriages and never divorced, or remarried, even where a spouse was deceased. The presence of a strong marital bond was the impetus within this theme – demonstrating stability and a solid relationship model for each participant. No matter their desires regarding marriage and family, participants in this study indicated a connection to their parents’ marriages as a guide, a standard, or model in shaping their lives and individual dating aspirations— a special feature of this examination.

Research scholarship generally does little to justify this importance of this theme in existing data. The preeminent text, Banks’ (2011) *Is Marriage for White People?*, comprehensively overviews issues of marriage, dating, children, inter-racial couples, partner availability, as well as relationship fears and desires, especially pertaining to African American women. However, in the interview data presented, this text failed to make a connection between strong African American parental marriages, and how such an example among African American women impacts their desire to attain the same example against not being married at all. Yet, Banks’ (2011) acknowledgement regarding the decline of marriage among African Americans and his attempt to present resolutions for single African American women who faced dating
challenges definitely coincided with data from this study; but was characteristic of other research in by reporting shortcomings versus circumstances and background in actual lived experiences. This study of CHAPAWNs presented that connection through rendering of this major theme, an action that existing literature omits.

While scholarship does little to justify this pertinent data, the omnipresent influence of a stable parental and family dynamic among study participants was more relevant to the theoretical framework. Social construction of reality indicated that institutions, like families, condition an individual’s circumstances in any given situation which becomes their norm (Wilden & Hammer, 1987). Data from this study supported that CHAPAWNs are acclimated to the prospect of marriage by stellar examples of their parents. As discussed in the data, these women are orientated to marital responsibilities, spousal collaboration and undertaking the demands of parenting children. Having experienced this stable environment, CHAPAWNs were equipped with knowledge in how a functioning marriage should operate. As study participants report, they were not likely to compromise this standard of familial stability in which they grew up, especially in being unable to reproduce that marital experience. And so, their lifestyle as CHAPAWNs was an alternative to the lifestyle by which they were raised, causing participants to maintain financial stability and their own domain. By placing the lens of social construction on this theme, apparently CHAPAWNs were adapting the norm from their childhood, by thriving in a lifestyle outside of marriage, as well as what is expected of them from society; if not by choice, but by necessity. Therefore, through the filter of social construction of reality, reality was distinguished from assumed ideals.

Another prominent theme within this study’s participant data was the central role career and professional pursuits have played in disabling the dating lives of these CHAPAWNS. As
these highly professional women aggressively pursued their careers, a common trait within this sample was the various ways success at work impacted their marital opportunities or choice not to pursue marriage. Be it professional demands or the lack of a work-related dating pool, CHAPAWNs participating in this study offered firm support in the restrictions that unintentionally exist from their professional settings. Ironically, the workplace was a source of achievement and fulfillment for CHAPAWNs, but unlike equally-successful women of other races, their dating opportunities in conjunction with work were limited. Bedard (1992) assessed that single people gain happiness from efforts leading to financial stability, or their professional pursuits instead of relying on fulfillment from marriage. In this instance, existing research literature offered adequate support. But still, the dominance in reporting shortcomings regarding African American relationships remained apparent. High rates of singlehood was expected among college-educated African American women due to economic disparity, mismatched education levels and lack of suitable mates, whereas White, Hispanic and Asian college-educated women have greater options to be married, achieve a career and family life (Ferguson, 2000; Bell, 1990; Bronzaft, 1991; Tanfer, 1987). Despite this bleak outlook presented in related research literature, CHAPAWNs participating in this study embraced their singleness in one way or another, half of whom are especially thriving and satisfied in their lives without marriage. Even those participants who actively sought matrimony and hoped to be married report that adjustments and changes in their current lifestyle will certainly be necessary, as they collectively enjoy the freedom of being heads of their own households. This study offered support of this reality and made a contribution to existing gaps in literature leaving the massively growing population of CHAPAWNs out of the discussion, or set aside when conducting research. By
understanding how their particular work life often disabled their love opportunities, a greater awareness of this lifestyle was offered.

A better source of support for this theme rested in the theoretical framework. Berger and Luckmann (1996) assessed that the human environment, as well as the individual produces the lived reality in understanding the shared experiences of a particular group of people—calling in the role of interpersonal communication within social construction of reality. As CHAPAWNs devoted much of their time to professional endeavors, that work setting became a primary environment within their overall lifestyle. And much like other successful single professionals, work became a source of social interactions, including dating. The fact that no dating opportunities existed in the work lives of CHAPAWNs in this study revealed how this theme was a contributing factor in understanding how lifestyle elements create or deny lived reality. Therefore, theoretical connection to this particular study theme supports how elements of the work environment of CHAPAWNs was crucial to understanding their overall data lives.

The last major theme that permeated across this sample set is a skepticism toward marital happiness. Participants in this study felt challenged with the idea of happy marriages. Through observations of peers, personal experiences of infidelity and feedback from married individuals, CHAPAWNs each reported some level of skepticism that marriage would not result in true happiness. Moreover, the data reflected hesitancy from several CHAPAWN participants to enter marriage all together, while others were unwilling to forego their current single state as a direct result of marital skepticism. While the current research offered abundant information in the prevalence of marital separations, high divorce rates and periods of long-term singleness among African Americans, a presence of firsthand accounts, explanations and personal experiences that supported those levels barely existed (Engram & Locker, 1993; Norton & Moorman, 1987).
The slight exception in the literature is data Banks (2011) reported and discussed which specifically indicated the influence of marital fear among single African American women. Yet and still, despite the significance of this text to studying the dating lives of CHAPAWN, Banks’ (2011) discussion of fear was relegated only to the circumstance of interracial marriage; his solution to dating complexities among CHAPAWNs, by which he avoided that very issue in the African American male-female marriage.

The connection of this theme to theory offered greater understanding of its significance. Since literature ignored the personal feelings of marital skepticism among CHAPAWNs, communication of this point by women of this group was pertinent. The act of acknowledgement, in of it itself, built credibility in this aspect of marriage realities among the CHAPAWN group. Berger and Luckmann (1966) asserted that everyday life is manifested through knowledge from awareness of the norms, situations and expectations exist. More specifically, the point of marital skepticism across this data sample reflected a distinguishing trait shared by all the study participants. As such, a reality regarding aspects of marriage and its possibility among them is created through the presence of marital skepticism. When a common trait is shared by individuals of a group, that reality sets them apart from others. As this point is communicated through study data, marital skepticism becomes a “real” factor in the collective environment of CHAPAWN dating lives. As previously discussed, the goal of social construction is to show communicative factors of what these women were actually living within the existence of societal norms. Essentially, the marital skepticism in CHAPAWNs is a true element of life that needed acknowledgement by greater society as having impact on their lived dating experiences. Theoretical framework supported the importance of marital skepticism in relation to dating realities among CHAPAWNs, where gaps in research scholarship ignored it.
Three minor study themes were prevalent in only part of this study’s sample and offered a significant contribution in understanding the dating lives of CHAPAWN. Just the same, these themes presented from within this study’s data have relevancy with regard to research and theory. Not finding “the right person,” a minor theme in this study, reflected the perspective in a few CHAPAWNs participating in this study when discussing their status. Whether career-related or having the flexibility to socialize among different classes of people, CHAPAWNs cited that an absence of the most appropriate partner has provided good reason to remain unmarried. Across the board, research literature upheld the idea of a lack in marriageable mates for single African American women. As reported, over three million African American women in the U.S. were without a mate, as lower life expectations, widespread unemployment, high incarceration mates and substance abuse rates have made African American male partners scarce since the millennium (Staples, 2007; Gordon et al., 1994). Moreover, as the literature indicated that by sheer number, the lowest ratio of men to women exists among African Americans in the United States, and that due to the diminishing pool of marriageable men, African American women are likely to remain unmarried or marry a less-educated man (Adimora & Schoenback, 2005). These citations were representative of a greater group of research which supported data in this study. Such literature revealed how the lack of finding the right person to date or marry has not only alluded many women in the CHAPAWN group, but supplied a strong reason for them to remain single. Specific to the latter was the declaration that African American women were more easily remain unmarried until they meet men who are equals, or may marry men with less of an economic and educational background (Chaney & Monroe, 2011; Banks, 2011). As such, the responses from CHAPAWN who indicated their lack of a marital partner perfectly coincided with acknowledgments in the research. Once again, as the research is mostly slanted toward
discussion of lack, shortcomings, and diminished mating opportunities regarding the love lives of African American women, this parallel between study data and existing research, although in sync, was not surprising.

Another minor theme, a lingering desire to have children, indicated within a small sector of study participants also shows a minor connection to existing literature. Banks (2011) affirmed that sex and marriage became detached with the confirmation of abortion laws and availability of birth control; offering a freedom for women to choose the manner and time by which to bear children. Yet and still, this slight mention in the research held greater salience in accordance with this particular theme. The avenue of choice and the advent of contraceptives not only allowed women to choose when to bear children, but how they would raise children.

CHAPAWNs participating in this study who desired children mostly agreed that marriage before motherhood was their standard in raising children. Not only did this point relate to the major theme of having a stable family background and parental marriage, but it represented the aspect of choice mentioned in the research regarding children and marriage. Therefore, CHAPAWNs in this study who desired children exercised their freedom of choice to postpone motherhood until they marry.

The last minor theme presented by data in this study was the omnipresent assertion of spiritual and religious doctrine. In this study, the variance by which it is discussed, places it in the category of minor themes, although it provided major impact within the data. Some participants of this study referenced church as an outlet for meeting potential dating or marital partners, while most other respondents referenced religious beliefs or spiritual values as a quality they desired in an ideal mate. In other instances, CHAPAWNs participating in this study cited their own spiritual beliefs as guidance in how they approached aspects their dating lives. In
either way, this minor theme held the least support of research literature used to ground this study. However, African Americans possessed a strong connection to church, attending religious services, and socializing within such circles (Chaney, 2008). From a cultural perspective, prevalent aspects of spiritual and religious doctrine was not unexpected in data reported by CHAPAWNs.

Social construction of reality also allowed for individual voices to be highlighted within situations or circumstances common to this group. Although this study contained multiple participants, each singular experience within this examination held a weighted importance among the study sample as whole. Be it finding the right mate, religious/spiritual doctrine, or a lingering desire to have children, each participant in this study sample was slightly different from the other. Essentially, this theory allowed for an exploration of individual experiences as communicated through narratives that ultimately compose a larger, shared experience among CHAPAWN. In the end, the interviewees’ communication about their identities evidenced the complexities of movement between the personal/individual and the shared/social—perhaps the *sine qua non* characteristic in social construction of reality.

In addition to a mutual connection to theory, major and minor themes represented aspects of life being experienced by CHAPAWNs in this study, as well as aspirations for their lives in the future, respectively. This studies’ major themes--stable parental marriage and family setting, career-enabled singleness, and skepticism of marital happiness were not just the result of applying protocol from Siedman’s (2006) interview research method to data collected in this investigation. Major themes in this study often worked in cooperation with each other to employ elements of the lifestyles inhabited by CHAPAWNS— not finding the right person in relation to career-enabled singleness and a lingering desire for children as related to stable parental
marriages and family settings. In all, major themes implied the impact of careers, family and dating experiences shared by women in the CHAPAWN group.

Although these women were well-educated and successful at work, their sacrifice has been a reliance on professional fulfillment when opportunities to date did not necessarily manifest from work, or equal the benefit of women from other races. Just the same, interview data from this study also indicated that their professional achievements often isolated them from maintaining an active dating life. Whether they desired a partner for future marriage or promoted satisfaction in the freedom of being single, data from this study proposed that the careers of CHAPAWNs can often determine if their single status is a gift or curse.

In the way of family, the greatness in this study’s revelation was that each of these CHAPAWN participants draw strength of example from a stable family background and parental marriage experienced since childhood. This finding was not coincidental, but indicated a link between the African American nuclear family and its tendency to render daughters who became CHAPAWNs. From a cultural standpoint, traditionally nuclear African American families executed childrearing that promoted strong expectations of daughters and a lenient nurturing of sons (DuBois, 1909). African American daughters growing up in traditional families, such as CHAPAWN participants in this study, held a two-sided sense of duty; to become educated and highly-successful professionals and pursue a marriage resulting in families of their own.

Collectively, these major themes specifically cued a greater complexity of family, other than an example these women could model. This family-related theme implied a contradiction of requirements. As presented in this study, attaining career success could prohibit marriage and family for single African American women without children. As such, accessing a happy marriage with an ideal partner and having children was less likely for these same women who are
programmed to attain professional affluence. Thus, a growing population of CHAPAWN women were groomed in the opposite direction from the marital model by which these stable parental and family settings exist.

As for dating, the collective of these major themes revealed that CHAPAWN women most certainly maintain a desired to gain love and a possible marital partner. However, longevity in the CHAPAWN lifestyle, while observing their peers pursue marriage, has procured in them a perspective that being happy in married was unreal. In response to this ideal, CHAPAWN women were cautious when approaching the dating market and maintained an exceptional amount of skepticism about marriage. Based on challenges African American marriages faced as presented in the literature, some CHAPAWN women responded by gaining satisfaction from being single and embraced the flexibility of that freedom, while others cling to desire for companionship or a marital partner. Either way, major themes from this study relegated how CHAPAWN women currently approached dating. Moreover these three major themes offered a blueprint into the current lives of CHAPAWN, showing how a connection to their families and careers shaped aspects of their dating lives. Nevertheless, each of these themes showed a correlation or omission from within the literature, but also reflected shared experiences that were filtered by social construction of reality to provide awareness, in understanding the current lives of CHAPAWNs as a group.

This study’s minor themes-- finding the right person, a lingering desire for children and spiritual/religious doctrine represented a collective of lifestyle aspects CHAPAWN women discussed in reference to marriage, children and parenting. Whether all study participants agreed in their stances, this collection of themes, allowed each participant to individually voice aspects mostly regarding the CHAPAWN lifestyle in their future relating to marriage, children and a
belief system. Regarding the minor theme of participants finding the right person, the reality of marriage was called into question for these women, who held skepticism about marital happiness.

In this study, CHAPAWNs acknowledged that their single status was not likely to change unless an ideal mate enters their lives. While this particular theme prominently connected itself to related ideas of partner lack in the dating lives of CHAPAWN from research literature, it exposed how some women in this study view their marital futures. Those who acknowledged the lack of an ideal mate were offering some implication that being single is likely to be a permanent status over time. Indirectly, the absence of the “right person” to pursue long-term companionship implied that CHAPAWN women were unwilling to comprise their current lifestyles for the possibility of marriage to a future incompatible mate, also asserted that marriage is not worthy of them without the appropriate partner. At the same time, CHAPAWNs were not adhering to an unrealistic standard in a potential marital partner. In regard to finding the right person, these women were seeking emotional and social compatibility; a partner who shared the same constitution regarding relationship practices, and surprisingly, one who is capable of taking a leadership role in the household—financial and socially. While several participants mentioned financial stability as quality in a potential partner, none made an implication that wealth and status were marital prerequisites. Thus, CHAWPAWNs were not necessarily seeking their professional or economic counterparts, but an African American male partner who embodied spiritual/religious character, offered support of their careers, be dually employed and share in creating a mutual support system for the relationship.

While only half the sample indicated a lingering desire to have children, this minor theme was especially poignant in understanding the relevance of hope among CHAPAWNs held to
achieve a life of family and children, despite their prerequisite for a husband or advancing age. Regardless of the literature and their own experiences, CHAPAWNs participating in this study possessed a degree of hope in the possibility of marriage and family. For those hoping for children, it fueled that desire. On the other hand, those CHAPAWNS who voiced disagreement with a future in parenting did not negate hope, nor they adhere to a separatist category or stereotypes. Their sense of hope permeated in the idea that their lives were equally fulfilling and rewarding in their quest to not become mothers. This agreement or disagreement expressed in regard to having children showed that CHAPAWN women do not view aspects of their futures through a singular perspective. Essentially, this data predicted that while these women shared lifestyle experiences today, in the future, they were more likely to pursue parenting choices that best-suit their needs and desires—to remain childfree or pursue motherhood, with or without a husband.

As for their promotion of religious/spiritual doctrine in the data, CHAPAWNs revealed a firm association with church and spirituality in relation to their dating lives. Every participant in this study strong asserted or mentioned that religious doctrine is a key variable for success in their love lives. Some CHAPAWNs voiced this to be a mandatory characteristic in their ideal mate, that a potential marital partner must be actively involved in a church group. Other respondents acknowledged church to be a major outlet in their lives outside of work—a source of social support. No matter the context, it was apparent that the lifestyle of CHAPAWNs include church going activities and/or a doctrine of religious and spiritual beliefs which grounds their daily living. This point highlighted an awareness that was barely acknowledged in the literature; the CHAPAWN group were not just accomplished professionally, but were devoted to a spiritual life they hope to share with a partner or potential spouse. The importance of spiritual
beliefs and religious faith was crucial to the lifestyle constitution shared among CHAPAWNs participating in this study, which could not be comprised for the sake of love or marital possibilities in the future.

Overall, these themes reflected experiences and accounts by the CHAPAWN group alluding to their ideas of marriage, children, and parenting. Although they held a minor position within this study’s data, at times, these minor themes were an extension of major themes. In either case, major and minor themes produced from firsthand accounts and experiences of CHAPAWNs participating in this study shaped their reality—a lifestyle challenged by dating limitations, but filled with hope for a spouse and/or children in the future, as well as a satisfaction in knowing that their current status offered an equally fulfilling existence cultivated from their family backgrounds, professional accomplishments and social support.

While data from this study rendered great explanation of the CHAPAWN dating lifestyle, it gave minimal response to related issues covered in existing research literature. Even though a relationship between raw data was apparent from themes and theoretical correlation, the obvious gaps in existing literature also included topics that had very little presence within this study. Incarceration was a highly touted issue within the literature surrounding the African American male-female relationship. High rates of African American male incarceration were directly attributed to reasons for low rates of marriage among African American women in existing research (Banks, 2011; Dixon, 1998; Gordon et al., 1994; King, 1999; Yeakey & Bennett, 1990). Yet, the mention of incarceration was barely apparent in this study’s data. Only one CHAPAWN participating in this study directly associated prevalent incarceration of African American men to her availability of potential marital partners, while all other participants were mute on this issue as a relevant factor in their dating lives. Either, this issue was an accepted
circumstance in dating among CHAPAWNs, or incarceration has little baring on the actual challenges and choices facing these women in the dating market.

Cohabitation, another highlight of the associated research literature in this study, was also mostly absent from the data. In existing research, cohabitation was discussed as a common alternative to marriage among African American couples where the same stability occurred (Banks, 2011; Chaney & Monroe, 2011). However, very little evidence of cohabitation was present in this study’s data. While two participants each mentioned a brief stint of cohabitation in past relationships, it was not acknowledged elsewhere in the study’s data. Moreover, confirmation that cohabitation was an acceptable choice among CHAPAWNs in dating was also absent in study data. Thus, the prevalence and marital simulation of cohabitation, as supported through existing literature cited, showed little relevance to the dating practices of CHAPAWNs participating in this study.

Similarly, the apparent connection of mansharing in African American male-female relationships cited in research literature, also showed minimal relevancy in this study. Although major research supported that mansharing is most prevalent among African American couples, it only held minimal bearing in CHAPAWN dating experiences discussed in this study (Chapman, 1986; Laumann, et al., 2004). In the same instances of cohabitation mentioned by participants in this study’s data, mansharing was the connective circumstance in each case, causing each of those relationships to end. Yet, the overwhelming consensus among all CHAPAWNs participating in this study was that a desirable partnership consisted of being with an available, unmarried, uncommitted African American man. Essentially, the highlight of mansharing within cited literature of this study was not heavily supported by the data.
Finally, the ongoing issue of African American female stereotypes, as greatly discussed in the research literature, was certainly supported by data from this study. Specifically, labels from the literature, such as “old maids”, “Miss Independent” and the “SBW” or “Strong Black Woman Myth” were dually rejected by study participants as in existing research (Gilchrist, 2011; Chandler, 2011). CHAPAWNs who participated in this study also indirectly denied the notion that they were women who did not desire male companionship, as in the research literature (Gilchrist, 2011). Through support of study themes, even CHAPAWN participants who fully embraced their status, hoped to meet a suitable African American male partner. In actuality, study data discerned that appropriateness of choice, suitability and availability were contributing factors to CHAPAWN participant singles, and not denial of companionship from an independent lifestyle. Data in this study supported the issue of stereotypes brought about in the research literature, and yet, provides clarity in understanding the motivation of how such stereotypes among single African American women are actively dispelled. Overall, this study continuously widened the gap in acknowledging how current literature truly aligns with the dating lives and experiences of those in the CHAPAWN group.

The significance of society’s role in the dating choices and dilemmas facing the CHAPAWN group must also be acknowledged in this discussion. Firstly, a common cliche of “having it all” could be viewed as a burden to women of this designation. A constant onslaught of published articles, editorials and broadcast commentary imposing the idea that women can balance a thriving career and fulfilling home life with family and children has been a societal myth. Often, work/life balance and professional productivity by women have disintegrated if the appropriate spouse was not in place. While women in general are not susceptible to the traditional roles of previous generations, their success has posed a threat to potential male
partners. As evidenced in this study, the lack of available or suitable African American male partners who will support their mate’s success and accept a modified family role has not been easy to attain for CHAPAWN women. While having it all may be a societal standard now in place for women in general, CHAPAWNs participating in this study have shown that attaining this status was often prohibited by work environments, finding the right person, and their belief that happiness may not be met. Thus, it is important to recognize that society may place certain expectations on the CHAPAWN demographic that will not likely be met.

Secondly, society has failed to support the honor and value of single African American women. Factors like social stereotypes have played a huge role in undermining the existence of single African American women. Singleness has not currently been the novel idea among African American women that it was in the 1970s—an era of freedom and independence for all women. Essentially, CHAPAWNs have been relegated to this position by circumstance with fewer marital possibilities than their racial counterparts. But instead of honoring their position, it has been framed as a shortcoming that is heavily reflected in research literature on the topic. Scholars and society have taken the position of negativity, as if to assume that the juxtaposition of career success and marital opportunity they face deserved a perspective of pity. In actuality, CHAPAWNs have forged paths for all women in the workplace, as business owners and through professional leadership roles. Moreover, women without families and children, have created professional opportunities for other women who follow, as well as adding credibility for them to choose work inside the home. Regardless, African American women, have experienced heavier societal criticism for the more opportunities they gained professionally, and those fewer attained in marriage and family. As such, CHAPAWNs have earned honor, especially in regard to the
value from their status within society, despite facing mating challenges while having achieved productive lives.

Thirdly, society must show acceptance of the constructed reality CHAPAWNs have presented. As shown from data in this study, CHAPAWN participants represent a growing population of singles who have continuously been overlooked. Now that single people in America now outnumber those who are married, the importance of understanding their lifestyles can no longer be overlooked. While prestige has always accompanied marriage, an equal status should have earned acknowledgement for unmarried individuals in society. As the circumstances surrounding CHAPAWNs will likely remain, acknowledging awareness and accepting their lifestyle, as discussed in this study, would only enhance societal interaction. But, as society’s nature has often been slow to approving different lifestyles, data from this study and subsequent research must serve as a blueprint of a growing new norm of marital status that CHAPAWNs represented. Ultimately, the role society has played surrounding the lived dating experiences of CHAPAWNs requires expansion. By lifting the burden of “having it all”, honoring their status, and accepting the CHAPAWN lifestyle as a new norm, greater awareness and understanding will have become the role that society should play in supporting these women.
Summary

This study presented and discussed the dating circumstances facing childfree heterosexual, African American professional women who never married (CHAPAWN); a phenomenon that mostly eludes existing research surrounding the topic. As this group of women have been a vastly growing sector of single people in the United States, their educational opportunities, professional successes, and affluence have made marriage less attainable for them. Limited scholarly literature on the topic generally ignored a key element of the issue: actual lived dating experiences among members within the CHAPAWN group. Previously, scholars made insignificant cross-cultural comparisons or marginalized discussions of the CHAPAWN group in the realm of couple communication research. This study provided fresh perspective and rich narratives, and as well, substantiates shared experiences that represent lived experiences versus conditioned norms. The results from this investigation were aligned with social construction of reality, whereby interview data becomes testimony of the lived dating experiences among CHAPAWN. By communicating their own situations and circumstances through firsthand accounts, CHAPAWNs offered common characteristics uniting their shared experiences, and thus, provided true a reality regarding their dating outside of current research literature and societal assumptions.

Social construction of reality established the process by which participant profiles of interview data became the communication stream structuring lived dating experiences within the
CHAPAWN group. Respondents constructed their reality by revealing how family background, occupational variables, and marital skepticism, along with partner choice, parenting desires, and religious/spiritual doctrine play a primary or secondary role in their actual dating lives. While parts of the data were supported by existing research, this study fills large gaps by the simple contribution of documenting accounts of lived experiences, a step that research omitted. Eventually, a greater understanding and awareness was gained from learning how dating situations were unique to CHAPAWN through data of firsthand accounts. These insights moved beyond what is assumed or has been previously researched regarding their position in the African American male-female relationship, and suggested that environments of family, work, and church are a major guide for CHAPAWNs living their current existence, or those seeking a transition to marriage and a family.

The use of Siedman’s (2006) interview research method guided the collection, analysis, and discussion of data from this research project. Through this method to the data, specific themes were produced to enhance existing literature and offer greater awareness of this subject matter. Three primary themes generated from the testimony of women in the CHAPAWN demographic regarding their dating lives were: stable parental marriage and family examples, careers that enabled singleness, and skepticism in marital happiness. These themes reflected major variables across the sample set that supported how decisions and opportunities are managed within the love lives of CHAPAWNs.

Regarding major themes presented in this study, the strong example of a stable family and parental marriage experienced by CHAPAWNs was made apparent from data, whereas existing research was oblivious to such an impact. Through the filter of social construction, this theme confirmed a norm across the data sample by which the parental marriage example and
stable family environment in childhood was the standard among CHAPAWN participants in referencing potential marital relationships. Therefore, CHAPAWN promoted an unwillingness to comprise that standard despite dating challenges such as partner unavailability or work demands. The major theme of career-enabled singleness was heavily touted in research literature as paralleled by data from this study provided. CHAPAWN participants in this study supported that with few dating possibilities from work in play, and a heavy commitment of professional responsibilities, such impact from work has aided in maintaining their singleness. Thus, this theme represented true reality in the dating lifestyles of the CHAPAWNs. Regarding skepticism of marital happiness, this study reported that existing literature also omitted attention to such a fact. However, support of this feeling within most of the data sample substantiates the presence of skepticism in marital happiness as another real factor in the dating lives of CHAPAWN. As most participants sited their disbelief in true marital happiness, the prevalence of this feeling impacts their perspective that getting married is a worthwhile life change. In all, major themes from this study filled the gaps of existing research literature bringing greater awareness to the real-life dating experiences of the CHAPAWN group.

Additionally, a few minor themes revealed factors impacting some of these women: absence of the “right” partner, a lingering desire for children and religious/spiritual doctrine. While only intermittently apparent within the data set, these secondary themes show other factors that influence the dating lives of CHAPAWN examined in this study. With strong support and presence in research literature, the minor study theme indicated an absence of the right partner, which corresponds with data from CHAPAWN participants, who claim to remain single when the appropriate mate is unavailable. Although half of study participants acknowledged a lingering desire to have children, and the other half embrace being childfree, this fact was
exposed from their individual perspectives. In constructing reality, presenting individual viewpoints amongst a group of people sharing the same experiences was warranted. As such, this theoretical caveat was substantiated in data from this study. Regarding the final minor study theme of spiritual/religious doctrine, existing literature offered few examples of support. Whereas, data from study participants truly explained the importance of spirituality to CHAPAWNs; church being a primary lifestyle activity by which such affiliation and/or beliefs are a requirement for all potential partners or future spouses. Major and minor themes reflected factors, needs and challenges of the CHAPAWN dating lifestyle that relates to family, career and dating aspects of their lived experiences—and in some instances filled gaps in academic literature. Overall, findings in this study suggested a degree of hope among CHAPAWNs to either be married or continue being satisfied and fulfilled with the status quo. Moreover, additional findings from this study concluded that CHAPAWNs face an unsubstantiated dichotomy— the expectation to live in the utmost professional success and get married with families of their own, when such personal gain is ultimately the sacrifice for career accomplishment.

**Implications**

Revelations from this study allowed for an updated understanding of the CHAPAWN group that was mostly overlooked in existing communication research. Moreover, this study clarifies the position of CHAPAWNs— some struggle with their singleness, while others live a fulfilled existence outside of marriage and children. Strong family ties across this study sample are shown to be a key element in the lives of these women. The commonness of a traditional two-parent family, based in long-term marriages, not only informs the attitude of these women about marital expectations, but also provides a family background rich in social support. While
the limitations of marriage were ever-present in this research, an outlook of hope appeared from CHAPAWN study participants; that despite a lack of opportunity, that belief of fulfilled marital desires, still permeates in their life goals. Moreover, an omnipresent connection to God throughout this data sample acknowledged the influence of spiritual guidance that current scholarship failed to address in existing research literature, but is revealed as an influential factor in daily living among CHAPAWNs. Yet, the overwhelming accomplishment from this study is a delivery of the dating lifestyle elements experienced by CHAPAWN. Essentially, this study acted as biographical documentation of actual lived experiences, firsthand accounts, and stories that accurately exemplify how CHAPAWNs feel about marriage and motherhood, explanation of their expectations for African American male partners, and the challenges they face in the dating market. CHAPAWNs presented a “new normal” in this study, as they are representative of a fast-growing single population who have full lives uplifted by strong social networks and a sense of personal satisfaction. In the end, this study elevated research by putting in notice that this population of women deserves to be heard, addressed and discussed in academic literature.

Additionally, a few practical applications can be drawn for this construction of the dating reality among CHAPAWNs. One idea is that the mere existence of this study could stimulate more informed narratives and stories covered in media programming. Very often, the media has sought to frame the perspective of a story or situation in a way that persuades an audience. However, the firsthand accounts of dating experiences detailed in this study is cause to retract that tendency. By presenting real accounts and experiences within the CHAPAWN dating lifestyle, audiences could gain understanding of true reality instead of one that is contrived.

On a more interpersonal level, this study inferred the possible existence of depression among the CHAPAWN group. Although results from this study promoted truth in desires,
satisfaction and family background, it minimally implied a certain sadness or frustration the rests in the minds and hearts of study participants. As a condition, depression has often appeared when change or response needed within a lifestyle does not occur. Therefore, CHAPAWNs are in a vulnerable position to develop varying degrees of depression, especially when the constancy of professional demands is not balanced by consistent intimate support. Although social support was apparent in this study’s data, it cannot replace the contribution that intimacy offers. Thus, the possible appearance of depression cannot be denied in an overall examination of this topic.

**Limitations**

Despite the rich revelations presented here, this study presents a few limitations. An assumed shortcoming of this study is the small sample size of participants. While time limitations and financial resources brought pressure during data collection, this shortcoming still failed to compromise validity within this study. However, by revealing rich and essential data, as well as theoretical relevance, the smaller sample size functioned more like a pilot study; exclusive data to launch continued research of this subject matter. Just the same this study data set precedence for subsequent future examinations of the CHAPAWN population. And so, a broader participant pool, double or triple the size of this study, could potentially enhance the results of an identical examination and further confirm findings using the same theoretical framework. However, a larger sample size may possibly overwhelm the data collection milestone of this study— a degree of data saturation. Even though the study sample set was not enormous, a level of saturation was indeed met, as much of the same information regarding partner preference, background and spiritual doctrine gained repetition in participant responses. Regardless, an increased number of participants would positively substantiate the findings in this current study.
Another actual shortcoming of this study was the absence of response from African American men. As data from this study of the CHAWPAWN lifestyle revealed, their preference in choice for life partners and spouses was African American men—their racial counterpart. While the data implied issues of unavailability, infidelity, and a lack of appropriate support among African American men, the presence of the male perspective, or some level of response to this data could further enhance understanding into the greater issue facing CHAPAWN women—dating complexities with African American men. Additionally, by presenting the perspective of these men, this study can further fill the gap that is apparent in research literature that continually discussed shortcomings and lack within the African American male-female relationship.

**Future Areas of Inquiry**

When viewed from a broad perspective, this study cued an abundance of future research and new strands of study to further enhance what is revealed regarding the dating lives of the CHAPAWN demographic. Particularly, this examination serves as precursor to subsequent research that can impact scholarly discussions in interpersonal communication and develop new research in the realm of couple communication.

