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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MARITAL STABILITY
OF OLDER BLACK COUPLES

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Cynthia Elaine Johnson, B.S., M.S.

The Ohio State University

1980

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Family Literature and Later Life

Marriages, including those which remain intact, have both external and internal pressures on them. Contrary to popular opinion, people who have happy marriages do divorce, and people with very unhappy marriages often stay together fifty years or more. Intact marriages often are referred to as "stable" marriages, i.e. ongoing marital relationships in the absence of divorce or separation (Troll, 1979). Marriages range from low-happiness-high-stability marriages to high-happiness-high-stability marriages. According to Hicks and Platt (1970), marital stability is apparently not necessarily contingent upon happiness but marital stability does reflect marital adjustment, i.e. how content a couple is with the overall relationship. Some attention has been given to high-happiness-high-stability marriages, especially among young couples. Little attention, however, has been given to low-happiness-high-stability marriages, especially among older couples. Even less attention has been given to marriages of black couples regardless of age.

Research on the family tends to be primarily focused on the events of early life, early childbearing experiences, the creation and development of new husband-wife units, and peer influences. Some emphasis has been given to research on mate selection, marital adjustment in the early
years, about parenting of young children, sibling rivalry among children and parent-child relationships. Very little research has been done on marital stability and satisfaction in old age or about the quality of the marriage in relation to racial, cultural, or ethnical differences of older couples (Troll, 1979). A review of the literature has shown that little research has been done on the couple as a unit and even less on black couples as a unit.

Although several issues related to the later part of married life have been studied extensively, namely, health and medical care, little is known about the quality of these marital relationships during the later years. All couples have their share of bad times; however, some couples manage to stay together. Marital stability says nothing about the quality of the relationship, nor does it tell anything about the contribution of each partner to the stability of the relationship (Bernard, 1966; Troll, 1979). In addition, it has been indicated that although marital quality and marital stability are highly correlated, it is likely that threshold variables (social and economic factors, premarital factors, and interpersonal and dyadic factors) operate as forces which allow some couples to separate while others stay together (Lewis and Spanier, 1979). Hence, there are some marriages of high quality which terminate and some marriages of low quality which remain intact in spite of what may be an intolerable relationship.

There has been much controversy over the issue of happiness versus stability. Hicks and Platt (1970) indicated that, in the past, the assumption has been made that happiness and stability were interdependent. However, ample evidence is available that instability leads to
unhappiness. However, data is emerging suggesting that stability may not be as dependent on happiness as previously has been assumed (Hicks and Platt, 1970). Happiness in a marriage depends as much on each partner's expectations as on their actual relationship (Troll, 1979). People who have happy marriages get divorced, and people with very unhappy marriages stay together for fifty years or more.

Little research has been done on black married couples. Data on black couples have been rare and frequently have not distinguished between middle-class and lower-class couples. In addition, some authors have reported that much of the research on black families is over-simplified stereotypes that have resulted from individuals seeking political gains and for serving as guidelines for public policy (Hill, 1972; Staples, 1979; Troll, 1979). Research of this nature has been directed toward poverty and poverty programs. Other research on the black family has focused on the structural features of the family rather than on its interactional process. There is a need to study black marriages from both a broader and more indepth perspective (Staples, 1979).

Research to date indicates that the population of older couples, regardless of race, vary widely on many parameters: social class, financial status, birth origin, urban or rural residence, ethnic origin, age at marriage, and family make-up (Troll, 1979). Attitudes toward marriage in the black community are as varied as the people who hold them. One finds stable and unstable, loving and unloving, violent and non-violent, happy and unhappy, in addition to male dominated and female dominated marriages. All of these marital situations exist to a greater or lesser extent in black families (Hill, 1972; Scanzoni, 1971). In other words,
heterogeneity describes marriages of both black and white couples. Black older marriages need to be studied independently from white older marriages so that further research can enlarge the understanding of differences, similarities, and universalities about black older families. Consequently, a more sound basis for public policy relative to all families can be provided.

Factors Influencing Marital Stability

Factors contributing to marital stability have been frequently researched. These factors include marital adjustment, personality characteristics, religiosity, and kin ties, as well as various demographic factors. Researchers in the study of marriage and the family have reported that marital stability is related to marital adjustment. Little is known about the quality and satisfaction of these marital relationships. Existing research has focused primarily on marital adjustment across the family life cycle with particular emphasis on white middle-class couples. Such studies frequently report marital adjustment having a curvilinear effect, that is, the early years and later years are more satisfying and the middle stages are less satisfying (Burr, 1970; Rollins-Feldman, 1970; Schram, 1979; Sporakowski, 1978). Other studies on marital adjustment report that marriages of older couples have improved over time (Lee, 1978; Montgomery, 1978; Stinnet, 1972).

Research studies on marital stability list personality characteristics as a major factor facilitating marital stability. Compatibility has been cited as a component of marital stability. Couples who share common interests, have similar values and philosophies of life, and have positive morales and life satisfactions are more likely to have stable
marriages than couples who have different personality characteristics (Luckey, 1966; Neugarten, 1964; Spence, 1971; Stinnet, 1972).

The literature has cited religiosity as a factor of marital stability. Couples who participate in church services and activities are less likely to have disruptive families (Hampton, 1979; Hill, 1972; Moberg, 1972). These studies also indicate that older couples participate in religious activities and services less frequently than younger couples because of such factors as lack of transportation, poor health, and limited finances.

Kin ties is another factor listed in the literature as contributing to marital stability. Studies have indicated that most kin interactions between families involve exchange of services, financial aid, and emotional support (Bernard, 1966; Komarovsky, 1967; Williams, 1970). These studies also indicate that children and other relatives have significant influences on the longevity of the marriage. In addition, blacks tend to have stronger kin relations than whites (Martin, 1973; Mindel, 1976; Staples, 1971).

Other identified components related to marital stability include demographic characteristics, such as stable employment, higher occupational status, incomes and educational levels of husbands, older age at marriage, and small family size (Glenn, 1978; Kerckhoff, 1979; Mueller, 1975). Individuals with rural orientations are more likely to have stable marriages than individuals with urban orientations (Grasmick, 1978; Kerckhoff and Parrow, 1979). All these factors have been reported to correlate positively with marital happiness.
Demographic Characteristics of Older Couples

What are some of the characteristics of older people? One of these characteristics relates to chronological age. Kalish (1975) identified an older or elderly individual as chronologically sixty-five years old. There are legal and economic bases for this definition, supported by rules regarding mandatory retirement, by income tax regulations, by Social Security requirements, and, to some degree, by popular consent. Using this definition of age, a second characteristic of the elderly has to do with marital status.

The proportion of older men sixty-five and over living with their wives has increased among both blacks and whites. In 1970, fifty-five percent of older black men were living with their spouses, compared to seventy percent of older white men. By 1977, almost fifty-seven percent of all older black men lived with their wives, compared to seventy-six percent of all older white men (Hill, 1978).

The largest group of older white families, approximately eighty percent, is composed of two-person households, whereas among blacks, approximately sixty-seven percent of the older families are of this size (Glicks, 1977; Hendricks, 1977). Since 1970, the older black population has increased from 1.6 to 1.9 million, raising the older black population from seven to eight percent of the total black population. By the end of the century, both black and white couples sixty-five and over are expected to increase nearly forty percent (Siegel, 1979).

It has been reported that one of every five couples with a husband sixty-five and over received income less than $4,000 (In "Facts About Older Americans 1976"). At the upper end of the income scale, one of every
four older couples had incomes of $10,000 or more. About 15.7 percent or thirty-three million persons sixty-five and older were below the poverty level. Among older whites, one of every seven was poor, but approximately thirty-three percent of older blacks were below the poverty level. The income received by poor families was derived mostly from public sources, such as Social Security, Supplemental Security, and public assistance (Hill, 1978).

A third characteristics of older black couples is that of educational levels. In 1970, eight percent of older black males had been graduated from high school compared to twenty-seven percent of older white men. In 1977, the educational comparison for high school completion was seventeen percent black and thirty-eight percent white; this shows less of a gap in education for both races. Older white women completing high school in 1970 was thirty-one percent compared to ten percent of older black women. By 1977, older white women completing high school was forty-one percent compared to fourteen percent for older black women. The gap widened for black and white older women in terms of educational achievement (Hill, 1978).

These demographic statistics show that the total elderly population varies on most parameters of socioeconomic statuses. Older blacks, however, tend to have lower levels of education, less income, larger households, and are more likely to be in poverty than older whites.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purposes in this study were to investigate factors influencing the stability of black couples who had been married fifty years or longer and to investigate how the couples adjusted to external and internal
pressures in the relationship over selected stages of the family life cycle. Essentially, the questions being asked were: What factors contributed to stable black marriages? What changes in the relationship occurred in these marriages over time?

The major factor under study was marital stability which was defined as a marriage lasting fifty years or more. In other words, stable marriages in this study were comprised of ongoing relationships in the absence of divorce, desertion, or separation. Factors believed to influence marital stability were explored. These factors included: (1) marital adjustment, (2) personality characteristics, (3) religiosity, (4) kin ties, and (5) demographic characteristics, including education, income, place of residence, age at marriage, and number of children. These factors have been cited in the literature as predictive of marital stability and were, therefore, considered important to include in the study. Other factors emerged during the study. These included sacrity of the marriage vows, a dominant spouse, and economic hardships. Suggestions for further research emerged from this study on older black families.

This study was descriptive and exploratory in nature. Consequently, a case study approach was used to investigate the problems. This approach allowed the researcher to focus on changes that occurred in the relationships, to probe areas where little information was given, to observe interactions of subjects, to change the ordering of questions, and to repeat questions.

The interactional framework was used to explain the findings in this study. This framework is advantageous in studying older black couples because it focuses on the micro-sociological aspect of the dyadic
relationship and uses qualitative research, i.e. case studies, interviews and questionnaires, as techniques rather than experimentation under controlled settings (Nye and Berardo, 1966; Pigors, 1961; Webb, 1966). This framework has contributed much to methodological procedures in studying both black and older families. It has focused on influences, structures, and variables of common family experiences. Staples (1969, 1971) has suggested that this framework is useful in studying black families with a concentration on the institution of marriage itself and the factors in the social structure which make marriages stable. He and others also recognized that the black family represents a unit of considerable variety and complexity and believe that the socio-dynamic process is an advantageous approach to studying black families (Billingsley, 1968; Troll, 1979; Willie, 1976).

**Objectives**

In order to achieve the purposes in the study, two objectives provided direction. They were as follows:

1. to describe the life experiences of selected older black couples in terms of:
   a. demographic data,
   b. stages of the family life cycle.

2. to identify factors that older black couples perceive to have affected the stability of their marriages.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were investigated in order to meet the objectives in the study:
1. How can older black couples be described in terms of education, income, occupation, age at marriage, number of children, and residence?

2. What effect do kin ties, personality characteristics, and religiosity have on the stability of the marital relationship for older black couples?

3. What kinds of adjustments were made in the marital relationship at various stages of the family life cycle?

4. How satisfied with the marital relationship for the couples perceive themselves being at selected points in the life cycle?

5. How satisfied are the couples with their marriages at the present time?

6. What factors do the couples perceive as contributing to their marital stability?

Definition of Terms

The following definition of terms are presented to clarify the meaning of the concepts used in the study.

Marital stability. A stable marriage means an ongoing marital relationship of at least fifty years in the absence of divorce, separation, or dissolution. The couple has lived together as man and wife throughout the years. Marital stability does not denote the quality of the relationship, but only the years of marriage.

Marital adjustment. Marital adjustment refers to the degree of contentment the couple feels with the overall relationship. Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (1976) was used to measure the degree of adjustment in the marriage, i.e. how content the couples were with their relationship at
the time of the study.

**Personality.** The term "personality" is conceptualized in terms of mental processes or self concepts and overt actions, i.e. the relation between thinking, wishing, and feeling on the one hand and behavior on the other (Kagan, 1971). Personality includes attitudes, habits, emotions, and behaviors which emerges from the impact of culture upon the growth, development, and maturation of an individual. Personality includes both negative and positive traits such as stubbornness, jealousy, self centeredness, friendliness, gratefulness, and consideration. Each positive trait measures +1 whereas each negative trait measure -1 (Meugaten, 1964).

**Religiosity.** Religiosity refers to the identification with a faith and individual participation. It also includes the internalized values focused around the basic faith commitments of the individual (Moberg, 1972). Religiosity is operationally conceptualized as the frequency of church attendance, with high religiosity defined as attending church more than once a month. Low religiosity is defined as attending church once a month or less (McDonald, 1979).

**Kin Ties.** Kin ties refers to the frequency with which relatives interact and the amount and kind of aid exchanged between families of orientation and of procreation (Clayton, 1975). Low kin ties is conceptualized as visits or aid exchanged three times or less per year; medium kin ties, as visits or aid exchanged between four to eight times a year; and high kin ties, as visits or aid exchanged between nine to twelve times or more a year.
Demographic characteristics. The demographic characteristics are defined as follows:

1. **Education.** Number of years of formal school and degrees held by each spouse.

2. **Income.** Total yearly net earning at height of employment.

3. **Residence.** Place where the couples spent most of their lives, either rural or urban.
   a. **Rural.** Community of 2,409 or fewer persons.
   b. **Urban.** Community of 2,500 or more persons.

4. **Age.** Number of years each spouse had lives at the time of the study.

5. **Age at marriage.** Number of years each spouse had lived at the time of marriage.

6. **Number of children.** Total number of children either born to or adopted by a couple.

7. **Older person.** Person who has lived for sixty-five or more years.
   a. **Older black.** A person sixty-five or older who has minority status based on race or ethnicity (Carrow and Smith, 1979).
   b. **Younger aged.** A person between the ages of sixty-five and sixty-nine.
   c. **Older aged.** A person seventy years or older.