Regarding theoretical framework, a new examination using social learning theory in a secondary analysis of this data set is appropriate for future research. Social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1971) is based in the idea that a social learning system exists whereby new patterns of behavior that an individual exhibits can be determined by their direct experience or observing the behavior of others. Social learning theory directs that the more extreme a manifestation of observing behaviors, or through direct experience, the greater the reward or punishment consequentially following any such actions (Bandura, 1971). Since each
of this study’s participants observed positive parental marriages, a connection between those
behavioral observations can be made in understanding their dating perimeters from within social
learning theory. Through observing married life from within their family of origin, social
learning theory could also provide an understanding of how marital expectations of this
demographic is further derived. Specifically, elements of social learning theory is indicated
through the interview data from these women who credit the positive behaviors of their fathers,
or modeling, in determining possible marital partners. In response to the point Bandura (1971)
assessed that models, “demonstrate how required activities should be performed” (p. 5). As
such, this theoretical implication can address how participants in this sample have either
benefited or become burdened by the stellar example of their fathers regarding potential African
American male marital partners. In the same manner, social learning theory is also relevant in
their observation of the long-term stable marriages that existed for each participant. Bandura
(1971) states: “Most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or
inadvertently through the influence of example” (p. 5). As such, participant observations of their
traditional two-parent family/marital environment in this study can also show major association
to social learning theory regarding the negative dating behaviors, issues and dilemmas revealed
by CHAPAWN in this study. Therefore, a secondary analysis where social learning theory is
applied to this sample set can specifically address the relationship between marital/family
stability and dating status among CHAPAWN.

Other ideas for future research can reflect elements of change occurring in the American
social landscape. A similar study, using Seidman’s (2006) interview research methods and the
framework of the social construction of reality could be most useful in examining homosexual,
ever-married, professional and childfree African American women. Now that same-sex
marriage is legal nationally, such a study might be beneficial as attitudes toward the LGBTQ population have been reserved within the African American community and often not tolerated in their churches. Moreover, if this type of study is conducted at least five to seven years from now, it could provide greater comparisons with counterparts of the straight participant pool, as well as lived experiences among that demographic, regarding same-sex unions.

Additional research of the relationship between this study and the emerging adult is also warranted. This study indirectly featured aspects of the emerging adult. Conceptually, the emerging adult referred to individuals in their early to mid-20s who are evolving in life and characterized by work/world views, changes in residence/jobs, lack of obligations and seeing themselves as adolescents (Nelson et. al, 2007). While this study focused on well-established women ranging from ages 41-61, participant data implied that “not feeling like a grown-up” existed from being unmarried and childfree. Although the idea of emerging adulthood was only mildly apparent in this examination, subsequent study of this topic regarding to the CHAPAWN population could likely reveal a commonality in self-perception.

Furthermore, new research on this subject matter could add contribution directly through investigating the African American male response to data derived from this study. As this study presented the dating lives of CHAPAWNs, reciprocal feedback from single African American men would not only provide the male response, but such information would either counter or support this study’s data. Most importantly, a response from African American men to this data would give voice to their position and offer a constructive balance to the results at hand. In the long run, such feedback could create a comprehensive view of firsthand experiences of the African American male-female relationship.
In all, this research study served the purpose of igniting scholarly conversation within interpersonal communication about African American romantic relationships, especially as discussed and navigated by the CHAPAWN population.
REFERENCES


Du Bois, W. E. B. (Ed.). (1909). The Negro American family: Report of a social study made principally by the college classes of 1909 and 1910 of Atlanta University, under the patronage of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund; together with the proceedings of the 13th annual Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University on Tuesday, May the 26th, 1908 (No. 13). Atlanta, GA: The Atlanta University Press.


APPENDIX

ATTACHMENT 1

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This is to certify that I understand I am being asked to participate in this study entitled, “Communicating the Dating Reality of Childfree, Heterosexual, Professional African American Women Who Never Married”. This study is being conducted by Michelle M. Walton, a doctoral candidate executing dissertation research at the University of Alabama. This study is being supported through supplemental funds from the UA Graduate School for the SREB Doctoral Scholar Fellowship Program to cover direct costs related to conducting this research.

The purpose of this study is to expose an unexamined phenomenon facing a growing subgroup of the single population in the U.S: heterosexual, never-married, professional African American women who are childfree. The primary objective of this study is to expose their lived dating experiences with African American men, and how situations, events and/or circumstances create a dating phenomenon.

The findings of this study will reveal a consensus that reflects participant experiences of dating and what it means to the lives of a larger group of women. The results of this study will create a connection as to a true reality of lived dating experiences by these participants versus what is assumed in greater society.

Through pre-selection or referral, you offered your contact information for this study. You also agree that you are a straight, professional African American women who has never married and has no children.

The primary investigator seeks to interview six to ten like participants over the next three months.

If you agree to participate in this study, Michelle Walton will interview you twice in your home or a place of your own choosing about your dating experiences with Black men. The interviewer would like to tape record the interview to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. However, if you do not want to be taped, simply tell the interviewer, who will then take handwritten notes.

Each interview should last no more than 90 minutes depending upon how much information you choose to share. The only cost of this study is the time you offer in being interviewed.
The chief risk to you is that you may find the discussion of your experiences to be sad or stressful. You can control this possibility by not being in the study, by refusing to answer a particular question, or by not telling us things you find to be sad or stressful. We can also recommend a counselor to you if you seem to be upset or depressed. Seeing the counselor would be at your own expense.

There are no direct benefits to you unless you find it pleasant or helpful to describe your dating experiences. You may also feel good about knowing that you have helped communication researchers to learn how to examine and report your experiences in dating.

You are free to decide where we will visit you so we can talk without being overheard. We will visit you in the privacy of your home or in another place that is convenient for you.

The only place where your name appears in connection with this study is on this informed consent. The consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer in Michelle Walton’s office, which is locked when she is not there. We are not using a name-number list so there is no way to link a consent form to an interview. When we record the interview, we will not use your actual name, so no one will know who you are on the tape. Your interview tape will be transcribed and tapes will be discarded. This should occur within three months of the final interview. You may also refuse to be audio taped, in which case the interviewer will take handwritten notes. When the results are written up, your actual name will not be used as you’re the information you offer will be referred to using a pseudonym.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary. You can choose not to participate. It is your free choice. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on your relationships with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

If you have questions about this study right now, please ask them. If you have questions later on, please call Michelle Walton at 917-204-6996. If you have questions or complaints about your rights as a research participant, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach
Website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html). After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask Michelle for a copy of it. You may also e-mail us at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions.

Date:

Signature:

Printed Name:
Interview Questions

**Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening** [NAME OF PARTICIPANT]! My name is Michelle Walton and the goal of my dissertation is to highlight the experiences of single, professional African American women. Since I am interested in dating, marriage, and motherhood, I will ask you several questions that relate to these topics. Since it would contribute greatly to my understanding of your experiences, throughout the interview, I will ask you to share stories to help me understand what you are thinking and feeling at the time. Since I am very interested in your thoughts and feelings about these topics, please remember that there is no right or wrong way to respond to any of the questions. In addition to choosing to not respond to any question or questions, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your anonymity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym of your choice. Do you have any questions for me? Okay, let’s begin……

**FIRST INTERVIEW**

Let’s Start With Your Career……

- Please tell me about career.
  Probe: What is your position?
  Probe: Where do you work?
  Probe: How long have you worked there?
  Probe: What lead you to choose this career?
  Probe: What are your general responsibilities?
  Probe: What do you love most about your career?
  Probe: What do you love least about your career?

- In, general, how happy are you with your career?
So, Tell Me About Your Family……..

- Where (in what city and state) were you reared?
- Do you come from a big family? How many siblings? Where are you in the birth order?
- Were your parents married?
  Probe: If your parents were married, how long were they married?
  Probe: If your parents were not married, who was your custodial parent? Did this parent encourage you to get married? If so, what advice did they give you regarding marriage (e.g., who to marry, when to marry, what to look for, etc.)?
  ‘Probe: At what age did you receive this advice?

Now, Let’s Transition to Dating……..

- In general, what has been your dating life as a single, professional African American woman been like?
  Probe: Are you currently dating anyone?
  Probe: If you are currently dating someone, how long have you been dating this person? How did you meet this person? What attracted you to this person? Are you cohabiting with this person? Do you want to marry this person? Do you expect to marry this person?
  Probe: If you are not currently dating someone, do you wish you were dating someone?

- Some professional African American women are single by choice, are happy, and have no desire to get married (voluntary/stable) while other professional African American women are single due to circumstance, are not happy they are single and have found it a challenge to find a mate (involuntary/stable). Based on your current dating life, how would you describe your singlehood?

- If you had a magic wand and could change from being single to married this second, would you wave it? If so, under what conditions would you wave that magic wand, or transition from being single to being married?
- Under what circumstances, if any, do you think it's permissible for two women to date the same man?
- Tell me what you most love about being single.
- Tell me what you least love about being single.
- In general, how happy are you currently with being single?
- If you made the decision to never marry, how would you feel about your life, overall?
SECOND INTERVIEW

Let’s Move On To Marriage…….

As an educated, attractive, and intelligent African American woman, I'd love to know about the greatest joys of challenges of being a single woman today.

**Probe:** Has anyone ever asked, "You have so much going for you! Why aren't you married?"

**Probe:** If you have been asked why you are single and unmarried, who asked you this question? How did you feel when you were asked this question?

**Probe:** If you have not/never been asked why you are single and unmarried, do you feel that people frequently wonder why you are single and unmarried?

**Probe:** Do you have one or more "Why aren't you married?" stories?

- Some women are not married by choice. Some women are not married because they have none or very few opportunities to meet and date. Some women are not married because they have not met the right person. Which of these three options best describes your current marital state?

- Overall, do you think that single, professional women of other races (e.g., White women) have an easier time finding a suitable marriage mate than single, professional African American women?

  **Probe:** If so, why do you think this is the case?

- Many single educated women refuse to marry until they find “Mr. Right.” Since there is no universal definition of the qualities that comprise “Mr. Right,” I would love to hear your views about "Mr. Right." Do you think "Mr. Right" exists? If so, how would you describe "Mr. Right?"

An increasing number of single professional African American women are currently dating or are open to dating and marrying non-African American men. Have you ever dated a non-African American man? If so, what was the race of this man? How did you meet? How long did you date? If the relationship ended, why did it end? If so, do you think there is a difference between
dating a African American versus a non-African American man? If so, what is that difference/what are those differences?

Probe: Does “Mr. Right” have to be African-American?

Probe: Would you prefer that “Mr. Right” be African-American?

Probe: Does “Mr. Right” have to share your level of education?

Probe: What specific qualities must “Mr. Right” possess in order for you to marry him?

Probe: Do you think that African American men are more or less likely than men of other racial groups (e.g., White men) to have the specific qualities you want?

Probe: Do you think that White men’s interest in marriage is lower, about the same, or higher than African American men’s?

• Some women want to get married while others feel they can do without marriage. When you hear the word "marriage," tell me what that word means to you.

Probe: Would you like to get married one day?

Probe: If you would like to get married one day, please share a story regarding how and when you came this decision.

Probe: If you do not have plans to marry, please share a story regarding how and when you came to this decision.

• Do you see yourself getting married one day?

Probe: If you do see marriage as part of your future, when do you see yourself getting married?

Probe: If you do not expect to get married, how and when did you come to this decision?

• Have you ever felt pressure from family and/or friends to be married?
**Probe:** If you have felt pressure to get married, who exerted the most pressure....family or friends?

**Probe:** If so, what do they say?

**Probe:** Please share a story related to the pressure that you have received from family and/or friends in regards to marriage.

- What would be the greatest benefits of marriage for you?

- What would be the greatest drawbacks of marriage for you?

- In what ways, if any, do you think that your life would be the same if you got married?

- In what ways, if any, do you think that your life would be different if you got married?

- As a single, professional woman, what things, if any, would you be willing to negotiate or give to get married?

**Let’s Transition to Children……..**

- Some women choose to not have children while other women would like to one day have children. Where do you see children in your life? Would you like to have children one day?
  **Probe:** If you would like to have children, how important is it to you that you bear your own children?

  **Probe:** If you would like to have children, do you feel that marriage should come before motherhood?

- In what ways, if any, do you think your life would be the same if you had children?

- In what ways, if any, do you think your life would be different if you had children?

- What does being a good mother mean to you? Please share a story regarding what it means to be a good mother.

  **Probe:** Do you think you would be a good mother?
Probe: If you think you would be a good mother, please tell me about the qualities that you possess that would make you a good mother.

Probe: If you have some concerns regarding your ability to be a good mother, please share why you feel this way.

What does being a good father mean to you? Please share a story regarding what it means to be a good father.

• Do you think that African American men are less, about the same, or more likely than men of other races (e.g., White men) to be good fathers? Please explain.

• Do you think that White men’s interest in fatherhood is less, about the same, or higher than African American men’s? Please explain.

• Have you ever felt pressure from family and/or friends to have children?

Probe: If you have felt pressure to have children, can you share a story regarding the person or persons who exerted the most pressure on you in regards to that decision?

• In general, how happy are you that you currently do not have children?

We’re getting close to the end of the interview, so let’s transition from children to one single, professional African American woman that is on television……..

• Have you seen the pilot movie or first season of “Being Mary Jane” on BET?
  Probe: If the participant has watched the show ask her, “What do you think of the show?”

  Probe: If the participant has never watched the show, explain the show to her.

• Do you like the show?
  Probe: If the participant likes the show, tell her, “Please share what you like about the show.”
Probe: If the participant does not like the show, tell her, “Please share what you do not like about the show.”

- In what ways, if any, can you relate to the life challenges (dating African American men, affair with a married African American man, loss of ideal mate, work/life balance) faced by Mary Jane Paul in “Being Mary Jane?”
- Is there anything that you would like to add?
- Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

[NAME OF PARTICIPANT], I really enjoyed interviewing you and I sincerely thank you for your time! At the beginning of the interview I mentioned that your anonymity would be protected by a pseudonym that you would choose. What name would you like to be called when the findings are written up? Again, I sincerely thank you for your time and please feel free to ask me any additional questions at a later date.
ATTACHMENT 3
REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION
OF INFORMED CONSENT

The only record linking you as a participant and the research would be the informed consent form. The principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. As a participant, you agree to have been asked whether you want documentation linking you to the project or not; that a pseudonym has been chosen to maintain the confidentiality of your identity in this study.

I have read this, understand it, and agree.

Date:

Signature:

Printed Name:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant &amp; Age</th>
<th>Career: Job &amp; Happiness</th>
<th>Family: Folks, Sibs &amp; Town, Career Happiness</th>
<th>Dating Status/Partner Race Preference</th>
<th>Parental Advice/Message About Marriage</th>
<th>Being Single: Temporary or Permanent</th>
<th>Happiness In Being Single</th>
<th>Overall Happiness if Never Got Married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHLOE (48)</strong></td>
<td>Financial Planner; 6 Yet to feel total efficient in job</td>
<td>Parents Married 50yrs to Dads death; 1 Older Sis; Pine Bluff, AR</td>
<td>Not Dating Anyone</td>
<td>Be in Love. Woman marries his whole family. Dad said ‘college &amp; career 1st’, then get married</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td>Wants/Believes will be married; Not a ‘Dating’ type of Woman; Would wave magic wand for right partner</td>
<td>Feels Blessed of not being in a bad marriage—No Regrets!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMETHYST (61)</strong></td>
<td>Retiree—Univ. Athletic Administrator; 8.5 Liked job due to flexibility in work hrs. per ailing other—RETIRED</td>
<td>Parents were Married 49yrs to Moms death; Only Child; Tuscaloosa</td>
<td>Dating a Black man 20yrs younger</td>
<td>Dad showed her; Mom told her; Husband is provider. Dad said to save money for herself. Mom said never let people gossip about husbands behavior w/other women</td>
<td>Was Permanent, but now open to possible marriage.</td>
<td>Happy that she was not in a bad marriage and that her career allowed her to earn, get business acumen, and help others; Slow to wave magic wand</td>
<td>Feels fulfilled; That her life &amp; work has been a blessing to others; Fills that she did what God wanted her to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SASHA (43)</strong></td>
<td>Deaf &amp; Blind Teaching Asst.; 6 Feels burnt out, needs change to next level</td>
<td>Parents married 50yrs.; Only Child; Muscle Schools, AL</td>
<td>Dating a Black man in non-exclusive relationship</td>
<td>Mother showed independence in marriage &amp; worked &amp; was decision maker; Father was provider; Parents helped each other</td>
<td>Hoping its Temporary</td>
<td>Enjoy being alone as gotten older; Likes sleeping alone &amp; being able to get up and go—Miss companionship though</td>
<td>Would be okay...really think so—Be okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIGER (41)</strong></td>
<td>Elementary School Teacher; Rigor of test scores &amp; prep has taken away teaching joy</td>
<td>Parents married 49yrs; Youngest-older bro; Port St. Joseph, FL;</td>
<td>Seriously dating a Black man in exclusive relationship</td>
<td>Look for a person who was nice &amp; kind; Showed her about working together; Both were a great</td>
<td>Temporary-always saw it that way</td>
<td>Have good days &amp; bad days. Tired of going out, like to lunch by myself.</td>
<td>I’d be okay. I’ve made it this far. I’ve done well. Its not the perfect life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOYCE (49)</td>
<td>Insurance Co. Asst., VP/Fiction Author; 9 Enjoying life in Houston; Good work/life balance; Exploring doing something different in organization</td>
<td>Parents married 50+ years—both deceased; Ten of 11 siblings; Arkansas</td>
<td>Not currently dating anyone</td>
<td>Showing than telling; Not conversations but their behavior; Dad was provider while Mother handled the house; Mom was jovial; Both givers and praying people; Don’t want to settle because of what they had; All other siblings were married to HS sweethearts at 21 &amp; all still married</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td>I’m single &amp; content. I think I’m making myself available. I’m out &amp; about. I travel. I do all kinds of stuff. If he was out there he’ll see me.</td>
<td>I’d be ok. It’s been so long. I’ve never been married, that’s all I know. And I’m happy w/my life now. I feel fulfilled. Im good until God says something different.</td>
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<td>FANNIE LOU (52)</td>
<td>Gov’t Agency PhD Researcher; 8 Love research over teaching; and the travel, networking and training; Would say 10 but per govt rates for trainees salary is not as much.</td>
<td>Parents married 25 before Moms early death; Both now deceased; Youngest w/two older bros Grew up on block w/ long wed grandprents &amp; long wed aunt-uncle</td>
<td>Two love interests: One at work who is “soulmate” divorced w/grown kids; Other is childhood love, divorced, who is “the one”; Mother told her to go to college and not be married w/kids. Mother was radical liberal. Father was conservative republican who wanted her to be married w/a bunch of kids. “It was an interesting dynamic in that household”.</td>
<td>On the fence.. In Between</td>
<td>When things are like they are now (busy), I am at a ten. But when things are slow.. its winter &amp; like 20 degrees out… I need a snuggle buddy. But it has to be a very cold night.. and an exceptionally slow week. I love my bed. I’m not sure I’m willing to share my bed overnight.</td>
<td>I feel great! I’m in the place financially to do whatever I want to do, so I wouldn’t look back on that. I have friends who have been married divorced, married divorced. I don’t have that drama. There’s nobody in control of</td>
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me that way. So, marriage is not what its all cut out to be. Everybody walking around ‘looking’ like they’re happy.
<p>| CHLOE | Nobody has chosen me. | -Believer in God -Not afraid to let a woman be herself -Provider -Accept me for me | I’d have to cook more, clean more &amp; not work as much--- Not seeing mother for holidays; Not let his mother come live; Must be Christian; | -Mom will make occasional snide remark; Family wants her to be married..say “she’s such a great gal”, they I’m lonely -I believe I will be married | Mom: love the kids; teach girls to be women, groom productive citizens; Mom was fiscally responsible | Mom: love the kids; teach girls to be women, groom productive citizens; Mom was fiscally responsible | Mom: The best mothers..take very seriously their responsibility of rearing children &amp; train a child how to maneuver thru life; Mother teaches them these thing | -Myth that Black men are bad fathers. I think all(fathers) are the same. All Black fathers I know love their kids &amp; active in their kids lives -Fatherhood is fatherhood |
| AMETHYST | -Never been proposed to. Marriage s don’t seem to work out from where I sit. The horror stories you hear is so outrageou s. That makes it difficult. -Combo of all three: job, parents &amp; living in college town | -At this age, Mr. Right is a Godsend! -Have financial stability &amp; retirement -A to Z Attractive, Attentive, Affectionate, Believer in JC, Compassionate, Devoted, Educated, Financial Acumen Relinquish control—sit back &amp; let him drive Won’t negotiate any kind of abuse, period. Verbal, Physical, that’s off the table. | -By far no..because many of us are not married. Has a number of CHAPAWN cousins in the family -Better suited, because of my personality of me never being married; Would be better w/someone younger if I got married | Mom: The best mothers..take very seriously their responsibility of rearing children &amp; train a child how to maneuver thru life; Mother teaches them these thing | Dad: A father makes sure his family has all the material things that they need to be success; Not wants but needs (Black) men need to be apart of this process beside the necessary things that human anatomy requires to create it -(White) fathers have a higher base on what they see &amp; observe b/c vast majority of them come from a family setting where their fathers are present. |
| SASHA | -I haven’t found anybody yet. kids(she | Someone who loves God; Cares about family and | -If he breaks some type of trust(not negotiating that) - I still would like to kinda have my | -I would like to get married; Don’t know if I expect to | Mom: Has too understanding, have faith &amp; foundation &amp; know God. | -(Black) men get a bad wrap. A lot of them really want to be | -Someday I have high demands of former job | -It woulda been nice, but a burden givn what I had to do w/Mom &amp; high demands of former job |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>TIGER</th>
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</table>
| - Hadn’t met right person until now.  
- My students’ parents would ask “You not married?”  
Feel kinda sad that they even ask me. It always makes me kinda down to hear them ask me that. | A caring person, loving & goal-setting. A leader who wants to lead and me sometimes be a follower. A good person who loves God, wants a family & no matter what…no matter where we are, we’re together.  
- Won’t be as selfish. Thinking like “us”. Compromising my thoughts & how I deal w/things.  
- Abuse, being mean. Someone whose selfish. I won’t put up w/that stuff, not working. We’re gonna split the bills…you know sharing doing things. Men, a lot of men don’t make much. Sometimes you have to say I love this person…but he doesn’t have a lot of money. Or, you get somebody who has a lot of money, but you don’t love them.  
- I do, I would like to get married. I’ve enjoyed my life being single. Its almost like you wanna try something new…experience what your friends are experiencing. I hope to get married one day. I expect to be married. Yes. Its gonna happen one day!  
- I don’t think its pressure. I think its more, like my best friend. I think its more worry.  
- Mom: A good mother is loving. Not really a friend, but confidante. Somebody you can depend on…a good listener. A person who can be disciplined, but then be fun.  
- Dad: A good provider. Caring, but stern. Who gives you, limits but then will allow you to fail, but be there for you anyway.  
- (Black) Less likely to be a good fathers. I hate to say The few good fathers we do have are great. Many fathers are not doing what they’re suppose to be doing  
- (White) I know a lot of White men who have kids and they’re not all that into their kids. They may be more likely, but they have their own issues.  
| 9  
On a good day, I am a 9 happy  
I don’t have kids. But, I am getting older. All my friends’ kids are in high school. Ill be 50, my kid will be 10 & Ill be fifty. I wanna have a baby even though its almost too late. |
JOYCE
-I honestly don’t think its time, that God was ready from me to get married now. If I wanted to be married, I could be, I just wanted to be married...a warm body in the room.

- I haven’t met that person...my head’s been down doing my own stuff. It just has to be the right person.

It just depends. ..The right person for me is somebody who compliment s me & what I have going on. He needs to be saved. Handle a bunch of different challenges at one time. I need someone who can lead a household, is affectionate, and can relate to people. Be able to understand me and I him. He’s gotta make his own me money, but just compliment what I have going on. Manage his finances, have emotional intelligence, & can have a conversatio n about almost anything.

-Willing to let him take lead as breadwinner and be at home more. -Not willing to marry someone who doesn’t have a relationship w/God. Or who. Or whose not going in same direction as me. Has 401K & retirement, because of my age.

Yes, I wanna be married.. but if it doesn’t happen, I’m not tripping. I’m busying myself doing other things until its time to happen. -No family pressure. My mother did not say if she liked someone until after I was not dating them. All other siblings are married.

Mom: Strong and giving. My mom was a jovial woman. By the time I came along, she was spiritual and calm.

Dad: A provider. Leading, and just taking charge and raising families. I’ve seen that. I saw my Dad, I’ve seen my brothers. I’ve seen friends. (Black) Black men know how to hand multiple things. Taking care of family. I’ve seen it more in Black men. They have just has more as any other race, even more, from my perspective. (White) Not saying that White men don’t know how to do that. But I’ve seen it more in Black men.

FANNIE LOU
- I sometime s say I have standards or maybe I don’t want to

Right now, Mr. Right must take care of himself. be health.. eat right..and be fit. Self- Separate bank accounts. We can have a joint acct, but make sure I had my separate checking acct. (Best friend lesson)

-I’m not sure I wanna be married. I go back & forth about it all the time. I love my space. I love Patience for mother & father. My MOTHER had a lot of it. But, my father needed a little more.. he was 7,8, 9...mayb e a 10. It depends on the day of...
be married. But really, I don’t wanna be miserable when I could be content by myself. Marriage is a lot of work. I saw that in my parents & grandparents. I have zero tolerance for bullshit. In marriage, you gotta contend w/the good & the bad, and I’m not willing to go w/the bad. If it can’t be good, then I don’t need the bad.

-I’ve met the right person. I love being free. I don’t like smother love I enjoy freedom. It’s a meeting the right man for where I

sufficient with good credit. Grown children w/no granddaddy drama Good job, close to retirement, self-sustaining. He has to be a spiritual man, religious and spiritual ..have a church ome. A great sense of humor..doesn’t have to have six digit bank account, but saving for retirement or great pension.

-Not negotiate freaky stuff in the bedroom. I ain’t hitting the dunky dunk. No anal sex..swinging..bon dage. I’m not negotiating that.

me. I love who I am. I met someone, and scared I have possibly met my soulmate. I don’t expect to be married…maybe when I’m 80..the odds of me are very slim. I don’t know, I have no idea.

-No. They’ve given up on me now. I’m 52 they’ve given upon that prospect. My brother has mentioned it since my 30s. I don’t feel that pressure.

a strict disciplinarian. My FATHER was very tender. I mean we would still hold hands when I was 15. He was trying to teach me how to be a young woman. even see Latino fathers reigning in on their kids. (White). White fathers let their kids be hog wild. White men take it for granted.

dealth, I can get a home health aid. My insurance will cover it.
am now!
COMMUNICATING THE REALITY OF DATING
IN CHILDFREE, HETEROSEXUAL, PROFESSIONAL
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO NEVER MARRIED

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Communication & Information Sciences in the Graduate School of The University of Alabama

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ABSTRACT

Communication related to the dating experiences of childfree, heterosexual, and professional African American women who never married were examined. Using an interview research method prescribed by Irvin Seidman, a sample of six women from this demographic participated in two separate in-depth interviews. The first interview covered career, family, and dating; the second addressed marriage, children, and parenting. Results generated three primary themes from across the data sample impacting this dating lifestyle: stable parental marriage examples, a career that enables singleness, and skepticism about marital happiness. Additionally, three secondary themes were identified from parts of the sample: a lack of the right partner, a lingering desire for children and spiritual/religious doctrine. The findings were theoretically aligned with the social construction of reality, whereby communication from a group of individuals sharing an experience establishes their situation’s authenticity versus upholding the perceived understanding held by society. Practical implications of depression, interracial dating and stressors offer additional understanding of this study. Further research through a larger study sample, as well as applying social learning theory through secondary analysis to examine modeling of the sample’s long-term parental marriages provide additional opportunities from this investigation. Furthermore, new research offering an African American male response to data, topics regarding emerging adults and a subsequent examination of a similar LGBTQ demographic may provide an interesting comparison in light of newly-legalized marriage
equality. In all, this research addressed and accounted for current limitations in existing literature on this subject matter.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the late Crystal Lorraine Dewberry, my best friend of 25 years. You were a true intellectual, purveyor of knowledge, and natural teacher. Your passing in my first month of doctoral study inspired me to stay the course during many challenges I faced in completing this program of study. In taking the path that should have been yours, I honor you!
**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>CHAPAWN</em></td>
<td>Childfree, heterosexual, African American professional women who never married</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>HBCU</em></td>
<td>Historically Black College or University</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am pleased for this opportunity to extend my appreciation to a number of parties. Thank you God Almighty for grace, mercy and strength! I am most indebted to Dr. David Francko, Dean of the Graduate School. From admission to submitting this study, you believed in me, supported me, and funded me along with tough love when I needed it. This would not have happened had it not been for your personal involvement—I am grateful! I am abundantly appreciative to Dr. Jason E. Black, for stepping outside of your communication specialty to chair this dissertation. Thank you for your willingness, endurance, support, and for being you! I would also like to thank all of my committee members, Dr. Mary Meares, Dr. Jane Baker, Dr. Aaron Kuntz and especially Dr. Cassandra Chaney, who encouraged me at a low point, and for agreeing to join this committee from your post at Louisiana State University. Special thanks to Dr. Paul Mohr, Director of Special Programs at ACHE, whose selection of me as an AL-SREB Doctoral Scholar made this educational opportunity possible. Also, thank you Dr. Ansely Abraham, Executive Director of SREB in Atlanta, and to UA alumni, Dr. Gina M. McCaskill, Dr. Tina L. Peterson, Dr. Miesha Williams and Dr. Mia Long Anderson for invaluable advice.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the realm of couple communication, discourse surrounding the dating lives and
intimate relationships of African American women with African American men are often
underreported, misinterpreted, or marginalized. Lived accounts and true testimonies from
African American women regarding these complex love encounters are most often limited or
omitted in research (Banks, 2011). Very little is being examined regarding the current growth,
particularly among childfree, heterosexual, professional African American women who never
married (CHAPAWN) especially for those who are also over 35 years old. Increasing numbers
of these women within the single population alerted us to a fascinating phenomenon
surrounding their options in dating, along with their potential for marriage and family. The
pool of available men leave nearly two-thirds of women, ages 20-29, and a third of women 30-
44 unmarried (Glick & Lin, 1986). Moreover, the combination of higher rates of African
American female education and income, along with growing incarceration and substance abuse
of African American men resulted in 25% of African American women who may never get
married (Dixon, 1998; King, 1999; Yeakey & Bennett, 1990). However, the growth in this
particular group could marked a trend where personal choice supersedes traditional
domesticity and a need to fulfill societal expectations. Regardless, the conversation about this
developing phenomenon was ripe for attention. Such discourse should include the voices of
these women reflected in academic scholarship. This clearly omnipresent issue deserves to be
addressed directly through the voices, (CHAPAWN) are significantly facing these challenges.

Discourse on this subject matter is particularly lacking in communication scholarship. Tanfer (1987) asserted that over the last 25 years, postponing marriage has become an emerging trend among never-married women. But, when examining this issue among African American women, the discussion seems to be more apparent in media broadcasts. For the most part, academicians have lagged behind news programs such as ABC’s Dateline and CNN’s Black in America, which have profiled this dating demographic in their news and featured programming. Therefore, given the current marital opportunities for professional African American women, as well as the current void that exists in the literature, awareness and a more clear understanding of dating within the CHAPAWN population is important.

The Phenomenon

Historically, intimate relationships between African American men and women have faced a peculiar set of circumstances. Staples (2007) argued that from the time of slavery in the United States, African American females have generally not depended on the economic resources of their African American male companions. Instead, these intimate relationships had been based on emotional investment, as no financial resources were available to African American women from African American men during the era of slavery. This resulted in a “unique trajectory of African American male-female relationships” (Staples, 2007). Dixon (2009) affirmed that a shift in power between genders began to emerge in the post-slavery United States within the African American male-female union. Over time, the shift weakened and diminished these partnerships. The shift prompted two key realities: the first being the independence and career prosperity of African American women, Secondly, the employment
instability of African American males. As such, African American women moved from human capital to becoming productive individuals acquiring skills, building occupational knowledge, and securing education (Becker, 1964). However, these advances did not necessarily translate to gaining marriage potential.

The Yale University Study by Nitsche and Bruekner (2009) reported that African American women are twice as likely to never have been married by age 45, and twice as likely to be divorced, widowed, or separated as White women. It is estimated that among the 42% of African American women who are currently not married, almost 30% never will marry at all (Banks, 2011; Nitsche & Bruekner, 2009). As women rise in professional and economic ranks faster than men, African American women are the least likely to be advantaged by marriage in terms of shared economics in a domestic partner (Banks, 2011). The argument for female economic independence suggests that the reasons for shifts in marriage rates are primarily based on changes to women’s financial incentives to marry (Farley & Bianchi, 1987). For instance, African American career women have done better than their White female counterparts by attaining professional positions and income levels at a faster rate, constituting a larger portion of the African American professional community, and more than White females hold in the professional world overall. Herein exists an inference that African American women may have lower marriage rates because the economic incentives to marry are lower than those of White women (Lichter, LeClere, & McLaughlin, 1991). Moreover, there may be more than three million African American women without an available or desirable mate in the United States (Staples, 2007). Yet, few examinations have sought to identify other factors contributing to the lived dating experiences of these women. Such factors warranted an exploration into the dating experiences among
By exploring the dating lives of these women, an authentic awareness from their experiences can provide more insight into how they communicate about their experiences and identities.

**Never-Married African American Women**

Clarifying the dynamics of their single status remains important, as this “never-married” sector of heterosexual, childfree and professional African American women face numerous dating complexities. Never-married adults overall comprise a unique sub-group of the single population, as their experiences may differ from those previously married; they are more likely to define being single as a long-term lifestyle (Cockrum & White, 1985). Single women were often judged as less feminine, less loving, less nurturing, less sexually attractive, and more selfish. Oftentimes they are represented as possessing strong, independent personalities with anti-marriage positionalities (Cockrum & White, 1985). Alternatively, singlehood might provide a lifestyle choice for women to facilitate achievement and occupational accomplishments (Cockrum & White, 1985). As it relates to never-married African American single women, Washington and Newman (1991) supported the notion that African American women may prefer to remain single than to settle for a less than equal African American male partner who may not satisfy their emotional needs. Bedard (1992) agreed that single people gain happiness from their social networks and from acquiring financial resources to support themselves instead of relying on fulfillment from their marital status. For that reason, many “African American women are likely to remain single” (Washington & Newman, 1992, p. 32).
**The African American Professional Woman**

Understanding professional status allows for building a connection between occupational endeavors and dating among CHAPAWNs. As early as the 1960s, African American women had more median years of schooling, and by age 25, were earning more college degrees than African American men. In fact, they were earning 60% of graduate and professional degrees, awarded to African Americans, one-third of which were doctorates (Epstein, 1973). With an emerging African American middle class, parents possessed the financial resources necessary to insist that their daughters pursue education with the primary goal of obtaining a professional career (Gilkes, 1982). As the 1980s approached, African American women were beginning to break new professional ground, and unlike their predecessors, they worked for personal fulfillment instead of mere survival to maintain the family and/or community (Bell, 1990). Also at this time, researchers found that African American women outnumbered African American men in college two to one (Allen, 1988). By the early 1990s, there were seven million African American women in the civilian labor force who made up five percent of all workers, 12 percent of all female workers and fifty percent of all African American workers (Hughes & Dodge, 1997). The added burden of negative stereotypes, (i.e., mammy, jezebel, African American matriarch) of African American womanhood offered more complexities (a “double whammy” really) to the budding professional identities of African American career women (Gilkes, 1982). However, the 1990s also ushered in the era of the “new African American woman,” who perceived her career as a vital component of life and personal identity. Bell (1990) notes this shift in identities for African American women:

… for African American career women of today, professional identity is a gratifying part of their core identity. As a group, they are career-oriented women who devote a tremendous
amount of time and energy to establishing their professional identities. They are keenly aware that having a career is a lifelong endeavor, often requiring rigorous training and continuous development (p. 459).

Therefore, professional and career endeavors as a focal point of living became a marker for modern African American women.

With a new primary emphasis on education and careers, modern women became less focused on marriage. With the surge of college-educated women, the prototypical act of marriage, once common to heterosexual women in the 1950s and 1960s at a 90% rate, was no longer the norm. As Goldstein and Kenney (2001) suggested, “this educational crossover, which occurs for both African American and White women in recent cohorts, suggests that marriage is increasingly becoming a province of the most educated, a trend that may become a new source of inequality for future generations” (p. 506). Despite the mark of those with professional and educational acumen, getting married has become less attainable for those particular African American women. So, the contemporary never-married, professional African American woman was not only college-educated and career-oriented, but has transformed her educational status and work into a distinct lifestyle of her own. Yet, the lifestyle of professional African American women exuded independence, opportunity, and individual identity, ironically, but tended to undermine these women’s dating opportunities.

**The Professional African American Man**

Over time, African American families sent their daughters to college while their sons worked, creating more educated African American women then African American men (Dixon, 2009). But before 1960, the pursuit of bachelor degrees earned among African American men was higher than that of African American women at 1.3% to 1.2%, respectively
(Jackson, 1971). After events of the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Movement, workplace and educational settings became more diverse. In 1970, African American men barely led African American women in earning bachelor degrees, 1.9% to 1.8% (Jackson, 1971). By the 1980s, college educated men and women worked in similar occupations (Black & Juhn, 2000). As such, many more African American men and women than ever before held degrees and worked in professional level jobs. Thus, an era of the thriving African American middle class emerged where salaries of African American men and women closed the income gap with their White counterparts (Smith & Welch, 1989).

Despite the financial and economic boom of the 1990s, there were fewer African American professional men than professional African American women in the career sector from the previous decade (Black & Juhn, 2000). African American men began to experience higher unemployment and incarceration rates while they represented smaller numbers on college campuses (Banks, 2011). This period gave way to a decline of employment and professional status among African American men due to a rising demand in occupational skills and fewer opportunities for them to attain college education (Moss & Tilly, 1996). More African American men were experiencing intermittent employment and sporadic job loss. This affected their financial ability to maintain long-term relationships with African American women (Dixon, 2009). At the millennium, as African American men faced diminishing life prospects, widespread unemployment, high incarceration rates, and substance dependency, their availability for African American female counterparts became scarce (Gordon et al., 1994). Apparently, the number of professional African American men to professional African American women is unequal; leaving fewer partner choices for the CHAPAWNs.
**Existing Romantic Relationship Research**

Hughes, Morrison, and Asada (2005) reported that general research regarding relationships often focuses on basic issues facing couples, such as such fidelity, spending time together, and the love life/work life balance. Some researchers felt that such a trend falls short of examining dating as a social phenomenon (Surra, Gray, Cottle, & Boettcher, 2004). The study of dating is defined as “an investigation of properties and phenomena that characterize the nature of romantic heterosexual and homosexual relationships, and the factors that affect relational properties” (Surra et al., 2004, p. 54). The factors surrounding relationships are a key element in understanding the contours of a relationship’s function and longevity, especially across ethnic cultures.

Regarding the discourse of relationships between African American women and African American men, research had traditionally been pathology-centered, which tends to characterize their conflicts and problems against that of European-American heterosexual relationships (Bell, Bouie & Baldwin, 1990). Just the same, other studies examining dating between African American men and women focused on the “game” of dating or stresses that each party brings to the union (Aborampah, 1989). Studies rarely sought out each individual’s perspective on the relationship or lived experiences, and have generally neglected the perspective of CHAPAWN altogether. Only a few studies examined how African American women describe their dating situations or how those experiences impact their lives (Chaney, 2011). However, recent research data providing rich content from African American women regarding this issue revealed a remarkable level of insight and vulnerability.

In his notable publication, *Is Marriage for White People?*, Ralph Richard Banks
(2011) presented findings consisting of firsthand accounts and lived relationships experiences from CHAPAWNs and African American male-female couples through interview data. Through the use of interviews, Banks (2011) dissected aspects of couple interaction among the African American male-female relationship including discussing the male partner shortage, state of marriage, being childfree, interracial dating, and marital desires of CHAPAWNs. More specifically, Banks (2011) highlighted relational revelations such as how fear, African American female stereotypes, and issues of self-perception influence these male-female intimate unions (Banks, 2011). Regarding marriage, Banks (2011) found that cultural and educational gaps, marital dissatisfaction, and marry-down relationships primarily affect the ability of African American women to attain or remain in matrimony with African American men. Also, Banks (2011) suggested that African American men often engage in colorism or discrimination against dark skinned African American women, which ultimately leads to fewer marriages and greater challenges in African American male-female relationships. Banks (2011) wrote that resistance to interracial dating on the part of African American women prevents marital opportunities that can exist for them in lieu of diminished marital opportunities with African American men. Banks (2011) developed a comprehensive work with historical, cultural, and experiential relevancy. As a source, this research aptly provided testimony and discussion of couple issues among African American partners that takes existing research to the next level. More importantly, this work provided a path for additional research of its kind. While Banks’ (2011) work contained several responses to dating complexities among African American women, it left an open window in understanding other factors surrounding their dating dilemmas.
The preceding topic overview and subsequent literature review, theoretical connection and investigative data results has been conducted to establish the actual lived dating experiences of CHAPAWNs. Through discussing their environment, contributing factors, lived experiences and desires, a prevalent lifestyle mostly untapped in research and overlooked by society can gain truthful exposure. By understanding the firsthand dating experiences and lifestyle traits among the CHAPAWN group, this examination offered discernment about this subject matter, where authentic representation supplements current research perspectives. Awareness from this study also acknowledged the voices of a group who constructed a life where dating has been at times, daunting and/or difficult.

This research provided a scholarly perspective of dating circumstances of the CHAPAWN population. Through a review of existing literature on this topic, the limitations of those current studies will be identified, which will in essence, validate the rationale for the current study. Thus, the scope of current research on this subject matter was established.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Construction of Reality

The social construction of reality is based, in part, on the work of Alfred Schutz (1932), who established that human situations should be studied through a commonsense interpretation of their social engagements, interactions, and experiences. Berger and Luckmann (1966) expanded these ideas in developing the social construction of reality, suggesting that people’s conceptions of knowledge and reality become the norm. That is, how people were raised, what they learned from school, church, or messages from media are interwoven in daily actions they individually experienced and shared among others. Berger and Luckmann (1966) posited that the social construction of reality develops over a time period when individuals create a social existence that becomes the norm in certain situations. Norms of those events are then universally accepted when others reciprocate and respond to their established concepts or systems. Further, communication was as the conduit through which concepts then become embedded in society. Communication then rendered experiences as knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Pearce (2009) further described social construction as the idea that reality, or what is known in part or whole to be reality, is also the product of people’s own actions. Reality then positioned them to make practical judgments about whether, when, and how a situation may be prevented or changed so that another can emerge. Trenholm and Jenson (2010) wrote that
communication has been the means by which social structures are dictated and maintained. So, without communication, social construction would simply be impossible. Therefore, reality has affected communication and has communication affected reality (Trenholm & Jenson, 2010, p. 54). In effect, “language appears…in the inherent nature of things” and created motion in socializing a construct, like marital pressure, in forming it into conventionality. Berger and Luckman (1966) emphasized that the process of transmission strengthens the reality of a social construct.

The process by which a social construct was produced happened through three steps: habitualization, institutionalization, and externalization through communication (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Accordingly, the habitualization step occurred when people accept meaning of a situation when it occurs within their regular routines (Berger & Luckman, 1966). For instance, marital pressure is a common social construct among single adults who are not married. Single people then accepted such pressure as it becomes regularly applied by work peers or family members who have entered matrimony. So, the expectation of family, friends, and coworkers creates an environment by which single people are encouraged to conform. There, marital pressure was habitualized by its application from peers and family, along with an acceptance by those single persons who simply deal with it as an expectation of how to eventually structure their personal lives.

Institutionalization occurred whenever there is a “reciprocal typification of habitualized actions” (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 52). In other words, when actions within a construct have been simulated by a group of people, like in the case of marital pressure, institutionalization occurs. Furthermore, “typifications of habitualized actions, or institutions, were always shared ones” (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 2) and so, the actions of marital
pressure are habitualized, or regularly applied and accepted. The consistency of those reciprocated actions among people within group, as well as the environment, created institutionalization. Situations like marital pressure exist within an institutionalized world, where they become the norms and habits human communication.

Externalization is referred to by Berger and Luckmann (1966) as the reality that—regardless of any agreement or argument to the contrary of any situation—that external existence of societal conditioning is still there. In other words, it cannot be ignored or wished away. So, due to externalization, single or never-married individuals had continuously faced with marital pressure from various directions, as long as they remain unmarried because marriage tends to be a social expectation within greater society. Externalization is the environmental expectation that societal conditioning and norms placed on individuals, a group of people, or a social situation (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Very simply, people interacted in an externalized world—a place of expectations based on collective societal conditioning. Externalization is a perspective of expectations, held by society in general (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Therefore, individuals must figure out how to negotiate existence in a system of expectations.

A social structure, like the single population, has embodied different constructs. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), a social construct like the dating phenomenon that was investigated in this study “takes the form of stories and that these stories bear the imprint of the language in which they are told and of the histories/biases/rhetorical choices of the persons who tell them” (p. 3) and are also “an orientation, a set of practices, or a set of themes” (p. 5) by those experiencing them. As such, single people negotiated those norms through how they chose to approach their marital status. The social construction of reality, or
the meanings that are taken from these situations, arise in part from the realities of a group of individuals’ everyday lives.

The dating lives of childfree, heterosexual, African American, professional women who have never been married (CHAPAWN) present a mostly-ignored dilemma in research. Social awareness of this lifestyle is required to address those challenges. As noted in Chapter One, dating challenges of this group were disregarded, overlooked, or marginalized within current research literature. Women of this group should be allowed to communicate how such challenges impact their personal lives, family situations, and the larger community. Theoretically, social construction showed relevancy in offering an understanding in the process of meaning made about this particular dating phenomenon, but a reality that women of this group experienced, especially by way of communicating about their experiences.

Of course, the social construction of reality has been more complex than just highlighting what is real. It reveals a relationship between self and society. These women shared a common social identity “that defines the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other categories (‘us’ vs. ‘them’, in-group vs. out-group, us women, those men, Whites, African Americans, etc.)” (Turner et al., 1994, p. 1). As members of a community who have the same cultural/ethnic dating complexities or situations with their male counterparts, CHAPAWN were commonly connected by these experiences. Turner et al. (1994) concluded that “the self can be defined subjectively as (through) social collectivity” (p. 2).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) pointed out that these realities are intersubjective, which is to say that an individual or group’s meaning of a situation to some extent depends on the meanings of others. In other words, humans cannot escape that their communication
environment plays an influential role in their lives. Wilden and Hammer (1987) concurred that opinions about situations were impacted through social conditioning from birth through family, school, media, and popular entertainment, along with personal experiences and informed decisions by individuals directly involved. Face-to-face interaction and language manifest realities that were then directly or indirectly experienced by society. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Face-to-face communication is also reciprocal and susceptible to interference from others (p. 54). Face-to-face communication is the method by which everyday reality can be negotiated or challenged; language creates meaning for how individuals and people come to know about their life situations.

The study of the social construction of reality seeks to distinguish between what of a situation is real, and what of it is ideal, or how it becomes manifested through societal conditioning. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966) everyday life has been manifested in society through knowledge or by simply knowing what norms, situations, or expectations exist. Pearce (2009) explained that since knowledge is produced through social interaction (i.e., communication), social constructionists tend to argue about the source by which knowledge originates: is it those people who claim to live a situation authentically (real) or those who have helped to cultivate (ideal) its existence?

As this group of women experience the same dating issues, situations or challenges individually, understanding how they authentically experience them is important in relation to how they are understood by others, and how their experience can be studied by researchers. While individuals within the CHAPAWN group have varied lived experiences, communicating those experiences creates a shared voice, one that establishes “real” factors regarding the situation they have in common. Through their communication of these dating circumstances,
the larger society gains a more accurate awareness of their dating lives versus what members of said larger society may view, read, or learn from others. Therefore, the process of social construction of reality can help explain this study’s participant lifestyle experiences. For example, when others (who were unaware that CHAPAWNs often forego marriage for career gain and have a disproportionate number of possible marital mates) communicate assumptions about CHAPAWNs, such knowledge may become accepted information (Banks, 2011; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). There, the goal of social construction was to understand the communicative process that reflect the constructed reality these women are actually living in the face of norms established by larger society. As the CHAPAWN were a substantial sector among singles understanding this, social construction allows this information to become shared knowledge for those not living the experience.

In relation to dating as a social construct, a relationship between how the phenomenon was experienced and how has been perceived in current or previous research sets the theoretical tone. However, existing scholarship placed this dating phenomenon in the context of being a social shortcoming versus a personally informed choice (King, 1999). The social construction of reality can offer a greater awareness of and understanding about how this dating situation has collectively resonated in the lived experiences and lifestyles of the CHAPAWN group.

Thus, the usefulness of the social construction of reality in this study can help support the dating phenomenon among the CHAPAWNs in two ways: one by understanding the self-identification of those who experience it, and by how dating is parlayed by this group through interactions with others. Furthermore, the importance between this theoretical framework and the subject matter is how CHAPAWN group members perceived the larger society to view this
phenomenon, how they shaped or resisted that societal perception, and what role individual/collective agency and communication played in clarifying their position. In other words, this framework has analyze what these women perceive as the constructed reality of this phenomenon and how they were involved in the process of this evolution. Essentially, this communication-based theory was used as a lens to understand social construction (product) and the perpetuation of those living the phenomenon (process).

**History of Singles**

Historically, a notable minority of the overall population have been single. Yet, for the first time since 1976, the single population in the United States outnumbers those who are married (Li, 2014. Given this current social reality, it is important to note that society’s perceptions of singles have changed. During the 19th century, singles were generally viewed by members of society as deviant, untrustworthy, social misfits (Spreitzer & Riley, 1974). However, at the turn of the century, in the United States and Europe singlehood was viewed as a respectable alternative to marriage for women if they were willing to serve a larger (Chambers-Schiller & Chambers, 1984). The emerging culture of singlehood during that time period offered more freedom for women who were sometimes viewed as social outcasts (Chudacoff, 1999). After the Great Depression from 1945 and 1964 people entered marriage younger than ever before as a means of gaining happiness and stability after experiencing those years of joblessness, poverty, and deep financial oppression (Rindfuss, Morgan, & Spicewood, 1988). Through the 1960s people were defined in terms of their relationship to marriage, as adulthood became synonymous with marriage and parenthood (Stein, 1975). Sociologist George Mead (1967) concluded that, “the good life is defined as marriage…any living arrangement is wrong that may make any marriageable individual forego marriage” (p.
Mead’s words subscribed to the prevailing negative attitude of the moment, one that viewed singlehood as deviant behavior for so-called normal adults. However, social changes of the late 1960s and 1970s ushered in a reinvention of singlehood.

Social change ignited a new existence for singles in the 1970s. The works of Margaret Adams (1978), Marie Edwards and Eleanor Hoover (1974), and most notably Peter J. Stein (1975, 1976, 1981) re-examined singlehood as a meaningful and multi-dimensional lifestyle in its own right. Stein (1975) firmly identified this new view held by single people as a right or choice, whereby they could meet their personal need for human growth and interpersonal relationships. This research marked singlehood as a social phenomenon inspiring dissatisfaction with traditional marriage (Stein, 1975). Most, there were more single people then ever by the 1970s, making singlehood a non-stigmatized life choice.

There were a large array of factors that attracted individuals to the lifestyle. For example, Stein (1976) asserted that marriage restricts self-realization and limits involvement with other relationships while singlehood affords individuals greater freedom of choice and autonomy. He further acknowledged the factors drawing people away from marriage and toward singlehood. Furthermore, Koropeckyj-Cox (2005) reported that negative attitudes toward singles declined by 1976 and marriage was regarded as optional: therefore singlehood became a permanent life choice for many during this era. Ironically, at the height of the 1980s Cold War, the single population generally had a favorable attitude about marriage, yet the vast majority of young people remained single longer than their parents (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). At this time, marriage was once again embraced as a gateway to happiness with “moral and patriotic overtones” (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005, p. 93). By the new millennium, singlehood was generally more common for men than women being impacted by high divorce
rates or deceased spouses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In the past, being married was a status symbol, a valued accomplishment that a couple had personal and economic prosperity (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). Cherlin (2004) agreed that marriage, once the standard above singlehood and a sign of conformity, has now become the capstone and marker of prestige. Koropeckyj-Cox (2005) affirmed that individuals still believe being single is the appropriate alternative to marriage when personal or economic stability is not achieved or the right dating partner is not found.

**Types of Single People**

Although singlehood has been less stigmatized than in the past, the status of being never-married still remained ambiguous, marginalized, and subject to labels. For instance, never-married singles are susceptible to stereotypes like being too old to marry or having failed to attain marriage (Rubenstein, 1987). But in fact, the never-married segment of the United States reports satisfaction in terms of family, social support networks, and dating partners (Allen & Pickett, 1987). Given the many lifestyles engaged in by individuals who are not legally married, key studies offer a number of single-types that can more positively and accurately describe sectors of never-married singles.

In response to the 1970s massive “coming out” of the single population, Stein (1981) identified four categories of singles based on the attitudes of single individuals: voluntary/stable singles, involuntary/stable singles, voluntary/temporary singles, involuntary/temporary singles. Although single people moved between these categories throughout life, a single person’s satisfaction and overall well-being depends on perception (Stein, 1981). Voluntary stable singles tended to be single by choice and generally satisfied with their decision (Stein, 1981). Involuntary stable singles tended to be dissatisfied with the
singlehood, such as single college-educated women who are challenged in finding a suitable mate and have trouble adjusting to permanent singlehood (Stein, 1981). Voluntary temporary singles were not opposed to marriage, but do not prioritize marriage to the same degree as involuntary singles (Stein, 1981). Involuntary temporary singles were never-married individuals who are actively seeking a mate or previously married people, like widows and divorcees (Stein, 1981). These categories created diversity within the single population. For the never-married sector, single life reflects a conscious choice to remain independent (O’Brien, 1991).

Researchers have contested designating certain types within the single population. Spreitzer and Riley (1974) agreed with Stein’s intention to characterize singles, but saw difficulty in categorizing various types of singlehood as many individuals single status is fluid. Conversely, DePaulo and Morris (2005), have redefined the singles’ types as proposed by Stein (1981):

..singles include myriad types of people—those who never marry, those who marry and divorce, those who were married and lose a spouse to death, those who never formed a sexually committed relationship in the first place by choice, and those who never formed a sexually committed relationship due to lack of opportunity (p. 135).

These categories showed connections between all forms of singlehood. Overall, the research on single types in this population reflected comprehensive aspects of attitudes, circumstance, and marital desire. And, to be sure, understanding such desires among single women re-directs this focus.

**Singlehood & Women**

Regarding women, Watkins (1984) argued that singlehood allowed for opportunities
and roles not available to mothers or married professionals. The increase of educational and economic opportunities made it more feasible for women to support themselves, thereby decreasing the economic and social necessity for marriage (Watkins, 1984). However, studies on childlessness suggest a strong societal pressure on women to marry and become mothers (DePaulo & Morris, 1995). Although some studies have suggested a negative stigma attached to single women (Faludi, 2009), other studies have validated the experiences of single, independent, career women as well as those who assume the roles of caregiver, parent and godmother (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). Overall, the literature omits accounts of lived experiences by CHAPAWN, and barely discusses singlehood within the context of race and gender.

**Singles’ Diversity Trends**

Watkins (1984) emphasized that women best benefit from being single, however trends of singlehood along other gender and racial lines among heterosexuals is somewhat scarce in the literature. That literature posited that 90% of all singles will have experienced marriage during their lives (Connidis, 2001). In a study of single college-educated women, Bronzaft (1991) found that two thirds of the White and Hispanic female respondents intended to collectively attain marriage, career, and start a family. However, another study emphasized that the percentage of single White women had doubled among 20-24 year olds, and tripled among 25-29 year olds from the 1980s to the present (Tanfer, 1987). In a study of native-born Chinese American and Japanese American singles, Ferguson (2000) found that they were discouraged from the traditional marriage roles of their mothers, lacked available Asian partners and felt pressure to attain advanced degrees, which ironically led to them feeling free to marry outside of their racial/ethnic group. While this sub-group of Asian women had
higher rates of singlehood than their Caucasian counterparts, research supported that
singlehood is steadily climbing among Asian and Hispanic women, respectively, despite their
strong familial ties (Ferguson, 2000).

Yet, the largest increase of singles, especially those never-married, occurred among
African Americans – rising from 32% in 1975 to 44% by the millennium (U.S. Census, 2000).
Research revealed that singles among African American and White American communities
strongly differ. Single African Americans marry later and have higher separation/divorce rates
than White Americans, spending more of their lives being single then their Caucasian
counterparts (Engram & Lockery, 1993; Norton & Moorman, 1987). Research has also
demonstrated that African Americans have lower rates of marriage and are less likely to be
married compared to white men and women (Korepeckyj-Cox, 2005). Moreover, these
demographic trends have created a context in which marriage is no longer the norm among
African Americans (Tucker & Taylor, 1989). Particularly for African American college-
educated women, for whom marriage is valued but not necessarily compatible with their
expectations, research has noted a high rate of singlehood (Korepeckyj-Cox, 2005). Beyond
the commonly discussed issues of economic disparity, mismatched education levels, and a
lack of suitable mates, Bell (1990) recognizes that other issues lead college-educated African
American women toward long-term or permanent singlehood.

**Cultural Relationship Attitudes**

Cross-cultural theorists have identified cultural and ethnic differences in their discourse
on couple attitudes toward dating (Dion & Dion, 1993; Hatfield & Rapson, 1993). On one
hand, a pioneering study examining culture’s impact on intimate partnerships confirms that
men and women of various cultural and ethnic groups seem to possess similar attitudes and
behaviors (Doherty, Hatfield, Thompson & Choo, 1994). Yet, Chaney and Monroe (2011) revealed that African American couples, particularly those in cohabitation, value the day-to-day aspects of growing together as a couple and more than the physical excitement that is typical in romantic relationships in general. Other issues of differing cultural attitudes within African American intimate partnerships indicate contrasts in feminine identity within dating. Regarding beauty, the literature also suggests that African American women are more satisfied with their bodies than White women, who generally value a slender physique (Chaney & Monroe, 2011). This designation indicates that African American women are not necessarily subscribing to overall societal norms when defining their role in intimate partnerships, but are carving out their own lifestyles. Therefore, cultural factors are likely to play a key role in dating attitudes in CHAPAWNs.

**Challenges of African American Couples**

Earlier studies such as *The Negro American Family* by W.E.B. DuBois (1908) noted how structural factors like imbalanced gender ratios between African American males and females have affected marriage from as far back as 1840. From the 1970s until 2003, available African American females began to outnumber African American males by sheer number (Dixon, 2009). Today, this gender imbalance is also attributed to the high incarceration rates of African American men (Dixon, 2009). Labor and income are other structural factors affecting African American couples. Scholars have noted that persistent unemployment, under-employment or sporadic employment of African American males undermines their viability in marriage and relationships (Staples, 1999).

Several years ago, Fry and Cohn (2010) noted that when evaluating mates, economic stability is more important to African Americans than to any other ethnic group. This data
helps to explain why, at every income level, African American men are substantially less likely than their White counterparts to be married; it also affirms the idea that economic stability is a concern for African American men in pursuit of a prospective wife, since little financial support is available like with parents or extended families of Caucasian couples (Banks, 2011). Related to this, Chaney and Monroe (2011) emphasized that “African American women more easily remain unmarried or choose an alternate status, such as cohabitation, until they meet men who are their economic equals, or alternately leave a marriage or relationship in which they are dissatisfied” (p. 657). So, as African American men become more economically marginal, African American women faced a limited pool of equitable marital mates.

**Dating Desires**

Recent findings (Thomas & Barrie, 2012) revealed that CHAPAWN possess a strong desire to eventually be married, but a discussion surrounding this specific issue is only now emerging in academic research. Only a limited sector of that research has attempted to draw rich data that supports their feelings and experiences accompanying such desire (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993). Edin and Kefalas (2005) found that low-income African American women possess a great desire to marry, but their male counterparts are not marriageable because they are unemployed, have been incarcerated, or possess a strong addiction to drugs and alcohol, which usually makes them violent. Even in this case, research also falls short in revealing firsthand experiences of how this issue impacts these women directly. But even in doing so, it is necessary to establish the dating phenomenon of CHAPAWN as a basis.

**African American Male Mates**

The deficiency of marriageable males for CHAPAWN creates another structural threat
that impacts dating ability. The African American population in the United States has the lowest ratio of men to women of any group in recent history (Adimora & Schoenbach, 2005). Dixon (2009) referred to this special situation affecting African American females as a “marriage squeeze” (p. 33). While some African American women marry successful African American male peers, the bulk of professional African American women remain unmarried or marry a less-educated man, diminishing the pool of marriageable men as a whole (Banks, 2011). Helm and Carlson (2013) wrote that African American women who want a male partner of the same race should expect to spend at least part of their life alone and become self-sufficient. Banks (2011) also affirmed that while this same condition may not affect other groups of women, the irony for African American women is clear: their hopes of marriage are bolstered by their successes, but are undermined by the shortcomings of African American men.

African American women who found marriageable mates are also educationally mismatched more than any other group. Banks (2011) found that a majority of college educated, professional African American wives had working-class husbands with less education. As such, these professional African American women and their working-class African American husbands often embody different cultural orientations as well: the women represent an increasing part of the American mainstream, while the men appear as a stereotyped symbol of disadvantaged African Americans (Banks, 2011). Harknett and McLanahan (2004) suggested that an inversion exists between perceived partner availability and relationship quality. According to Helm and Carlson (2013), the deficiency of marriageable African American men led to relationships lacking commitment from the men. African American women then “settle for less and like what they settle for, even less”
(Franklin, 1984, p. 145), which set the stage for lowered levels of self-esteem, happiness, and satisfaction.

**Dating Alternatives**

These lackluster levels of satisfaction accepted by African American women result in complicated intimate unions. Since African American females experienced scarcity in available African American men, the men have become better able to dictate relationship terms that challenge acceptable standards; women then feel pressured to do more than they are comfortable by overlooking indiscretions (Banks, 2011). In this instance, frivolous sexual encounters become a commonplace behavior accepted by women who feel they have must adapt to a script that benefits men (Bogle, 2008). Regnerus and Uecker (2010) found that when male companions are scarce, men hold the balance of power in relationships. Women are led to believe they will not be treated well, and thus, accept nonexclusive and/or uncommitted intimate interactions. Banks (2011) suggested when African American men are in short supply that they can negotiate terms undermining exclusivity. Chaney (2011) emphasized that in African American male-female relationships, each partner is expected to give and receive support from one another. However, as African American male partners are scarce, they can hold the advantage in a relationship, sometimes leaving African American women at their mercy.

**Mansharing**

The prevalence of non-monogamous relationships has been a topic of discussion in the African American community for decades. Over 25 years ago, Audrey Chapman (1986), author of the first controversial book on mansharing, described the growing predicament of women, willing or not, who at some point has shared a man with another woman. Some
experts believe that eight out of every ten women have at one time shared or are currently sharing a man (Randolph, 1991). Specifically, Chapman (1986) declared mansharing to be shameful as “women feel they can’t consciously accept sharing—they feel better holding on to fantasies about men and romance, even though these delusions tend to set them up for unhappiness” (p. 22). The act of mansharing is hardly uncommon. When ABC’s Nightline went to Atlanta in 2010 to interview successful African American women about their choice not to marry, the women reported a lack of exclusivity as a common barrier (Banks, 2011).

Evidence that African American men maintained long-standing nonexclusive relationships has been supported by scholars. Laumann, Ellingson, Mahay and Paik (2004) authored a seminal study finding that African American men are participating in nonexclusive relationships more and more, but specifically that more educated African American men are even more likely to participate in long-term concurrent relationships than White men. This study also reported that man sharing more prominently involves African American men who are married, engaged, or have live-in partners (Laumann, et al., 2004). In the end, the most desirable African American men – perhaps those better-educated and professionally successful – negotiated shallow relationships with African American women, or female companionship without commitment. Interview data revealed that as these instances continually appear, some African American women feel it is better to accept a shared relationship with an African American male partner than be alone because if they refuse it, another woman may accept it (Banks, 2011). As such, African American women may view nonexclusive relationships as an acceptable option in their dating quandary. However, other options exist for African American women seeking love.
**Inter-dating**

Interracial dating and marriage offered another option for mate selection among CHAPAWN. The tendency to date or marry within the same ethnic group is thought to influence mate choice, but when severe gender imbalances and a shortage of marriageable mates exist within a race, this option may not seem viable (Curran, et al., 2005). According to recent data, there are more than half a million inter racially married African American men, and only 200,000 inter racially married African American women (Banks, 2011). African American women are the least likely of all groups to marry across racial lines, where Asians and Latinos are nearly three times more likely than African American women to inter racially marry (Passel, Wang, & Taylor, 2010). Intimate segregation, which describes a group of individuals who choose to only mate or marry within their race, is a stark reality among African American women over any other racial group (Bank, 2011).