**Limitations**

Because of the nature of the study, the accuracy of the data was subject to the recall and perceptions of the respondents. By interviewing each couple as a unit, then separately, the accuracy of the information may have been enhanced.
Limitations of the study also include method and sampling procedures. The presence of taping devices, the pictures selected to represent black family life, and the presence of the researcher or other family members may have hindered the subject from reporting accurate information. Because of the lack of research for both black and white marriages, but especially on black families, generalizations and elaborations were limited.

The case study approach was used to meet the general purpose of the research. Since the sample size is small, the data is restricted in the degree of generalization. However, the method does provide indept insights into a seldom studied phenomenon. The information collected would be more significant had a larger randomly selected sample been used.

Organization of the Study

A brief introduction to the study, a statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, definition of terms, and limitations of the study were included in Chapter One. Chapter Two includes a section on the theoretical views of aging. Studies related to (1) marital adjustment, (2) personality characteristics, (3) religiosity, (4) kin ties, and (5) demographic characteristics conclude the chapter. In Chapter Three, the method of the study is described. The content includes sample criteria and selection, design of the research, instrumentation, preliminary procedures and treatment of the data. The findings of the study are discussed in Chapter Four. Chapter Five includes the summary, conclusions, implications and suggestions for further study.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of the literature includes theoretical views on the study of aging and summaries of research on marital stability. Theoretical perspectives are reviewed under the headings of (1) disengagement, (2) activity, (3) personality, (4) continuity, (5) exchange, and (6) interactional. The present study is based on the interactional framework.

The summary of research studies on marital stability covers the last two decades. During this time period, both the older population and the black population gained attention by researchers. Marital stability studies are organized under the headings of (1) marital adjustment, (2) personality characteristics, (3) religiosity, (4) kin ties, and (5) demographic characteristics, i.e. socioeconomic status, education, age at marriage, type of job, and residence. The studies in each category are organized according to race of the subjects. First, studies with a white sample of subjects will be reviewed; second, those with both white and black subjects; and third, those with only black subjects.

Theoretical Views on Aging

During the 60's and 70's, theoretical approaches to aging gained attention, especially the social theories of aging. In addition, various views pertaining to understanding the black family emerged or were expanded upon. This section will summarize some of the major theories on aging.
with emphasis on the interactional framework, which will be used in explaining the results of older blacks in this study. The theories summarized include: (1) disengagement, (2) activity, (3) personality, (4) continuity, (5) exchange, and (6) interactional.

**Disengagement Theory**

The disengagement theory focuses on an explanation of the tendency of older people to withdraw from activities in the world around them (Hendricks, 1977; Troll, 1979). Older people sometimes disengage from their roles outside their families, but they rarely disengage from their involvement inside their families. They disengage into rather than from their families. In other words, disengagement theory describes role involvement with increasing age.

Disengagement theory attempts to predict how one might respond to old age. The theory contends that it is both normal and inevitable that people will decrease their activity and seek more passive roles as they age. The timing and form of disengagement varies from individual to individual. According to Barrow and Smith (1979), disengagement is a mutual withdrawal of the old from society and society from the old in order to ensure its own optimal functioning. Older individuals, wishing to escape stress resulting from recognizing their own diminishing capacity, collaborate and consent in this withdrawal.

The process involves loosening social ties due to lessened social interaction. Awareness of the shortness of time before death, perceptions of a narrowing of life experiences, and a sense of loss of self-esteem all signal the onset of disengagement. Ultimately, society's need for persons with new energy and skills, rather than the wishes of the aged individual, dictates when disengagement takes place. (Barrow and Smith, 1979, p. 54)
There are controversies and unsettled questions about the disengagement theory relevant to the (1) role of the individual, (2) the role of society, and (3) satisfaction versus dissatisfaction with disengagement. First, some older individuals disengage and others do not. The extent of disengagement may depend upon the life experiences and closeness to death. Second, it has been argued that the withdrawal of society from its older members is necessary for the smooth operation and survival of the social system. Perhaps many withdrawal actions of older people are in reaction to a society that excludes them. Third, the disengagement theory does not adequately explain why some people are happy in an active old age and others are not so active and involved in life.

**Activity Theory**

Like the disengagement theory, the activity theory attempts to predict how one might respond to old age. Activity theory implies that social activity is important to the old in maintaining their health and well-being. Studies have shown that more active people, i.e. mentally, physically, socially, are better adjusted than non-active people (Barrow and Smith, 1979; Hendricks, 1977). These studies predict that individuals who remain socially active will more likely achieve positive self-images, social integration, satisfaction with life, and will probably age successfully. The activity theorists state that people must retain adequate levels of social activity if they are to age successfully.

Activity theory implies that if older people establish new roles, continue social functioning, establish rules to guide their behavior and receive support from society, old age could be as rewarding as any other stage of the life cycle. This may be difficult to achieve for persons
who have already adopted ways of doing things. A major weakness of this theory is that little attention has been directed to the differences between types of activities or an individual's ability to exert any significant control over either the roles themselves or the performance of those roles (Hendricks, 1977). Busying oneself with activities may not in itself contribute to adjustment.

**Personality Theory**

Personality theory directs attention to the study of the factors that make up the personality, such as interests, motivation, and awareness. According to Neugarten (1964), personality factors explain why some people disengage and others do not and why some aged individuals are satisfied with an active lifestyle while others prefer disengagement.

Neugarten (1964) outlined four personality patterns of old persons: integrated, defended, passive, and unintegrated. Barrow and Smith (1979) describe these types as follows:

1. **Integrated.** Persons classified as integrated are mature, happy individuals who vary in the amount of activities they engage in. They are reorganizers who maintain active lives and substitute new activities for lost ones, the focused who show medium levels of activity, and the disengaged who are content to move away from role commitments and activity.

2. **Defended.** These individuals are striving, ambitious, and achievement-oriented. They either hold on to the roles of the middle age or view the world as collapsing and becoming preoccupied with their losses.

3. **Passive-dependent.** Passive-dependent individuals may be the succorance-seeking who have strong dependency needs or the apathetic who are passive and unhappy.
4. **Unintegrated.** Persons in this category show a disorganization pattern of aging and suffer mental health impairment.

Personality theory does not adequately explain the aging process, although it does consider factors other than those that compose the personality in adapting to old age. Research has indicated that older personalities are most often merely the extension of middle-age coping styles into later life (Hendricks, 1977). In other words, personalities do not change appreciably through most of adulthood.

**Continuity Theory**

Continuity theory is linked to personality theory. Neugarten (1964) has proposed that a person's general pattern of adaptation to old age can be predicted at around age fifty. According to the continuity theory, the personality formed early in life continues throughout the life span with no basic changes. This theory implies that neither activity nor disengagement theory explains adjustment to aging. Parrow and Smith (1979) contend that adjustment is dependent on past ability to adjust to life situations and on the ability to continue the life patterns of former years. This approach is consistent with the core of personality theory which relates adult personality to the growth and adjustment patterns of the formative years of life. This theory suggests that a core personality is achieved by adulthood. Coping mechanisms have been established, and ego defenses have become defined (Barrow and Smith, 1979). The personality theorists acknowledge that factors other than those that make up the personality affect adaptation to old age. For example, cognition and financial status influence this adaptation.
The continuity theory explains predictive personality behavior and how such individuals may adjust to life. However, the theory does not explain unpredictable personality patterns. This theory also fails to describe individuals who experience crises or losses in old age and, consequently, have to develop new coping mechanisms or expressive personality changes.

Exchange Theory

Exchange theory, borrowed from sociological theory, has gained attention by gerontologists in the past decade. Exchange theory has the following four basic premises:

1. Individuals and groups act to maximize rewards and minimize costs.
2. The individual uses past experiences to predict the outcomes of similar exchanges in the present.
3. An individual will maintain an interaction if it continues to be more rewarding than costly.
4. When one individual is dependent upon another, the latter accrues power (Turner, 1979).

Personal losses of aged people may include the loss of finances, loss of demand for skills, loss of social contacts, loss of meaningful tasks, and loss of a reference group (Leslie, 1980).

The exchange theorists place much emphasis on power, the loss of power, rewards, and the loss of rewards. Life is a series of exchanges that add to or subtract from one's store of power and prestige. These exchanges may be more than economic transactions and may include psychological satisfaction and need gratification (Barrow and Smith, 1979).
This theory does not adequately explain why some aged couples who are powerless remain viable and forceful in old age, why some older individuals have to pay higher prices for the same exchanges than others, and why some older individuals survive and remain active regardless of their losses. In addition, an imbalance of power for the older person could lead to withdrawal, inactivity, decrease in status and role loss.

Interactional Theory

The interactional framework views the dynamic relationship between husband and wife and the family as a unit (Broderick, 1971; Christensen, 1964). It focuses on shifts in roles relationships, individual roles, the couple as a unit, and the quality of human relationships, including the frequency of contacts among relatives, mutual obligations and helping patterns, and bonds and feelings between people (Troll, 1970).

The interactional approach takes into account historical events and circumstances of the family (Troll, 1979). Marital accord, marital discord, family accord, and family discord have been the focus of much study within this framework, making references to dynamic relationships, marital equilibrium and internal workings of families (Nye and Perardo, 1966).

According to Schvaneveldt (1966), the interactional framework, commonly referred to as role theory, views the couple as a unity of interacting personalities, a living, changing unit. Role assignments of each spouse are dynamic in terms of needs, behavior patterns, and adjustment processes. Interaction in each stage of family development determines and gives direction to interaction in the subsequent stage of family action. These processes account for role-playing, status relations, communication problems, decision-making, stress reactions, and socialization
processes. Little attempt is made to view the overall institutional or cross-cultural relationships of family structure and function.

According to Schvaneveldt (1966), the interactional theory focuses on the family as an arena which provides for the emergence of conflicts, for children to grow at different rates, and for parents to reconcile their own inner desires. In addition, the interactional theory focuses on individual differences and patterns of behavior as they relate to family functioning.

Interactional theory includes the following assumptions:

1. Man lives in a symbolic as well as physical environment and is stimulated in social situations to act by symbols as well as by physical stimuli.

2. Through symbols, a man has the capacity to stimulate others in ways other than those in which he himself is stimulated. Role taking is involved in all communications by means of significant others.

3. Man has the capacity to learn huge numbers of meanings and values through symbolic communication. This is the process of socialization.

4. Symbols appear in social-stimulus situations both as isolated entities and as clusters.

5. Thinking is the process by which possible symbolic solutions and other future courses of action are examined, assessed for their relative advantages and disadvantages in terms of the values of the individual, and one of them chosen for action.

6. Interaction cannot be freely understood by means of external observation.
7. It is assumed that the human being is an actor as well as a reactor.
8. Man must be studied on his own level and environment.
9. The basic unit of observation is interaction.
10. Social conduct is most immediately a function of the social milieu.
11. The relationship represents more than the sum of the personalities that make it up. The dynamics of the individual and group are therefore not interchangeable. An effect on the one partner in the relationship will always influence the behavior of the other (Christensen, 1964; Schvaneveldt, 1966; Turner, 1978).

Marital Adjustment

The factor, marital adjustment, concerns determining how content a couple is with their marital relationship. It does not reflect the quality of the relationship; neither does it make comparisons with other relationships. It reflects how pleased the couple is with the overall relationship. Studies on marital adjustment have been conducted as they relate to the family life cycle, age at marriage, marital roles, and education.

Studies relating to the family life cycle include those stages identified by Duvall (1967). The eight stages in the family life cycle are as follows:

1. Beginning families (couples married zero to ten years without children)
2. Early childbearing families (oldest child under three)
3. Families with preschool children (oldest child over five and under thirteen)
4. Families with teenagers (oldest child over twelve and living at home)
5. **Families as launching centers** (oldest child gone to youngest's leaving home)

6. **Families of middle years** (empty nest to retirement)

7. **Families in retirement** (one spouse retired to onset of disability)

8. **Families in old age** (one spouse disabled to death of one spouse)

What happens to marital satisfaction and adjustment as the length of marriage increases? Several early studies indicate that marital satisfaction declines over the years of married life. For the 400 couples in a longitudinal study conducted by Burgess-Wallen which began in 1936, marital adjustment significantly declined from the early years of marriage to the later years. There were reported declines in shared activities, communication, and sexual activities. Other studies (Blood and Wolfe, 1939; Blood, 1962; Burgess, 1939) also indicated that marital adjustment measures evidenced a consistent decline following the newly married stage with either a continuation of the decrease or a leveling in the later years. Blood contends that this deterioration may be due to psychological losses or a growing sense of disenchantment with the partner. In addition, this deterioration may be social in the sense that the partners' lives become increasingly disengaged from one another. At the other extreme, some manage to resist the pervasive processes of decay.

More recent studies have refuted earlier studies. There are a few studies which report marital satisfaction or adjustment as having a curvilinear effect, that is, marital satisfaction is high among young married couples, declines after the birth of the first child through the launching stage and then increases during the postparental stage (Rollins-Feldman, 1970; Schram, 1979). For example, Burr (1970), in a study of 147 intact
couples, found that the schoolage stage was less satisfying and more difficult than other stages. This study indicated that the early and later stages were more satisfying and the middle stages were less satisfying. It was concluded that satisfaction with various aspects of marriage gradually decreased over the life cycle, and the pre-launching stage was perhaps the most difficult. The results may be biased toward the middle-class family since the lower socioeconomic strata from the census tracts was eliminated as subjects for this study.

Rollins and Feldman (1970) conducted a similar study using questionnaire data from both husbands and wives in 799 middle-class families. Eighty percent of the spouses indicated that things were going well in their marriages all of the time or most of the time. They reported that the pattern of general marital satisfaction for wives included a steady decline from the beginning to the schoolage stage, then a leveling off with a rapid increase from the empty nest to the retired stage of the family life cycle. For the husbands, there was a slight decline from the beginning to the schoolage stage, a slight increase to the empty nest stage, and then a rapid increase to the retired stage. The amount of change for husbands was much less than that for wives.