Historically, African American women were just as likely to intermarry as African American men from 1960 to the 1980s (Banks, 2011). In response to the prevalence of intimate segregation, many evaluators have taken the trend for granted, and “researchers have tended to assume that even the most successful African American women—those with college degrees and good jobs, and who seem to navigate comfortably in most White professional environments—must marry African American men, if they marry at all” (Kaba, 2012, p. 121). Some researchers accused never-married, professional African Americans of self-sabotage through intimate segregation and propose that if one in every five African American women were willing to marry outside of their race, their pool of quality men would increase (Kaba, 2012). However, a marginal position exists for them in dating relationships.
Dating Hegemony

Hegemony not only impacts women of color in social situations, but also exists within their love lives. Dominant social groups confine African American women to an “other” position, marginalizing them through societal structure (Boylorn, 2008). Such marginalization has an impact on the intimate relationships of African American woman with African American males. Dominant society controls African-American women through powerful stereotypes related to intimate partnering, such as the asexual mammy image or the oversexed jezebel persona (Boylorn, 2008; Collins, 2000). Jezebels are perceived as hypersensitive, bossy, emasculating, confidently hyper-sexualized and classless. On the other hand, the mammy is perceived as nurturing, self-sacrificing, non-threatening, as well as a warmth that is portrayed through a comical and physically robust exterior (Boylorn, 2008; Collins, 2000; Hudson, 1998). Using a perspective of the “oppositional gaze” and negotiating self-identity with mediated versions in reality television, Boylorn (2008) asserted that African American women are more often misrepresented, misunderstood, and misportrayed through the Jezebel caricature. Yet, Hudson (1998) asserted that regardless of which dichotomy is the focal point, both the Jezebel and mammy images suggest the need for an African American male to be present. In addition, such an assertion implies that African American women socially position themselves, in one way or another, to attract a man. However, this may not necessarily be the goal of the CHAPAWN.

Sutherland (2011) affirmed that portrayal, self-definition, and self-reliance can be explored solely as they pertain to single African American women in society or in intimate relationships. In a study that examined dichotomous stereotypes of African American female professors as “old maids” or “Miss Independent,” Gilchrist (2011) revealed these
academicians rejected these labels from friends and family because it was assumed that they were unmotivated to find love. In other words, although these African American women enjoyed their independence, they did not want others to believe that they had no desire to be in a relationship. One African American female used the following words to describe her feelings:

I am independent, but I’m not “Miss Independent”. Being independent informs that I am self-sufficient, but being ‘Miss Independent’ would suggest that I do not want or need anyone for anything and that is not true. I hope and pray that someone will come into my life, with whom I can share my hopes, dreams, burdens, and finances, but until he comes, I’m holding it down on my own (p. 190).

Chandler (2011) supported similar notions when discussing the “Strong Black Woman Myth” (SBW), a contemporary concept that links historical characterizations (like the “mammy”) to strength and deviant womanhood often associated with African American women. The SBW is viewed as a burden and a threat to productive romantic relationships with African American men. Chandler (2011) further stressed that if an African American woman’s community perpetuates the same myths as the larger society, one might believe these stereotypical images are true representations. These erroneous images may validate the negative perceptions that some Black men have of Black women.

**Womanhood in Dating**

While the phenomenon of single African American women has consistently been theorized by assumed stereotypes, along with partner and relational shortcomings, very little scholarship has examined African American’s sense of womanhood and its possible
connection to dating desires. Although some earlier forms of scholarship associated womanhood with the demonstration of “submissive and sentimental” traits (Williams & Best, 1990), more recent research has focused on the inherent resilience, or strength of Black women. In support of this, manhood, Beauboef-Lafontant’s (2005) qualitative study revealed that contrary to a subordinated social status, African American women are armed with great prescriptive and descriptive strengths. So, prescriptive strength, which refers to the selflessness of African American women, and descriptive strength, or the humanness of these women, are complementary rather than mutually exclusive emotional states (Beauboef-Lafontant, 2005).

More recent research significantly contradicted these early perceptions of womanhood among African American females. In her qualitative study of how African American women defined and described womanhood, Chaney (2011) revealed these women defined womanhood through the lens of femininity versus the common perception as mother, employee, wife, or companion, which is merely a demonstration of earlier perceived womanhood roles. As such, research from the African American feminist perspective has heavily contributed to a re-definition of African American womanhood. Chaney (2011) asserted that African American feminist scholars emphasize that race, ethnicity, sexuality and class collectively influence women’s social worlds and that such aspects are not universal or static. Essentially, the individual, family, and historical experiences of African American women should be told by them to avoid misinterpretation. The noted Black Feminist scholar, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) wrote in *African American Feminist Thought* that mobility of African American women has been mostly restricted by external definitions and that a self-defined world viewpoint should be used to validate the experiences of these women.
In her qualitative study of womanhood and marriage, Chaney (2011) found that although African American women are independent and strong, they oftentimes struggle in male-female relationships to “let men be men.” With this in mind, African American male mates with less education and fewer economic resources may find that one of the greatest challenges of being in a relationship with a strong African American woman is negotiating who will be the ‘head of the household’ (Chaney, 2011). As it directly relates to womanhood, Chaney’s (2011) findings further revealed that while traditional femininity advocated for workplace upgrades, African American women sought success at work and at home. Basically, when a suitable African American male mate is in place, African American women are happy to relinquish leadership, but if not, are willing to lead a household or family on their own. Clearly, womanhood plays a significant role among African American women in what they can contribute to dating relationships.

**Single or Married**

Getting married did not necessarily dictate the lifestyle choices of CHAPAWN. Generally, this association between marriage and life satisfaction, including well-being and mental health, was actually strongest for men of various races (James, Tucker, & Mitchell-Kernan, 1996; Williams, Takeuchi & Adair, 1992). The quality of lifestyle for CHAPAWN was not negatively affected, as many rely on an extended support system and social network of family and friends (James et al. 1996; Thompson-Seaborn & Ensminger, 1989). King (1999) asserted that these relationships reduce the isolation many CHAPAWN may experience and offers them important social, psychological, and practical support that has been traditionally provided through marriage. Thus, CHAPAWNs maintained lifestyle satisfaction through a strong source of social support.
Cohabitation

Many single African American women are still seeking the fulfillment of companionship that marriage provides. Some, therefore, choose to cohabitate. Although this may not be a choice for CHAPAWN, it is common in African American male-female couples. King (1999) wrote that nonmarital relationships are not effective substitutes for marital relationships. Marital relationships either bind men and women together, reciprocal and meaningful relationships that same-gender friendships and non-marital relationships are unable to replicate, are legally sanctioned relationships between adult men and women offering the most social and economic benefits among societal partnerships, and serve as the initial and primary link between unrelated families (King, 1999). In contrast, Rinelli (2006) asserted that African American couples who cohabitate view it as a long-term arrangement that is suitable for child-rearing, and stay together for at least five years. Chaney and Monroe (2011) found that low-income African American cohabitating couples either immediately embrace plans to marry or are content with the status quo. Moreover, these findings reveal that African American couples in long-term cohabitation were as stable as married African American couples.

Current Study

The above literature review illustrates that numerous relationship traits and external factors can impact dating among the CHAPAWN demographic. These women tend to face varying obstacles such as socially constructed pronouncements of “authentic” womanhood, the lack of a large pool of potential mates, the seeming complications of sometimes holding educational and professional credentials beyond their prospective partners’ reaches, and the ramifications that come with choosing a life of singlehood (in general). The research outlined
speaks to the subject matter yet generally excludes the firsthand experiences of CHAPAWN themselves. The theories discussed in the present chapter can provide a solid scholarly foundation as the present study seeks to understand what the CHAPAWN communicate about their experiences. Interview data gleaned from this study’s participants reveal some specific communicative examples not yet studied in the larger field of interpersonal and relational communication.

This phenomenon validated why this study focused on CHAPAWN who are managing complex dating situations and are creating a unique lifestyle of their own. In addition, by interviewing CHAPAWNs, disparities in existing literature can be highlighted, new directions of research can be forged, and practical applications can be recommended. This qualitative study was based on the methodical modifications determined by Seidman (2006), and responded to the following questions:

1. How do CHAPAWN describe their singlehood?
2. Among CHAPAWN, how is marital possibility communicated?
3. How is the state of being childfree described by CHAPAWN?
4. How do CHAPAWN use stories to explain their marriage and motherhood opportunities?
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Social Phenomenon

The study was conducted to better understand the lived experiences and firsthand communication surrounding the dating lives of childfree, heterosexual and professional African American women who never married (CHAPAWN). This study also related those experiences to the social construction of reality—that what was known about their experiences is a direct result of how and what is communicated directly, from the perspective of these women. As a qualitative method, study of phenomenon intersected well with the social construction of reality. However, this study did not work from formal phenomenology. According to Christensen, Johnson, and Turner (2010), the main objective of this type of study was to create transparency in meaning and structure related to the lived experiences of an individual or group of people surrounding a specific phenomenon (e.g., dating). Essentially, researchers using such methods described commonalities of all who experience a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, studying a phenomenon attempted to understand meanings of human behavior through the eyes of a study’s participants. Similar to formal phenomenology as a research method, this study has set the stage for future research. Moreover, this study presented a qualitative examination of the lived dating experiences among CHAPAWN as a social construct of reality through phenomenological interview research prescribed by Irving Seidman (2006).
Background

In developing social phenomenon for qualitative research, the work of Alfred Schutz (1967) was a basis for the social construction of reality, and also serving as a method of phenomenological interviewing cultivated by Seidman. This method activated focused, in-depth, and life-history interviewing drawn from Schutz’s (1967) phenomenological assumptions. According to van Manen (1990), the basic purpose of phenomenological research has been to attach individual experiences within a particular phenomenon to a universal description revealing its essence. In identifying “lived experiences”, van Manen saw the phenomenon as an “object” of human experience (1990, p. 163). In contrast, Schutz (1967), whose work resulted in creating social phenomenon, asserted that it is never possible to have a perfect understanding of an individual’s experience because to do so would infer entering one’s stream of consciousness firsthand (i.e., by ‘being’ them).

Schutz (1967) explained phenomenon to be “subjective” of human experience; that is, to know the meaning an individual has made from experiencing the phenomenon and putting related behavior into context. The common ground between these two perspectives involved the shared lived experiences of individuals. The view of these experiences are conscious ones and through a common description among those individuals, understanding of the actual phenomenon can occur. Yet, based on the perspective of Schutz (1967), the interviewing of individuals who experienced a phenomenon results in meaning and how they carried out those experiences. Interviewing provided access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby extended a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior (Seidman, 2006).

Interviewing as a tool is commonly used to conduct qualitative research by elevating the discourse of individuals. Seidman (2006) stated that “interview research is an interest in
other individuals’ stories because they are of worth” (p. 24). To be satisfied with formal knowledge and to negate the stories of others is what Siedman (2006) referred to as “anti-intellectual”. This was so because individuals’ stories demanded action through interviewing. “Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action” (Seidman, 2006, p. 24). When a researcher’s goal is to understand the meaning of people’s experiences, interviewing has provided a necessary and strongly sufficient avenue of inquiry. The method is time-consuming and can be expensive. Yet, establishing access, collecting and transcribing interview data before sharing the results was a gratifying accomplishment that shed light on an otherwise unknown phenomenon (Seidman, 2006).

**Interview Research Method**

Seidman (2006) affirmed that interviewing as a method is a powerful way to gain insight into important social issues and to understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues. As a method of inquiry, interviewing has been most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language; it centers the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration. Ostensibly, Seidman (2006) concluded that this research method is deeply fulfilling to researchers who are interested in others’ stories.

Siedman’s (2006) interview method prescribed a three-interview process with directives regarding group identities and style, culminating with a multi-step analysis and data interpretation process. The first of three recorded 90-minute interviews, separated by at least three days, was focused life history revealing family, educational, job, and/or community backgrounds. An interview detailing lived experiences of the phenomenon constituted the second interview and the third interview in Seidman’s method was one of meaning and
reflection, which revealed how the individual views her/his lived experiences in the context through which they occur (Seidman, 2006).

It is important to note that all three interviews prescribed by Seidman (2006) had an individual focus, thus created comprehensive meaning by offering stories framed with a beginning, middle, and end. Although Seidman (2006) prescribed a distinct interview structure, provisions were cited for extenuating circumstances; allowing for amendments in conducting interviews in two separate sittings, versus three, and a variation in days between interviews, or other such adjustments as the situation requires. Seidman (2006) stressed that completing the interview by varying the means was better than no interview at all. “The governing principle in designing interviewing projects might well be to strive for a rational process that is both repeatable and documentable. Remember that it is not a perfect world. It is almost always better to conduct an interview under less than ideal conditions than not to conduct one at all” (Seidman, 2006, p.22).

The analytical process of the Siedman (2006) interview method was a two-step reduction process; the first to develop profiles of study participants and grouping them into sense-making categories, and secondly, marking passages in interview transcripts which were then grouped into categories and studied for thematic connections. Each step occurred in a separate copy of the transcribed interview. In one copy, the initial step of crafting a profile was meant to make data analysis and interpretation achievable; so when a profile could not be created, a vignette was produced with a more limited narrative of a study participant’s experience (Seidman, 2006). The profile was constructed as an extended story or narrative of an individual’s experiences comprised of words from the participant and interviewer, and titled using a pseudonym. The other copy was used for the second step of “marking” and theme
connection. Marking, or labeling excerpts from the interviews that reflected a like or significant theme is Seidman’s (2006) brand of coding. After the excerpts are categorized and filed accordingly, the most compelling were produced into emerging themes and interpretive categories connecting meaning of the participants’ lived experiences to the phenomenon. With regard to producing thematic connections, Seidman (2006) warned against forcing excerpts into categories and subsequent themes, but for the participant’s experiences to guide this step. Themes were then interpreted by interviewing a number of participants and connecting their experiences by checking comments of one participant against those of others. Basically, the goal of the process was to understand how the participants make meaning of their experiences.

**Intent of Interview Research**

The qualitative research study was meant to produce a substantive description and eventual understanding of the dating issue facing CHAPAWN. This study also exposed the situations, interactions, and settings that enabled or impacted this phenomenon. Moreover, by utilizing Seidman’s (2006) interview research method for this subject matter, this study proposed to reconstruct each participant’s lived dating experiences to explore and present a better understanding of the phenomenon, which supported or contradicted pre-existing scholarly discourse regarding this topic. This study also promotes theoretical relativity to lived dating experiences among CHAPAWN. Finally, this examination sought to show this dating phenomenon as a social construct of reality from the perspective of the women who experience it.

Social constructionism coincided with interview research as a method. Berger and Luckmann (1966) maintain that conversation is a most crucial component in constructing reality. Conversation was at the heart of interviewing, by which descriptions and information
gathered in this study render a dating reality for CHAPAWN. In each interview conversation with study participants, meaning and understanding, produced reality in their dating phenomenon automatically presents itself (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

**Study Design**

The ideal process to gain an understanding of meanings and circumstances of this under-researched phenomenon came about by adhering to the criteria of Seidman’s method. Participants of the study were recruited through chain referral snowball sampling initiated by pre-selected subjects who met the criteria: childfree, heterosexual, never-married and professional African American women who are at least 35 years of age, and no older than 65 years of age. It was previously determined that women in the participant group tend to marry later than their counterparts of other races, and thus, the youngest age of participation would be CHAPAWNs who were at least 35 years old (King, 1999).

All potential respondents were sent an individual, personalized email invitation (Attachment 1). Once a potential respondent was confirmed to meet the study criteria and agreed to participate in this study, the researcher secured a location and meeting place to conduct each audio-taped in-depth interview. In accordance, the interview protocol reflected Seidman’s (2006) guidelines: at the time of the interview, each respondent was presented with a study description (Attachment 1) and copy of the informed consent acknowledgment form (Attachment 2) and a form requesting a waiver of written documentation (Attachment 4). The participant read the study description, and, if needed, posed any other questions regarding the data collection process which was then answered by the principal investigator. Upon full understanding of responsibilities as a study participant, the respondent read and signed the informed consent form. Before the audio-recorder was activated, each participant identified a
self-chosen pseudonym, by which their data was identified in study results and discussion.

Interview sessions commenced using specified interview questions (Attachment 2). Interviews were scheduled at least three days apart, and covered a three-part arc that included questions on life history, dating background, and future dating desires. Polkinghorne (1989) recommends that researchers interview from 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon. This study met the minimum requirement interviewing six respondents over only two separate sessions instead of the three sessions prescribed by Seidman (2006). Such provisions were not only necessary but supported in this method as an acceptable amendment when limitations exist in executing the study (Seidman, 2006). As such, all three interview areas were still covered within the two interview sessions for each of the six study participants. After completing the interview process of this study’s six participants, a satisfactory degree of saturation was met in that a repetition of responses and experiences were reflected in data offered. Thus, this sample set reflected full and rich data.

In accordance with Seidman’s (2006) process to derive meaning and openness from interview research, a modification of his systematic procedures was deemed necessary. Due to the limitations of time, funding resources, and investigative personnel, a determination that two interview sessions were necessary in order to complete the study in a timely manner. Each of the two participant interviews contained a greater amount of information in order to cover the three-part content arc on life history, dating experiences, and mating desires. Responses in this study became the raw data used in the analysis. Then, the dual-step profiling and labeling process was applied to data. Each of those steps produced two categories of themes, which then produced meaning. Those meanings, as they relate to the CHAPAWN demographic, were compiled into a written description based on their narratives of actual
experiences. The final composite description revealed an overall understanding or essence of this dating phenomenon. The description also uncovered correlation as a social construct of reality. By producing a core understanding of the problem, this qualitative study exposed influential elements that substantiate circumstances and elements within this dating demographic.

**Recruiting**

Seidman’s (2006) model emphasized that interviewing grants access to people’s behavior and an avenue for researchers to draw meaning from communication. However, recruiting participants who are willing to divulge such information proved to be more challenging than anticipated.

Six participants from a large metropolitan city in Southeast Texas and a mid-sized town in Central Alabama were recruited through snowball referrals as locations most accessible by the primary researcher. After being referred, each potential participant was electronically contacted, sent an email with study description and participation invitation, followed by a telephone call when such information was provided. However, six other individuals refused participation due to shortcomings in meeting study demographic requirements or an unwillingness to disclose personal experiences related to dating and/or marital desires. Despite these hurdles, the interviewing process proved to be mostly seamless among other study respondents.

**Collecting Data**

As stated, the process from Seidman’s (2006) method, which prescribed three 90-minute recorded interviews, was reduced to two 45-minute to hour-long audio-recorded interviews with each participant. In order to meet individual comfort levels, study
participants chose the site of each interview. Those locations included residences, workplaces, and school or public libraries. For all but one participant, both interviews occurred at the same site, at least three days apart per Seidman’s (2006) specification, with only the respondent and the primary researcher present in the designated interview space. As previously stated, in order to protect anonymity, pseudonyms were self-selected by each study participant to identify their data in the study. Designated questions were formulated into two interview guides (Attachment 2) and asked during each interview, respectively. Specifically, the first interview consisted of questions that revealed a description of their job duties and a day-to-day account of their work. The initial interview also inquired about details regarding the participants’ families, such as siblings, parents, and extended family support. The first interview ended with questions pertaining to participants’ experiences in dating situations, especially their take on why marriage never materialized from previous relationships. By the second interview, questions employed then required participants to discuss reasons for never getting married, along with describing any existing desires for having children, and how experiences growing up with their own parents have impacted their current state of being unmarried and childfree. With each participants’ second interview, a comfortable level of rapport was built through the ease and openness of subsequent responses. Depending on individual responses, predetermined or improvised prompts were employed by the primary investigator during one or both interviews to provide clarity and continuity where necessary. To further achieve clarity and thematic derivation, interview notes were taken to notate specific or significant points emphasized by participants during each interview. In all, interviews were concluded over nine weeks of collecting data for the study. No additional interviews or follow-up questions were needed to complete the sample data. This resulting
sample, composed of twelve interviews among six total participants, represented a rich, in-depth, full data set primed for coding and analysis. Fundamentally, this sample adequately offered greater understanding of the lifestyles and accompanying perspectives among CHAPAWNs.

**Data Coding**

Upon completion of each interview, notes from each of the two individual interviews were placed in a hard copy file created to hold data for every participant. Next, audio-recordings of each interview were transcribed by the principle investigator, who also conducted interviews. In fact, most study participants inquired about who would produce audio transcription, showing more ease and satisfaction with the interview process after learning the primary investigator also served study’s data transcriber. Then, once the entire data collection process ended, three copies of each interview transcript were made for the purposes of coding. In one transcript copy, existing notes from corresponding interviews were used as a guide to identify related data, which were marked and highlighted. In a second transcript copy, participant responses to designated questions that reflected elements of the three-part content were also marked and highlight. The third transcript copy of each interview was used to produce a singular data profile, as presented by Seidman (2006), which represented a comprehensive story reflecting raw data for each study participant.

To precipitate the coding process, a charting structure was used for dissect data profiles for each study participant interview. Siedman (2006) emphasized that there is no right way to share interview data; therefore, the categorization process of charting was substantiated. Using the second marked copy of the transcript, charting consisted of data from each interview relating to three categories derived from marking and highlighting transcripts.
Designated data reflecting the categories of career, family, and dating from the first interview of each participant was compiled in a chart (see TABLE 1). Next, designated data reflecting the categories of marriage, children and parenting from the second interview of each participant was compiled in another chart (see TABLE 2). Data from categories in those charts were then analyzed and compared to the raw data profiles produced from the third transcript copy. In all, the coding process was further simplified as the primary investigator also served as the sole data transcriber and coder for this study.

Analysis of the data was applied from comparing charted data with interview notes and comprehensive raw data profiles. From there, identification of repeated lifestyle traits across this sample population rendered several themes. Primary themes were deemed so by appearing across the data sample. Whereas secondary themes gained acknowledgment from being evident in only parts of the data. However, both sets of themes reflect elements of the lifestyle benefits and issues in dating situations facing members of the CHAPAWN group. Moreover, the findings regarding participant data revealed an overall sample description, from correlating themes that promote meaning and understanding communicated from experiences common among CHAPAWNs.

Description of Sample

The characteristics of this study’s sample set presented striking similarities beyond the basic qualities of this demographic. All participants met the criteria of being childfree, heterosexual, African American, professional women who are never-married (CHAPAWN). In earlier phases of planning for this study, the age range became a point of serious contemplation. As it was determined that CHAPAWNs are likely to get married up until the age of 35, when remaining singles became less socially acceptable and whereby marital
pressure was more apparent. Also, by age 35, women who were career-oriented are more likely to secure a strong employment position. While the intended age range of these particular women was originally 35-45 years old, accessibility constraints rendered a slightly older sample comprised of participants ranging from 41 to 61 years of age. In actuality, this age range best coincided with existing literature, which implied that African Americans tend to marry later in life, particularly in their late-20s to mid-30s (Engram & Lockery, 1993; Norton & Moorman, 1987). Thus, this study accessed an optimal sample of participants who have passed that age marker and are situated squarely within the CHAPAWN group status.

Regarding career and economic status, more commonalities were revealed from this sample set. First, each study participant held at least a baccalaureate degree and nearly 20 years of professional work history. Second, all but one participant has attained a graduate degree or has studied at that level. Third, the study’s respondents have reached the income and economic capability to be current homeowners, as in all cases but one, who is currently building her first home. Finally, each participant claimed financial independence, having attained economic stability from their own professional and personal money management efforts. Happiness and/or success at work has played a major role in achieving and sustaining such an economic lifestyle. Although these participants have gained financial autonomy from their families, they held common characteristics regarding family dynamics.

Pertaining to family background, participants in this study held traditional, uniform familial characteristics. For instance, each respondent was raised in a two-parent family with their biological mother and father. Regardless of having several or no siblings, each participant was raised in a family headed by parents who remained married for 25 to 50 or more years. Moreover, no parents of these respondents were ever divorced, and those who
were widowed, never remarried. Between the parents of each study participant, the father served as the primary financial provider. Despite the fact that most respondents had working mothers during part or all of childhood, each father worked to cover most of the family and household expenses. Therefore, family, financial, and household stability in childhood were shared characteristics evident among all participants in this sample.

However, it was location, profession, and a perception of their singleness that presented distinguishable traits among the study participants. Among the six study participants, two lived on opposite sides of the nation’s fourth largest city in South Texas, three reside in a mid-sized West Alabama town, and the last lived in a major Central Alabama metropolitan hub. Between the two South Texas respondents, one worked in financial advising and the other is an insurance company executive. However, the three participants in the West Alabama mid-sized town had similar professions in education of some sort: one was a public elementary school teacher, another was a retired university administrator and the third is a teaching assistant for deaf and visually impaired toddlers. In contrast, the respondent living in a Central Alabama metropolis was employed as a government healthcare agency researcher. Yet, the location of their current lives truly did not hold the influence of geography in this study. Participant accounts indicated that their native cities were the most influential geographical factor. It was those home-base cities that serve as the setting to family environments, upbringing and dating experiences of their early lives which contribute in shaping their current marital status, dating circumstances and lifestyles.

Additionally, as all of these professional and childfree women were African American and heterosexual, not all classified their single status in the same way. Surprisingly, all but one of this study’s participants viewed being single as a temporary situation, with the other
claiming to be single as mostly a matter of choice. However, every study participant in this study concurred that her marital partner of preference must be an African American man who is a believer in God. Moreover, each study participant embraced their current single lifestyle, enjoying the oneness and freedom it provided, contrary to whatever marital desires they may individually possess or previously held in the past. Overall, this sample description reflected participants with shared circumstances overall, implying that CHAPAWN are bonded by common experiences and traits.

**Rationale for Design**

This process of interview research was an appropriate tool to derive meaning from the lived experiences among study participants. Additionally, in-depth interviewing in Seidman’s (2006) procedures and analysis structure were ideal for assisting non-advanced qualitative researchers with producing meaning-based data related to social phenomenon. This study exposed actual experiences from the dating lives of CHAPAWN. This study also shed light on the meaning of their intimate journey in dating African American men, and discussed how life history, background, and environmental circumstances contributed to their experiences.

**Significance of Study**

The CHAPAWN group members faced a dating phenomenon like no other group in America. Not only had marriage become less attainable for these women, but factors like their educational opportunities, professional success, and economic affluence had even posed challenges in their dating relationships with African American men (Banks, 2011). As a social issue, this problem is widely acknowledged using similar themes through news reports and media programming. In academic research, the issue has received only minimal support. Some existing examinations have implied that African American women are unlikely to benefit from
being married (Black et al., 2005; McAdoo, 2007). Thus, room exists for bringing more examinations of this subject matter to light.

As such, this study was warranted for several reasons. First, regarding the realm of communication scholarship, this study examined the relationship between real-life phenomenon against its presentation in academic scholarship. Specifically, such a study gave voice to the African American women who have been perceived as the blame or cause for their own dilemma. Second, this study offered phenomenological clarity focusing on the impact of cultural, relational and interpersonal communication factors related to the CHAPAWN experiences. Finally, this qualitative research study provided support and some contradiction to existing research related to CHAPAWNs.

**Investigator Connection**

As a professionally-inclined, childfree, heterosexual and never-married African American woman, reflecting on my own dating situations with African American men was of key importance to me personally and in my research. Quite frankly, my love life had been somewhat of a disaster by typical standards. I tended to prioritize my professional desires and individual dreams over romantic relationships. Even now, with my parents’ persistent health challenges, my personal relationships remained less important. Dating was always a lower priority—not necessarily my primary concern. And if I did make love a priority, it flopped or failed.

For most of my adult life, my work almost always took me out of town. I would connect with men away from home, finding myself in a series of long-distance relationships. In fact, my first love at 16 was a young African American male I met the summer before he went off to college. That relationship seemed to set a pattern in my relationships, many of which have been with African American men. I find that I am often involved with men who are geographically unavailable on a consistent basis. Subconsciously, I believe this was so the relationship will not interrupt whatever educational or work opportunity I am pursuing; be it grad school, performing on the road as an actor, working on cruise ships, or being a flight attendant. And with that, it seems like the availability of straight African American men in my work or social circles seems scarce or, in the least, difficult to manage given my existing priorities.

So, I never saw the urgency in seeking out a partner or seriously pursuing marriage. I wanted to honor myself, an admitted “free-spirit,” with the ability to pursue whatever crazy adventurous opportunity that came along. For several years, I lived my dream as a working actress where I relied on my accessible flexibility to take an out-of-town gig at a moment’s notice. In my twenties, while living and performing in New York City, I just went with the flow as a few dating opportunities presented themselves.
In my thirties, I was trying to find myself professionally and figure out my long-term career path.

The very week I turned 30, I landed in the messiness of ending an off-and-on three year long-distance relationship with an unavailable man, while heading home during a parental health crisis. Dating was hardly on my mind as I permanently moved back to my hometown soon after, and then to Texas the next year.

By age 35, I was back in New York City and found myself in a particularly vulnerable place while working as a flight attendant. I was faced with emotional and professional uncertainty. Maybe it was the failing economy or my pivotal age, but I was feeling unsettled. I then fell into dating an African American male partner from my past, now a divorcee with children, who resided in another city. It was at this moment that I was slapped with a dose of reality: the kind of African American men available in my twenties were long gone, and some of those remaining were undesirable or seemed to come with heavy baggage.

So, as always, I focused on my career.

The next year, I landed in a doctoral degree program. During the first month of classes, my best friend suddenly died. Shock or grief did not provoke me into self-reflection about her death; she too was a never-married, professional and childfree African American woman. She would never fulfill her strong desire for marriage and family. Instead, I reacted by hanging on with the same guy from my dating past. He still lived at a distance, had substantial baggage, financial constraints and held no true desire for a committed relationship.

Early in my studies another never-married, African American, childfree female doctoral student proclaimed that getting a PhD would detract a suitable African American male partner from me. I openly disagreed with her as I personally felt that a favorable African American male suitor would not necessarily be dressed with an advanced degree or suit-and-tie profession. However, I must admit that it made me ponder my future love life. I acknowledged the possibility that I may face rejection in attracting a good African American male partner by virtue of my education. However, I felt she was only repeating what we all were hearing—that highly-educated African American women, with robust salaries along with professional and educational status had trouble finding an African American male mate with complimenting traits. Truthfully, I felt very different. For me, meeting a good African American man does not mean he must have an advanced degree or even a white-collar job. That said, if he was financially stable, and a good match emotionally, I would be open to him.

Since I am the product of parents married for nearly 50 years, and my only sibling is over 20 years married, one may assume that I wanted the same thing-- not necessarily so! My sister married her college sweetheart soon after she graduated, as did most of their married friend, from Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs). In fact, many couples who dated at HBCUs went on to get married and were still together. I also attended an HBCU where I observed certain dating rituals. I discovered there is a dating window of sorts that existed in the campus male-female dating dynamic. My senior year, many women at my institution were in the know. They
took to robbing, stealing, and snatching the boyfriends of other women in order to make the ‘dating window’ for a possible husband after graduation.

In observing my parents over the years, it seemed to me that marriage is a choice; one that should be wisely decided with a willingness to stay married. A commitment like that always overwhelmed me. Admittedly, I always wanted to have the professional choices that so many women, particularly African American women, do not always have available to them. I yearned to have as many options in my grasp as possible (e.g., to start a business, to live or work overseas, to change careers). I never wanted to be pushed, pulled or derailed from a career or lifestyle opportunity in the case of an unsupportive mate.

Previously, I did not believe that a prospective African American male partner of the same education and occupational orientation was put off by an accomplished African American woman. Yet and still, this was confirmed to me during a late night conversation with my sister’s husband, while I was deep into writing a paper for a doctoral course. As always, he jokingly asked, “When do I get a brother-in-law”? This particular night I told him that he may not get one, especially since I heard getting a PhD made me less of a catch. Then, he dropped the boom! My college-educated brother-in-law admitted to me that he intentionally worked extremely hard in technical sales for a major communications corporation to ensure he earned more than my sister--an environmental engineer who was earning upwards of $75K annually at the time. I was stunned and shocked by his admission! Without further explanation, I fully understood the challenge African American men have in being partnered with African American women who are educationally, professionally, or financially more successful.

Now, in my early forties, I have wondered if my desire to maintain choices has blinded me from seeking out a fulfilling love life with an African American male partner. As my parents collectively battle health issues and decreasing mobility, I moved back to Texas in support of them. I felt that my single status has my family perceiving a sense of selfishness on my part. I still want to exercise options coinciding with my chosen lifestyle, outside of them. That being said, as I have watched my parents grow older and less healthy, I think about what my personal life would be like if they were gone. Where would my family foundation exist? Over the years my family also included close single friends who functioned like an extended family. But now, several of them have transitioned into marriage.

I have always been open to dating good guys, even if they are not African American. However, I am certain that if I agreed to marriage, having an African American husband is my first choice. While I do not actively pursue or plot for a marital partner in any way, I sometimes wonder if that possibility is still out there for me.

I must say though, I will always move forward with my plans as a proud career-oriented, never-married African American woman with no kids—one with opportunities to make my dreams come true whether single, married, or attached. There does exist one certainty: I will always choose being single now, and in the future, especially if my overall happiness may be undermined or compromised.

Regarding lifestyles of these women with African American men, the key element of this study was firsthand accounts—such as the reflexive passage above. Presenting a reflexive
account eliminated any pre-understandings by the primary researcher and prefaced the richness of revelations in subsequent data collection (Finlay, 2008). By including this reflexive passage, familiar insights resulted from the researcher’s related stance intermingled with awareness, data analysis, and social critique (Finlay, 2008). Moreover, the inclusion of this reflexive statement enhanced the significance of this study. It provided a reason, relevancy and connection in examining this investigation. Therein, exists an insight that was related, yet, relegated by the study’s actual protocol. However, the study focused on data offered by participants; for it was their experiences, insights and perspectives that held ultimate value in creating a lived reality. In all, this qualitative study revealed direct descriptions, narratives, and truth-telling of the lived relational experiences among CHAPAWN participants which maximized impact of this subject matter. This rich data also provided clarity, depth and understanding of this dating lifestyle.