These data, the authors concluded, suggest that marriage has very different meanings for husbands than for wives and that very different events within or outside the marriage and/or family influence the developmental pattern of marital satisfaction in men and women.

Sporakowski and Hughston's study (1978) also supports the notion of curvilinearity. Their study sample included forty couples who have been married fifty years or more. The stages seen as most satisfying were the
childrearing, preschool, and aging stages. With regard to least satisfaction, the childbearing, launching, and middle stages were most often indicated. Both males and females saw themselves as experiencing more satisfying and unsatisfying aspects as compared to their perceptions of their spouses. This appears to confirm the couple's overall positive experience with marriage. The authors stated that the persons interviewed reported marriage as a very positive experience. The author's findings in this study agree with findings of previous investigators in which marriage at earlier and later stages of the life cycle have been reported to be more satisfying, whereas the middle stages have been reported to be less satisfying.

Still other studies conclude that the question of curvilinearity is not yet settled. One such study conducted by Spanier, Lewis and Cole (1975) included a systematic random sample of 326 matched pairs of married couples in Georgia; 265 couples in a stratified area probability sample in Iowa and a stratified area probability sample of 192 matched pairs in Ohio. The findings indicated limited support for the interpretation of curvilinearity. The Ohio data demonstrated a curvilinear relationship which was significant at the .05 level for males and the .01 level for females. The Georgia and Iowa relationships, however, were not significantly curvilinear for males or females. The authors stated that of major importance in this and other studies of this kind is the reliance upon cross-sectional as opposed to longitudinal data. It was concluded that the higher means reported for marital adjustment in later stages of the family life cycle were more a function of chronological age or age-related perceptions than of actual changes in the marital relationship.
Still other studies on marital adjustment report that older married couples evaluate their marriages in a positive manner, and that their marriages have improved over time (Lee, 1978; Montgomery, 1978; Rollins-Feldman, 1970). Stinnet (1972), in a study of 408 husbands and wives aged sixty to eighty-nine, found that these marriages had become better over time which is in sharp contrast with the prevalent image of marital satisfaction in the later years.

The early studies on marital satisfaction suggest progressive marital disenchantment over the life cycle. Later studies suggest that although there may have been difficulties in the beginning stages of the relationship, satisfaction may have increased as a result of resolution of problems early in the relationship or the minimization of existing problems because of the investment in the marriage. Schram (1979) supports the latter position. She suggests that older couples, now in the later stages of family life, were probably socialized, married, and formed their families of procreation within more traditional milieus, for example, commitment to marriage and avoidance of divorce, as well as other factors. In addition, Hicks and Platt (1970) illustrated two types of marriages that may fit Schram's position, the institutional and companionship marriages. In the institutional marriage, there is adherence to traditional role specifications, customs, and mores. These factors would be most significant to the success or happiness of the marriage. The husband's role is held to be the more instrumental; the wife's role, the more expressive integrative. The companionship marriage places greater emphasis on the affective aspects of the relationship. Emphasis is placed on personality interaction: role specifications are
taken for granted. Expression of love, communication, and esteem for spouse characterize the companionship relationship. Hicks and Platt's typology support the notion of the investment in the marriage.

Glenn (1975) also noted that greater happiness or enjoyment of life was in the postparental category. His data was taken from the Gallup and National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of individuals aged forty to fifty-nine. He concluded that age was negatively related to reported well-being. The individuals in the middle-age category reported higher satisfaction in the postparental stage than the author expected. The findings of this study indicated that the children's leaving home did not typically lead to an enduring decline in the psychological well-being of middle-age persons.

Some studies have reported marital morale as an aid to marital stability. For example, Lee (1978) studied 258 married males and 181 females sixty years and over. A positive relationship was found between satisfaction and morale. Men were more responsive to the simple presence of a spouse whereas women were more sensitive to the quality of the marital relationship. Health, according to this data, was a primary correlate to morale among elderly individuals. Lee (1977) also investigated the relationship between age at marriage, marital role performance and marital satisfaction of 354 couples married six years or less. Small positive associations were found to exist between age at marriage and marital role performance.

Gibbs (1976), in a study of sixty black couples, found that the spouses considered the companionship aspects of marriage to be important in marriage. Communication, especially verbal self-disclosure, was
important to marital satisfaction. For husbands, their own and their wives' communicative behavior were the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction. For wives, their own and their husbands' socioeconomic success was as predictive of satisfaction as their own husbands' communicative behavior, suggesting an ambivalence among black wives concerning their own marital investment. These findings are related to Hicks and Platt's (1979) aspects of the companionship marriage.

Still in another study of 128 couples (seventy-eight Blacks, eighty-two Anglos, and ninety-six Chicanos), McCurdy's (1978) results support the theory that the stronger the adherence to traditional role relationships, the greater the marital satisfaction and the fewer the family problems, regardless of ethnicity. Again, this study supports Hicks and Platt's (1970) and Schram's (1979) concept of adherence to traditional roles and marital stability.

Overall, these studies suggest that satisfaction is a major factor contributing to marital stability and that there may be other factors aiding in the overall contentment of the relationship. These studies also suggest that husbands are less affected by stages in the family life cycle. Wives, however, show a decrease in general marital satisfaction during the childbearing and childrearing phases. Finally, it is suggested that marriages that are low in stability may be partly due to lower levels of traditional marital role performance, less communication, lower morale, and less companionship.

**Personality Characteristics**

Several personality factors contributing to marital stability have been mentioned in the literature. Stinnet (1972), in a study of married
couples aged sixty and over, found that the older people reported respect, sharing common interests, and being in love as factors contributing to their successful marriages. Personality incompatibility was reported to be the basic cause of marital problems. Companionship and being able to express true feeling to each other were most often chosen as the most rewarding aspects of the relationship. Having different integrative measures, such as values and philosophies of life and lack of mutual interests, were often reported as the two aspects of the marriages which presented conflicts. Stinnet's findings are similar to those of other studies (Clayton, 1975; Levinger, 1972; Williams, 1970).

Luckey (1966) indicated that of the eighty couples married twenty-one years or less in her study, personality qualities, such as being admired, grateful, cooperative, friendly, affectionate, considerate, and helpful, were reported as being important to the marriage. The longer the couples were married, the more they saw their mates as always giving advice, acting important, selfish, shrewd, unfriendly, touchy, and bitter. These negative traits developed over the years. However, they saw themselves as knowing how to cope with such negative attitudes and being less influenced by their spouses the longer they were married.

Duvall (1967) indicated that older men and women do become petulant, demanding, and difficult to please. This implies that it may not be the marital relationship any more than simply being older, having less financial security, and loss of function, that cause older people to see themselves and others see them as being bitter, resentful, and having low morales and life satisfactions. For example, Hutchinson (1975) obtained survey data from 893 Caucasian, non-Latin respondents
who either lived alone or with their spouse, and who could be classified as either poverty level or low-income respondents. The results indicated that feelings of loneliness were significantly higher for poverty level females, the widowed, divorced, and separated. With minor exceptions, the author stated that neither sex nor marital status made a difference on morale and life satisfaction for the poverty level elderly; for low income elderly, the widowed reported themselves considerably more negatively than did the married. It was concluded that either very low income or widowhood was associated with lower morale and life satisfaction among the elderly.

In addition to morale, life satisfaction and personality traits, Spence (1971) reported on personality characteristics of mothers in the empty nest period. Case material was obtained from twenty-seven white, middle-class mothers. He noted that this period was a transition period and that the mothers reported they were bound by commitments which they expected by this time in their life to have met. As a consequence, they assumed they had somehow failed which was reflected in poor self-concepts. The author concluded that poor self-concepts may be characteristic of individuals who are in transition from one stage to another and that these individuals may portray different personality traits at other stages of the life cycle.

Neugarten (1964, p. 190) identified personality types of the older population according to sex. They included the following:
<table>
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<th>Male Types</th>
<th>Female Types</th>
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<tr>
<td>integrated</td>
<td>integrated</td>
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<td>introspective</td>
<td>self-doubting</td>
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<td>defended</td>
<td>competitive</td>
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<td>passive-dependent</td>
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<td>constricted</td>
<td>defended-constricted</td>
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<td>unintegrated</td>
<td>unintegrated</td>
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Neugarten stated that older people seem to move toward more eccentric, self-preoccupied positions and to attend increasingly to the control and the satisfaction of personal needs. Such factors as status, health, financial resources, and marital status are more decisive than chronological age in influencing degrees of adjustment in people who are old. Moberg (1972) supports this position of the above mentioned factors influencing the personality of old people. In addition, he suggests that the attitudes of older people are developed much earlier in life, are persistent, and are not changed by efforts to substitute other factors or change established ways of thinking or doing things.

Duvall (1967) has indicated that a significant number of older men and women find the later years of life the most fruitful of all and that life does not become a burden for them nor their families. This is related to the type of perceptions they have of themselves and the type of perception they project to others. Older persons who maintain strong senses of pride, independence, and respect are able to project positive images of themselves (Narrow and Smith, 1979). This would apply to those married as well as those that are not married.
Studies have been conducted as they relate to sex roles, economic factors, and functions of marriage. Scanzoni (1975), in a sample of 3100 black and white respondents from metropolitan areas of the east-north-central region of the United States, compared measures of sex role norms, self-concept, and task performance evaluation of wives. Twenty-five percent of the sample was black and seventy-five percent white. Blacks emerged as more egalitarian on the innovative and behavioral measures of roles, but less egalitarian on the neo-traditional and more ideological sex role dimensions. Economic satisfaction (and the factors that account for it) helped to account for perceptions of marital satisfaction. However, one significant aspect of the study was the definition of the situation as the wife perceived it. It was concluded that economic satisfaction may be linked to status aspirations, and to perceptions of how well significant others are doing.

Another study relating to the definition of the situation and marital stability included forty couples married fifty years or more. Structured interviews using the Locke-Wallace Short Form Marital Adjustment instrument and the Interpersonal Checklist were conducted by Soorakowski and Hughston (1978). The wives defined the following elements in the marital relationship and personality: love; giving and taking, having children, a family, a home; the joining of two people; God and the Bible; forever and being happy. The husbands defined the following elements as the most important elements in a marital relationship: forever, companionship, and working together to make a marriage grow. Commitment played a major role for both spouses. Overall, males rated their marriages higher on the Locke-Wallace Scale than the females, and males
were rated higher by the females than the females rated themselves. On
the happiness rating scale, males rated themselves higher than the fe-
males rated themselves, and females rated their spouses higher than
males did. For males, the largest differences between self-perceived
and spouse-perceived occurred on in-laws, philosophy of life and affect-
tion. This study indicated that marital adjustment was dependent to a
degree upon the definition each marital partner gave to the relationship
and that males and females may have had different definitions of the ad-
justments in the relationship.

Williams and Stockton (1973) interviewed 321 black families in one
neighborhood of a large southwestern city to determine family structure
and function and their relationship to personality. Personality was in-
dexed by determining if the family members shared common goals, helped
with domestic chores, and stimulated conversation. The authors listed
three family functions that emerged: instrumental, expressive, and in-
strumental-expressive. Instrumental functions (education, job stability,
income, and health care) indicated a family's resources. The most sali-
ent fact in this study was the presence of both a husband and wife in
the household. Expressive function (belonging, self-worth, adjustment
to the marriage role, the companionship of the husband and wife, and fam-
ily cohesion) represented the second type. Instrumental-expressive func-
tion included successful socialization of children, education of children,
adjustment to the parent role, and the mental health of the children. In
this study, personality development included not just the heads of the
households, but the influence of children as well. Children, it was not-
ed, did influence the personality development of the parents.
These studies suggest that personality compatibility aids in marital stability and that the saliency of personality characteristics change over time. This may be a factor of age as well as experiences the couples may have faced in the marital relationship.

Religiosity

In addition to marital adjustment and personality characteristics, religion has been reported to contribute to marital stability and success. This phenomena is significant only insofar as it is shared by both husband and wife (Blood, 1962). Religion is defined as identification with a common faith and participation in religious services. If either is missing, according to Blood (1962), religion becomes a disintegrative force in family relations.

Religion is much broader than church related activities. Moberg (1972) indicated that religion includes the internalized values focused around the basic faith commitments of the individual. These commitments influence church-related activities and other internal religious practices as well as self-images and private religious behavior, i.e. as silent prayer and meditation, which may not be observable to others. Moberg further states that:

...religion is important at all stages of the life cycle and that all developmental tasks, family goals, and social relationships are influenced by religion, even when they are not identified as "religious" and even if the persons involved feel that there is no religious dimension to their lives. (p. 47)

Conversely, the more actively husband and wife participate jointly in the same faith, the greater the family solidarity and happiness. It has been reported that religious families have a lower divorce rate than
non-religious families. Moberg (1972) and Blood (1972) support this notion and suggest that perhaps the church serves as an integrating or uniting agency which aids families in achieving common goals and resolving conflicts. Blood noted that, especially in the latter half of marriage, couples in trouble drop out of church. Religion is one of the attractions and one of the barriers of a relationship that holds it together according to Levinger (1972). It has been found, too, that there is a slight tendency for more religious males to both delay marriage and to experience greater marital satisfaction when they do marry than less religious or non-religious males (Lee, 1978).

Little research has been conducted in the last decade on religiosity and its effect upon marital stability, especially on older couples. Mueller and Johnson (1975), in a nationwide survey of 2,482 adults, found a higher religious participation among the married individuals without children.