To establish this study’s focus, the primary investigator/author self-identified as being a member of the CHAPAWN group and provided a reflexive statement prior to collecting data. While acknowledging a relationship to the topic, this step counteracted researcher bias, as previously stated, and allowed for a source of initial insight in rendering subsequent data. Nevertheless, the focus of this study rested the actual data collected from CHAPAWNs who offered more than just a simple overview of their lives. These study participants not only divulged meaningful descriptions, honest feelings and open responses to predetermined interview questions and prompts, but provided transparency and engagement. Through rendering great revelations about their careers, family backgrounds, dating experiences, and marital/parent desires, awareness of the dating perspective among CHAPAWNS was offered.

At the point of conducting interviews, this investigator not only communicated such a connection to the study’s focus, but also acknowledged the intent of ascertaining participants’
lived experiences and perspectives on dating, marriage, and children through interview data and firsthand accounts. All participants were told that the purpose of this study was to fulfill final requirements for a doctoral degree program in communication studies. After interview protocol was executed and data collection occurred, responses were then transcribed and analyzed. Ultimately, themes, descriptions and an analytical discussion resulted from raw data to gain understanding of how the dating lives of CHAPAWNs unfold.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

To best understand the dating lives of CHAPAWNs in this study, coding and analysis of responses from in-depth interviews provided great description, powerful insight, and substantive examples of their dating lives. Responses to interview data was pertinent in this particular investigation. Not only did interview data offer informative support, but essentially, this data presented firsthand accounts, real-life experiences and background from CHAPAWNs themselves. A collective representation of this in-depth interview data rendered key responses to the research questions posed in this study.

Describing Singlehood

The first study research question asked how CHAPAWN described their singlehood. Initially, every CHAPAWN participating in this study designated themselves as a temporary single. Such an assessment assumed, that in time, marriage will likely be a life occurrence for them. Based on study findings, Chloe, Sasha and Tiger were involuntary temporary singles, having each professed the strongest degree of marital desire, each acknowledging marriage as a future outcome for their lives. However, Amethyst, Joyce and Fannie Lou are found to be voluntary temporary singles whose description of singleness coincided with having less of a priority due to their eminent career focus. Through Stein’s (1981) categorization of temporary singles, this study supplied an equal balance of participants who described their singleness according to each of the two categories.
Strikingly, participants in this sample described opposing perspectives regarding their descriptions of being single. Respondents who are classified as involuntary temporary singles communicate ideas revealing a motivation to move from singleness to marriage. Chloe’s statement, “I believe that I will be married” established her future plans, and explains “I have not found a guy—I believe that when you are asked to be married, you’ll know.” Tiger’s affirmed that “I expected to get married” and further elaborated saying, “it’s gonna happen one day, because I haven’t given up—my dreams are still there.” Sasha requested that “I would like to get married,” and declared her marital desire which is dually supported when she claimed “I want that connection--I want somebody that I can communicate with, I want somebody who can be my best friend.” These three participants presented a collective view that marital desire is a prevalent thought and a pursuit among them. In this way, these three respondents presented the mainstream expectation that getting married is a life goal to naturally be achieved. Whether striving or assuming that marriage will happen their future, this faction of the sample was not settled in being single, and looked forward to their individual futures of being married.

On the other hand, those participants classified in the voluntary temporary category maintained a viewpoint of being situated in their singlehood. Joyce declared being “happy with life now” and asserts “I am happy with my singleness, simply because I am not anxious for anything.” Fannie Lou, who self-assessed as a “runaway bride” on three different occasions, is the most unwavering in her satisfaction with being single boasting: “There’s nobody in control of me…I can be a loose cannon.” Fannie Lou asserted that she was “happy being single,” confirming that she was “content with my singleness.” Amethyst, recently retired after decades of a 60-hour work week was very settled saying “I feel very satisfied” and further elaborated that “I am ready just to be, and adventure, and move and do and go experience life.” In collective
opposition of the aforementioned views, this side of the sample reflected women who not only embrace their single status, but possess few regrets from singlehood. Although never they are married, this sector of the sample possessed a positive contentment and welcomed acceptance that singleness has brought to their lives. Unlike the other half of study participant views, these respondents have no unmet expectations of marriage, or a presumed sense of happiness being married may offer.

Much like the rhetoric and composition of political parties who share opposing views, study participants on both sides of this particular issue revealed paradoxes that call into question their collective viewpoints from each side of the issue; to either prepare for marriage or relish in being single. Although three participants, Amethyst, Joyce and Fannie Lou were CHAPAWNs representing contented singleness, some contradicting data within this perspective exists among them. Joyce offered, “I see singleness as temporary because I believe God gives you the desire of your heart--I do have the desire to be in a relationship.” While this response did not negate happiness with being single, it implied a desire, coinciding with the three involuntarily single study participants in the sample who were seeking a partner to eventually marry. While this is a singular contradiction of the collective view, it indicated a possible subliminal marital desire existing just beneath the surface of CHAPAWNs who express or portray a strong exterior of contentment in singleness.

Just the same, contradiction existed among the study’s involuntary temporary singles who present a collected desire and expectation of future marriage. Chloe confessed, “…to say that I’m yearning to have someone in the house with me 24/7 is not me.” Therein existed yet another contradiction of perspective. Instead, she indicated a deeper satisfaction with her singleness that may be stronger than her response of marriage expectation. Again, this singular contradiction of
marital desire suggested a greater sense of satisfaction with being single. This slight contradiction implied that being acclimated to living as a single person subconsciously creates long-term singleness. Moreover, such an effect can undermined martial potential, especially among career-driven CHAPAWNs who have dedicated their lives to work success, leaving them less-likely to transition into marriage.

Although opposing views of seeking marriage and being contented in singleness were equally represented in this study’s data, they are not absolute. Much like positions of extreme opposition, this data represented dissenting opinions on both sides. Such variation offered a sense of milder or moderate positions in how CHAPAWNs in this study described their singleness. In all, this data suggested a sense of duality among study participants’ description of their singlehood. Despite the inclination for participants to initially designate themselves, a simple explanation of their singleness was unjustified. In actuality, singleness among CHAPAWNs participating in this examination showed a complexity of responses, intermingled with emotions, undiscovered desires and firm expectations, all of which implied a staunch satisfaction with their current status, or most certain desire that despite long-term singleness, marriage was still a possibility within the CHAPAWN group.

**Marital Possibility**

The second research question described how CHAPAWN view their possibilities of getting married. Participants in this study discussed marital possibility through acknowledging a lack of diversity access in partners at work, finding the right person, and disappointment in being unmarried. Firstly, as the work environment played a major role in the lifestyles of CHAPAWN. Study participants acknowledged that their professional settings heavily hindered marital possibilities, despite the professional and financial opportunity offered -- as indicated in the
major study theme of career-enabled singleness. Even though work can be a primary avenue for meeting a potential spouse, CHAPAWNs seeking a potential male suitor at work were especially disadvantaged due to a lack of male diversity. Collectively, study participants professed that few African American males exist in their work environments, but the massive presence of White males at work provided abundance in potential partner availability for women of other races who seek them. Chloe explains, “Where I work right now, out of 50 people I work where there is not a single African American male. I just got a new district manager from Chicago…he’s African American—that’s the only African American male.” Her comment specifically established how a lack of diversity in men at work led to being a poor resource for meeting a potential spouse.

Regarding the lack of male diversity at work, Sasha asserted, “its only one guy there.” She further discussed how in spending much of her time working a full-time and part-time position simultaneously, the ability to meet African American males is virtually nonexistent. Just the same, Tiger mentioned how women, especially White women, outnumbered the men on her job as an elementary teacher; and the few African American males in that work setting were often same-sex oriented. Moreover, Fannie Lou added, “In my circles, I’m normally the only African American female. I rarely see African American men.” Again, support for the lack of diversity within the career setting among study participants was also apparent in the healthcare environment where Fannie Lou works. As such, the lack of African American men in work settings among CHAPAWNs prevented the same accessibility of potential spouses from which women of other races gain benefit.

Secondly, communication about marital possibility among CHAPAWNs researched in this study were reflected through their inability to meet the “right” or best-suitable partners. A major theme discussed from within this study’s data, participants not only cited their inability to
meet African American men in daily settings, but claimed their dating experiences have left vacancy in connecting with the best-suited and most appropriate African American male partner to date and/or eventually marry. Joyce was most emphatic in asserting this point of view: “I could be married if I just wanted to be married, but it has to be the right guy. I just have not met that right person. Now lately, I haven’t met anybody because my head has been down doing my own stuff. But back then, I was out and about dating, going places and meeting guys. I’m way past that. It just has to be the right person.” Here, Joyce discussed that her busy job and writing pursuits now occupy the time she previously gave to the dating scene. Therefore, her current lifestyle provided a clear guideline she has established; the right person must be present for her to contemplate the possibility of marriage. Fannie Lou attested, “the men that are in my age group are locked up in jail. The pool is smaller.” She referenced her long-term singleness at age 52, leaving fewer eligible African American men to date, let along meeting the right person. Fannie Lou also pointed out that many unmarried African men in her age range are incarcerated, which further denies their accessibility to become marital partners. Similar sentiments were offered by Amethyst, 62, in regard to discussing the absence of the right African American male partner. She asserted, “Mr. Right is more a Godsend to me. You look for someone who potentially has retirement or some kind of financial stability because you are looking toward retirement.” After a lifetime of being single, Amethyst, a 62-year-old recent retiree, emphasized that as she is transitioning into retirement, she is void an eligible African American male partner who possessed a solid long-term financial future financial. Regarding meeting the right person, Chloe based her response from a previous relationship with a partner she later learned was married by saying, “I don’t want a part of no man, because they are getting all of me.” In this instance, Chloe not only offered reckoning of her past with this firm stand, but asserted that in
order to fulfill her martial desire, an African American male partner must be available in marital status, emotionally and physically. Therefore, not meeting the “right person” presents an obstacle CHAPAWN women in this study revealed as a reason for not being married or gaining marital opportunity.

A third manner by which participants in this study discuss marital possibilities is by expressing feelings of loss as marriage has yet to occur in their lives. Sasha, 41, testified, “I really thought I’d be married by now…have kids by now. I’m kind of sad for me. Most of my girlfriends are married and have kids”. In her response, Sasha confessed that she expected to be married at this current age and phase of her life. Her longing, disappointment and regret was apparent in this statement. Similarly Tiger admitted, “Some days I feel like I’m giving up. Every now and then, you get a glimmer of hope. As time went on I thought I might as well give up. But then, you have those good days where you meet someone and think, maybe it will happen.” Tiger clearly expressed her longing to be married and the disappointment she has experienced as a single women seeking matrimony. Despite wanting to abandon her marital desires, Tiger’s strong desire and hope to be married remained.

**Childfree Status**

The third research question in this study asked CHAPAWNs to describe their childfree status. In their descriptions of being childfree, CHAPAWNs participating in this study hold two opposing views: while one half of study participants discussed a strong desire to have children, the other half of this sample wholly embraced a childfree existence. Tiger, 41, Sasha, 43, and Chloe 46, were the only study participants to affirm the idea of having children. Tiger and Sasha, the youngest study participants, maintained fading and limited fertility, respectively.
Chloe, the only participant to ever physically approach motherhood, also discussed the possibility of parenting alternatives.

In each case, these study respondents presented some variance of affirmation regarding the possibility of having children. Tiger declared, “I wanna to have a baby even though it’s almost too late.” In this case, Tiger acknowledged that her age and biological capabilities may undermine her desires, yet, she still maintains hope to have children. However, Tiger was adamant about having children within the auspice of marriage by declaring: “Marriage comes before motherhood. I really want that. I want a husband, then a child.” Sasha described her fading fertility from the perspective of loss, by stating: “It’s hard when you think that you might not ever have a child, or ever get to experience that feeling. It’s so depressing.” In this example, Sasha was somewhat mourning the loss of her fertility and subsequent ability to physically bear children. Yet and still, she too claimed to be unwilling to pursue motherhood without a husband, emphasizing the challenge of raising children as a single parent. Sasha further testified that if marriage with her current male partner materialized, she holds interest in having children, stating she would want to “try and have a child” with that potential marital partner. Sasha added: “It would be fun to have a girl”, and “it would add something to life.” Here, Sasha discussed that while she holds limited fertility, children are not necessarily out of the question, especially if she married her current boyfriend. But overall, Sasha only viewed the possibility of having children with a spouse.

Chloe, who experienced miscarrying a child, still speaks of having children in the future. She responds: “I can’t have kids, I mean if I could, I would. There are times when I don’t feel grown up because I don’t have any kids. I know my life would totally change.” Her comment implied that having children may be a possibility, as she later mentioned the option of adopting
or being a foster parent. By making predictions about a life with children, Chloe further offered a sense of possibility of having children in the future. However, in discussing the prospect of having children, she did not specify having a husband as co-parent, leaving the idea of single parenting as an option. Chloe, Sasha and Tiger, represented one-half of the sample examined in the study, each of whom affirm the possibility of having children in various ways.

However, the other half of the data sample in this study revealed a starkly contrasting perspective in being childfree. Amethyst, Joyce and Fannie Lou, the older participants examined in this study, discussed their childfree status through acceptance, embrace and choice. When working prior to retirement, Amethyst discussed how being a childfree and single professional was necessary for her work/life balance. While working a grueling 60-hour-a week, 24-hour on-call work schedule and caregiving for parents, particularly a wheelchair-bound mother, Amethyst indicated that being childfree was a necessity, saying: “I had so many responsibilities with my job and as an only child with my parents as they aged, until I didn’t really see where I could put anything else on my plate.” This comment explained how being childfree in the prime of her professional life was a clear advantage to Amethyst who also supported her parents’ care. However, Amethyst admits attempting to get pregnant for the sake of her parents: “When I was 38 years old, I really tried to get pregnant, more or less for my Mom because I wanted her to experience having grandchildren.” Despite admitting to an attempt of motherhood out of family guilt, Amethyst corroborated that having children would have been a burden during her prime working years. Principally, Amethyst’s state of being childfree was a necessity of extreme work demands and caregiving responsibilities.

Regarding her childfree status, Joyce embraced a lifestyle without children. She was emphatic about being in such a position by declaring: “I’m not trying to have babies and be tied
down. I have a lot of nieces and nephews. I have forty-one. So, that’s enough, that’s enough!”

Here, Joyce implied that her role as an aunt to a huge host of nieces and nephews, takes the place of parenting. She was clear that by not having children of her own, she could move freely through her life and career pursuits. As such, Joyce embraced her status as a childfree, professional woman.

Similarly, Fannie Lou described her childfree status, not just through embrace, but as a definite choice. She claimed: “I had the opportunity to be married and have children. I decided I didn’t want it.” In this instance, Fannie Lou discussed her childfree status to be a choice; one that she has held long-term. In her descriptions of having children, Fannie Lou said, “Kids suck the life out of you,” and further professed that “with kids I would have been depressed.” Clearly, Fannie Lou is supporting her long-term choice to be a childfree woman. She later expressed that having children would be too stressful, despite her tough exterior. Essentially, Fannie Lou described being childfree as not just a choice, but the appropriate situation regarding her personal disposition. Contrary to the other three existing study participants who shared a desire for children, these three respondents discussed how their childfree status existed out of necessity, or as a celebrated and deliberate choice in pursuit of career-based lifestyles.

**Stories of Marriage and Motherhood**

The final research question of this study asked how stories provided by CHAPAWNs were used to explain their marriage and motherhood opportunities. Regarding marriage and motherhood, participants in this study used stories to accentuate how their overall lived dating experiences. Particularly, the stories offered supplemental meaning and greater understanding of lifestyles inhabited by these women. One story told by Amethyst revealed the negative impact professional success holds in the love lives CHAPAWNs:
The thing that is most challenging for me is that all the women in my family, just in one family; where all the women are not able to marry and have children. This is what bothers me… I cannot figure it out.

According to Amethyst, all but two of her first cousins were CHAPAWNs, highly educated with successful careers that include world travel, corporate perks, and elite status. As daughters of siblings, all were reared in two-parent homes and a close-knit extended family. She professed that each of them, amidst their professional and financial good fortune, have never married or had children, despite actively dating. Furthermore, Amethyst classified that this consistency of successful female cousins with no husbands or children is a “family curse.” While this story seems ironic and dramatic, it emphasized the commonality of this dating issue faced by CHAPAWN. Moreover, Amethyst’s story offered support, and explained how widespread this population of women may extend, and how deeply there existed a connection between CHAPAWN and traditional African American families.

The traditional African American family was apparent in this study; an ever-present resource among CHAPAWN participants. Every respondent confirmed being raised with her biological parents in stable family households. Their stories expressed colorful descriptions of how strong family interplay and parental examples shaped their perceptions and expectations for marriage. Particularly, several participants told interesting stories about their fathers’ influence; most fathers served as models as these CHAPAWN women seek male partners.

Chloe revered her father, a military man and strong provider. She not only heeded her father’s advice in establishing a solid career before marriage and children, but she also patterned her strong work ethic and career success after him. Chloe particularly credited her father with providing a good example of a how an African American husband and father should behave both
emotionally and financially – a standard she maintained for any future marital mate. Chloe recalled: “I always looked up to my Dad and thought he just walked on water. He was just so patient and everything. My Dad needed to love me and show me how to be adored, and show me the right way to be cared for and protected.” Specifically, Chloe credited her father for having taught her how an African American male partner should treat her and the manner in which he should conduct himself as potential father. It was by her own father’s example and influence throughout her life that Chloe set the standard for any potential African American male spouse with whom she may build a life.

In the same manner, Tiger spoke about how watching her parents’ be married, helped her understand how spouses working together through challenging situations can accomplish stability and successfully raise children. Tiger described:

They always worked hard. I don’t think they told us a lot of things but, my parents both worked hard. They both put their money together and they both built things. And they both wanted things. They had a desire to want more. I saw that change over time—yes, they didn’t have a great marriage all of the time, but they never gave up on each other. So, you see that example, (wondering) how can you find somebody like that.

Tiger discussed how her father worked alongside her mother to keep together an imperfect relationship. Tiger further emphasized that observing such honorable behavior from her parents, structures her own expectations in various dating situations and serves as a cue in knowing if a partner held similar marital qualities.

Joyce also told a related story that reflects the omnipresent stability of within her family; and a possible reason as to why strong marital ties exist among her 10 siblings and their spouses. Joyce spoke of her mother warning a sister’s fiancé about how he would treat her daughter:

One of my bro-in-laws, asked for my sister’s hand in marriage. My Mom said, you know what, when I come to see her, I wanna see her in the same condition. Meaning she didn’t need him beating on her. “If you feel like you gotta do that, then you need to bring her
back home, because we’re not gonna have that.” None of my brothers-in-law have ever, I didn’t think they would anyway, tried any of that kind of stuff.

Essentially, such feedback from her mother has been beneficial, as all of Joyce’s siblings married young and held stable families with their original spouses. Even though Joyce’s career and personal life was contrast with her siblings, it is apparent that her mother’s advice and support regarding her children’s marital opportunities contributed to their matrimonial happiness. As such, Joyce was affected regarding her own partner choices by being cautious about entering marriage. Each of these stories not only enhanced the background and detail of dating experiences among study participants, but provided nuances in understanding how CHAPAWNs view and approach the idea of marriage.

**Major and Minor Themes**

Data rendered from two in-depth interviews conducted with the six study participants produced three major themes: stable parental marriage examples, career-enabled singleness, skepticism of marital happiness. These themes were revealed across this sample through examining dating experiences, career and family impact experienced by CHAPAWNs. Interview excerpts presented not only showed connection of the theme among study participants, but showed similar, or in some cases, differences in supporting how the theme exemplifies certain aspects and/or issues CHAPAWNs face through lifestyle and dating experiences. Each theme represented an aspect of data that was shared in most or all of participant responses. In the case of each theme, participants offered examples, accounts, or stories which particularly emphasized how elements of the theme relate to their individual lived experiences as a CHAPAWN. Moreover, major themes derived from this study’s data are experiences common to most study participants, and are a contributing factor, element, characteristic or situation connected to understanding the overall dating lifestyles of CHAPAWNs.
Stable Parental Marriage and Family Settings

The most noticeable theme appearing in this data was the strong examples of marriage and family stability that existed in each participant’s background. As previously mentioned, each respondent was reared in a family with their biological parents who had long-term marriages and never divorced, or re-married, even where a spouse was deceased. The presence of a strong marital bond was the impetus within this theme – demonstrating stability and a solid relationship model for each participant. No matter their desires regarding marriage and family, participants in this study used their parents’ marriages as a guide, a standard, or model in shaping their lives and individual dating aspirations. Such a reference was indicated in each participant profile. As a 46-year old Chloe, a financial planner in South Texas clearly described how her upbringing in a military family in Pine Bluff, AR set precedence for her regarding marriage and family:

A man has to ask you to get married… you had to say yes, and then you took on his entire family. That’s how marriage was to me, that’s the way I saw it. I never believed in having kids outside of marriage. It was, you go to school, get your degree, you find a man, you get married. That’s it! My Dad was like, okay, “I want you to have a career first”. He would say, “They’ll come, they’ll come.

In this instance, Chloe acknowledged that a standard was established by observing her parents’ relationship and heeding her father’s advice, which shaped her expectations of how work and family life should develop. Her reverence for her father, along with his words, served as a premise to which she is adhering. She emphasized that the example of a strong, yet dynamic, marriage and family life she observed growing up shaped her understanding of marriage and family should evolve. Chloe noted that such a process is one that she intends to duplicate in her own life.

This experience was similarly evident in the family background of Joyce, 49, an insurance company executive in the same South Texas metropolis. While being reared in a rural
Arkansas town, Joyce revealed that the example of her parents is the doctrine of marriage that she upholds:

My parents were more about showing than telling. I don’t remember a lot of sit down conversations. And I just saw my Dad as provider. I mean he just worked, always working, always brought the money home—gave it to my Mom so she could handle the house. So, my Mom was a strong woman, jovial woman. And, my Dad was as well. They were giving no matter what. I just saw how they behaved. It’s almost like that’s what I wanted so I’m not gonna settle. If I wanted to be, just married, I could be. But, it’s more than just saying the word, that I’m married. I wanna be happy along with that. And so, I guess I just saw what not to do.

Here, Joyce also referenced how her parents’ marital relationship acted as a standard by which she has regards her possibility of becoming married. Particularly, Joyce emphasized the effective collaboration of how her father’s role as a provider and her mother’s role as the household manager left a strong impression on her of how a couple successfully works together. Their productive interactions and behavior modeled for her the kind of marriage she may someday attain. She recalled that such behavior is the basis of her expectations if she were ever married. Joyce clearly confirmed that she is unwilling to comprise their example of a marital bond just for the sake of attaining marital status. Therefore, she chose to remain single, unless she can experience the same type of marriage her parents held.

Tiger, 42, living in a small West Alabama is employed as an elementary teacher communicated that her parents’ marital interaction served as an influential example while growing up in the village of Port St. Joe, FL:

My parents grew up poor. We grew up poor, but they never told us we were, ‘cause they always worked hard. They both put their money together and they both built things. And they had a desire to want more. Yeah, so, it was like, okay, will I ever find somebody that wants more out of life? It’s been hard you know, because everybody is satisfied with one thing. And I saw that change over time. Yes, they didn’t have a great marriage all of the time, but they never gave up on each other. You see that example…so how can you find somebody like that? It’s hard to find that kind of person when you’ve seen somebody who is always with their family.
In this case, Tiger not only described the mutual exchange she witnessed in the marriage of her parents, but she also acknowledged their ability to remain together amidst challenges. She detailed how her parents not only worked together, grew as a couple with similar desires but strived toward a greater life for their own family. As a result, Tiger also acknowledged the difficulty in finding similar traits in a potential mate of her own. She specified that such an example is what she grew up learning, but questioned the ability to duplicate similar marital harmony in her own love life, especially that of building a life together with a potential spouse. Again, her recollection of early family life indicated a sense of how a stable, successful parental marriage serves as blueprint for her own possible future marriage.

Amethyst, a 61-year old retired university athletic administrator, reared and living in the West Alabama city, was extremely transparent in discussing how her parental marriage and family stability was a core trait from her childhood family life, one that she currently values:

I grew up with a mother and father. My parents were married 48 years when my mother passed away. Both my parents worked. We were not rich by no stretch of the imagination. I grew up in a middle class family. I was in the sixth grade when we moved into the home that my parents would buy. The home, we were in until my mother passed away. So, I had a very stable upbringing. I didn’t grow up not knowing if I was going to go back to the same place or not. I had stability, food, clothes, everything. We were the first African American family in the subdivision. But, I had no siblings, I am an only child. I did not know a lifestyle of not having a father present, and not having a mother present.

In this instance, Amethyst offered details of her parents’ long-term marriage, and how she grew up as their only child, ingesting their marital example. She gave implicit details of how her parents’ economic resources allowed them to own a home, and garner a steady stream of resources for living. She clearly described how the stability of her life growing up is not just fact, but a source of pride for which she seems to still cherish and respect. Here, Amethyst was projecting how her stable background is what she came to learn regarding marriage and family.
Sasha, a 43-year old working as a deaf and blind teaching assistant in the same West Alabama city, concurred with having been raised among a stable parental marriage and family environment. She detailed how her family environment and parents’ long-term marriage offered a strong example:

My parents have been married for 50 years. I am an only child. I do have a “play” brother … who my parents took underneath their wing. My mother is very Independent, even though her and my father are respectful of each other. She bought what she wanted. My mom bought the groceries, she did the household stuff, but she didn’t pay the bills or anything, he took care of that. But she paid her own bills that she made herself. My mother is very talkative, where my dad is very quiet-- goes with the flow. I never heard them arguing or anything like that.

Sasha discussed the steady parental marriage and family setting in which she was raised. In addition to her parents’ long-term marriage, her family unit was strong enough to include a male from their community who was raised in her family as a brother and son, respectively. The uniqueness in Sasha’s description regarding her parental marriage example was how their contrasting personalities produced marital harmony within their relationship. She also emphasized her father’s role as provider, and her mother’s independent nature. Sasha’s discussion of her family corroborated the theme of her being raised in a stable family environment with a strong parental marriage.

Fannie Lou is a 52-year old CHAPAWN living in a Central Alabama metropolitan hub working as a government healthcare agency researcher. Raised in Brooklyn, NY, Fannie Lou verbally documented how her family stability derived from extended family members in close range to her family, and a strong marital relationship between parents who were polar opposites:

I’m from New York. I came from a two-parent home. My mother was a nurse and my father worked as a production analyst for IBM. I have two older siblings, brothers. I’m the youngest of three children. We were evenly spaced apart… two, four, six years. We grew up in a home, not the projects, but a home in Brooklyn. My grandfather owned property. So, we lived in his home. My grandparents lived in the floor below us. An aunt and uncle lived on another floor. Across the street,
my aunt and her family. Even thought my immediate family is small, I grew up around a lot of … relatives. At 15, my father moved us to North Carolina, his home state. I graduated high school in North Carolina. My mother died prematurely of colon cancer. They were married 25 years when she died. My father never remarried. My father had ten siblings. My grandparents were married, and had many siblings. It was an interesting disconnect between the two of them. My mother was this Catholic woman who was this radical liberal. My father, was protestant, and a very conservative Republican. So, it was an interesting dynamic in that household.

Here, Fannie Lou concisely described the extended-family environment of her early childhood. Not only was she raised with a mother, father and two siblings, but the presence of her extended family members, who lived in very close proximity offered uniformity in their familial stability. The most interesting detail of Fannie Lou’s description was that her parents had strongly opposing socio-political views, but their connection as a couple was so solid Fannie Lou’s father never remarried in the decades after her mother’s passing. Although they were a couple with dichotomous perspectives, the contrasting mix created a strong family dynamic offering stability and strength within their family, further supporting this common trait among trait among participants. Thus, family stability with long-term parental marriage examples was a relevant theme shared among CHAPAWN participants in this study.

**Career-Enabled Singleness**

Another prominent theme reflected among this study’s participant profiles was the central role career and professional pursuits have played in the dating lives of these CHAPAWNS. As these highly professional women aggressively pursued their careers, variably, work success impacted their choice, ability or availability in dating African American men. Amethyst stressed how her extreme job demands enabled her single status:

> When I was in the midst of my career and my mother was living and in a wheelchair…between my work and caring for her, I could only see where having marriage would have been an added burden. I had worked so much, morning, noon, day and night, weekends, there was really not an opportunity to meet people.
Although she is now retired, Amethyst, emphasized how her workload dominated most of her time. With that, she indicated that work disabled her ability to meet possible mates or regularly date. Amethyst suggested that her career in college athletics was a round-the-clock assignment, only allowing time to care for her parents, specifically her mother who required a wheelchair. Particularly, Amethyst pointed out that marriage would have been a burden added to the enormous responsibilities she held at work and in caregiving for her parents. Amethyst indicated how the overwhelming demands for her job negated her ability to have a regular love life during the many years she worked in university sports. Based on the details of her account, Amethyst’s former work role undermined her ability to pursue an active love life.

Chloe repeated similar experiences in the way of an imbalanced work life with dating. Chloe’s previous job demands prohibited her access in meeting African American men, or regularly dating due to an intense work environment and heavy job responsibilities:

"Until I moved, I was with a national retailer for twenty years. I was always the only female manager, assistant manager with my peer group. Most of them were men, either White...some of them were married... so it was always this colleague thing. And because I was always the only female, I was always isolated. The downside with that retailer is that it consumed so much of my time that I didn’t have family time, I didn’t have any time. It was all the company’s time because of my work ethic."

Chloe asserted how her previous long-term position left her feeling isolated in regard to dating, as her retail management position was demanding and time-consuming. It left Chloe with no time to pursue a personal life outside of work. In that position, Chloe worked in a male-dominated environment, yet, any men she encountered were either married or White, both of which were not dating options for her. While in that position, which covers the bulk of her professional career, Chloe maintained a mostly inactive dating life. Certainly, Chloe’s account
echoed support regarding career-enabled singleness brought on by professional demands apparent in this group of CHAPAWNs.

Sasha also recalled similar accounts regarding the impact of work in connection with her dating life. However, in this instance, Sasha specifically highlighted that her work environment lacked other single people for interaction, or men to possibly date:

I think it’s because of my work environment. I work with all White women. And just now we’re starting to get African American women in there. It’s kinda like there’s people my age there, but they’re married and they have kids. It’s no single people there. It’s only one guy there.

Sasha is certain to point out how work was not a source for dating or socializing with other singles, especially those who are African American. Here, Sasha acknowledged how her work environment has a shortcoming of dating opportunities, which often occurs through work. Basically, Sasha provided support from her accounts that her work setting encouraged her single status, instead of being a source to potentially change it.

Tiger added another dimension of how work impacts her dating life:

Who I work with every day are not many of African American people. So, the few African American men that I ever saw were mostly gay. So, there wasn’t a lot of choices as the other races. They have lots of choices it seems like.

In this response, Tiger proposed that the lack of available men in her work environment, especially those who are African American, play a role in her ability to meet potential partner. Here, Tiger is implied that since there are very few African Americans present in her work environment as a teacher, therein exists one less outlet toward connecting with a male partner. Unlike any other study participants, she specified the presence of gay African American men in her occupational environment, but only as a way to support the lack of dating opportunities there. Thus, these findings also implied that as a single African American woman of professional and
social prominence, Tiger had limitations regarding exposure to potential marital partners around her professional setting, a theme similarly conferred by experiences of other study participants.

As an assistant vice president at an insurance company, Joyce held a completely different take on how her job has enabled her single status. She prescribed that the contrasting demands of her work/life circumstances, required an African American male who is versatile:

I just need him to be down-to-earth and compliment what I have going on. If I need you to put your hat on going backwards and go to a football game—put your jersey on, your tennis shoes, let’s have fun! If I need you to go to the symphony with me because my manager invited me, I need you to put that tuxedo on, and let’s roll. I need you to be able to do it all, just like me. Be down-to-earth, but (like me) I can act the part wherever I am…I just have not met that person.

Joyce indicated a staunch difference between her more casual social life and the environment of work that often lends itself to formal, classy affairs that often accompany the lifestyles of corporate executives. Here, Joyce was not speaking of work in the sense of being a channel, or lack thereof, for dating, but implied that a suitable African American partner must be flexible in his social abilities to meet the needs of her upscale work life, while also dwelling in her down-to-earth social settings. She was not advocating her lack of dating opportunities, but more specifically, access to the kind of African American men who present the same social and professional flexibility that she possesses. Joyce’s response spoke to how her work setting impacted who she dates versus being a source of access to available African American men. As such, this particular account enhanced the notion that not all CHAPAWNs face the same challenges with the same perspective. Yet, each of these experiences supported the apparent theme of career-enabled singleness, although differently, but relevant to the dating lives among CHAPAWNs.
Skepticism of Marital Happiness

The last major theme permeating across this data sample was a sense of skepticism toward happiness in marriage revealed in data responses. Participants in this study were challenged with the idea of marriage, in that, most spoke of hesitancy in entering marriage, especially as veterans of singleness.

Amethyst spoke to a true since of her skepticism that married people are actually happy. She described her own observations of marriage and recalls a lesson about marital happiness she was taught by her parents:

To be honest, marriage frightens me. I see so many marriages…I see so many couples who are still together, but they’re so unhappy, or they’re going through horrible divorces. One thing my mother did tell me about marriage is that you’re gonna put up with something. You just have to decide what it is you’re gonna put up with.

In this instance, Amethyst implied that her reluctance about marriage is born from the unhappiness she has observed in the marriages among her peers. Moreover, she admitted how the skepticism and doubt she carries causes her a fear of being married. Ironically, Amethyst substantiated this point by referring to the marital advice offered by her mother, that acceptance of relational shortcomings is a reality in marriage. More than likely, the idea of making such a compromise also enhanced the marital fear accompanying Amethyst’s skepticism--believing that marriage may truly not a happy life.

Chloe also offered a clear perspective of skepticism of marital happiness. Here, she also drew out this theme through referencing such observations of marriage among her peers:

I’ve been around people that have not had what I had…they have the marriage, they have the kids, they have all of those things and I see how fu**ed up their life is because they went into those situations, because of wanting material things or not wanting things that are truly designed for them, and they’re unhappy. I truly believe that I can do bad all by myself.
In this response, Chloe addressed her understanding and feelings of how marriages can become unhappy through observing the experiences married peers. Yet, in her case, she directed the burden of marital unhappiness on the couples themselves, citing that they became unfocused in their relationships. Chloe was quick to acknowledge that instead of accepting that kind of unhappiness in a marriage she may enter, her preference is to remain single.

Joyce asserted that the fidelity of a possible spouse fuels her beliefs about unhappy marriages:

They cheat so much. You just don’t trust ‘em. So, I honestly have this wall like built up, with an expectation that the shoe was gonna drop at some point. They’re gonna cheat, so just get ready. I don’t snoop around, I don’t look for it. It’s gonna show right up in our face. So when it happens, I’m done.

In this passage, Joyce not only suggested a belief that men are likely to be unfaithful in relationships, but she clearly sets a firm boundary in tolerating such behavior. She asserted that her expectation of a cheating partner is innate, and implies that infidelity of a mate will likely exist in marriage, leading to unhappiness. Joyce also emphasized that her assumption of possible marital infidelity puts her at an emotional distance in terms of connecting with men. Thus, her doubts of an overall happy relationship provided a massive skepticism that marriages are happy.

Initially, Sasha referred to the comments she is offered by married people about entering matrimony:

It’s funny, they (friends) ask me why I’m not married, and they will then say, “Aw, it’s not all that it’s cracked up to be. Take your time”. They give me that kind of advice. I just say that I haven’t found anybody yet.

While this response did not directly parlay a sense of marital skepticism that Sasha may possess, it is indicative of possible marital unhappiness voiced to her by married peers. However, Sasha later offered a stronger sense of her own skepticism in recalling the marital unhappiness experienced by a close friend:
Another friend of mine, her and her husband separated, they one that had the child. They are back together. Last time I talked to check-in, she said, “Girl, it was for my sanity”. She said because her “little boy is happy, I’m happy. I get my time, I get to go get my hair done”, she said, “its our normal”. It was hard being by herself. I’m like, “What about you and him, how are y’all?” (Friend said:) “We’re still working on that. In the meantime, I have my freedom.

Sasha recalled the experience her friend encountered by returning to her husband after financial hardship during a period of separation. Sasha clearly indicated in this account that this example of marriage is a less than happy one, as confirmed through her friend. In this instance, Sasha supported the aforementioned notion that marriage involves an acceptance of relational shortcomings. Here, her sense of skepticism is more implied in that she later indicated that being in an unhappy marriage is less than an optimal marital situation, one she would not knowingly choose.

Fannie Lou, by far, made the strongest statements regarding her skepticism of being happy in a possible marriage. Specifically, she dictated that her life without marriage is a better fit and less stressful:

In marriage you gotta contend with the good and the bad, and I’m not willing to go with the bad. I can do good by myself. I don’t need the stress of somebody else’s mess! Marriage is over-rated. I respect the tradition… I would not be here if it were not for marriage.

Despite her position, Fannie Lou offered honor for the institution of marriage, admitting that is was the foundation of her own family background. Yet, she was adamant regarding her status as a never-married, childfree woman. Fannie Lou firmly voiced an unwillingness to embrace marriage, and dismisses the value of marriage in her current life. In particular, Fannie Lou specifically deemed marriage to be “over-rated”. Her comment is fierce in that while she respected marriage, she discounted the strong value generally regarded toward marriage. Clearly, Fannie Lou was not only voicing skepticism of marital happiness, as she is addressed the
viability that marriage in general. From her viewpoint, marriage was a liability, especially in pursuing the lifestyle she currently maintains. Apparently, CHAPAWNs interviewed in this study share a common skepticism that being married does not automatically render happiness.

In all, data from interviewing six CHAPAWN study participants rendered three major themes: stable parental marriage examples, career enabled-singleness, and skepticism of marital happiness. Each represented a major category across data of this study regarding family background, dating, and marriage within this group of CHAPAWNs.

Three minor themes resulted from this examination of CHAPAWN. These particular findings were relevant in portions of the data sample versus across the study as a whole; usually occurred between two to three participants in this study. While not as prevalent, these secondary themes still maintained salience in understanding contributing factors in the lived dating experiences among the CHAPAWN group.

**Finding the Right Person**

While not supported across the sample of this study, several participants cited that a contributing factor to their single status the absence of meeting, connecting with or dating the right person. Regarding this minor theme, the right person for each participant discussing this characteristic differed. However, these participants were referring to an African American male partner who is the best-suited, most complimenting, and personally appropriate for their individual needs, that has yet to appear as a possible love contender in their lives.

In one instance, Joyce particularly described her individual definition of who the right mate is for her. She described, in detail, how the right partner for her should interact with her family, in work-related settings, and in general encounters:

> Can you just give me somebody who’s kind, respectful, who can compliment me in every way? I need for you to hang and communicate with my family. I
don’t need you to stand in the corner, with your nose turned up like you’re too good to be here ‘cause I’m from Arkansas. I mean come on! So, that’s one thing, just down-to-earth. It doesn’t matter if it’s the shoe shine guy, or if it’s the CEO. I can talk to any of them, it doesn’t matter to me. I don’t care who it is. I can communicate with anybody and would expect him to be able to do that as well. Nobody is beneath me, I don’t want him to behave that way.

Here, Joyce emphatically described the right mate for her to be someone whose own professional, financial or social status does not prohibit them from being socially acclimated to her large southern family. She offered this same requirement in a potential suitor in regard to their social interaction with people in general. Joyce implied that although she is a corporate executive, an ideal mate is a man who can intermingle in that work setting, as well as have a “down-to-earth” comfort with relatives, friends, and people in general. Her stance is that the right love mate will maintain the same social fluidity that she shares with people regardless of status or professional standing. Joyce contended that a male suitor who can accommodate both facets of life will be an ideal mate, but has yet to appear in her love life.

Amethyst mimicked a similar point regarding finding a mate who complemented her previous career in college athletics. In this way, she was referencing how her career required a possible spouse or male partner who fully-supported her professional setting:

It was majority males, and there is a certain sense of comradery and touchy-touchy, feely-feely kind of things. People that work in that business know that, but someone who is a mechanic at Sears that you’re married to may not understand it, and my misinterpret it.

Amethyst, was also explaining how her professional setting required her to be matched with a partner who was not intimidated by her all-male work environment. She described that a probable mate working a blue collar position likely holds a different set of occupational social rules. Amethyst implied that her ideal partner needed to be open to the constant, but platonic, physical interaction that surrounds a male-dominated college sports scene. Amethyst insinuated
that such a caveat has been challenging in her dating life, especially during the many years she worked in university athletics. And for this reason, the absence of this particular mate aided in her long-term single status.

**Lingering Desire for Children**

Despite the higher age range within this study sample, several participants discussed their existing desire to be mothers, and bear or raise children. While this desire was not apparent across the study’s sample, as a minor theme, it addresses aspects of motherhood in relation to the CHAPAWN population. The youngest women in the study, who still have capability of bearing children shared the strongest sentiments about having children. Tiger, is 41 years old, alluded to potential regret she was developing regarding her ongoing desire for children:

> I will feel bad that I’ve never had a baby, ‘cause I would like to experience that… to see how I can impact a kid of my own. Other than that, I’d be fine with my life… I wanna have a baby even though, it’s almost too late.

In this response, Tiger revealed a positive desire to still have children, especially after spending nearly two decades as a teacher and being in her early forties. Tiger acknowledged that her biological capabilities were reaching the limit, but also asserts her intention of bearing and raising her own children. However, she clarified that desires of parenthood will not negate her standards of marriage and family:

> Marriage comes before motherhood. I really want that. I don’t want to be a statistic as people say. I hear about it all the time. When people, say, “Oh, she had her baby before she got married”. I really don’t wanna hear that. It could have happened, but I didn’t want that. I want a husband, and then a child.

Even with her desire to have children, Tiger declared that she wanted to be married before having children. In other words, she sought the complete picture of a traditional family, not just motherhood alone. Although Tiger held a definite desire to have children, she was unmoved by her familial requirement: to uphold the standard established from her upbringing. Tiger’s desire
to have children was guided by the strong example of her parents; that she would be in a marriage of her own before raising children.

Sasha voiced a sense of regret if she pursues marriage and does not have children. Even then, she too acknowledged that bearing children may be a biological impossibility. Yet, she admitted her overwhelming desire for having her own children, including the fact that a potential spouse has fully raised a child, she exposed a fear that gaining parenting opportunities may be capable of her control. Sasha discussed the idea of having children within the structure of marriage:

If it worked out with me and him (current guy), I don’t really think he would like to have another child, ’cause he’s already had one who graduated high school. I think part of me would be okay with it. But, I guess part of me would like to try. And then, I don’t know if I’d be able to have a child.

Like Tiger, Sasha spoke of having children with a possible marital partner. Yet, again, she discussed concern about two looming issues—her inability to bear children and the possibility of having children with her current mate; who has raised a grown daughter. This point reflected the issues of marriage and family that exist for never-married women who approach the possibilities of being married and having children for the first time, much later in life. Yet, her account reflected a positive reaction regarding plans for motherhood among CHAPAWN in this study.

Chloe, the only participant to disclose having taken steps toward motherhood, still considers becoming a parent. She discussed that raising children is a challenging job, but one that she is still open to accepting:

I have entertained the thought of actually adopting. Oh, let’s say, maybe a child going to kindergarten. I probably think now, more realistically, around the 3rd & 4th grade. But, that would require a lot of psychological testing. I would prefer doing that on a foster care basis—because I firmly do believe that I have the capacity to do those things. I see too many children that are in foster care, and I’ve seen people out there that make less money than I do, and have less means than I do, and have shown
compassion for children. And these children today are having to make adult
decisions and do adult things. I could do that if, if need be.

In this case, Chloe discussed her openness to becoming a parent, even if not in the traditional
manner. Instead of a desire to bear children from a marriage, Chloe spoke of the possible foster
parenting or adoption. While she made no mention of marital status in reference to fulfilling a
parenting role, the Chloe supported the notion that motherhood and raising children is still on her
the mind, even though her ability to biologically bear children is no long available. As such,
Chloe’s account signified that parenting may still be an option in the realm of lifestyle
possibilities for her.

**Church and Spiritual/Religious Doctrine**

Throughout interview data in this study, participants discussed their own spiritual or
religious beliefs in reference to dating and marriage. In some instances, it was referred to as a
requirement for a future marriage, or in others, a trait that a potential mate must possess. As a
theme, spiritual and religious doctrine was a relevant and substantial connection to encounters of
dating and intimate relationships experienced by several CHAPAWNs participating in this study.

Chloe referenced church and religious doctrine in two ways. After establishing that her
previous work long-term environment prohibited her from meeting eligible African American
male partners, she cited church as the next best resource for meeting such suitors among
CHAPAWNs:

> The only place besides work is church. I mean, and I’m not saying that all
Black women go to church, but that’s the second common denominator of
where women assemble, besides the workplace. You know, you can go to
clubs… after age 30, really the club scene is like, uh, “get away from me.

In this instance, Chloe referenced church as being a primary place where African American
women have a good possibility of meeting eligible African American men. Along with Chloe’s
disclaimer that church is not always an aspect of life for all women of color, she affirmed church
to be a place of massive gathering, and acknowledged the atmosphere of church as one of a very few places CHAPAWNs can expect to have contact with the kind of African American men in which they seek to establish dating relationships.

Secondly, Chloe referenced religious faith when describing characteristics of an ideal man that she would choose to marry in the future:

He has to not necessarily go to church, but, he has to have a faith and belief in God. I do prefer a Christian man. I want a Christian man”. And, if we don’t have God as the center of our lives… he’s the one that has to be spiritually fed.

In describing the type of African American male she desired to marry in the future, Chloe offered that such a man should carry a spiritual faith in God and maintain such a doctrine in his life. Here, she asserted that as she is a woman of faith, she requires to be married to a man who has a similar doctrine. Chloe was sure to establish that even if he does not actively participate in a church or is affiliated with a religious group, she required that her marital partner to be a man of religious faith. Essentially, Chloe was emphatic about partnering with a man who believes in God.

Joyce spoke similarly of religious faith regarding a dating partner. In her case, she offered a plea of sorts to the universe—calling for specific characteristics in the kind of man she prefers:

Can you just give me somebody who’s kind, respectful, and who can compliment me in every way, including his spiritual life? He has to believe in Jesus Christ. I am not gonna go into a relationship unequally-yoked like that.” I’m just, I don’t have desire for that.

Dialectically, Joyce’s response presented itself like a prayer call; in that she was asking it as a universal question. In it, she requested that a potential dating or marital partner possess beliefs, not only in Jesus Christ, but maintain a doctrine of faith. Joyce described that a possible male dating partner with no religious or spiritual beliefs was an unequal match to her. For Joyce, the
disposition of religious faith was an essential requirement for any man who she seriously dates or may consider marrying in the future.

In describing an ideal mate, Fannie Lou also offered a belief in God to be an abiding personal characteristic within a potential male partner. However, in her case she specifically assessed that such a mate be actively involved in a church:

He definitely has to be a religious man-- religious and spiritual, recognizing that Jesus is Lord, and Savior of the world. That’s really important to me, having a church home.

In her response, Fannie Lou was not just mirroring the sentiments of other CHAPAWNs in this study regarding a requirement of religious faith in a potential male partner. She specifically discussed that such a suitor have involvement in a religious community and/or be a member of a church. Fannie Lou discussed this factor as an important aspect in her life— that a future partner or spouse be a church-going man of religious faith. Moreover, a few honorable mentions regarding this theme also existed. In naming characteristics, of her ideal mate from A-Z, Amethyst labeled him to be a “believer in God.” Just the same, Sasha characterized her ideal mate as being “God-fearing.” Regardless of being a place to meet or having a place in the minds and lives of potential mates, CHAPAWNs in this study discussed the presence of religious/spiritual beliefs and church to be a major requirement for the African American men who they date or may potentially marry. As such, the prevalence of this connection among several participants gave it thematic status in this study—one that represents an important element in their dating activity and overall lifestyles.

Overall, data responses from CHAPAWNs interviewed in this study propelled three secondary themes: finding the right person, a lingering desire for children and a religious/spiritual doctrine in a potential spouse. Each of these minor themes represented
findings associated with partial segments of the study’s sample. Finally, presenting these secondary themes provided additional understanding of core expectations and prominent realities within the dating lives of CHAPAWNs.

In addition to presenting desires, expectations and shaping the dating lifestyle among CHAPAWNs, each of these themes offered substantive support in responding to the study’s research questions. The major and minor positioning of each theme was totally irrelevant regarding this particular relationship. Moreover, each theme further offered a connective response to specific research questions by enhancing the data. Thus, the role of study themes added credibility to the rich data in this study.

**Singlehood Theme**

In the first research question, CHAPAWNs described their singlehood. By doing so, findings revealed that study participants generally identified themselves as temporary singles; half as involuntary or actively seeking marriage, and the other half being voluntary where gaining a marital partner was not a priority. In addition to these singlehood revelations, career-enabled singleness, as a theme, further enhances understanding of the CHAPAWN singleness nature. It was found that work demands among CHAPAWNs and the lack of diversity in male coworkers to become potential partners existed. As such, the ever-present professional environments of study participants conversely enabled their singleness. Thus, CHAPAWN study participants did not just signify a state or status in being single, but this particular theme offered additional information as to why these women were possibly unable to meet a potential marital partner. In other words, career-enable singleness provided an answer to why CHAPAWNs in this study face singlehood as a daily reality.
Themes of Marital Possibility

CHAPAWN study participants described their marital possibilities in response to the second research question. Within the data relating this point, study participants described that accessibility of potential mates, availability of partners, and partner suitability were some circumstances that denied them opportunities to possibly get married. Here, study data created the situation surrounding marital possibilities of CHAPAWNs, however, a few study themes elaborated on the reasons for the existence of such marital potential. Two themes, marital skepticism and finding the rate partner, both related to issues surrounding less marital potential among study participants. More specifically, these themes reflected prohibiting factors, or limitations reflected in CHAPAWNs discussion of marriage opportunity. In actuality, both of these themes served as reasons, in addition to descriptions, for why marital possibilities among CHAPAWNs had a lesser standing in their lives. Ultimately, each of these two themes explained why marital potential among CHAPAWNs in this study was not perceived as their right, but a choice shaped via caution.

Childfree Themes

The third research question addressed the childfree status of CHAPAWNs in this study. Data surrounding participant description of their childfree status reflect a dichotomy. Half of them viewed being childfree as a choice related to work demands or lacking a desire to parent. The other half of study participants acknowledged that their childfree status was due to unfulfilled parenting desires. One study theme, a lingering desire for children, directly represented the latter. While this theme only related to part of the sample set, it offered supplemental explanation surrounding the childfree state of CHAPAWNs participating in this study. This theme countered the assumption of choice, and established that a childfree state
has occurred in some CHAPAWNs by default. As such, those who desire to have children, revealed a marriage prerequisite, and thus, remain childfree. This particular point, best relates to the other theme connected this research question. Those participants who desired marriage before children, and even those participants who were deliberately childfree showed a connection through religious doctrine or strong sense of spirituality. Even with opposing parenthood desires, it was the background of church, and religious/spiritual beliefs that served as a foundation for both sides of the parenting issue among CHAPAWNs. Specifically, a religious/spiritual doctrine was determined in study data as a standard among most participants, in that religion dictates a traditional structure of family. Thus, those study participants who desire children have that standard, and those who embrace their childfree status, did so for the reason that their religious/spiritual requirements for a marital partner and family base are left intact by their choice of the lifestyle alternative. Relating to this specific research question, both these themes provided background relating to the childfree status of these women and offered an overall reason as to how the absence of parenthood responsibilities exist in the lives of CHAPAWNs participating in this study.

**Themes to Motherhood and Marriage Stories**

The last research study question sought stories from participants that addressed CHAPAWNs various marriage and motherhood opportunities. Regarding this inquiry, participant stories about a generational family curse of CHAPAWNs, strong husband examples from their fathers, positive marital interaction from parents, and family support of strong marriages were divulged. One influential theme across the data set and apparent from these stories was a strong parental marriage and family setting among CHAPAWN study participants. This theme was at the core of CHAPAWN lived dating experiences and backgrounds. It not
only radiated from these stories, but showed relevancy to other study themes. This theme of stable parental marriages and family settings recognized that CHAPAWNs in this study had strong upbringings and were raised to not only achieve professionally, but attain the highest level of life satisfaction outside of work. These stories reflect how the example of family, or impact with their parents, has framed their views of how their own potential marriages and family should evolve. This theme explains why CHAPAWNs have maintained such a status in their current dating lives, especially since duplication of the family and marital environments they were raised in had yet to manifest in their own lives. Overall, study themes enhanced the responses to this study’s research questions, by expanding the explanation and understanding that of how and why the factors surrounding the dating lives of CHAPAWNs exist.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This examination into the dating lifestyles of childfree, heterosexual, African American, professional women who have never married (CHAPAWN) generated rich data, and produced findings that addressed responses from research questions posed and related themes discussed in the previous chapter. Most importantly, this robust data alluded to a particular understanding of how CHAPAWNS have shaped their lives regarding career endeavors, family and their dating complexities, and supports how CHAPAWNs perceive and respond to opportunities of marriage, children and parenting. Moreover, this study data served as a catalyst in understanding how the limited existing research attempts to discuss this lifestyle phenomenon. Additionally, this data provided support in discussing how CHAPAWNs’ perception of their dating experiences construct a previously untapped reality in academic scholarship, and thus, an examination connecting study data to social construction of reality as a theoretical framework. Overall, the data from this study offered an improved awareness of the background, response and perception CHAPAWNs present as members of a populated sector of single people through scholarly acknowledgement of their journey.

In discussing how CHAPAWNs participating in this study described their single status, data from this investigation revealed that all participants initially assigned themselves the designation of being temporary singles, according to Stein’s (1981) four categories of single-types. As Stein (1981) further prescribe that this category consists of involuntary temporary singles, or those actively seeking a marital partner, and voluntary temporary singles who hold
marriage as less a priority. Although all study participants readily identified with being temporary singles, further examination of their responses reveal greater connection with Stein’s (1981) sub-categories of temporary singles; three participants being involuntary single and the other three respondents as voluntary singles. Yet and still, the data regarding this particular inquiry was hardly a clear delineation. As participant responses revealed, the desires of those classified as voluntary temporary singles collide with the descriptions of involuntary temporary singles, and vice versa. Joyce, a voluntary temporary single, divulged her desire to be married, although her lifestyle is solely focused on her career pursuits. Similarly, Chloe’s acknowledgment of being settled and comfortable with her lifestyle somewhat detracted from her designation as an involuntary temporary single. Despite this data’s alignment with Stein’s (1981) ground-breaking research category classifications, study data shows that CHAPAWNs cannot be clearly categorized. However, data regarding this point presented information that is not present in existing research. Bulcroft and Bulcroft (2013) asserted that current literature is very limited in offering firsthand data from the CHAPAWN group that supports explanations of their dating desires. Even with this study, discussion surrounding the dating and marriage desires of CHAPAWNs were only beginning to emerge (Thomas & Barrie, 2012). Moreover, the literature mostly glossed over this particular subject, objectifying low-income African American women, and not considering how professional African American women with higher financial resources impact the nature of their singleness (Eden & Kefalas, 2005). Essentially, this study revealed that existing research can offer some classification in understanding their single status, but failed to connect marital desires of CHAPAWNs to long-standing categories of singles established in existing literature.
Regarding a connection to theory in this study, CHAPAWNs established their own position. Social construction of reality created understanding of what actually occurs versus what is assumed or established through a societal source (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As participant responses contradicted the structure of established singles’ categories in research, the testimony of their actual feelings, desires, and descriptions became a truth-telling. According to Pearce (2009), when verbal communication has been used to construct an aspect of reality, a social construct is born. Therefore, CHAPAWNs participating in this study claimed ownership in producing their own descriptions of being single; that the nuances of their single status cannot necessarily be clearly categorized through established research.

With regard to learning how CHAPAWNs discussed the possibility of marriage in this study, data reveals these women experience a lack of diversity among male coworkers, feel the absence of “the right person,” and disappointment in being unmarried. Robust and dynamic data responses from participants in this study shaped understanding that an overall unavailability of African American male partners for the CHAPAWN group were at the root of their dating challenges. Responses like: “where I work there is not a single African American male”, “I just have not met the right person,” and “you meet someone and think, maybe it will happen” are direct data examples offered by CHAPAWNs that reflect real-life support regarding their limitations of marital opportunity. Despite the scarcity of existing research about the dating dilemma facing this population, a term from the literature that described a long-term timeframe whereby African American women remain single, the “marriage squeeze,” is relevant to this portion of the data (Dixon, 2009). As study participants ranged in age from 41-61, other related existing literature further elaborated that never-married African American women should expect to remain single for at least half of their lives (Banks, 2011; Helm & Carlson, 2013).
actuality, the smallest gaps in research regarding this phenomenon was filled by literature that speaks to partner lack, high levels of non-marriage rates and relationship disadvantages among never-married African American women (Banks, 2011; Chaney, 2011; Dixon, 2009; Regnerus & Uecker, 2010). In general, current academic research seemed to lean toward discussion of shortcomings regarding marriage and dating in single African American women, like CHAPAWNs, instead of understanding their experiences and feelings relating to these challenges. This is likely due to the habit of research studies who viewed single women in negative ways (Fauldi, 2009). However, Koropeckyj-Cox (2005) reported that individuals believe the choice to remain single is valid when personal economic stability is not achieved or the right dating partner is not found. Moreover, Goldstein and Kenney (2001) suggested that although marriage was becoming a province of the most educated, getting married has become less attainable for professionally inclined African American women who cannot reap the benefits. The literature posits that for African American college-educated women, a high right of singlehood was now the norm since marriage is not compatible with their expectations (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2005). Banks (2011) summarized that for African American women, hopes of marriage are enhanced by their education and professional status, but is affected by the shortage of African American men. These exceptions in the literature were a few sources to support the position among CHAPAWNs who are only open to a marriage with a quality partner. These data examples supported the inaccessibility of potential marital partners and subsequent disappointment add a dynamic of lived accounts where current research merely focuses on external circumstances. Yet and still, existing literature seemed to be in alignment with participant data regarding this inquiry, in that, both present support of CHAPAWNs having fewer opportunities to meet, date or marry African American male partners.
In examining this inquiry of minimal marital opportunities among CHAPAWNs participating in this study, through a theoretical lens, elements regarding social construction of reality were present. Berger and Luckmann (1966) asserted that the human environment, as well as the individual, produces lived reality in understanding social phenomenon. This point called into play the role of interpersonal communication within social construction. Just as experiences shared among a group of individuals must be verbalized in constructing reality, the interplay of the environment and the phenomenon was influential. As these CHAPAWN study participants reported a lack of access to potential African American male partners at work, or exposure to ideal matches, the influence of work and social environments surrounding them is highlighted. Trenholm and Jenson (2009) emphasized that through interpersonal communication, social interaction is dictated and maintained. Therefore, as CHAPAWNs interacted within their professional settings and work environments, a consistency in limited access to potential partners was likely to continually challenge their dating opportunities; surely affecting marital possibilities.

In examining the response study participants offered in describing their childfree status, a dichotomy is reflected. Half of study participants held the desire to potentially raise and bear children, while the other side of the sample are deliberately childfree. Opposing views on this topic within the CHAPAWN group was directly related to age, work and lifestyle choices. Sasha and Tiger, who were still within childbearing age, affirm a desire for children before they lose fertility; both of whom, were emphatic about being married before having children. At age 43 and 41, respectively, these women seemed to be holding the traditional manifesto followed by many singles whose goal has been to be married with children; whereas Chloe was considering alternative parenting. Current research supported that a strong pressure among single women to
be married and become mothers is apparent (DePaulo & Morris, 1995). Certainly, this was predicated through the responses of Sasha and Tiger, but in regard to Chloe, current research on single parenting, especially due to its massive presence in the African American community, was abundant. Yet, limitations in existing studies have shown how CHAPAWNs consider their parenting choices outside of marriage.

On the other side of this study’s sample, participants embraced their childfree status. Amethyst, Joyce, and Fannie Lou made the deliberate choice to prioritize their career pursuits over motherhood. Through comments like “I decided I didn’t want it” and “I’m not trying to have babies and be tied down” or “I couldn’t put anything else on my plate” implied that not having children was a choice and necessity. In this sector of study respondents, a sense of satisfaction with work and/or other life responsibilities was priority to becoming motherhood versus holding a longing or loss of parenting opportunities as experienced by CHAPAWNs on the opposite side of this issue. Even from gaps in the literature regarding CHAPAWN dating lives, supported for being childfree is affirmed. Cockrum and White (1985) asserted that singlehood provides a choice in lifestyle for women to facilitate achievement and occupational accomplishments. Although this example references singleness, that same notion of choice correlates that of motherhood among CHAPAWNs. Existing research further elaborated that a childfree existence among CHAPAWN is supported by a network of extended family and friends (Thompson-Seaborn & Ensminger, 1989). From this sector of data, a lifestyle full of independence, opportunity, and individual identity supports the option among CHAPAWNs to negate motherhood, despite their diminished opportunities to date or marry.

In relation to this study’s theoretical framework, the issue of motherhood and being childfree in this study related to established societal conditioning. In social construction of
reality, Berger and Luckman (1966) claimed that over time, individuals created a social existence that became the norm in certain situations. Those, norms then were universally accepted as people reciprocated and/or responded to them. Through this communication, a knowledge of how life “should” be, or is expected to be is present, rendering societal conditioning. As such, the expectation of women to become mothers has been an accepted norm in society. While this norm was supported by correlating data from this study, it was also denounced. As such, CHAPAWN participants in this study communicated that while a desire for motherhood is still relevant, others choose to remain childfree for the freedom of work endeavors and social pursuits. However, this dichotomy is not just an emerging norm for this population of women, the existence of a caveat offered more clarity. For participants desiring motherhood, marriage is the communicated prerequisite. Therefore, CHAPAWN are constructing a reality of specific opposition, whereby those who desired children hope to achieve marriage before motherhood, or otherwise would choose to be childfree. Pearce (2009) added that once a reality has been constructed, individuals can then make practical judgements about how a situation can be changed, upheld or modified. CHAPAWNs participating in this study communicated a reality that being childfree is a definite choice embraced by some, but for others, motherhood remained an option within or outside the structure of marriage.

In regard to opportunities of marriage and motherhood, CHAPAWNs participating in this study used stories to supplement these specific lived experiences in order to extend greater awareness and understanding of this lifestyle. Specifically, in stories offered by study participants regarding marriage, a variety of supplemental information provided added nuances to previously discussed details. Amethyst brought awareness to the effects of a possible “family curse” by which most of her female first cousins were CHAPAWNs, which she deemed to be
more than a coincidence. More likely, this trend within her extended family reiterated the connection between a stable parental and family foundation to the development of CHAPAWNs. This study’s existing connection between CHAPAWNs and a stable family background is further supported by stories from Chloe and Tiger who specifically credited their fathers for providing a strong example of being a good husband and parent for future marital reference. Additionally, that connection also reflected when Tiger spoke to how her parents have worked through challenges, which informed her of a quality marriage. Each of those examples added dimension to understanding the contribution of stable marital examples that provide a base by which CHAPAWNs make dating decisions within their lives.

In correlating this point to the literature, stories about strong family examples were supported. Chaney (2011) asserted that African American women seek success at both work and home. So, when a quality mate is present, these women were willing to relinquish leadership in the way of traditional gender roles. Additionally, these stories help to demystify the burdensome stereotype of the “Strong Black Woman” who were viewed as relationship antagonists by African American males (Chandler, 2011). Moreover, Hill Collins (1990) added that external characteristics, like the education and professional success prohibit these women, particularly CHAPAWNs, to be self-defined from their experiences. Here, existing literature is aligned with participant stories that further elaborated on CHAPAWN lifestyles by providing background information.

Stories told by CHAPAWNs relating to motherhood, also played a supplementary role in understanding their previously stated viewpoints. Sasha’s story about motherhood further elaborated her desire to have children. By recalling how a colleague modified a teaching post to accommodate new motherhood, Sasha discussed being better informed in changing her current
childfree lifestyle when becoming a parent. In contrast, Fannie Lou revealed that her choice to remain childfree throughout life was literally a different story in her youth. As Fannie Lou recalled developing a desire for motherhood from watching television sitcoms, her mother’s advice to get educated and pursue a career prevailed. This story shows how the CHAPAWN lifestyle choices, such as motherhood, were often redefined overtime.

As a supplement, the function of self-definition and description from these stories were supported by existing literature. In studying womanhood and marriage, Chaney (2011) explained that self-definitions by African-American women can be contradicting, or start as one perspective, then evolve into another. Therefore, the trait of self-empowerment and self-definition was a determinant in making choices and deciding lifestyle pursuits within the CHAPAWN population examined in this study.