Older persons' church participation varies. According to Moberg (1972) the variations in church participation is directly related to physical capabilities, transportation availability, economic costs, and other factors. Moberg further indicates that the opinion that religion is important is held proportionately more by people past sixty-five than by younger adults. Furthermore, conservative or traditional religious beliefs are held by more of the elderly than of young and middle-aged people. The respondents in Project Find (1970) reported religious activities to be a major part of their activities. Nearly sixty percent named a synagogue or church as the organization to which they belonged.
In relation to activities, Jackson (1972) interviewed 135 married subjects aged fifty and above using the Adam's Kinship Schedule. She found that spouse activities were primarily related to joint activities both within and outside the home. The subjects were most likely to attend church together. Next in frequency of participation was visiting with relatives, shopping and vacationing. The author concluded that limited incomes and inadequate transportation within the sample area may have been barriers to greater participation.

Religion is very much a part of black family life. This includes the religious rite of passages, baptism, christening or infant dedication, confirmation and other ceremonies, such as marriage and death (Du-Bois, 1971; Jackson, 1972; Moberg, 1972). Hampton (1979), in a survey of 575 married black couples with families, reported that one of the strengths of the black family life was its strong religious orientation. In those families where the husband never, or rarely, attended religious services, there was a significantly higher rate of family disruption than in families where the husband attended services regularly. This finding is similar to that of Hill (1972). Hill mentioned that blacks have used religion as a mechanism for survival and advancement throughout their history in America and that this is one factor that has accounted for the family staying together.

The church is historical to the black family. The black family has its roots in the religious institutions. The church was the place where character and leadership developed. The purpose of religious training was to stress the continuity of existence of persons through identification and positive interaction with the home-school-community
environments. It was through these forces that personal worth, a sense of identity, group integrity, and community support were identified (Frazier, 1971; Kunkel, 1971; Staples, 1971; Wilson, 1972). DuBois (1971) further indicated that social authority, work principles, family functions, social life and amusements all have their roots in the religious beliefs of blacks. This religious structure, according to DuBois, became the vehicle whereby the dominant pattern of monogamous and stable family life, with the male as head and provider, became institutionalized among black American culture.

Barrow and Smith (1979) reported that the black church has been a frame of reference for coping with the oppressive forces of racial discrimination and has played a vital role in the survival and advancement of blacks. They also noted that the church has provided the older blacks with a place where he or she can feel like somebody and be somebody. Martin and Martin (1978) found in a study of thirty extended families that many of the older blacks believed in the "old time religion", i.e. they felt close enough to God to communicate with Him on a personal basis. The Martins further stated that childrearing in black family tradition rested upon religious beliefs. This included strict discipline, respect for parental authority and reliance upon experience. In their study, although the older individuals did not attend church regularly, they believed it important for young people to establish a relationship with God by attending church.

The church continues to function as an important element in the organized life of blacks, and, it continued to communicate and to reinforce dominant family values and behaviors. Scanzoni (1971) reported that
about eighty percent of blacks remain involved to some extent in the church. According to Scanzoni, blacks with greater status are more likely to be religiously involved than blacks with lesser status. This involvement is a chief means of transmitting and reinforcing dominant conjugal patterns.

The studies on religiosity indicated that older blacks continue to participate in religious activities and services but to a lesser degree because of such factors as transportation, poor health, and financial status. Family life was found to be deeply rooted in the religious beliefs of blacks.

*Kin Ties*

Kin ties, the frequency with which relatives interact and the existence and amount and kinds of aid exchanged between families of orientation and procreation, is another factor reported in the literature as contributing to marital stability. Studies have indicated that kin ties and interactions between families involve exchange of services, financial aid and emotional support from children to parent and from parent to children (Bernard, 1966; Clayton, 1975; Komarovsky, 1967; Norton and Glick, 1976; Williams, 1970).

Several studies have been conducted on kin relation, especially among black families. Hill (1972) listed strong kinship bonds as one of the strengths of black families. He defined family strengths as those traits which facilitate the ability of the family to meet the needs of its members and the demands upon it by systems outside the family unit. It is generally acknowledged that the black family kinship is more extensive and cohesive than kinship bonds among the white population across
all socioeconomic levels (Hill, 1978; Mindel, 1976; Norton and Glick, 1976). Black families are much more likely than white families to have young children in them. This is especially true for older families headed by black women (Hill, 1978). Approximately twenty percent of older black families have other children, especially grandchildren under the age of eighteen, living in their homes. This is four times greater than the rate for older white families (Hendricks, 1977; Woehrer, 1978). The extended kin of blacks frequently includes siblings, nieces, nephews, and grandchildren (Woehrer, 1978). Woehrer also stated that the exchange between kin in black families is more difficult to compare to white families because the sharing of resources and patterns of kinship exchange are more complex. In black families, relatives live together to share in financial resources and help with childrearing. This mutual sharing and exchange takes place within a family context with culturally defined expectations.

The kin family cohesion of black families also provides a pattern for informal foster care and adoption services to children among older families, especially those headed by women. Black older individuals are more likely to take others into their household rather than permit themselves to be taken into the households of younger relatives than white older individuals (Hill, 1978).

Sussman (1977) refers to this relationship of aid and exchanges among relatives as "linking". Linking is a part of the socialization process. According to Sussman,

...the objective is to develop skills and knowledge for dealing with bureaucratic organizations in order to meet family needs and objectives in a particular life sector... the primary modalities of the exchange system are visitation,
communication, emotional and social support, financial aid, advice and child care. Such exchanges are not universal or equal and within all networks conflicts as well as cooperation exists. (p. 13)

This linking is the built-in mutual aid system in black extended families and is a major survival component. Martin and Martin (1978). in a study of thirty extended families, concluded that without this survival component mechanism, the extended family structure would be jeopardized. The extended family, which is the functional unit of the black family, may serve to buffer the psychological isolation and poverty of older individuals and this tight kinship network may be a mechanism for providing extra emotional and economic support for family members (Hill, 1978; Mindel, 1976; Staples, 1971).

In her study of 135 black married subjects married fifty years and above, Jackson (1972) found that individuals depend upon their families as the first source of assistance. When they have children, they turn toward them and, most often, their children respond. In the absence of children, they direct their needs toward other relatives and those relatives respond as well. Family functioning is still highly supportative.

Both black and white aging couples differ in the degree of closeness and dependence that exists between them, in the number and importance of the things they do together, and in the closeness of their relationship with children, other relatives, and outsiders.

Leslie (1980) has identified four types of family cohesiveness as they affect family relations. These types include:

1. **High family cohesion—close knit network.** Husband and wife are emotionally close to one another and share interests and activities. These are meaningful ties and relationships with relatives and others.
The couple does things together with other people (own adult children, other relatives and friends).

2. **High family cohesion—loose knit network.** The couple shares intimacy and joint interests and activities, but their relationships with others are fewer and less important. The spouses do virtually everything together but do little with their children or with others. They are not active in groups or organizations.

3. **Low family cohesion—close knit network.** There is often the comfort and security that accompany long standing habitual adjustments. The partners may get along well enough, but they are not particularly close. Each spouse has his or her own important interests that are pursued without the other. Each spouse has relationships with persons or groups outside the marriage that give most of the meaning to life.

4. **Loose family cohesion—loose knit network.** Since there is little closeness in the marriage relationship, it can neither absorb the interests nor meet the needs of either partner. Moreover these couples also have little in the way of important relationships with anyone other than the marriage partner.

Little research has yet been done to verify the meaningfulness of these types, or to determine what proportion of the population falls into the various categories. These categories do, however, according to Leslie, relate with the common experience of people observed in aging couples.

Another type of kinship typology was used by Farber (1977) to study social contacts, kinship mapping, and family norms among a sample of 248 university students. The typology included four types of models: (1)
Canon Law Model - members of one's family of procreation and of orientation constitute the core of kinship; all other relatives are placed in successive layers in accordance with their distance from the individual's nuclear family; (2) Genetic Model - related by blood, shared chromosomes; (3) Civil Code Model - used to compute the distance between an individual and his/her ancestors; and (4) Parental Orders Model - used to study property settlement. Farber suggested that the results from the study showed that this typology was a useful way of understanding modern kinship. However, because a select sample was used, significant differences were not reported and should they have been reported, may have been misleading.

The concept of "filial responsibility" has been studied as it relates to kin ties. Seelbach (1978) defined filial responsibility as the adult offsprings' obligations to meet the needs of their aging parents. It emphasizes "duty" and is usually associated with protection, care and economic support. Seelbach's sample consisted of 1,002 older individuals aged sixty-five or older (74.3 percent black; 25.7 percent white). The purpose in the study was to determine the correlates of older persons' filial responsibility expectations and realizations. The author reported that the findings suggested that as one becomes older, one tends to expect more from offsprings in the way of filial aid and support. This might be due to the increasing dependencies associated with advanced age. No significant differences were found between black and white individuals when compared in terms of their filial expectations and realizations.

Findings from a study by Hays and Mindel (1973) reported not only the exchange of aid between relatives, but the increasing frequency of
aid in black and white families. The study sample included seventy-six matched pairs of black and white couples. The authors indicated that the mean number of relatives was reported higher for black families than for white families in all categories of relatives except parents. In the case of black families, nonparental kin (except for cousins) were seen in greater numbers than parents whereas among the white families, the parents were seen more often. The total mean of relatives seen per week was 4.8 for the blacks and 2.00 for the whites in the study. This study supports other studies already mentioned in that black families have more intensive and extensive kin ties than white families.

Most of the literature on kin ties has been related to families of orientation and procreation. However, Hess and Waring (1978) reported another dimension of kin ties, i.e. a trend toward an increasing public responsibility for income maintenance and primary health care of the aged. Consequently, aid to older parents may be more voluntary from children and kin; thus removing some of the burden from the kinship structure. This trend, as noted by the authors, needs further investigation to determine what effect public assistance has on kin relations.

The studies on kin ties reported that cohesiveness characterizes black families. This cohesiveness had aided in marital stability of black families, not only financially, but emotionally and psychologically as well. When older families are in need, whether black or white, they turn to their children first, and other relatives second. The degree to which this occurs is greater for black families than for white families. A trend toward public assumption of some of the assistance to aged families has been reported. More research is needed to verify this trend in
extended families.

**Demographic Characteristics**

Differences in marital stability have been reported across socioeconomic status. Education, income, occupation, age at marriage, rural-urban differences, and children all influence the stability of the marital relationship of a couple.

Komarovsky (1967) reported a positive, significant relationship existed between education and marital happiness in a study of blue-collar marriages. The high school graduates on the whole were happier in marriage than those who did not finish high school. The high school graduates had more skilled occupations and, consequently, a smaller proportion were unskilled laborers than those who had not finished high school. The high school graduates in the sample had a somewhat higher average income, a higher rate of church and club affiliation and a smaller number of children than the less educated. Income, occupation, education, and family background all correlated with the stability of the marriages.

Using income as a variable, Bernard (1966) concluded that the probabilities of achieving stable marriages are greater for white than for non-white men. In the age bracket forty-five to fifty-four, Bernard reported that 76.8 percent of all races in this age group were living in stable marriages. However, the differences decline as income, schooling, and job level become more similar for whites and non-whites. School dropouts appear to have a lower probability of achieving marital stability than do completers, no matter at what level they drop out. School dropouts are, in effect, more likely to be marriage dropouts, too.
Chilman (1959) collected data on fifty-two dropouts and fifty-two graduates from high school. She suggested that the dropouts had a "social background and psychological orientation" which could well mitigate against marital stability. Still another national survey of 3,993 subjects reported that men from low socioeconomic families were more likely than men from middle-class families to marry early. This was more true for whites than blacks. The findings were consistent in showing that for blacks, early marriages had a depressing effect on educational attainment among those attending high school. They were also less likely than their unmarried counterparts to be in school several years later and they tended to have lower overall educational attainment aspirations (Kerckhoff and Parrow, 1979). Early educational attainment varies within cohorts and failure to take such variations into account leads to an underestimate of the significance of age at marriage.

Hampton (1979), in a study of 575 black married families, found income to be a measure of marital stability. Those couples with lower incomes had higher levels of instability and those who married when they were younger tended to have higher rates of marital instability than those who married when they were older. Age had a stronger effect than income.

Elder (1976) studied the effect of marital timing on women's life patterns in a cohort of women born from 1925 to 1929. It was found that early marriages tended to occur more frequently in lower class than middle class strata except during recession or depression when marriage is deferred by both groups. Elder noted that early marriage was found to be associated with subsequent socioeconomic deprivation, restricted
education, and the return to work after childbirth, while late marriers occupy an advantageous socioeconomic position and tend to work only until marriage or the birth of a first child.

Early marriages and early childbearing seem to effect the income earning potential which, in turn, affects the marriage. Other studies have also reported a direct positive effect on socioeconomic status and marital stability (Bernard, 1966; Blood, 1962; Hill, 1970; Rainwater, 1966; Staples, 1971). Income is strongly linked to marital stability. The lower the income, the higher the proportion of men living apart from their wives (Willie, 1970). This is true of both black and white families.

Dietrich (1974), in a study of 501 black homemakers, found a direct and interrelated effect of husband's and wife's education and occupation and family income. The findings showed the wife's occupation and education had an effect, though not significantly, upon marital satisfaction that was not indicated by the effects of the variables on family income. This suggests that wives' education and occupation have a meaning for the lower-class black marital relationships that do not relate to the family's articulation with the opportunity structure per se. The author concluded that the bulk of variation in lower-class black wives' marital satisfaction may be explained by factors other than forces external to the lower-class black family system.