Truly, it is theory that grounded the effects of stories in understanding the background of marriage and motherhood discussions by CHAPAWNs. Pearce (2009) declared that a social structure embodies different constructs. Accordingly, Berger and Luckmann (1966) posited that a construct “takes the form of stories and that these stories bear imprint…of the histories/biases/rhetorical choices of the persons who tell them” (p. 3). Basically, storytelling created history and background in constructing reality. As CHAPAWNs shared similar dating challenges, perspectives and experiences, these stories created a background and understanding that would not otherwise be known. Here, stories proposed reasons that inform a participant’s specific view of marriage and motherhood. Explanations for the connection between family stability and the CHAPAWN lifestyle was provided through these stories. These stories were also revealed how a friend or mother’s influence can shape motherhood choices in CHAPAWN. From such stories, the description of positive male and father role models helped to
understanding why CHAPAWN women are cautious about the men they may date or consider marrying. Through social construction of reality, the meanings drawn from these stories and situations were a reflection of components that created specific lifestyle choices and circumstances surrounding CHAPAWN women.

Three major themes were present throughout this sample in the dating lifestyles of CHAPAWNs: stable parental marriage and family, career-enabled singleness and skepticism of marital happiness. Most obviously, this theme reflected the strong examples of marriage and family that exist in each participant’s background. As previously mentioned, each study participant was reared in a family with their biological parents who had long-term marriages and never divorced, or remarried, even where a spouse was deceased. The presence of a strong marital bond was the impetus within this theme – demonstrating stability and a solid relationship model for each participant. No matter their desires regarding marriage and family, participants in this study indicated a connection to their parents’ marriages as a guide, a standard, or model in shaping their lives and individual dating aspirations— a special feature of this examination.

Research scholarship generally does little to justify this importance of this theme in existing data. The preeminent text, Banks’ (2011) *Is Marriage for White People?*, comprehensively overviews issues of marriage, dating, children, inter-racial couples, partner availability, as well as relationship fears and desires, especially pertaining to African American women. However, in the interview data presented, this text failed to make a connection between strong African American parental marriages, and how such an example among African American women impacts their desire to attain the same example against not being married at all. Yet, Banks’ (2011) acknowledgement regarding the decline of marriage among African Americans and his attempt to present resolutions for single African American women who faced dating
challenges definitely coincided with data from this study; but was characteristic of other research in by reporting shortcomings versus circumstances and background in actual lived experiences. This study of CHAPAWNs presented that connection through rendering of this major theme, an action that existing literature omits.

While scholarship does little to justify this pertinent data, the omnipresent influence of a stable parental and family dynamic among study participants was more relevant to the theoretical framework. Social construction of reality indicated that institutions, like families, condition an individual’s circumstances in any given situation which becomes their norm (Wilden & Hammer, 1987). Data from this study supported that CHAPAWNs are acclimated to the prospect of marriage by stellar examples of their parents. As discussed in the data, these women are orientated to marital responsibilities, spousal collaboration and undertaking the demands of parenting children. Having experienced this stable environment, CHAPAWNs were equipped with knowledge in how a functioning marriage should operate. As study participants report, they were not likely to compromise this standard of familial stability in which they grew up, especially in being unable to reproduce that marital experience. And so, their lifestyle as CHAPAWNs was an alternative to the lifestyle by which they were raised, causing participants to maintain financial stability and their own domain. By placing the lens of social construction on this theme, apparently CHAPAWNs were adapting the norm from their childhood, by thriving in a lifestyle outside of marriage, as well as what is expected of them from society; if not by choice, but by necessity. Therefore, through the filter of social construction of reality, reality was distinguished from assumed ideals.

Another prominent theme within this study’s participant data was the central role career and professional pursuits have played in disabling the dating lives of these CHAPAWNS. As
these highly professional women aggressively pursued their careers, a common trait within this sample was the various ways success at work impacted their marital opportunities or choice not to pursue marriage. Be it professional demands or the lack of a work-related dating pool, CHAPAWNs participating in this study offered firm support in the restrictions that unintentionally exist from their professional settings. Ironically, the workplace was a source of achievement and fulfillment for CHAPAWNs, but unlike equally-successful women of other races, their dating opportunities in conjunction with work were limited. Bedard (1992) assessed that single people gain happiness from efforts leading to financial stability, or their professional pursuits instead of relying on fulfillment from marriage. In this instance, existing research literature offered adequate support. But still, the dominance in reporting shortcomings regarding African American relationships remained apparent. High rates of singlehood was expected among college-educated African American women due to economic disparity, mismatched education levels and lack of suitable mates, whereas White, Hispanic and Asian college-educated women have greater options to be married, achieve a career and family life (Ferguson, 2000; Bell, 1990; Bronzaft, 1991; Tanfer, 1987). Despite this bleak outlook presented in related research literature, CHAPAWNs participating in this study embraced their singleness in one way or another, half of whom are especially thriving and satisfied in their lives without marriage. Even those participants who actively sought matrimony and hoped to be married report that adjustments and changes in their current lifestyle will certainly be necessary, as they collectively enjoy the freedom of being heads of their own households. This study offered support of this reality and made a contribution to existing gaps in literature leaving the massively growing population of CHAPAWNs out of the discussion, or set aside when conducting research. By
understanding how their particular work life often disabled their love opportunities, a greater awareness of this lifestyle was offered.

A better source of support for this theme rested in the theoretical framework. Berger and Luckmann (1996) assessed that the human environment, as well as the individual produces the lived reality in understanding the shared experiences of a particular group of people—calling in the role of interpersonal communication within social construction of reality. As CHAPAWNs devoted much of their time to professional endeavors, that work setting became a primary environment within their overall lifestyle. And much like other successful single professionals, work became a source of social interactions, including dating. The fact that no dating opportunities existed in the work lives of CHAPAWNs in this study revealed how this theme was a contributing factor in understanding how lifestyle elements create or deny lived reality. Therefore, theoretical connection to this particular study theme supports how elements of the work environment of CHAPAWNs was crucial to understanding their overall data lives.

The last major theme that permeated across this sample set is a skepticism toward marital happiness. Participants in this study felt challenged with the idea of happy marriages. Through observations of peers, personal experiences of infidelity and feedback from married individuals, CHAPAWNs each reported some level of skepticism that marriage would not result in true happiness. Moreover, the data reflected hesitancy from several CHAPAWN participants to enter marriage all together, while others were unwilling to forego their current single state as a direct result of marital skepticism. While the current research offered abundant information in the prevalence of marital separations, high divorce rates and periods of long-term singleness among African Americans, a presence of firsthand accounts, explanations and personal experiences that supported those levels barely existed (Engram & Locker, 1993; Norton & Moorman, 1987).
The slight exception in the literature is data Banks (2011) reported and discussed which specifically indicated the influence of marital fear among single African American women. Yet and still, despite the significance of this text to studying the dating lives of CHAPAWN, Banks’ (2011) discussion of fear was relegated only to the circumstance of interracial marriage; his solution to dating complexities among CHAPAWNs, by which he avoided that very issue in the African American male-female marriage.

The connection of this theme to theory offered greater understanding of its significance. Since literature ignored the personal feelings of marital skepticism among CHAPAWNs, communication of this point by women of this group was pertinent. The act of acknowledgement, in of it itself, built credibility in this aspect of marriage realities among the CHAPAWN group. Berger and Luckmann (1966) asserted that everyday life is manifested through knowledge from awareness of the norms, situations and expectations exist. More specifically, the point of marital skepticism across this data sample reflected a distinguishing trait shared by all the study participants. As such, a reality regarding aspects of marriage and its possibility among them is created through the presence of marital skepticism. When a common trait is shared by individuals of a group, that reality sets them apart from others. As this point is communicated through study data, marital skepticism becomes a “real” factor in the collective environment of CHAPAWN dating lives. As previously discussed, the goal of social construction is to show communicative factors of what these women were actually living within the existence of societal norms. Essentially, the marital skepticism in CHAPAWNs is a true element of life that needed acknowledgement by greater society as having impact on their lived dating experiences. Theoretical framework supported the importance of marital skepticism in relation to dating realities among CHAPAWNs, where gaps in research scholarship ignored it.
Three minor study themes were prevalent in only part of this study’s sample and offered a significant contribution in understanding the dating lives of CHAPAWN. Just the same, these themes presented from within this study’s data have relevancy with regard to research and theory. Not finding “the right person,” a minor theme in this study, reflected the perspective in a few CHAPAWNs participating in this study when discussing their status. Whether career-related or having the flexibility to socialize among different classes of people, CHAPAWNs cited that an absence of the most appropriate partner has provided good reason to remain unmarried. Across the board, research literature upheld the idea of a lack in marriageable mates for single African American women. As reported, over three million African American women in the U.S. were without a mate, as lower life expectations, widespread unemployment, high incarceration mates and substance abuse rates have made African American male partners scarce since the millennium (Staples, 2007; Gordon et al., 1994). Moreover, as the literature indicated that by sheer number, the lowest ratio of men to women exists among African Americans in the United States, and that due to the diminishing pool of marriageable men, African American women are likely to remain unmarried or marry a less-educated man (Adimora & Schoenback, 2005). These citations were representative of a greater group of research which supported data in this study. Such literature revealed how the lack of finding the right person to date or marry has not only alluded many women in the CHAPAWN group, but supplied a strong reason for them to remain single. Specific to the latter was the declaration that African American women were more easily remain unmarried until they meet men who are equals, or may marry men with less of an economic and educational background (Chaney & Monroe, 2011; Banks, 2011). As such, the responses from CHAPAWN who indicated their lack of a marital partner perfectly coincided with acknowledgments in the research. Once again, as the research is mostly slanted toward
discussion of lack, shortcomings, and diminished mating opportunities regarding the love lives of African American women, this parallel between study data and existing research, although in sync, was not surprising.

Another minor theme, a lingering desire to have children, indicated within a small sector of study participants also shows a minor connection to existing literature. Banks (2011) affirmed that sex and marriage became detached with the confirmation of abortion laws and availability of birth control; offering a freedom for women to choose the manner and time by which to bear children. Yet and still, this slight mention in the research held greater salience in accordance with this particular theme. The avenue of choice and the advent of contraceptives not only allowed women to choose when to bear children, but how they would raise children. CHAPAWNs participating in this study who desired children mostly agreed that marriage before motherhood was their standard in raising children. Not only did this point relate to the major theme of having a stable family background and parental marriage, but it represented the aspect of choice mentioned in the research regarding children and marriage. Therefore, CHAPAWNs in this study who desired children exercised their freedom of choice to postpone motherhood until they marry.

The last minor theme presented by data in this study was the omnipresent assertion of spiritual and religious doctrine. In this study, the variance by which it is discussed, places it in the category of minor themes, although it provided major impact within the data. Some participants of this study referenced church as an outlet for meeting potential dating or marital partners, while most other respondents referenced religious beliefs or spiritual values as a quality they desired in an ideal mate. In other instances, CHAPAWNs participating in this study cited their own spiritual beliefs as guidance in how they approached aspects their dating lives. In
either way, this minor theme held the least support of research literature used to ground this study. However, African Americans possessed a strong connection to church, attending religious services, and socializing within such circles (Chaney, 2008). From a cultural perspective, prevalent aspects of spiritual and religious doctrine was not unexpected in data reported by CHAPAWNs.

Social construction of reality also allowed for individual voices to be highlighted within situations or circumstances common to this group. Although this study contained multiple participants, each singular experience within this examination held a weighted importance among the study sample as whole. Be it finding the right mate, religious/spiritual doctrine, or a lingering desire to have children, each participant in this study sample was slightly different from the other. Essentially, this theory allowed for an exploration of individual experiences as communicated through narratives that ultimately compose a larger, shared experience among CHAPAWN. In the end, the interviewees’ communication about their identities evidenced the complexities of movement between the personal/individual and the shared/social – perhaps the sine qua non characteristic in social construction of reality.

In addition to a mutual connection to theory, major and minor themes represented aspects of life being experienced by CHAPAWNs in this study, as well as aspirations for their lives in the future, respectively. This studies’ major themes-- stable parental marriage and family setting, career-enabled singleness, and skepticism of marital happiness were not just the result of applying protocol from Siedman’s (2006) interview research method to data collected in this investigation. Major themes in this study often worked in cooperation with each other to employ elements of the lifestyles inhabited by CHAPAWNS— not finding the right person in relation to career-enabled singleness and a lingering desire for children as related to stable parental
marriages and family settings. In all, major themes implied the impact of careers, family and dating experiences shared by women in the CHAPAWN group.

Although these women were well-educated and successful at work, their sacrifice has been a reliance on professional fulfillment when opportunities to date did not necessarily manifest from work, or equal the benefit of women from other races. Just the same, interview data from this study also indicated that their professional achievements often isolated them from maintaining an active dating life. Whether they desired a partner for future marriage or promoted satisfaction in the freedom of being single, data from this study proposed that the careers of CHAPAWNs can often determine if their single status is a gift or curse.

In the way of family, the greatness in this study’s revelation was that each of these CHAPAWN participants draw strength of example from a stable family background and parental marriage experienced since childhood. This finding was not coincidental, but indicated a link between the African American nuclear family and its tendency to render daughters who became CHAPAWNs. From a cultural standpoint, traditionally nuclear African American families executed childrearing that promoted strong expectations of daughters and a lenient nurturing of sons (DuBois, 1909). African American daughters growing up in traditional families, such as CHAPAWN participants in this study, held a two-sided sense of duty; to become educated and highly-successful professionals and pursue a marriage resulting in families of their own. Collectively, these major themes specifically cued a greater complexity of family, other than an example these women could model. This family-related theme implied a contradiction of requirements. As presented in this study, attaining career success could prohibit marriage and family for single African American women without children. As such, accessing a happy marriage with an ideal partner and having children was less likely for these same women who are
programmed to attain professional affluence. Thus, a growing population of CHAPAWN women were groomed in the opposite direction from the marital model by which these stable parental and family settings exist.

As for dating, the collective of these major themes revealed that CHAPAWN women most certainly maintain a desired to gain love and a possible marital partner. However, longevity in the CHAPAWN lifestyle, while observing their peers pursue marriage, has procured in them a perspective that being happy in married was unreal. In response to this ideal, CHAPAWN women were cautious when approaching the dating market and maintained an exceptional amount of skepticism about marriage. Based on challenges African American marriages faced as presented in the literature, some CHAPAWN women responded by gaining satisfaction from being single and embraced the flexibility of that freedom, while others cling to desire for companionship or a marital partner. Either way, major themes from this study relegated how CHAPAWN women currently approached dating. Moreover these three major themes offered a blueprint into the current lives of CHAPAWN, showing how a connection to their families and careers shaped aspects of their dating lives. Nevertheless, each of these themes showed a correlation or omission from within the literature, but also reflected shared experiences that were filtered by social construction of reality to provide awareness, in understanding the current lives of CHAPAWNs as a group.

This study’s minor themes-- finding the right person, a lingering desire for children and spiritual/religious doctrine represented a collective of lifestyle aspects CHAPAWN women discussed in reference to marriage, children and parenting. Whether all study participants agreed in their stances, this collection of themes, allowed each participant to individually voice aspects mostly regarding the CHAPAWN lifestyle in their future relating to marriage, children and a
belief system. Regarding the minor theme of participants finding the right person, the reality of marriage was called into question for these women, who held skepticism about marital happiness.

In this study, CHAPAWNs acknowledged that their single status was not likely to change unless an ideal mate enters their lives. While this particular theme prominently connected itself to related ideas of partner lack in the dating lives of CHAPAWN from research literature, it exposed how some women in this study view their marital futures. Those who acknowledged the lack of an ideal mate were offering some implication that being single is likely to be a permanent status over time. Indirectly, the absence of the “right person” to pursue long-term companionship implied that CHAPAWN women were unwilling to comprise their current lifestyles for the possibility of marriage to a future incompatible mate, also asserted that marriage is not worthy of them without the appropriate partner. At the same time, CHAPAWNs were not adhering to an unrealistic standard in a potential marital partner. In regard to finding the right person, these women were seeking emotional and social compatibility; a partner who shared the same constitution regarding relationship practices, and surprisingly, one who is capable of taking a leadership role in the household—financial and socially. While several participants mentioned financial stability as quality in a potential partner, none made an implication that wealth and status were marital prerequisites. Thus, CHAWPAWNs were not necessarily seeking their professional or economic counterparts, but an African American male partner who embodied spiritual/religious character, offered support of their careers, be dually employed and share in creating a mutual support system for the relationship.

While only half the sample indicated a lingering desire to have children, this minor theme was especially poignant in understanding the relevance of hope among CHAPAWNs held to
achieve a life of family and children, despite their prerequisite for a husband or advancing age. Regardless of the literature and their own experiences, CHAPAWNs participating in this study possessed a degree of hope in the possibility of marriage and family. For those hoping for children, it fueled that desire. On the other hand, those CHAPAWNS who voiced disagreement with a future in parenting did not negate hope, nor they adhere to a separatist category or stereotypes. Their sense of hope permeated in the idea that their lives were equally fulfilling and rewarding in their quest to not become mothers. This agreement or disagreement expressed in regard to having children showed that CHAPAWN women do not view aspects of their futures through a singular perspective. Essentially, this data predicted that while these women shared lifestyle experiences today, in the future, they were more likely to pursue parenting choices that best-suit their needs and desires—to remain childfree or pursue motherhood, with or without a husband.

As for their promotion of religious/spiritual doctrine in the data, CHAPAWNs revealed a firm association with church and spirituality in relation to their dating lives. Every participant in this study strong asserted or mentioned that religious doctrine is a key variable for success in their love lives. Some CHAPAWNs voiced this to be a mandatory characteristic in their ideal mate, that a potential marital partner must be actively involved in a church group. Other respondents acknowledged church to be a major outlet in their lives outside of work—a source of social support. No matter the context, it was apparent that the lifestyle of CHAPAWNs include church going activities and/or a doctrine of religious and spiritual beliefs which grounds their daily living. This point highlighted an awareness that was barely acknowledged in the literature; the CHAPAWN group were not just accomplished professionally, but were devoted to a spiritual life they hope to share with a partner or potential spouse. The importance of spiritual
beliefs and religious faith was crucial to the lifestyle constitution shared among CHAPAWNs participating in this study, which could not be comprised for the sake of love or marital possibilities in the future.

Overall, these themes reflected experiences and accounts by the CHAPAWN group alluding to their ideas of marriage, children, and parenting. Although they held a minor position within this study’s data, at times, these minor themes were an extension of major themes. In either case, major and minor themes produced from firsthand accounts and experiences of CHAPAWNs participating in this study shaped their reality—a lifestyle challenged by dating limitations, but filled with hope for a spouse and/or children in the future, as well as a satisfaction in knowing that their current status offered an equally fulfilling existence cultivated from their family backgrounds, professional accomplishments and social support.

While data from this study rendered great explanation of the CHAPAWN dating lifestyle, it gave minimal response to related issues covered in existing research literature. Even though a relationship between raw data was apparent from themes and theoretical correlation, the obvious gaps in existing literature also included topics that had very little presence within this study. Incarceration was a highly touted issue within the literature surrounding the African American male-female relationship. High rates of African American male incarceration were directly attributed to reasons for low rates of marriage among African American women in existing research (Banks, 2011; Dixon, 1998; Gordon et al., 1994; King, 1999; Yeakey & Bennett, 1990). Yet, the mention of incarceration was barely apparent in this study’s data. Only one CHAPAWN participating in this study directly associated prevalent incarceration of African American men to her availability of potential marital partners, while all other participants were mute on this issue as a relevant factor in their dating lives. Either, this issue was an accepted
circumstance in dating among CHAPAWNs, or incarceration has little baring on the actual challenges and choices facing these women in the dating market.

Cohabitation, another highlight of the associated research literature in this study, was also mostly absent from the data. In existing research, cohabitation was discussed as a common alternative to marriage among African American couples where the same stability occurred (Banks, 2011; Chaney & Monroe, 2011). However, very little evidence of cohabitation was present in this study’s data. While two participants each mentioned a brief stint of cohabitation in past relationships, it was not acknowledged elsewhere in the study’s data. Moreover, confirmation that cohabitation was an acceptable choice among CHAPAWNs in dating was also absent in study data. Thus, the prevalence and marital simulation of cohabitation, as supported through existing literature cited, showed little relevance to the dating practices of CHAPAWNs participating in this study.

Similarly, the apparent connection of mansharing in African American male-female relationships cited in research literature, also showed minimal relevancy in this study. Although major research supported that mansharing is most prevalent among African American couples, it only held minimal bearing in CHAPAWN dating experiences discussed in this study (Chapman, 1986; Laumann, et al., 2004). In the same instances of cohabitation mentioned by participants in this study’s data, mansharing was the connective circumstance in each case, causing each of those relationships to end. Yet, the overwhelming consensus among all CHAPAWNs participating in this study was that a desirable partnership consisted of being with an available, unmarried, uncommitted African American man. Essentially, the highlight of mansharing within cited literature of this study was not heavily supported by the data.
Finally, the ongoing issue of African American female stereotypes, as greatly discussed in the research literature, was certainly supported by data from this study. Specifically, labels from the literature, such as “old maids”, “Miss Independent” and the “SBW” or “Strong Black Woman Myth” were dually rejected by study participants as in existing research (Gilchrist, 2011; Chandler, 2011). CHAPAWNs who participated in this study also indirectly denied the notion that they were women who did not desire male companionship, as in the research literature (Gilchrist, 2011). Through support of study themes, even CHAPAWN participants who fully embraced their status, hoped to meet a suitable African American male partner. In actuality, study data discerned that appropriateness of choice, suitability and availability were contributing factors to CHAPAWN participant singles, and not denial of companionship from an independent lifestyle. Data in this study supported the issue of stereotypes brought about in the research literature, and yet, provides clarity in understanding the motivation of how such stereotypes among single African American women are actively dispelled. Overall, this study continuously widened the gap in acknowledging how current literature truly aligns with the dating lives and experiences of those in the CHAPAWN group.

The significance of society’s role in the dating choices and dilemmas facing the CHAPAWN group must also be acknowledged in this discussion. Firstly, a common cliche of “having it all” could be viewed as a burden to women of this designation. A constant onslaught of published articles, editorials and broadcast commentary imposing the idea that women can balance a thriving career and fulfilling home life with family and children has been a societal myth. Often, work/life balance and professional productivity by women have disintegrated if the appropriate spouse was not in place. While women in general are not susceptible to the traditional roles of previous generations, their success has posed a threat to potential male
partners. As evidenced in this study, the lack of available or suitable African American male partners who will support their mate’s success and accept a modified family role has not been easy to attain for CHAPAWN women. While having it all may be a societal standard now in place for women in general, CHAPAWNs participating in this study have shown that attaining this status was often prohibited by work environments, finding the right person, and their belief that happiness may not be met. Thus, it is important to recognize that society may place certain expectations on the CHAPAWN demographic that will not likely be met.

Secondly, society has failed to support the honor and value of single African American women. Factors like social stereotypes have played a huge role in undermining the existence of single African American women. Singleness has not currently been the novel idea among African American women that it was in the 1970s—an era of freedom and independence for all women. Essentially, CHAPAWNs have been relegated to this position by circumstance with fewer marital possibilities than their racial counterparts. But instead of honoring their position, it has been framed as a shortcoming that is heavily reflected in research literature on the topic. Scholars and society have taken the position of negativity, as if to assume that the juxtaposition of career success and marital opportunity they face deserved a perspective of pity. In actuality, CHAPAWNs have forged paths for all women in the workplace, as business owners and through professional leadership roles. Moreover, women without families and children, have created professional opportunities for other women who follow, as well as adding credibility for them to choose work inside the home. Regardless, African American women, have experienced heavier societal criticism for the more opportunities they gained professionally, and those fewer attained in marriage and family. As such, CHAPAWNs have earned honor, especially in regard to the
value from their status within society, despite facing mating challenges while having achieved productive lives.

Thirdly, society must show acceptance of the constructed reality CHAPAWNs have presented. As shown from data in this study, CHAPAWN participants represent a growing population of singles who have continuously been overlooked. Now that single people in America now outnumber those who are married, the importance of understanding their lifestyles can no longer be overlooked. While prestige has always accompanied marriage, an equal status should have earned acknowledgement for unmarried individuals in society. As the circumstances surrounding CHAPAWNs will likely remain, acknowledging awareness and accepting their lifestyle, as discussed in this study, would only enhance societal interaction. But, as society’s nature has often been slow to approving different lifestyles, data from this study and subsequent research must serve as a blueprint of a growing new norm of marital status that CHAPAWNs represented. Ultimately, the role society has played surrounding the lived dating experiences of CHAPAWNs requires expansion. By lifting the burden of “having it all”, honoring their status, and accepting the CHAPAWN lifestyle as a new norm, greater awareness and understanding will have become the role that society should play in supporting these women.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Summary

This study presented and discussed the dating circumstances facing childfree heterosexual, African American professional women who never married (CHAPAWN); a phenomenon that mostly eludes existing research surrounding the topic. As this group of women have been a vastly growing sector of single people in the United States, their educational opportunities, professional successes, and affluence have made marriage less attainable for them. Limited scholarly literature on the topic generally ignored a key element of the issue: actual lived dating experiences among members within the CHAPAWN group. Previously, scholars made insignificant cross-cultural comparisons or marginalized discussions of the CHAPAWN group in the realm of couple communication research. This study provided fresh perspective and rich narratives, and as well, substantiates shared experiences that represent lived experiences versus conditioned norms. The results from this investigation were aligned with social construction of reality, whereby interview data becomes testimony of the lived dating experiences among CHAPAWN. By communicating their own situations and circumstances through firsthand accounts, CHAPAWNs offered common characteristics uniting their shared experiences, and thus, provided true a reality regarding their dating outside of current research literature and societal assumptions.

Social construction of reality established the process by which participant profiles of interview data became the communication stream structuring lived dating experiences within the
CHAPAWN group. Respondents constructed their reality by revealing how family background, occupational variables, and marital skepticism, along with partner choice, parenting desires, and religious/spiritual doctrine play a primary or secondary role in their actual dating lives. While parts of the data were supported by existing research, this study fills large gaps by the simple contribution of documenting accounts of lived experiences, a step that research omitted. Eventually, a greater understanding and awareness was gained from learning how dating situations were unique to CHAPAWN through data of firsthand accounts. These insights moved beyond what is assumed or has been previously researched regarding their position in the African American male-female relationship, and suggested that environments of family, work, and church are a major guide for CHAPAWNs living their current existence, or those seeking a transition to marriage and a family.

The use of Siedman’s (2006) interview research method guided the collection, analysis, and discussion of data from this research project. Through this method to the data, specific themes were produced to enhance existing literature and offer greater awareness of this subject matter. Three primary themes generated from the testimony of women in the CHAPAWN demographic regarding their dating lives were: stable parental marriage and family examples, careers that enabled singleness, and skepticism in marital happiness. These themes reflected major variables across the sample set that supported how decisions and opportunities are managed within the love lives of CHAPAWNs.

Regarding major themes presented in this study, the strong example of a stable family and parental marriage experienced by CHAPAWNs was made apparent from data, whereas existing research was oblivious to such an impact. Through the filter of social construction, this theme confirmed a norm across the data sample by which the parental marriage example and
stable family environment in childhood was the standard among CHAPAWN participants in referencing potential marital relationships. Therefore, CHAPAWN promoted an unwillingness to comprise that standard despite dating challenges such as partner unavailability or work demands. The major theme of career-enabled singleness was heavily touted in research literature as paralleled by data from this study provided. CHAPAWN participants in this study supported that with few dating possibilities from work in play, and a heavy commitment of professional responsibilities, such impact from work has aided in maintaining their singleness. Thus, this theme represented true reality in the dating lifestyles of the CHAPAWNs. Regarding skepticism of marital happiness, this study reported that existing literature also omitted attention to such a fact. However, support of this feeling within most of the data sample substantiates the presence of skepticism in marital happiness as another real factor in the dating lives of CHAPAWN. As most participants sited their disbelief in true marital happiness, the prevalence of this feeling impacts their perspective that getting married is a worthwhile life change. In all, major themes from this study filled the gaps of existing research literature bringing greater awareness to the real-life dating experiences of the CHAPAWN group.

Additionally, a few minor themes revealed factors impacting some of these women: absence of the “right” partner, a lingering desire for children and religious/spiritual doctrine. While only intermittently apparent within the data set, these secondary themes show other factors that influence the dating lives of CHAPAWN examined in this study. With strong support and presence in research literature, the minor study theme indicated an absence of the right partner, which corresponds with data from CHAPAWN participants, who claim to remain single when the appropriate mate is unavailable. Although half of study participants acknowledged a lingering desire to have children, and the other half embrace being childfree, this fact was
exposed from their individual perspectives. In constructing reality, presenting individual viewpoints amongst a group of people sharing the same experiences was warranted. As such, this theoretical caveat was substantiated in data from this study. Regarding the final minor study theme of spiritual/religious doctrine, existing literature offered few examples of support. Whereas, data from study participants truly explained the importance of spirituality to CHAPAWNs; church being a primary lifestyle activity by which such affiliation and/or beliefs are a requirement for all potential partners or future spouses. Major and minor themes reflected factors, needs and challenges of the CHAPAWN dating lifestyle that relates to family, career and dating aspects of their lived experiences—and in some instances filled gaps in academic literature. Overall, findings in this study suggested a degree of hope among CHAPAWNs to either be married or continue being satisfied and fulfilled with the status quo. Moreover, additional findings from this study concluded that CHAPAWNs face an unsubstantiated dichotomy—the expectation to live in the utmost professional success and get married with families of their own, when such personal gain is ultimately the sacrifice for career accomplishment.

Implications

Revelations from this study allowed for an updated understanding of the CHAPAWN group that was mostly overlooked in existing communication research. Moreover, this study clarifies the position of CHAPAWNs—some struggle with their singleness, while others live a fulfilled existence outside of marriage and children. Strong family ties across this study sample are shown to be a key element in the lives of these women. The commonness of a traditional two-parent family, based in long-term marriages, not only informs the attitude of these women about marital expectations, but also provides a family background rich in social support. While
the limitations of marriage were ever-present in this research, an outlook of hope appeared from CHAPAWN study participants; that despite a lack of opportunity, that belief of fulfilled marital desires, still permeates in their life goals. Moreover, an omnipresent connection to God throughout this data sample acknowledged the influence of spiritual guidance that current scholarship failed to address in existing research literature, but is revealed as an influential factor in daily living among CHAPAWNs. Yet, the overwhelming accomplishment from this study is a delivery of the dating lifestyle elements experienced by CHAPAWN. Essentially, this study acted as biographical documentation of actual lived experiences, firsthand accounts, and stories that accurately exemplify how CHAPAWNs feel about marriage and motherhood, explanation of their expectations for African American male partners, and the challenges they face in the dating market. CHAPAWNs presented a “new normal” in this study, as they are representative of a fast-growing single population who have full lives uplifted by strong social networks and a sense of personal satisfaction. In the end, this study elevated research by putting in notice that this population of women deserves to be heard, addressed and discussed in academic literature.

Additionally, a few practical applications can be drawn for this construction of the dating reality among CHAPAWNs. One idea is that the mere existence of this study could stimulate more informed narratives and stories covered in media programming. Very often, the media has sought to frame the perspective of a story or situation in a way that persuades an audience. However, the firsthand accounts of dating experiences detailed in this study is cause to retract that tendency. By presenting real accounts and experiences within the CHAPAWN dating lifestyle, audiences could gain understanding of true reality instead of one that is contrived.

On a more interpersonal level, this study inferred the possible existence of depression among the CHAPAWN group. Although results from this study promoted truth in desires,
satisfaction and family background, it minimally implied a certain sadness or frustration the rests in the minds and hearts of study participants. As a condition, depression has often appeared when change or response needed within a lifestyle does not occur. Therefore, CHAPAWNs are in a vulnerable position to develop varying degrees of depression, especially when the constancy of professional demands is not balanced by consistent intimate support. Although social support was apparent in this study’s data, it cannot replace the contribution that intimacy offers. Thus, the possible appearance of depression cannot be denied in an overall examination of this topic.

**Limitations**

Despite the rich revelations presented here, this study presents a few limitations. An assumed shortcoming of this study is the small sample size of participants. While time limitations and financial resources brought pressure during data collection, this shortcoming still failed to compromise validity within this study. However, by revealing rich and essential data, as well as theoretical relevance, the smaller sample size functioned more like a pilot study; exclusive data to launch continued research of this subject matter. Just the same this study data set precedence for subsequent future examinations of the CHAPAWN population. And so, a broader participant pool, double or triple the size of this study, could potentially enhance the results of an identical examination and further confirm findings using the same theoretical framework. However, a larger sample size may possibly overwhelm the data collection milestone of this study—a degree of data saturation. Even though the study sample set was not enormous, a level of saturation was indeed met, as much of the same information regarding partner preference, background and spiritual doctrine gained repetition in participant responses. Regardless, an increased number of participants would positively substantiate the findings in this current study.
Another actual shortcoming of this study was the absence of response from African American men. As data from this study of the CHAWPAWN lifestyle revealed, their preference in choice for life partners and spouses was African American men—their racial counterpart. While the data implied issues of unavailability, infidelity, and a lack of appropriate support among African American men, the presence of the male perspective, or some level of response to this data could further enhance understanding into the greater issue facing CHAPAWN women—dating complexities with African American men. Additionally, by presenting the perspective of these men, this study can further fill the gap that is apparent in research literature that continually discussed shortcomings and lack within the African American male-female relationship.