Comparisons have also been made on the differences between urban and rural couples. One such study, using census data, was conducted by Woodrow and Tu (1970). They concluded that rural people were more likely to marry at younger ages, and if divorced, could be expected to remarry
at younger ages than their urban counterparts. Older couples from rural areas in the study stayed married longer and showed less frequent patterns of divorce than their counterparts in urban areas. According to the authors, these patterns, in combination with the slightly less likelihood of divorce in rural than in urban areas, have been attributed to two factors. First, rural people possess a lifestyle that is heavily dependent upon the family. Second, the social identity of adults in rural areas is largely defined in terms of "being married". Yahraes (1970) has maintained that rural people, like urban people, differ greatly in their life styles. Incomes differ widely, too. For example, in the Golden Years study (1972), a sample of 10,000 older persons from ten states (eighty-six percent white, thirteen percent black) were interviewed. Half of the sample was considered poor. More respondents from rural sections showed lower incomes than respondents from urban areas. This study supports other studies in suggesting that geographical location, as well as income, affect the marital stability of older couples.

Grasmick (1978) suggested, after interviewing 350 adults, that many individuals currently experiencing the "material conditions" of an urban, industrial community have a value orientation which is more "synchronized" with the material conditions of the rural, agricultural communities in which their parents and grandparents lived. Education, age, and exposure to mass media were variables studied. Although family characteristics no doubt influence a person's values indirectly, the authors (1978) predicted such factors as educational attainment to be a direct effect from the intrafamilial transmission of values in the socialization process. The Grasmicks also reported that the earlier a person was born, the more
likely that person was to have had parents and grandparents who were farmers. Age was positively related to farm background. This is related to Troll's (1979) finding in which she reported that couples who were married in the first decade and the twentieth century were more likely to be from rural families than couples who married after the first decade.

These findings suggest that greater institutional support is given to the married status in the rural context than in the urban. In rural areas, there appears to be greater social pressure to marry, to remain married, and to remarry following a divorce or death of a spouse.

It is popularly assumed that children and marital happiness go together and are causally related. This assumption has received little or no support from empirical research the last two decades (Hicks and Platt, 1970). However, people in unsatisfied marriages have listed children as their only satisfaction.

Various findings have been reported in the literature relating to children, child density, and marital stability. Luckey and Bain (1977), in a sample of eighty married couples, identified as satisfactorily or unsatisfactorily, reported that children were mentioned as one of the greatest satisfactions of marriage almost equally as often by husbands and wives. However, when compared to a group of satisfactorily married couples, there were a statistically greater number of respondents in the unsatisfied group who listed children as their only satisfaction in marriage. Size of family, the order of birth, sex, and spacing patterns were not found associated with marital satisfaction. In a similar study of thirty extended black families, it was found that older individuals
considered their greatest accomplishment was helping to rear children in the family (Martin and Martin, 1978).

Some research exists on child density and marital stability. Child density, defined by Miller (1975), as the number of living children divided by the number of years married, has received attention in the literature. There are different findings on child density. For example, Miller (1975), interviewed 140 individuals to determine the effect of child density upon marital stability. Each respondent had been married fifty years or more. No relationship to marital satisfaction and child density was found. However, the author found a significant inverse relationship between child density and marital conventionalization (social desirability), suggesting that this latter measurement might be capturing a certain marital euphoria depressed by child density but not tapped by the satisfaction index. In relation to Miller's study (1975), Ryder (1973), completed a longitudinal study relating marriage satisfaction and having a child. Of the 112 couples in the sample, no data supported the hypothesis that having children and the size of a family affected marital stability. However, the author indicated that the only significant correlate of having a child was that wives were more likely to report that their husbands were not paying enough attention to them.

Another study of forty-six couples, who were married faculty, staff, and graduate students at Pennsylvania State University, reported no significant relationship between demographic variables (religious strength, religious background, age of parents, years married per se, number of children per se) and the marital relationship score (Figley, 1973). According to Figley, there was substantial evidence in this study
to conclude that no significant relationship existed between child density and two measures of the marital relationship, marital communication, and marital adjustment. He further noted a dramatic decrease in marital adjustment and communication during the childrearing period, suggesting a low point in the marital relationship in the period just prior to the departure of the children from home.

It has been ascertained that children lower the divorce rate and this aids in marital stability. Arland (1977) found in a study of black and white marriage, using the data of the National Fertility Study 1970, that for both races, women with small and medium families at the beginning of a four-year interval generally had the lowest dissolution rates, whereas white, large families had the highest dissolution rates. Small and medium size families had the smallest dissolution rates. For nonwhites, the highest rates were observed either for those families with no children or those with many. Overall, the nonwhite women with large families had the highest dissolution rates. The author suggested that while a few children may increase marital satisfaction for women, a large number may, in turn, reduce happiness.

The studies on children and its relation to marital stability were viewed in relation to marital satisfaction and child density. It was reported that for some couples, having children was the only source of satisfaction in their marriages; however, the number of children in a family was not conclusive. It was found, though, that differences between couples who do and who do not have a child do not demonstrate that having a child causes some particular result.
Summary

The review of the literature summarized six theoretical views of aging. They included: (1) disengagement, (2) activity, (3) personality, (4) continuity, (5) exchange, and (6) interactional. The interactional perspective has been acknowledged to be advantageous in studying not only the aged family, but the black family as well. The interactional theory focuses on the dynamic relationship between husband and wife and the family as a unit. This theory also accounts for historical events and circumstances of the family. Hence, the findings in this study will be explained using this framework.

The review of the literature also summarized research studies that had identified factors which are believed to contribute to marital stability. These factors include (1) marital adjustment, (2) personality characteristics, (3) religiosity, (4) kin ties, and (5) demographic characteristics, including income, education, age at marriage, residence and number of children. Of the studies reviewed, significant relationships were noted among the identified factors and marital stability.

Researchers in the study of marriage and the family have focused primarily on marital adjustment on middle-class white couples. Little research has been done on either black or white couples in the later years.

More studies have reported the factor marital adjustment as aiding in marital stability than any other factor reviewed. This does not mean, however, that marital adjustment is more important than other factors, but that more studies have been done on marital adjustment and the overall satisfaction of the marriage. Early studies reported a decline in marital satisfaction the longer a couple was married. More recent studies
have reported that marital satisfaction improved over the life cycle.

Personality compatibility was reported as facilitating in marital stability. Having similar attitudes, values, interests, and behaviors were reported as contributing in the overall success of the marriages.

Couples who participated and identified with a religious affiliation reported more marital stability than couples who did not participate and identify with a religious affiliation. Couples who had children were reported to be more religious oriented than couples without children.

The frequency with which kin interacted and the amount and kind of aid exchanged were identified as contributing to the stability of the relationships. It was also reported that black families have more cohesive kin ties than white families.

Education, income, type of job, age at marriage, residence and children were demographic characteristics identified as contributing to marital stability. The higher the levels of education and income, the more marital stability was reported. Couples who married later, after the completion of high school, were more likely to report stable marriages than couples who were dropouts. Couples from rural areas tended to have more stable marriages than couples from urban areas. Having children has been reported to aid in marital stability but there is conflicting evidence on the number of children in a family.

Fewer research studies have been conducted on marital stability of black families as compared to the studies conducted on their white counterparts as indicated in the studies reviewed. Even fewer studies have been done on the marital stability of black aged couples.
The study was designed to investigate factors which contributed to marital stability of older black couples. The descriptive, exploratory study was designed to use the case study approach. This chapter includes a description of the subjects, research design, instrumentation, preliminary procedures, and procedures for the analysis of data.

Sample Selection

Criteria for Subject Selection

The criteria for the subjects who participated in the study included the following characteristics:

1. had been married fifty years or more,
2. had never been divorced, separated, widowed, or deserted,
3. were black,
4. currently lived in Pitt County, North Carolina, and
5. neither spouse had lived apart for reasons of extended illnesses or employment.

All of the subjects volunteered to participate in this study.

Contact of Subjects

A list of thirty-five couples believed to meet the criteria of the study was compiled from newspapers, local community leaders, church clubs,
senior citizens, and the Greenville Area Chamber of Commerce. Twenty-three couples were contacted in order to obtain twenty couples to participate in the study. Serious illness in two of the families and a death in a third prevented three of the couples contacted from participating in the study.

The twenty-three couples selected for initial contact were chosen solely on the basis of their geographic location and concentration in the country. The sources of names included perhaps those couples or spouses who were or had been active in community services. Hence, nonactive couples could have been overlooked or unknown to community or church leaders. Although the sample was not random, there is no reason to suspect that it included an overrepresentation of problem couples, "normal" couples, or above "average" couples.

Initial contacts were made by personal visits and telephone calls to explain the purpose of the study, solicit their participation, and verify their eligibility. Couples were informed that they could contribute to black history and black family life education by sharing and leaving a record about what made their marriages survive. Furthermore, the information they shared would be available to aid other couples in preparing for marriage. Each spouse was required to sign a consent form agreeing to participate in the study. The investigator or a family member was granted permission to sign the consent form for those individuals who had poor eyesight or some other ailment that prevented them from writing.

Subjects were assured of the confidentiality of the information and that their names would not be used in any data presentation
Geographical Location

The couples who participated in the study resided in eastern North Carolina. The county chosen was Pitt because of the distribution of black aged in the county, the growth and changes in the county during the past century, and the researcher's personal interest in this geographical location.

Pitt County in the late 1800's, the time when most of the couples in the study were born, was basically rural farm. However, by 1970, it was only 13.4 percent farm, 36.6 percent non-farm, and fifty percent urban. In the late 1800's, the population was 58.2 percent black and 41.8 percent white. However, the latest census indicated that 65.1 percent of the population was white and 34.5 percent black (Brown, 1977). These figures show that although the black population decreased, the white population increased. The older aged couples in this study reported being children of slaves and that their parents worked on some of the then large southern plantations in the area. The younger aged black couples reported being grandchildren of slaves.

Pitt County is located in the Coastal Plains area of North Carolina. In 1975, the population was estimated to be 79,500, with a medium age of twenty-four and a per capita income of $4,668. The major crop was flue-cured tobacco (Brown, 1977).

Research Design

The case study method was employed to provide a detailed description of the subjects' marriages and to allow for the identification of
the factors that made for marital stability over time. The study was ex-
post facto in that subjects were asked to identify factors they believed
influenced the longevity of the marriages after the marriages had been in
existence for fifty or more years.

Each couple was interviewed as a unit, then separately, approximately
two times. Interviews were scheduled on different days and the length
and time were determined to the mutual convenience of each couple and the
researcher. General open-ended questions about the economy, weather,
neighborhood, or some local interesting events were used to make the coup-
les feel at ease. Three pictures, selected by the researcher, depicting
various historical changes of black families, were chosen to aid in con-
versation and enhance memories. However, the pictures proved to be
stereotyped and demeaning to the first couples interviewed. They were
not used after the third interview in order to ensure more accurate re-
porting and less bias by the subjects.

The researcher conducted the interviews in the subjects' homes dur-
ing a three-month time span, from December 1979 through February 1980.
Responses from the interviews were tape recorded with the knowledge and
consent of the subjects. Written observations of interactions and res-
ponses were recorded immediately after each interview by the researcher.

The Case Method

Advantages. Researchers in the study of marriage and the family
have made little use of the case study as a method in studying marital
relationships. The case study approach allowed a focus on the changes
that had occurred in the relationship and how the couple coped with those
changes. This approach allowed each spouse to be described individually
as well as a unit. In addition, the case study approach allowed for exploration of many perspectives of a situation.

The case method approach was superior for exploring areas where there was little basis for knowing either what questions to ask or how to formulate them, for revealing private sentiments, for avoiding the problem of poor writing skills of respondents, and for observing both verbal and nonverbal interactions. Finally, the case method approach allowed the researcher much flexibility in scheduling, ordering of questions, and repetition of questions.

Limitations. The case study approach involved a considerable amount of time in interviewing, transcribing, and coding. Hence, this method is not practical for large samples. Because of hearing and sight losses of some of the couples, questions had to be repeated and the investigator had to speak loudly. The presence of taping device may have prevented some individuals from speaking freely. However, the investigator learned to gather demographic information first, when the subjects were apprehensive about talking. By the time of free responses, the subjects were more relaxed and freer in their conversations.

Another limitation was the presence of other members in the home during the interview of a few of the couples. Because of the cold weather and snow, it was not always feasible for other family members to leave the "sitting room" during the interview.

Instruments

The interview schedule consisted of two distinct sections. Spanier's (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used to measure marital
adjustment and an interview schedule developed by the researcher, was used to collect data on marital stability and demographic data.

The major purpose of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale was to assess the quality of marriage. The thirty-two item Likert-type scale included four components (dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesions, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression) which are conceptually and empirically related to dyadic adjustment (Appendix C).

Items included in the Dyadic Adjustment Scale were evaluated by three judges for content validity. The scale was administered to a married sample of 218 persons and a divorce sample of ninety-four persons. For each item, the divorced sample differed significantly from the married sample (p < .001) using a t-test for assessing differences between sample means. The mean total scale scores for the married and divorced samples were 114.8 and 70.7 respectively. These total scores are significantly different at the .001 level.

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale was correlated with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (1959) with a correlation of .86 among married respondents and .88 among divorced respondents (p < .001). Construct validity was further established through the factor analysis of the items (Spanier, 1976).

Reliability was determined for each of the component scales as well as the total scale. Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha (1951), a conservative estimate of internal consistency, which is a variant of the basic Kuder-Richardson (1937) formula, was used to determine reliability. The total scale reliability was .96 (Spanier, 1976). The data indicate that the total scale and its components have sufficiently high reliability to
justify their use.

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale was incorporated into the interview schedule. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale was completed in approximately fifteen minutes. The format allowed for easy coding or scoring and it encouraged the respondent to think about each of the items being presented.

An interview schedule, developed by the researcher, comprised an open-ended questionnaire about the stability of the marriage and basic demographic information about each spouse individually and as a couple. Included were questions related to the factors identified in the literature as effecting marital stability (personality characteristics, religiosity, kin ties, and demographic characteristics), how the marriage had changed throughout the life span and what factors the couples perceived as having contributed to the degree of marital satisfaction experienced over the life span (see Appendix C).