**Future Areas of Inquiry**

When viewed from a broad perspective, this study cued an abundance of future research and new strands of study to further enhance what is revealed regarding the dating lives of the CHAPAWN demographic. Particularly, this examination serves as precursor to subsequent research that can impact scholarly discussions in interpersonal communication and develop new research in the realm of couple communication.

Regarding theoretical framework, a new examination using social learning theory in a secondary analysis of this data set is appropriate for future research. Social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1971) is based in the idea that a social learning system exists whereby new patterns of behavior that an individual exhibits can be determined by their direct experience or observing the behavior of others. Social learning theory directs that the more extreme a manifestation of observing behaviors, or through direct experience, the greater the reward or punishment consequentially following any such actions (Bandura, 1971). Since each
of this study’s participants observed positive parental marriages, a connection between those behavioral observations can be made in understanding their dating perimeters from within social learning theory. Through observing married life from within their family of origin, social learning theory could also provide an understanding of how marital expectations of this demographic is further derived. Specifically, elements of social learning theory is indicated through the interview data from these women who credit the positive behaviors of their fathers, or modeling, in determining possible marital partners. In response to the point Bandura (1971) assessed that models, “demonstrate how required activities should be performed” (p. 5). As such, this theoretical implication can address how participants in this sample have either benefited or become burdened by the stellar example of their fathers regarding potential African American male marital partners. In the same manner, social learning theory is also relevant in their observation of the long-term stable marriages that existed for each participant. Bandura (1971) states: “Most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently through the influence of example” (p. 5). As such, participant observations of their traditional two-parent family/marital environment in this study can also show major association to social learning theory regarding the negative dating behaviors, issues and dilemmas revealed by CHAPAWN in this study. Therefore, a secondary analysis where social learning theory is applied to this sample set can specifically address the relationship between marital/family stability and dating status among CHAPAWN.

Other ideas for future research can reflect elements of change occurring in the American social landscape. A similar study, using Seidman’s (2006) interview research methods and the framework of the social construction of reality could be most useful in examining homosexual, never-married, professional and childfree African American women. Now that same-sex
marriage is legal nationally, such a study might be beneficial as attitudes toward the LGBTQ population have been reserved within the African American community and often not tolerated in their churches. Moreover, if this type of study is conducted at least five to seven years from now, it could provide greater comparisons with counterparts of the straight participant pool, as well as lived experiences among that demographic, regarding same-sex unions.

Additional research of the relationship between this study and the emerging adult is also warranted. This study indirectly featured aspects of the emerging adult. Conceptually, the emerging adult referred to individuals in their early to mid-20s who are evolving in life and characterized by work/world views, changes in residence/jobs, lack of obligations and seeing themselves as adolescents (Nelson et. al, 2007). While this study focused on well-established women ranging from ages 41-61, participant data implied that “not feeling like a grown-up” existed from being unmarried and childfree. Although the idea of emerging adulthood was only mildly apparent in this examination, subsequent study of this topic regarding to the CHAPAWN population could likely reveal a commonality in self-perception.

Furthermore, new research on this subject matter could add contribution directly through investigating the African American male response to data derived from this study. As this study presented the dating lives of CHAPAWNs, reciprocal feedback from single African American men would not only provide the male response, but such information would either counter or support this study’s data. Most importantly, a response from African American men to this data would give voice to their position and offer a constructive balance to the results at hand. In the long run, such feedback could create a comprehensive view of firsthand experiences of the African American male-female relationship.
In all, this research study served the purpose of igniting scholarly conversation within interpersonal communication about African American romantic relationships, especially as discussed and navigated by the CHAPAWN population.


Du Bois, W. E. B. (Ed.). (1909). *The Negro American family: Report of a social study made principally by the college classes of 1909 and 1910 of Atlanta University, under the patronage of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund; together with the proceedings of the 13th annual Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University on Tuesday, May the 26th, 1908 (No. 13)*. Atlanta, GA: The Atlanta University Press.


Gilchrist, E. S. (2013). Neither an “old maid” nor “miss independent”: Deflating the negative perceptions of singles. In E. Gilchrist (Ed.). *Experiences of Single African-American


Publishing.


APPENDIX

ATTACHMENT 1

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This is to certify that I understand I am being asked to participate in this study entitled, “Communicating the Dating Reality of Childfree, Heterosexual, Professional African American Women Who Never Married”. This study is being conducted by Michelle M. Walton, a doctoral candidate executing dissertation research at the University of Alabama. This study is being supported through supplemental funds from the UA Graduate School for the SREB Doctoral Scholar Fellowship Program to cover direct costs related to conducting this research.

The purpose of this study is to expose an unexamined phenomenon facing a growing sub-group of the single population in the U.S: heterosexual, never-married, professional African American women who are childfree. The primary objective of this study is to expose their lived dating experiences with African American men, and how situations, events and/or circumstances create a dating phenomenon.

The findings of this study will reveal a consensus that reflects participant experiences of dating and what it means to the lives of a larger group of women. The results of this study will create a connection as to a true reality of lived dating experiences by these participants versus what is assumed in greater society.

Through pre-selection or referral, you offered your contact information for this study. You also agree that you are a straight, professional African American women who has never married and has no children.

The primary investigator seeks to interview six to ten like participants over the next three months.

If you agree to participate in this study, Michelle Walton will interview you twice in your home or a place of your own choosing about your dating experiences with Black men. The interviewer would like to tape record the interview to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. However, if you do not want to be taped, simply tell the interviewer, who will then take handwritten notes.

Each interview should last no more than 90 minutes depending upon how much information you choose to share. The only cost of this study is the time you offer in being interviewed.
The chief risk to you is that you may find the discussion of your experiences to be sad or stressful. You can control this possibility by not being in the study, by refusing to answer a particular question, or by not telling us things you find to be sad or stressful. We can also recommend a counselor to you if you seem to be upset or depressed. Seeing the counselor would be at your own expense.

There are no direct benefits to you unless you find it pleasant or helpful to describe your dating experiences. You may also feel good about knowing that you have helped communication researchers to learn how to examine and report your experiences in dating.

You are free to decide where we will visit you so we can talk without being overheard. We will visit you in the privacy of your home or in another place that is convenient for you.

The only place where your name appears in connection with this study is on this informed consent. The consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer in Michelle Walton’s office, which is locked when she is not there. We are not using a name-number list so there is no way to link a consent form to an interview. When we record the interview, we will not use your actual name, so no one will know who you are on the tape. Your interview tape will be transcribed and tapes will be discarded. This should occur within three months of the final interview. You may also refuse to be audio taped, in which case the interviewer will take handwritten notes. When the results are written up, your actual name will not be used as you’re the information you offer will be referred to using a pseudonym.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary. You can choose not to participate. It is your free choice. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on your relationships with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

If you have questions about this study right now, please ask them. If you have questions later on, please call Michelle Walton at 917-204-6996. If you have questions or complaints about your rights as a research participant, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach
Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask Michelle for a copy of it. You may also e-mail us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions.

Date:

Signature:

Printed Name:
Interview Questions

Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening [NAME OF PARTICIPANT]! My name is Michelle Walton and the goal of my dissertation is to highlight the experiences of single, professional African American women. Since I am interested in dating, marriage and motherhood, I will ask you several questions that relate to these topics. Since it would contribute greatly to my understanding of your experiences, throughout the interview, I will ask you to share stories to help me understand what you are thinking and feeling at the time. Since I am very interested in your thoughts and feelings about these topics, please remember that there is no right or wrong way to respond to any of the questions. In addition to choosing to not respond to any question or questions, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your anonymity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym of your choice. Do you have any questions for me? Okay, let’s begin………

FIRST INTERVIEW

Let’s Start With Your Career………

• Please tell me about career.
  Probe: What is your position?
  Probe: Where do you work?
  Probe: How long have you worked there?
  Probe: What lead you to choose this career?
  Probe: What are your general responsibilities?
  Probe: What do you love most about your career?
  Probe: What do you love least about your career?

• In, general, how happy are you with your career?
So, Tell Me About Your Family………

• Where (in what city and state) were you reared?
• Do you come from a big family? How many siblings? Where are you in the birth order?
• Were your parents married?
  Probe: If your parents were married, how long were they married?
  Probe: If your parents were not married, who was your custodial parent? Did this parent encourage you to get married? If so, what advice did they give you regarding marriage (e.g., who to marry, when to marry, what to look for, etc.)?
  ‘Probe: At what age did you receive this advice?

Now, Let’s Transition to Dating………

• In general, what has been your dating life as a single, professional African American woman been like?
  Probe: Are you currently dating anyone?
  Probe: If you are currently dating someone, how long have you been dating this person? How did you meet this person? What attracted you to this person? Are you cohabiting with this person? Do you want to marry this person? Do you expect to marry this person?
  Probe: If you are not currently dating someone, do you wish you were dating someone?

• Some professional African American women are single by choice, are happy, and have no desire to get married (voluntary/stable) while other professional African American women are single due to circumstance, are not happy they are single and have found it a challenge to find a mate (involuntary/stable). Based on your current dating life, how would you describe your singlehood?

• If you had a magic wand and could change from being single to married this second, would you wave it? If so, under what conditions would you wave that magic wand, or transition from being single to being married?
• Under what circumstances, if any, do you think it's permissible for two women to date the same man?
• Tell me what you most love about being single.
• Tell me what you least love about being single.
• In general, how happy are you currently with being single?
• If you made the decision to never marry, how would you feel about your life, overall?
SECOND INTERVIEW

Let’s Move On To Marriage…….

As an educated, attractive, and intelligent African American woman, I’d love to know about the greatest joys of challenges of being a single woman today.

Probe: Has anyone ever asked, "You have so much going for you! Why aren't you married?"

Probe: If you have been asked why you are single and unmarried, who asked you this question? How did you feel when you were asked this question?

Probe: If you have not/never been asked why you are single and unmarried, do you feel that people frequently wonder why you are single and unmarried?

Probe: Do you have one or more "Why aren't you married?" stories?

• Some women are not married by choice. Some women are not married because they have none or very few opportunities to meet and date. Some women are not married because they have not met the right person. Which of these three options best describes your current marital state?

• Overall, do you think that single, professional women of other races (e.g., White women) have an easier time finding a suitable marriage mate than single, professional African American women?
  Probe: If so, why do you think this is the case?

• Many single educated women refuse to marry until they find “Mr. Right.” Since there is no universal definition of the qualities that comprise “Mr. Right,” I would love to hear your views about "Mr. Right." Do you think "Mr. Right" exists? If so, how would you describe "Mr. Right?"

An increasing number of single professional African American women are currently dating or are open to dating and marrying non-African American men. Have you ever dated a non-African American man? If so, what was the race of this man? How did you meet? How long did you date? If the relationship ended, why did it end? If so, do you think there is a difference between
dating a African American versus a non-African American man? If so, what is that difference/what are those differences?

Probe: Does “Mr. Right” have to be African-American?

Probe: Would you prefer that “Mr. Right” be African-American?

Probe: Does “Mr. Right” have to share your level of education?

Probe: What specific qualities must “Mr. Right” possess in order for you to marry him?

Probe: Do you think that African American men are more or less likely than men of other racial groups (e.g., White men) to have the specific qualities you want?

Probe: Do you think that White men’s interest in marriage is lower, about the same, or higher than African American men’s?

Some women want to get married while others feel they can do without marriage. When you hear the word "marriage," tell me what that word means to you.

Probe: Would you like to get married one day?

Probe: If you would like to get married one day, please share a story regarding how and when you came this decision.

Probe: If you do not have plans to marry, please share a story regarding how and when you came to this decision.

Do you see yourself getting married one day?

Probe: If you do see marriage as part of your future, when do you see yourself getting married?

Probe: If you do not expect to get married, how and when did you come to this decision?

Have you ever felt pressure from family and/or friends to be married?
Probe: If you have felt pressure to get married, who exerted the most pressure... family or friends?

Probe: If so, what do they say?

Probe: Please share a story related to the pressure that you have received from family and/or friends in regards to marriage.

- What would be the greatest benefits of marriage for you?

- What would be the greatest drawbacks of marriage for you?

- In what ways, if any, do you think that your life would be the same if you got married?

- In what ways, if any, do you think that your life would be different if you got married?

- As a single, professional woman, what things, if any, would you be willing to negotiate or give to get married?

Let’s Transition to Children……

- Some women choose to not have children while other women would like to one day have children. Where do you see children in your life? Would you like to have children one day?
  
  Probe: If you would like to have children, how important is it to you that you bear your own children?

  Probe: If you would like to have children, do you feel that marriage should come before motherhood?

- In what ways, if any, do you think your life would be the same if you had children?

- In what ways, if any, do you think your life would be different if you had children?

- What does being a good mother mean to you? Please share a story regarding what it means to be a good mother.

  Probe: Do you think you would be a good mother?
Probe: If you think you would be a good mother, please tell me about the qualities that you possess that would make you a good mother.

Probe: If you have some concerns regarding your ability to be a good mother, please share why you feel this way.

What does being a good father mean to you? Please share a story regarding what it means to be a good father.

- Do you think that African American men are less, about the same, or more likely than men of other races (e.g., White men) to be good fathers? Please explain.

- Do you think that White men’s interest in fatherhood is less, about the same, or higher than African American men’s? Please explain.

- Have you ever felt pressure from family and/or friends to have children?

  Probe: If you have felt pressure to have children, can you share a story regarding the person or persons who exerted the most pressure on you in regards to that decision?

- In general, how happy are you that you currently do not have children?

We’re getting close to the end of the interview, so let’s transition from children to one single, professional African American woman that is on television…….

- Have you seen the pilot movie or first season of “Being Mary Jane” on BET?
  Probe: If the participant has watched the show ask her, “What do you think of the show?”

  Probe: If the participant has never watched the show, explain the show to her.

- Do you like the show?
  Probe: If the participant likes the show, tell her, “Please share what you like about the show.”
Probe: If the participant does not like the show, tell her, “Please share what you do not like about the show.”

- In what ways, if any, can you relate to the life challenges (dating African American men, affair with a married African American man, loss of ideal mate, work/life balance) faced by Mary Jane Paul in “Being Mary Jane?”
- Is there anything that you would like to add?
- Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

[NAME OF PARTICIPANT], I really enjoyed interviewing you and I sincerely thank you for your time! At the beginning of the interview I mentioned that your anonymity would be protected by a pseudonym that you would choose. What name would you like to be called when the findings are written up? Again, I sincerely thank you for your time and please feel free to ask me any additional questions at a later date.
ATTACHMENT 3
REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION
OF INFORMED CONSENT

The only record linking you as a participant and the research would be the informed consent form. The principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. As a participant, you agree to have been asked whether you want documentation linking you to the project or not; that a pseudonym has been chosen to maintain the confidentiality of your identity in this study.

I have read this, understand it, and agree.

Date:

Signature:

Printed Name:
### TABLE 1

**CHAPAUN STUDY: Participant Data Profile Chart #1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant &amp; Age</th>
<th>Career: Job &amp; Happiness</th>
<th>Family: Folks, Sibs &amp; Town, Career Happiness</th>
<th>Dating Status/Partner Race Preference</th>
<th>Parental Advice/Message About Marriage</th>
<th>Being Single: Temporary or Permanent</th>
<th>Happiness In Being Single</th>
<th>Overall Happiness if Never Got Married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHLOE (48)</strong></td>
<td>Financial Planner; 6 Yet to feel total efficient in job</td>
<td>Parents Married 50yrs to Dads death; 1 Older Sis; Pine Bluff, AR</td>
<td>Not Dating Anyone</td>
<td>Be in Love. Woman marries his whole family. Dad said ‘college &amp; career 1st, then get married</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td>Wants/Believes will be married; Not a ‘Dating’ type of Woman; Would wave magic wand for right partner</td>
<td>Feels Blessed of not being in a bad marriage—No Regrets!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMETHYST (61)</strong></td>
<td>Retiree—Univ. Athletic Administrator; 8.5 Liked job due to flexibility in work hrs. per ailing other-RETIRED</td>
<td>Parents were Married 49 yrs to Moms death; Only Child; Tuscaloosa</td>
<td>Dating a Black man 20yrs younger</td>
<td>Dad showed her; Mom told her; Husband is provider. Dad said to save money for herself. Mom said never let people gossip about husbands behavior w/other women</td>
<td>Was Permanent, but now open to possible marriage.</td>
<td>Happy that she was not in a bad marriage and that her career allowed her to earn, get business acumen, and help others; Slow to wave magic wand</td>
<td>Feels fulfilled; That her life &amp; work has been a blessing to others; Fills that she did what God wanted her to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SASHA (43)</strong></td>
<td>Deaf &amp; Blind Teaching Asst.; 6 Feels burnt out, needs change to next level</td>
<td>Parents married 50yrs.; Only Child; Muscle Schools, AL</td>
<td>Dating a Black man in non-exclusive relationship</td>
<td>Mother showed independence in marriage &amp; worked &amp; was decision maker; Father was provider; Parents helped each other</td>
<td>Hoping its Temporary</td>
<td>Enjoy being alone as gotten older; Likes sleeping alone &amp; being able to get up and go—Miss companionship though</td>
<td>Would be okay...really think so—Be okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIGER (41)</strong></td>
<td>Elementary School Teacher; Rigor of test scores &amp; prep has taken away teaching joy</td>
<td>Parents married 49yrs; Youngest-older bro ; Port St. Joseph, FL;</td>
<td>Seriously dating a Black man in exclusive relationship</td>
<td>Look for a person who was nice &amp; kind; Showed her about working together; Both were a great</td>
<td>Temporary-always saw it that way</td>
<td>Have good days &amp; bad days. Tired of going out, like to lunch by myself.</td>
<td>I’d be okay. I’ve made it this far. I’ve done well. Its not the perfect life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOYCE  (49)</td>
<td>Insurance Co. Asst., VP/Fiction Author</td>
<td>Dad was great example, not to settle for “just to have a man”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents married 50+ years - both deceased; Ten of 11 siblings; Arkansas</td>
<td>Not currently dating anyone</td>
<td>Showing than telling; Not conversations but their behavior; Dad was provider while Mother handled the house; Mom was jovial; Both givers and praying people; Don’t want to settle because of what they had; All other siblings were married to HS sweethearts at 21 &amp; all still married</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| FANNIE LOU (52) | Gov’t Agency PhD Researcher; 8 Love research over teaching; and the travel, networking and training; Would say 10 but per govt rates for trainees salary is not as much. | Two love interests: One at work who is “soulmate” divorced w/grown kids; Other is childhood love, divorced, who is “the one”; Mother told her to go to college and not be married w/kids. Mother was radical liberal. Father was conservative republican who wanted her to be married w/a bunch of kids. “It was an interesting dynamic in that household”. | On the fence.. In Between | When things are like they are now (busy), I am at a ten. But when things are slow.. its winter & like 20 degrees out...I need a snuggle buddy. But it has to be a very cold night.. and an exceptionally slow week. I love my bed. I’m not sure I’m willing to share my bed overnight. | I feel great! I’m in the place financially to do whatever I want to do, so I wouldn’t look back on that. I have friends who have been married divorced, married divorced. I don’t have that drama. There’s nobody in control of |
me that way. So, marriage is not what its all cut out to be. Everybody walking around ‘looking’ like they’re happy.
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<td>Nobody has chosen me.</td>
<td>-Believer in God</td>
<td>I’d have to cook more, clean more &amp; not work as much. Not seeing mother for holidays; Not let his mother come live; Must be Christian.;</td>
<td>-Mom will make occasional snide remark; Family wants her to be married..say “she’s such a great gal”, they I’m lonely -I believe I will be married</td>
<td>Mom: love the kids; teach girls to be women, groom productive citizens; Mom was fiscally responsible Dad: Show girls love &amp; how to be adorn; right way to be cared for &amp; protected; Dad show how to be Black professional@ work</td>
<td>Mom: The best mothers..take very seriously their responsibility of rearing children &amp; train a child how to maneuver thru life; Mother teaches them these thing Dad: A father makes sure his family has all the material things that they need to be success; Not wants but needs</td>
<td>-Myth that Black men are bad fathers. I think all(fathers) are the same. All Black fathers I know love their kids &amp; active in their kids lives -Fatherhood is fatherhood</td>
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<td>Never been proposed to. Marriage don’t seem to work out from where I sit. The horror stories you hear is so outrageou s. That makes it difficult.</td>
<td>-At this age, Mr. Right is a Godsend! -Have financial stability &amp; retirement -A to Z Attractive, Attentive, Affectionate, Believer in JC, Compassionate, Devoted, Educated, Financial Acumen</td>
<td>Relinquish control—sit back &amp; let him drive Won’t negotiate any kind of abuse, period. Verbal, Physical, that’s off the table.</td>
<td>-By far no..because many of us are not married. Has a number of CHAPAWN cousins in the family -Beter suited, because of my personality of me never being married; Would be better w/someone younger if I got married</td>
<td>Mom: The best mothers..take very seriously their responsibility of rearing children &amp; train a child how to maneuver thru life; Mother teaches them these thing Dad: A father makes sure his family has all the material things that they need to be success; Not wants but needs</td>
<td>-(Black) men need to be apart of this process beside the necessary things that human anatomy requires to create it -(White) fathers have a higher base on what they see &amp; observe b/c vast majority of them come from a family setting where their fathers are present.</td>
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<td>-I haven’t found anybody yet. kids(she</td>
<td>Someone who loves God; Cares about family and</td>
<td>-If he breaks some type of trust(not negotiating that) - I still would like to kinda have my</td>
<td>-I would like to get married; Don’t know if I expect to</td>
<td>Mom: Has too understanding, have faith &amp; foundation &amp; know God.</td>
<td>-(Black) men get a bad wrap. A lot of them really want to be</td>
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<td>TIGER</td>
<td>Teaches) ask &quot;Don’t you have a husband?&quot; -Not married by choice &amp; few opportunities</td>
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<td>freedom...girls night out or New Orleans for the weekend.</td>
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<td>be married. I thought I’d be married by now w/one or two kids. -Only get pressure from “adopted” brother’s wife. My mother things she feels threatened since he’s not my biological brother..it would put her at ease</td>
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<td>Child is gonna be like you! Being involved w/child. Not be scared.</td>
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<td>Good. It depends on where they come from. (White) Again, it depends where they come from. On TV we kinda get the impression that their all good &amp; everything. Yesterday..all those men picked up for child pornography and child molestering…they were all White.</td>
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<th>TIGER</th>
<th>-Hadn’t met right person until now.</th>
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<td>-My students’ parents would ask “You not married?” Feel kinda sad that they even ask me. It always makes me kinda down to hear them ask me that.</td>
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<td>A caring person, loving &amp; goal-setting. A leader who wants to lead and be sometimes a follower. A good person who loves God, wants a family &amp; no matter what…no matter where we are, we’re together.</td>
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<td>-Won’t be as selfish.. Thinking like “us”. Compromising my thoughts &amp; how I deal w/things.</td>
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<td>-Abuse, being mean. Someone whose selfish. I won’t put up w/that stuff, not working. We’re gonna split the bills..you know sharing doing things. Men, a lot of men don’t make much. Sometimes you have to say I love this person..but he doesn’t have a lot of money. Or, you get somebody who has a lot of money, but you don’t love them.</td>
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<td>-I do, I would I like to get married. I’ve enjoyed my life being single. Its almost like you wanna try something new..experience what your friends are experiencing . I hope to get married one day. I expect to be married. Yes. Its gonna happen one day! - I don’t think its pressure. I think its more, like my best friend. I think its more worry.</td>
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<td>Mom: A good mother is loving. Not really a friend, but confidante. Somebody you can depend on..a good listener. A person who can be disciplined, but then be fun.</td>
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<td>(Black) Less likely to be a good fathers. I hate to say The few good fathers we do have are great. Many fathers are not doing what they’re suppose to be doing</td>
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<td>(White) I know a lot of White men who have kids and they’re not all that into their kids. They may be more likely, but they have their own issues.</td>
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<td>9 On a good day, I am a 9 happy. I don’t have kids. But, I am getting older. All my friends’ kids are in high school. Ill be 50, my kid will be 10 &amp; Ill be fifty. I wanna have a baby even though its almost too late.</td>
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JOYCE

- I honestly don’t think its time, that God was ready from me to get married now. If I wanted to be married, I could be, I just wanted to be married.. a warm body in the room.

- I haven’t met that person… my head’s been down doing my own stuff. It just has to be the right person.

    It just depends. ..The right person for me is somebody who compliment s me & what I have going on. He needs to be saved. Handle a bunch of different challenges at one time. I need someone who can lead a household, is affectionate, and can relate to people. Be able to understand me and I him. He’s gotta make his own money, but just compliment what I have going on. Manage his finances, have emotional intelligence, & can have a conversatio about almost anything.

    -Willing to let him take lead as breadwinner and be at home more.

    -Not willing to marry someone who doesn’t have a relationship w/God. Or who. Or whose not going in same direction as me. Has 401K & retirement, because of my age.

Yes, I wanna be married.. but if it doesn’t happen, I’m not tripping. I’m busying myself doing other things until its time to happen.

-No family pressure. My mother did not say if she liked someone until after I was not dating them. All other siblings are married.

Mom: Strong and giving. My mom was a jovial woman. By the time I came along, she was spiritual and calm.


(Black) Black men know how to hand multiple things. Taking care of family. I’ve seen it more in Black men. They have just has more as any other race, even more, from my perspective.

(White) Not saying that White men don’t know how to do that. But I’ve seen it more in Black men.

Past childbear ing years.

FANNIE LOU

- I sometime s say I have standards or maybe I don’t want to

    Right now, Mr. Right must take care of himself..be health..eat right..and be fit. Self-

    -Separate bank accounts. We can have a joint acct, but make sure I had my separate checking acct. (Best friend lesson)

    -I’m not sure I wanna be married. I go back & forth about it all the time. I love my space. I love Patience for mother & father. My MOTHER had a lot of it. But, my father needed a little more.. he was

    (Black) I think Black men are definitely are good fathers. I think very, very protective. I

7.8, 9..mayb e a 10.

- It depends on the day of
| be married. BUT really, I don’t wanna be miserable when I could be content by myself. Marriage is a lot of work. I saw that in my parents & grandparents. I have zero tolerance for bullshit. In marriage, you gotta contend w/the good & the bad, and I’m not willing to go w/the bad. If it can’t be good, then I don’t need the bad. -I’ve met the right person. I love being free. I don’t like smother love I enjoy freedom. It’s a meeting the right man for where I | sufficient with good credit. Grown children w/no granddaddy drama Good job, close to retirement, self-sustaining. He has to be a spiritual man, religious and spiritual .have a church ome. A great sense of humor..doesn’t have to have six digit bank account, but saving for retirement or great pension. -Not negotiate freaky stuff in the bedroom. I ain’t hitting the dunky dunk. No anal sex..swinging..bondage. I’m not negotiating that. me. I love who I am. I met someone, and scared I have possibly met my soulmate. I don’t expect to be married…maybe when I’m 80..the odds of me are very slim. I don’t know, I have no idea. -No. They’ve given up on me now. I’m 52 they’ve given upon that prospect. My brother has mentioned it since my 30s. I don’t feel that pressure. a strict disciplinarian. My FATHER was very tender. I mean we would still hold hands when I was 15. He was trying to teach me how to be a young woman. even see Latino fathers reigning in on their kids. (White). White fathers let their kids be hog wild. White men take it for granted. the week. I don’t have to worry about the caregiver burden. I worry about not having kids to take care of me, as I get older. My finances are right. I can get a home health aid. My insurance will cover it. |
am now!
April 21, 2015

Michelle Walton
College of Communication & Information Sciences
The University of Alabama
Box 870172


Dear Ms. Walton:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on April 19, 2016. If your research will continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms and advertisement.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

I. Identifying information

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator</th>
<th>Second Investigator</th>
<th>Third Investigator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Names: Michelle M. Walton</td>
<td>Jason Black, Ph.D.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department: CIS</td>
<td>CIS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College: College of Communication</td>
<td>College of Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University: University of Alabama</td>
<td>Univ. of Alabama</td>
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<td>Address: Tuscaloosa, AL 35487</td>
<td>Box 870172</td>
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<td>Telephone: (917) 2014-6996</td>
<td>(205) 657-6755</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>FAX:</td>
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<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:mmwalton@crimson.ua.edu">mmwalton@crimson.ua.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:jason.black@ua.edu">jason.black@ua.edu</a></td>
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Title of Research Project: The Dating Lifestyles Among Heterosexual, Never-Married, Professional African American Women Who Are Childfree

Date Submitted: 3/13/2015
Funding Source: SREB Doctoral Scholars Supplemental Funding/UA Graduate School

Type of Proposal

<table>
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<tr>
<th>☑ New</th>
<th>☐ Revision</th>
<th>☐ Renewal</th>
<th>☐ Completed</th>
<th>☐ Exempt</th>
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Please attach a renewal application
Please attach a continuing review of studies form
Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page

UA faculty or staff member signature:

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review: ☑ Full board ☐ Expedited

IRB Action:

☑ Approved—this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date: 4/19/16

Items approved:

☑ Research protocol (dated 4/20/15)
☑ Informed consent (dated 4/20/15)
☑ Recruitment materials (dated 4/20/15)
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This agreement serves as your consent to participate a study entitled, "The Dating Lives of Heterosexual, Never-Married and Professional African American Women Who are Childfree". This study is being conducted by Michelle M. Walton, a doctoral candidate executing dissertation research at the University of Alabama. This study is being supported through the supplement of SREB Doctoral Scholars funding from the UA Graduate School covering indirect costs related to conducting this research.

The purpose of this study is to examine the dating circumstances facing a growing subgroup of the single population in the U.S: heterosexual, never-married, professional African American women who are childfree. The primary objective of this study is to construct authentic reality from the lived dating experiences of this demographic that either shapes or resists how research and greater society has posed this situation.

The findings of this study will reveal individual attitudes or a consensus that reflects participant experiences of dating and what it means to the lives of a larger group of women. The results of this study seek to support a true reality of lived dating experiences among straight, never-married, professional and childfree African American women.

Qualified persons who meet the criteria will be contacted to participate in the study and also to recommend other similar possible respondents for study participation. Agreeing to participate is confirmation that you meet the criteria: being a straight, never-married professional African American woman has no children.

The primary investigator seeks to interview six to ten participants over the next three months.

Agreeing to participate in this study means Michelle M. Walton will interview you twice in your home or a place of your own choosing to discuss your dating experiences. The interviewer would like to tape record the interview to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. However, if you do not want to be taped, simply tell the interviewer, who will then take handwritten notes.

Each interview should last no more than 90 minutes, depending upon how much information you choose to share. The only cost of this study is the time you offer in being interviewed.

The chief risk to you is that you may find the discussion of your experiences to be sad or stressful. You can control this possibility by not being in the study, by refusing to answer a particular question, or by not telling us things you find be emotionally draining. We can also recommend a counselor to you if you seem to be upset or depressed. Seeing the counselor would be at your own expense.

You may also feel good about knowing that you have helped communication researchers to
learn how to examine and report your experiences in dating.

You are free to decide where we will meet so we can talk without being overheard. We will visit you in the privacy of your home or in another place that is convenient for you.

The only place where your name appears in connection with this study is on this informed consent form. The consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer in Michelle Walton's office, which is locked when she is not there. We are not using a name-number list so there is no way to link a consent form to an interview. When your interview is recorded, we will not use your actual name, so no one will know who you are on the tape. Your interview tape will be transcribed, after which, tapes will be discarded. This should occur within three months of the final interview. When the results are written up, your actual name will not be used and you will be referred to by a pseudonym you can choose.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary. You can choose not to participate. It is your free choice. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on your relationship with the principle investigator or university.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

If you have questions about this study right now, please ask them. If you have questions later on, please call Michelle Walton at 917-204-6996. If you have questions or complaints about your rights as a research participant, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask Michelle for a copy of it. You may also e-mail us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions.

Signature: ______________________________ Date: -

Printed Name: ______________________________

Audio tape consent: ___ yes ___ no (Please check one.)
ARE YOU: AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN, EDUCATED PROFESSIONAL, NEVER MARRIED, CHILDFREE & 35-45 YEARS OLD?

If you fit this criteria, you are being sought to participate in a study to find out the love lives, circumstances, lifestyles and histories of these women are professionally successful but facing challenges the way dating or marriage.

Help a doctoral student at the University of Alabama, earn her PhD and participate in this study!!!

Qualified participants will take part in two interviews that represent a mass of women whose love lives are underrepresented in research!

Take part in creating research history!

Contact: Michelle M. Walton at mmwalton@crimson.ua.edu

UA IRB Approved Document
Approval date: 04-20-15
Expiration date: 04-19-16