Religiosity. Religiosity was defined as the identification with a faith and individual participation. It also referred to internalized values focused around the basic faith commitments of the individual. Religiosity was operationally conceptualized as the frequency of church attendance, with high religiosity defined as attending church more than once a month. Low religiosity was defined as attending church once a month or less. This measurement was that used by McDonald (1979) in his study with adolescents.

Personality Characteristics. A set of negative and positive characteristics were used by the investigator to measure this factor (Neugarten, 1964). Negative characteristics (stubbornness, gets angry easily,
feelings easily hurt, nervous or irritable, moody, jealous, and self-centered) received -1 for each response if a spouse reported having such a characteristic and +1 if a spouse did not manifest such a behavior, either during the early years of marriage or at the time of the study. Positive characteristics (cooperation, friendly, grateful, respectful, and considerate) received +1 if a spouse manifested such a characteristic and -1 if not. The difference between -1 and +1 determined what characteristics aided in marital stability. If positive characteristics were higher than negative characteristics, it was assumed that those characteristics aided in stable marriages and vice versa. If scores were even, it was assumed that neither positive nor negative characteristics made a difference in the stability of the marriage. Differences were also noted in personality changes in the early years and later years of the relationship.

Kin Ties. The frequency of visits and the amount and kind of aid exchanged by relatives was categorized by the investigator as low, medium, and high kin ties. Low kin ties was measured as visits or aid exchanged three times or less per year; medium, as visits or aid exchanged between four to eight times a year; and high kin ties as visits or aid exchanged nine to twelve times a year or more. Kin ties not only included personal visits, but telephone calls and written communication as well.

Occupation. Socioeconomic status was based on occupation. Occupation was determined by the major job held during the height of employment. Hodges' "Occupational Prestige in the United States", was used to determine prestige ranking of the reported occupations in this study. A simplified grouping of class taken from Roach's "Social Stratification in
the United States, 1969", was used to classify job status. Roach's scale consisted of three categories: middle class, working class, and lower class. This scale permitted wives to be included with the occupation of their husbands', especially since about half of the couples were farmers during the height of their employment. In addition, the employment of both spouses is reported in determining socioeconomic status for black families (Hill, 1978; Staples, 1969). (See Appendix B.)

Residence. Place of residence was categorized either a rural or urban using a community of 2,499 persons or less for rural and 2,500 or more persons for urban (Yahraes, 1976).

Pretesting

The marital adjustment scale and the interview schedule were pretested on two black couples who were not a part of the study sample before being used in the research. This facilitated in determining the extent to which the instruments met the objectives of the study, suitability of the wording of questions to the respondents' levels of understanding, the face validity of the specific questions asked or observations made. The pilot test also aided in determining interview length, the number of interviews, the use of taping devices, and a coding system for the responses. From the pilot test, the researcher gained practice in interviewing and information about revising questions. The investigator made some words simpler, restated sensitive information; omitted a few questions on intimacy and gave the couples the opportunity to write their own responses to the demographic data. For example, the words "stable" and "longevity" were replaced with "stayed together", and the questions on sexuality were omitted.
Interviewing

Telephone calls and personal visits were made to all potential couples to be interviewed, explaining that the researcher would be conducting a study on black marriages and wanted to learn as much as possible about how their marriages had survived all these years. This gave each couple an opportunity to become familiar with the researcher which could have aided in anxiety reduction. Another contact with each couple was made either by phone or a visit one day prior to the visit to remind the couple of the interview.

The couples were very cooperative and none refused to talk about their marriages. However, several trips had to be made to complete some of the interviews because a couple or spouse had gone someplace else, had other visitors, or was too busy with other chores. (A portion of the interviewing took place during Christmas vacation.) Several husbands refused to report income or talk about intimate matters of the relationship. In such cases, the researcher went to another question and later rephrased the intimate question. The wives were more talkative than the husbands and had longer interviews. The investigator was able to obtain basic information from the husbands. However, little other information about the marriages was volunteered.

Whenever possible, each spouse was seen alone, at least for part of the interview. On several occasions, a spouse would forget that the investigator wanted to interview each separately and beckoned for the other spouse to share in the conversations. In some cases, a child, grandchild, or other relative was present during the interview. All except two of the interviews were completed in the spouses' homes. One couple was
having the house repaired and another wanted to get out of the house. These interviews were held at relatives' homes.

It was impossible to adhere to the same order of asking questions for all interviews. Sometimes the subject would answer questions before the interviewer reached them. When spouses were interviewed on different days, they discussed the questions and were ready to give answers when the investigator returned the next day. Each case was transcribed by the researcher immediately after leaving a spouse if at all possible, but always within the same week.

The interviews were kept within one to two hours in length per spouse so not to tire them. Couples were usually interviewed twice. The first visit was usually on basic information and the second on the relationship itself. The first session was sometimes spent sorting through family Bibles and other documents to determine age and length of marriage (and to see photographs of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren). This was more true of the older aged than the younger aged.

The younger aged couples (aged sixty-five to sixty-nine) were more guarded in their responses than the older aged couples (aged seventy and above). The younger aged couples tended to carefully weigh what they said and often asked if most couples responded that way. They also wanted to know if other couples had similar problems. Consequently, the length of time spent with each couple varied considerably across the sample.

Description of Data Collection

Data were collected by the investigator within a three-month period. This included the interviewing, taping, transcribing, scoring and coding.
The investigator was able to observe firsthand interactions between spouses, decided to discontinue the use of pictures, scheduled and rescheduled interviews, set the pace of the questions and, in many instances, signed the consent form with the permission of the subject. In addition, the investigator provided small spontaneous services for some respondents, such as reading mail, paying bills, and grocery shopping.

The investigator had some basic insight before beginning the study about black families and black family life. However, her knowledge was limited about black aged couples and their marital lives.

Analysis of Data

Measures of central tendency and frequencies were used to provide descriptive analysis of the data. Analysis of data was presented in response to the research questions. Findings from the study were compared with those studies reviewed in the literature. Comparisons were made from the findings of marital stability between both black and white couples. Differences were pointed out in the target population through the use of frequency distributions and percentages. Strengths and weaknesses of the study and those in the literature on marital stability were analyzed.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Factors influencing the marital stability of older black couples were investigated in this study. Twenty couples, married fifty years or more, currently living in Pitt County, North Carolina, comprised the sample. Personal interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule with taped and transcribed responses were used to collect the data. Measures of central tendencies and frequencies were used for the data analysis.

The results of the study are presented in this chapter. An analysis and explanation of the data are presented in relation to each research question. The findings in the study are compared with other research on marital stability. The interactional theoretical framework is used to explain the stability of these marriages in relation to the objectives.

Demographic Profile of Subjects

The mean age of the twenty husbands in the study was 72.9 (Table 8, Appendix D). The oldest husband was ninety-one and the youngest husband was sixty-six. The mean age of the wives was 69.2. The oldest of the twenty wives was eighty-one and the youngest wife was sixty-four. The husbands were, on the average, three years older than the wives.

The couples in the study had been married an average of 52.1 years with a range of nineteen years (Table 3, Appendix D). The longest married couples had been married sixty-nine years and the shortest married couple,
fifty years.

In ten cases, the older couples lived alone; in five cases, the older couples lived with an adult child; in three cases, grandchildren lived with the older couples; in one case, a great-grandchild lived with the older couple; and in another case, a non-relative, boarder, lived with an older couple.

Twelve of the couples either owned their homes or were buying them. Five couples rented their homes and three couples lived in rent-free homes.

Findings in Relation to Research Questions

Research Question One. How can older black couples be described in terms of education, income, occupation, age at marriage, number of children, and residence?

Education

Seventy-four percent of the husbands and forty-two percent of the wives completed less than eight years of schooling, whereas forty-two percent of the wives completed between eight and twelve years of schooling compared to sixteen percent of the husbands. Ten percent of the husbands had completed technical school or had some college compared to sixteen percent of the wives. Wives, on the average, had higher educational attainment than husbands (see Table 9).

The educational attainment of the older male subjects are somewhat higher than the national figure. Hill (1978) reported that eight percent of the nation's older black males had been graduated from high school. Sixteen percent of the study sample had some high school education. The national average for high school graduates among white older men in 1970
was twenty-seven percent. White older women completing high school in 1970 was thirty-one percent compared to ten percent black older women. The women's educational attainment in the present study is higher than that reported for black older women across the nation. The educational level of the study sample was approximately that for older white educational attainment. It should be noted in comparing these figures on educational attainment that the national data is for high school graduates whereas the study data shows subjects whose levels range from eight to twelve years of schooling.

Income

Although all couples were asked to report their annual incomes, only sixteen couples were willing to do so. The couples reported incomes at the height of employment and at the time of the study. Eleven of the couples reported that their present incomes represented the height of their employment. The other five couples reported incomes at the height of employment, before retirement, to be between $5,000-9,000. Eight couples (forty percent) reported present incomes to be between $2,000-4,000: three couples (fifteen percent) between $5,000-9,000, and five couples (twenty-five percent) between $10,000-20,000. Four couples (twenty percent) refused to report incomes. Those couples reporting higher incomes were younger, still employed, and both spouses were working either full or parttime. The oldest couple in the sample had the smallest income.

Sources of income in order of frequency included: fulltime job (12); Social Security (11); parttime job (7); retirement (5); disability (5); relatives (4); and welfare (3). Those couples in the higher income bracket had obtained those incomes in their later years.
These findings are somewhat different from those reported by Hill and Project Find. Hill (1978) reported that the majority of older black families receive social security as the major source of income (ninety-one percent). He also reported that a smaller proportion of blacks compared to whites receive supplemental security, dividend, and pensions. Project Find (1972) reported that older black couples receive more public assistance and depend more on their own and/or a spouse's income than white older couples. In this study, the majority of the couples depended upon a full or parttime job, Social Security, and retirement as major sources of income.

Almost half of the couples in the study characterized their incomes as not enough to make ends meet (see Table 1). There was some discrepancy in the responses of husbands and wives. However, several wives reported that their husbands managed the money, which could account for some of the perceptual differences.

During the early years of the marriages, both husbands and wives reported that husbands managed the money in seven cases (thirty-five percent); wives in three cases (fifteen percent); and both spouses in ten cases (fifty percent). In the later years, both spouses reported that husbands managed the money in four cases (twenty percent); wives in four cases (twenty percent); and both spouses in twelve cases (sixty percent). When asked if they would manage their incomes differently if given the opportunity, half report "no" (fifty percent); six couples reported 'yes' (thirty percent); and four couples reported they did not know (twenty percent).

A wife married fifty years gave the following advice in retrospect:
Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of How Finances Work Out at the End of the Month

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW MONTHLY FINANCES WORK OUT</th>
<th>HUSBANDS</th>
<th>WIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough to make ends meet</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just enough to make ends meet</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some money left over</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>16*</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Four husbands and two wives were not willing to discuss how their finances worked out at the end of the month.

I would be more determined to find out how it (money) was spent. My husband managed the money. I have to ask him for money and I hate it. He gives me what he wants to.

Other responses about managing the money differently included saving more money, being wiser in spending habits, spending less and starting saving accounts early in the relationships.

Poverty characterizes about half of the study couples who have income below the standard poverty level annual budget of $4,695 (Hill, 1978). Hill reported that in 1976, only seventeen percent of older white couples had incomes below the standard poverty annual budget whereas thirty-seven percent of older black couples were below the standard budget. Although a small number of the younger aged couples in this study
had higher incomes, these incomes represent recent gains and the employment of both spouses.

Occupation

Major occupations reported by the husbands at height of employment included, in order of frequency: farmers (9), laborers and unskilled workers (7), semi-skilled workers (2), and unskilled workers (2). The largest percentage were farmers -- owners and tenants whereas the smallest percentage were semi-skilled and skilled workers (see Table 10, Appendix D).

Although the couples are of retirement age, fifty-five percent of the women and twenty percent of the men were still participating in the work force at the time of the study. These figures are about the same as the national figures. Hill (1978) reported that about sixty percent of older black women are employed compared to about fifty percent of older white women. Slightly more than twenty percent of older men, both black and white, are in the labor force (see Table 11, Appendix D, for present employment status of the couples).

Most of the women in this study worked on farms during the growing seasons and held parttime jobs the remainder of the year. Eleven wives reported working parttime when they had small children; four wives worked fulltime; and four did not work outside the home. All of the husbands worked fulltime during the farming seasons when they had small children.

According to Roach's (1969) social stratification, at the height of employment, forty-five percent of the couples are categorized middle-class, twenty percent working class, and thirty-five percent lower class.
The sample couples fall in the lower half of Hodges' (1963) occupational prestige ranking. Farmers rank seventy, semi-skilled works rank sixty-three, and laborers rank forty-eight. In essence, most of the couples in this study were in the lower prestige occupations.

Age at Marriage

The mean age at marriage for the husbands was twenty-two. The oldest age at marriage for the husbands was thirty-three and the youngest age at marriage for the husbands was eighteen. The mean age at marriage for the wives was nineteen. The oldest age at marriage for the wives was twenty-four whereas the youngest age at marriage for the wives was sixteen. The age at marriage of the couples in this study are similar to those reported by Glick (1977) covering the time period of first marriages during the early decades of the twentieth century, 20.9 for wives and 22.8 for husbands for both races.

When asked "How long did you know your former spouse before marriage?", both husbands and wives reported in order of frequency: 6-12 months (2), 1-2 years (2), 3-4 years (3), 5-6 years (5), 7-8 years (6), and 10 or more years (2).

Number of Children

Nineteen of the twenty couples had children. One couple was childless but had a non-relative, boarder, living in the home. The average number of children per family was 5.68, with a range of eleven children. The largest number of children in a family was twelve and the smallest was one. The average national number of children for all families reported by Glick (1977) was 3.3, in the early 1900's. The average number of
children per family in this study is almost twice the national average for the time period covered. However, Lantz (1978) reported that in the South in the early 1900's, black women had an average of 7.4 children, 1.9 children more than the families in this study.

Husbands' ages at the time of the birth of the first child ranged from nineteen to twenty-eight years with a mean of 23.8 years. Wives' ages at the time of the birth of the first child ranged from sixteen to twenty-five years with a mean of 20.3 years. The age at the birth of the last child ranged from twenty-three to fifty-one, with a mean of 40.5 for the husbands, and a range of twenty to forty-five for the wives with a mean of 36.1. The median age for the wives is slightly lower than the average norm for women married during the 1920's and 30's. Glick (1977) reported the median age for women at the birth of the first child was 22.8 during the 20's and 23.5 during the 30's. Compared with the birth of the last child, Glick reported that the median age was 31.0 and 32.0 for the 20's and 30's respectively. In this study, the median age for women having their last child was somewhat higher than the national average. Overall, the women began childbearing at an earlier age and continued for a longer period of time than the national norm.

Four couples reported one stillbirth per family and three couples reported one miscarriage per family. These seven couples had the largest number of children per family in the study (seven to thirteen children). One of the seven couples reported five deaths out of thirteen children, including a set of twins.
Residence

Twelve couples (sixty percent) who participated in the study resided in the rural areas (farm and non-farm) and eight couples (forty percent) lived in urban areas at the time the data were collected. Seventeen of the husbands (eighty-five percent) and fifteen of the wives (seventy-five percent) spent the majority of their lives in rural areas whereas three husbands (fifteen percent) and five wives (twenty-five percent) spent the majority of their lives in urban areas.

The couples had moved an average of 3.5 times since they were married with a range of seven. One couple had not moved since marriage and two couples had moved seven times.

When asked if they could live anywhere, with anyone in any arrangement, the majority of the couples preferred their current living situations. However, one wife preferred living with her daughter in another city and three husbands preferred living in a warmer climate.

Hill (1978) reported that in 1977, fifty-five percent of older blacks lived in central cities of metropolitan areas, compared to twenty-nine percent of older whites. Approximately thirty-three percent of older whites lived in suburban areas, compared to eleven percent of older blacks. A larger proportion of the older individuals in this study live in rural areas compared to the national average.

Discussion of Research Question One

Research has indicated that higher levels of education, income, occupation, later age at marriage and small family size make for marital stability. The couples in the present study had slightly higher levels of these factors than for older blacks in general but lower levels
compared to older whites. Yet, they had managed to stay together fifty years or more. There is some support from this study that the demographic factors cited in the literature contributed to marital stability in the study couples. It would seem that other factors influenced the longevity of these marital relationships.

This study supports other studies in suggesting that geographical location influences the stability of the relationship. According to Grassmick (1978) and Woodrow (1970), couples from rural areas are more likely to marry at younger ages, to support a lifestyle that is heavily dependent upon the family, and to be defined in terms of "being married". The majority of these couples had a rural orientation to living, and, perhaps this rural orientation contributed to the longevity of their marriages.

Results which are contrary to expectations may be attributable, in part, to the historical cultural orientation of black families. The interactional framework has been extended to attempt to view the family as a changing, growing, interacting unit under various historical events and economical circumstances. From this perspective, the black family adjusted its standard of living to the meager income as the social-economical status of society changed. The couples remained in lower occupations throughout their marital histories; hence, lack of skills and few opportunities for advancement kept the couples in lower standards of living.

They managed to survive with what few resources they had.

The couples in this study can be described as either "stable poor" or "copers". According to Miller (1970), the stable poor is characterized by economic security and family stability, i.e. regular employment in low skill jobs, including farmers and non-farmers. These stable poor families
are intact families. The families may have high social status in the community because of their regular employment. The children of the stable poor are likely to be educationally and occupationally mobile.

Miller identified copers as poor families characterized by economic insecurity and family stability. These families have a rough time economically but manage to keep themselves relatively intact, i.e. layoffs and seasonal work. The families are less likely to have high social status in the community, but their children tend to be educationally and occupationally mobile as stable poor children.

Families in this study can be described either by economic insecurity and family stability or economic security and family stability. In other words, regardless of the economic situation, the families remained intact.

In addition, being without money and the material possessions which money can buy in a consumer economy could have been a source of marital discord. Yet, these families adjusted to a society characterized by fast-paced change and consumer goods orientation. Perhaps the more one experienced financial setbacks, misfortunes, and hardships, the more one manages to accept being without and to adapt and adjust effectively to subsequent hardships. While many of the families in this study cannot be called successful by society's standards, all of them are stable and provide satisfying experiences to the marital partners. One husband, married fifty-eight years, stated that his marriage had survived because of "our hard times we have had".

Shifts in role relations were observed throughout the marriage. For example, the husband was the major breadwinner during the farming
seasons but the wife became the major breadwinner other times of the year. This is congruent with the ideas and values of the working wife in the black family. In this respect, the family is viewed as adjusting to the needs of the family for survival purposes. The dominant theme seems to be "survival" in the midst of the hardships.

Perhaps remaining married was a better alternative than divorcing. Levinger (1976) had indicated that some marriages are intact because divorce or separation is expensive; hence, the couples in this study could have been too poor to divorce. In addition, cultural affiliations and norms may have pressured the couples to remain married. Disapproval is usually greater in smaller communities than in large ones and in rural areas more so than urban areas. Cultural norms and lack of finances, then, could have been what Levinger (1976) called "barriers" against divorce. In other words, individuals stay together because they are attracted to each other and/or they are barred from leaving them; individuals compare their current relationships with alternative ones. If internal forces and cultural norms are stronger than alternatives, marriages are apt to remain stable.

The hard times and disappointments as well as the adjustments the couples experienced may have drawn them closer. Consequently, they were less likely to report marital disenchantment. "Tough love", i.e. sticking together despite external circumstances, characterize these marriages.

Research Question Two. What effect do kin ties, personality characteristics, and religiosity have on the stability of the marital relationships for older black couples?
Kin Ties

Kin ties included visits and the amount and kind of aid exchanged between children and other relatives and the older parents. When asked how often do you visit your children, both husbands and wives reported visiting their children. However, wives reported more visits than husbands (see Table 2). Children who lived in close proximity to the spouses were visited more often than those living at greater distances. One husband reported that he had never visited any of his children but that the wife visited them at least once a year.

Overall, the children in the families visited their parents more often than the parents visited their children. There were discrepancies in the estimate of visits by children as reported by each spouse. However, agreement between spouses did exist that the children visited or gave aid to their older parents more often than the older parents visited or gave aid to them.

Ten of the wives (fifty percent) visited their children nine to twelve times or more a year; five wives (twenty-five percent) visited between four and eight times a year; and five wives (twenty-five percent) visited three times or less per year. Seven husbands (thirty-five percent) visited their children nine to twelve times or more per year; eight husbands (forty percent) visited between four and eight times a year; and three husbands (twenty-five percent) visited three times or less per year. Forty-seven percent of the children visited their parents nine to twelve times or more a year; thirty-three percent visited their parents between four and eight times a year; and twenty percent visited their parents three times or less per year (see Table 2).
Table 2

Frequency of Kin Ties Between Parents and Children and Between Children and Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIRECTION OF VISITS/AID</th>
<th>FREQUENCY CLASSIFICATION OF VISITS/AID</th>
<th>Low*</th>
<th>Medium**</th>
<th>High***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From parents to children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From children to parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Low = visits or aid exchanged three times or less per year.
** Medium = visits or aid exchanged between four and eight times a year.
*** High = visits or aid exchanged between nine and twelve times a year or more.

Fourteen couples (seventy percent) reported that a particular child "kept an eye" on them. This child was usually a daughter (ten cases). However, a son in three of the families and a grandson in one family "kept an eye" on the older parents. The child who "kept an eye" on the older parents either lived in the same household with the older parents or lived a few miles away. Six couples (thirty percent) reported that a particular child did not keep in contact with them.

The couples reported that their children provided them with money, gifts, emotional support, a place to live, and advice. These findings are similar to those listed by Kalish (1975) in which he stated that older
persons and their children maintain active exchanges of money, gifts, help, and advice.

Beside children, the couples reported kin ties with other relatives. In many cases, the older couples interacted more often with other relatives than with their children and more often with the wives' relatives than with the husbands'. Three couples (fifteen percent) reported getting together with other relatives on a daily basis; six couples (thirty percent), almost every day; four couples (twenty percent), once a week; five couples (twenty-five percent), several times a month; and two couples (ten percent), about every other months. Most of these relatives lived in the same neighborhood, as close as next door, or as far as a mile distance. These other relatives included siblings, sisters and brothers-in-law, cousins, nieces, nephews, and grandchildren.

Relatives were reported to be important to both spouses but more so for wives than husbands. These relatives provide transportation for shopping, attending religious and social functions, going to the doctor, and visiting other relatives and friends. The relatives also check on the safety and security of the older parents.

When asked if the older couples' relatives had anything to do with their marriages lasting, half reported "yes" and half reported "no". The oldest husband in the study, aged ninety-one, said that his relatives prayed a lot for him. Most often reported responses for relatives aiding in the stability of the marriages were giving advice, food, and clothing. Although contacts with relatives were high, there is not sufficient evidence to conclude that kin ties with relatives aided in the stability of these marriages.
Eighty percent of the couples reported that their children influenced the longevity of their marriages. Some responses by husbands in order of frequency were: brought us closer together (5), had more responsibilities (4), stayed home more (3), became more understanding (3), and gave us farm help (2). Wives' responses in order of frequency included: brought us closer together (3), made more adjustments (5) demanded more time (3), had more responsibilities (3), husband did more housework (2), and quit job to stay home with the children (2). Both spouses reported having close relationships with their children when they were growing up and at the time of the study. However, wives reported closer relationships than husbands both when the children were growing up and at the time of the study.

The findings in this study are consistent with other studies on the cohesiveness of black families and the frequency and amount of aid exchanged between families of procreation and orientation and other relatives (Hendricks, 1977; Hill, 1972; Mindel, 1976; Morton and Glick, 1976, Staples, 1971).

**Personality Characteristics**

Personality characteristics included both positive and negative traits and were rated for the early as well as for the later years of marriage. Overall, husbands tended to rate wives higher than wives rated husbands. The negative characteristics of spouses as perceived by both husbands and wives reduced over time. Husbands reported higher negative characteristics for their wives in the early years than in later years. Wives also reported their husbands as having more negative characteristics in the early years than in the later years.
The most frequently mentioned negative characteristics in the early years as perceived by wives was "stubbornness" whereas "gets angry easily" and "feelings easily hurt" were most often mentioned by perceived husbands. In the later years, perceived wives mentioned "nervous or irritable" whereas perceived husbands mentioned "stubbornness", "jealousy", and "feelings easily hurt". Least frequently mentioned negative characteristics of perceived self of husbands included "bossy" and "self-centered" in the early years and "nervous or irritable" in the later years. Least frequently mentioned negative characteristics of perceived self for wives included "feelings easily hurt" in both the early and later years. The most frequently mentioned negative characteristics of perceived self as reported by husbands in the early years were "stubbornness" and "gets angry easily". Wives reported being "stubborn" as the most frequently negative characteristics in both the early and later years (see Tables 13 and 14, Appendix D).

Both husbands and wives perceived themselves as having more negative characteristics in the early years than in the later years. Wives perceived themselves as having more negative characteristics in both the early and later years than husbands perceived for themselves as noted in Tables 13 and 14 (Appendix D).

The most and least frequently mentioned positive characteristics of perceived self and perceived spouse were similar for both spouses during the later and early years. The most frequently mentioned positive characteristic in the early years of perceived spouses was "friendly". The majority of the positive characteristics were listed with about equal frequency in the later years. The least frequently mentioned positive
characteristic was "cooperative" for perceived spouses. The least frequently mentioned positive characteristics in the early years for perceived self was "grateful" for the husbands whereas the wives mentioned "considerate". The most frequently mentioned positive characteristic for both husbands and wives during the early years was "friendly" whereas "respectful" and "considerate" were reported in the later years for perceived self (see Tables 15 and 16, Appendix D).

Husbands reported their wives as having more positive characteristics than wives reported for themselves. Both husbands and wives reported more positive characteristics of their spouses and of themselves to a larger degree than negative characteristics. Wives tended to report that for husbands, positive characteristics had remained about the same throughout the marriages. However, husbands reported that wives had more positive characteristics early in the marriage than at the time of the study. Positive characteristics were higher than negative characteristics for those reported by perceived self and perceived spouse. One wife of fifty-two years of marriage stated that her husband was stubborn and had always been stubborn but that she and the children had "kept him in place".

The couples reported sharing common interests. They included in order of frequency: attending church (8), doing housework (4), traveling (4), visiting friends and relatives (3), dining out (3), looking at television (2), playing cards (2), and babysitting (2).

The couples in this study reported both positive and negative characteristics in the early and later years of their marriages. It is suggested that the positive characteristics may have been consistent over
time. In addition, the couples may have learned to cope with the negative attitudes and traits of their spouses in order to maintain stability of the marriages. Other studies have reported similar findings in coping with negative behaviors of spouses (Barrow and Smith, 1979; Duvall, 1967; Stinnet, 1972; Williams and Stockton, 1973).

Religiosity

Religion and the participation in religious services were valued by the couples. In fact, the findings were contrary to what the investigator expected. Research has shown that the religious participation of older couples decrease in the later years (Moberg, 1972). Research has also shown that religious participation for blacks is higher than for whites (Hill, 1978; Jackson, 1972). However, the religious participation of the study couples was greater in the later years than in the early years as noted in Table 3.

All of the couples were Protestants (Baptists, Methodists, and Church of Christ). Most couples belonged to the same denomination, but not necessarily the same church. For example, one husband belonged to a Free Will Baptist Church whereas his wife belonged to a Missionary Baptist Church. Fifteen of the husbands (seventy-five percent) compared to nineteen of the wives (ninety-five percent) held membership in a church. Five husbands and two wives reported attending church only when there were deaths or weddings in their families or the community. The couples placed emphasis on religious teachings and often reported doing religiously oriented things together, such as reading the Bible, visiting the sick, and praying. Some mentioned the "old fashioned" or "old time religion" as the basic guide for their lives.
Table 3
Frequency of Attendance at Religious Services in the Early and Later Years as Reported by Husbands and Wives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREQUENCY OF ATTENDANCE*</th>
<th>HUSBANDS</th>
<th>WIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Low = attendance at church once a month or less.
High = attendance at church more than once a month.

When asked if they felt pressures from their churches or own religious beliefs against separation or divorce, eleven husbands (fifty-five percent) reported "no"; four husbands (twenty percent) reported "somewhat", and five husbands (twenty-five percent) reported "yes". Twelve wives (sixty percent) reported "no"; three wives (fifteen percent) reported "somewhat"; and five wives (twenty-five percent) reported "yes". These findings suggest that the church or their own convictions did not keep them from divorcing or separating. These findings also support the theory of Moberg (1972) and Blood (1962) that the more actively the husband and wife participate in the same faith, the greater the family solidarity.
The findings of high attendance rates and church participation was unexpected. The expectation was that as couples aged, they would drop out of church services. Although church participation varied, the couples attended religious services at a higher degree in the later years than in the early years. These findings are in contrast to other studies in which religious participation has been reported to decline over the years (Hampton, 1979; Hill, 1972; Jackson, 1972).

Religiosity was reported to facilitate in the study couples staying together although they reported little pressure from their religious organizations against divorce. This was especially true since many couples reported that husbands attended infrequently in the beginning of the marriages. Table 3 shows that the religious participation of these couples increased over time.

In the later years, higher religiosity was reported for both husbands and wives than in the early years. Wives had higher religious participation throughout the marriage than did husbands. The increased participation in religious services may be due, in part, to the greater meaning attached to religion; the lack of other social activities for older couples; the fact that the younger aged couples were in good health, active, and had status positions in the community; and other family members may have encouraged the older couples to continue to participate. In addition, perhaps religion has a higher value for black couples during their later years than at other stages of the family life cycle. The present economical situation, the rural orientation of the couples, and their perceptions of approaching death could influence the increase in religious participation.
**Discussion of Research Question Two**

The interactional framework views the couple as a unit of interacting personalities, a living, changing unit which is influenced by the symbolic nature of the environment. This concept effectively describes the factors mentioned in this study and their influence upon the stability of these marriages. The development of kin ties, personality characteristics, and religiosity are all rooted in the interaction with others. This interaction provides a basis for definitions, rules of conduct, and moral codes. In addition, the concept of the social self, the spiritual self, and the emerging self are shaped by the couples' primary groups. Hence, the value these couples place on religion, kin, and personality traits may be related to the social milieu and the culture of the study group.

The interactional framework also views the personality as "a fit" between the individual and the environment; it reflects adaptation to past experiences and colors responses to the present social and physical environments (Kimmel, 1974). In this respect, the personality, although basically consistent over time, is open to change. The data presented in this study suggest that change did occur in some personality characteristics and that perhaps spouses became tolerant of own behavior; hence, they were more tolerant of their spouses' behavior.

The marital relationship of the couples in this study represent more than the sum of the personality traits of the couples, but, in addition, the influence of one partner over the other; the frequency of contact with others; the need for personal, religious, and social survival; the exchange of roles; and the symbolic nature of interactions and
These marriages may have been characterized by conflicting behaviors. Closeness sometimes does give rise to frequent occasions for conflicts, but if the spouses feel that their relationship is tenuous, they may avoid conflicts by overlooking unpleasant behaviors, fearing that it might endanger the continuance of the relationship. In addition, an individual's subjective perception of the relationship or spouse and his/her role in the family interactions are perhaps more crucial than other family characteristics, i.e. income and education, in clarifying the role of each spouse in the relationship and determining its stability.

Eshleman (1974) has suggested that couples who adhere to traditional and religious rules and regulations, specified duties and obligations, and other social pressures impinging on family members, fit best under the category of an "institutionsal family". The majority of the couples fit under this category. This type of relationship adheres to sanctions of the law, religion, established norms, and traditional family functions. Kin relations, predictable personalities, and regular attendance at religious services characterize the institutional relationship. In a period of transition in societal norms, these couples held on to the traditional religious and cultural values and symbols and at the same time adjusted to new and different roles and interactions. The old norms were evidently effective in maintaining the longevity of these marriages.

Research Question Three. What kinds of adjustments were made in the marital relationship at various stages of the family life cycle?

The stages identified included: (1) beginning families - couple married without children, (2) childbearing families - couple with children at
home, (3) launching families — oldest child gone to youngest child leaving home, and (4) later stage — retirement.

Most of these couples were in the beginning and childbearing stages of the family life cycle when the Depression of the 1930's occurred. The Depression was considered "hard time". However, almost all of the couples stated that the Depression had little or no effect on their relationships that they remembered. The Depression was not significantly different from other times early in the relationship. However, two couples reported that during the Depression they bought property from individuals who could not afford to pay the taxes on their property.

The men were at a favorable age for employment when the Depression began, yet, work was hard to find except for farm work. Since most of the couples were farming at this time, i.e. tenant farming, their financial statuses did not change substantially. They were poor and remained so. Little financial adjustments had to be made during the Depression. In most cases, the interests of the families did not involve the expenditure of much money. For example, electricity was rare in their homes; hence, electrical and heating bills were nil. One wife, married fifty years, said: "We had it very hard. We did the best we could." This response was typical of the study couples when discussing the early years of their marriages.

The couples reported that they managed their depleted resources effectively. Food rationings helped them to survive. The Depression did place stress on the relationship regarding children, since little money was available for toys and clothing, especially at Christmas. One husband, married fifty years, stated that he kept his children out of school
to pick cotton for the large land owners. A wife, the mother of eight children, stated that:

We have always lived in the rural area. Therefore, when the time came when money was scarce, we depended on our garden for vegetables. We also had hogs and chickens to give us meats. With the money we bought material and did some sewing to help out with the clothing. As the children grew up and began to leave home, the struggle of rearing a family when times wasn't so good began to ease. Now that the children are all grown up, we are blessed to continue to work. By doing so, we can enjoy the things of life that we sacrificed for the care of the children.

Some couples stated that they prayed more often and attended religious services more often during the Depression than at other times early in the marriages.

Another wife, married fifty years, reported:

When times were hard with our family, we always told our children what he or she could get and what we couldn't get them. I was very much up in age when I started having children as you see. But there were times me and my husband would get together and say we couldn't afford this and made them understand, so it went very easy. And, of course, I think it was love that had made our marriage last. Some of my best times and when I really enjoyed my marriage, we spent a lot of time traveling from one small town to another. But now he has been sick for about six years and we don't go that much. And I am very lucky to have all my children.

These findings differ from those reported for white families who experienced financial loss, job loss, status loss, and had fewer children during the Depression (Morgan, 1939). Farley (1970) reported that the national marriage rate, child density and economic and social statuses of blacks declined during the Depression. Lantz (1978) suggested that the decline in black family size may have been due to an absorption of attitudes and practices from the white population. However, there is little evidence in the present or other studies reviewed to support this position.
Twelve of the couples (sixty percent) reported financial strain during the childbearing stage through the launching stage. Fifteen of the wives (seventy-five percent) worked during this time to help ease the strain. Both husbands and wives reported working for an average of seventy-five hours per week during the farm seasons. In addition, a part-time or full-time job was held when farm work was minimum. The majority of the husbands interviewed did not mind their wives working. Not only did it add to the financial resources of the family, but as one husband replied, "It kept me from getting nagged at all day." Other responses in relation to adjustments made during the childrearing stages were: did not eat or dress as well, did not tell anyone how bad things were, passed down clothes from older children and white people, kept children out of school to pick cotton and shared food and clothing with relatives.

During the launching stage, about half of the couples reported that they quit farming because they had little help and found work elsewhere. It was during this stage that couples reported saving money for homes. Two couples were able to pay for their children's college education.

The later years were reported to be the best years and few adjustments were reported. The adjustments reported related to economic pressures, i.e. high prices, inflation, and reduced incomes. Hill (1973) reported that the major problem of older black are those related to the economy - high prices and low incomes. Findings in the present study are in agreement with those of Hill.

Discussion of Research Question Three

The interactional approach takes into account historical events and circumstances of the family. From this perspective, the Depression was
an historical event that affected many families. Yet, it had little effect on the financial situation of the families in this study. The families had gained little or no financial resources prior to the Depression; hence, they had few financial resources to lose, few adjustments were made, and their standards of living remained about the same.

Wives worked throughout the marital relationships to help ease financial strains, especially during non-farm seasons. This is the historical pattern for black women. It has been easier for black women to find employment than men in the South during off farm seasons, especially for part-time unskilled jobs, such as housecleaning, cooking, babysitting, and working in tobacco factories.

Fewer adjustments were reported in the later years, except those relating to high prices and low incomes. This may be due, in part, to the fact that the couples had made so many adjustments earlier in the relationship that daily decision-making was not considered adjustments, but perhaps routines.

Research Question Four. How satisfied with the marital relationships do the couples perceive themselves being at selected points in the life cycle?

Both husbands and wives reported similar responses when first married and during the childrearing stage. They were either very pleased or somewhat pleased during these stages. Husbands were more pleased than wives during the launching stage. There was some overlap with the childrearing stage and the launching stage for some couples were having children and launching others at the same time. Husbands expressed more satisfaction in the launching stage than did wives (see Table 4). This may be related to less financial pressures and less strain on the role of
Table 4

Perceived Satisfaction of the Marriages by Husbands and Wives at Selected Stages of the Family Life Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGES OF THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE</th>
<th>HUSBANDS* N=17</th>
<th>WIVES* N=17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very pleased</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat pleased</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very pleased</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chidrearing Stage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very pleased</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat pleased</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very pleased</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launching Stage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very pleased</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat pleased</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very pleased</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Seventeen couples responded to this section. Three couples were not willing to discuss this section.

A few of the subjects reported that marriage provided an escape from unsatisfactory home environments and provided opportunities to make something out of their lives. The concept "happy to be married" can be applied to those individuals who were seeking escapism or a better life through marriage.

A father of ten children stated:

When I first got married, I wanted to please. I thought I had done the wrong thing. My small children helped me realize they needed my help. When my children grew up and left home,
then I could see how much it meant to them and me. For the marriage now I am still pleased. I love my wife and my wife loves me. It is love that keeps us together.

These findings support the notion of curvilinearity, in that, marital satisfaction is high among young married couples, declines after the birth of the first child through the launching stage, and then increases during the postparental stage (Rollins-Feldman, 1970; Schram, 1970; Sporakowski, 1978). A few of the couples reported that their marriages improved over time. These findings are consistent with those of Lee (1978), Montgomery (1978), and Stinnet (1972).

Discussion of Research Question Four

In relation to the family life cycle, the findings in this study support the concept of curvilinearity, with the implication that some of these couples were "happier to be married" in the early years. The middle stages were reported as the least satisfactory. This may be partly due to the heavy burden of rearing a large family on a meager income and the social-political-economical climate of society during those stages. The launching phase refers to the departure of the children from their family. This period may involve some degree of upset and conflict, particularly if the mother has centered much of her time and interest on the children. The launching of the children would involve a considerable role shift for the mother. In addition, launching the children may lower the self-esteem and dependency of parents, especially for wives, who have high needs for such traits. This period is also considered midlife crisis for middle aged individuals.

A review of the literature indicates that marriages perceived as satisfactory in the later years have usually been satisfactory from the
beginning while those perceived as unsatisfactory have generally been regarded as such from the beginning. Evidence also exists from other studies that marriage satisfaction declines during the later years, particularly among lower socioeconomic class couples and among marriages in which a small amount of shared companionship and satisfaction existed in the early years. In addition, there is evidence that many older persons consider their marriage relationships to be as satisfactory as, if not more than, in previous years (Feshleman, 1974).

Research Question Five. How satisfied are the couples with their marriages at the present time?

The majority of the couples reported that they were well pleased with their present relationships. Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used to assess the current satisfaction of the marriages. Thirteen of the husbands (sixty-five percent) reported they were happy, two (ten percent) extremely happy, and two (ten percent) a little unhappy. Thirteen of the wives (sixty-five percent) reported they were happy, two (ten percent) extremely happy, and two (ten percent) very happy. Three husbands and wives reported they did not know how satisfied they were with their marriages (see Table 5). There were individual differences between the spouses. For example, one husband reported that he was a little unhappy while his wife reported she was extremely happy. Overall, both husbands and wives were happy with their current marital relationships as illustrated in Table 5.

Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used to measure marital adjustment. This scale consists of four subscales which measure the degree of adjustment in various aspects of the relationship. For example,
Table 5
Frequency of Current Marital Satisfaction as Reported by Husbands and Wives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF SATISFACTION</th>
<th>HUSBANDS</th>
<th>WIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely happy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little unhappy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dyadic satisfaction measures adjustments about financial matters, recreation, religion, friends, philosophy of life, decision-making and handling of marital disagreements. Dyadic cohesion measures adjustment in marital discord and disharmony. Affectional expression measures adjustment pertaining to love, sex, and the degree of happiness in the relationship. Dyadic consensus measures the degree of adjustment in matters pertaining to outside interests and exchange of ideas.

The degree of adjustment by husbands and wives in each subscale is reflected by the amount of similarity in each area. For example, husbands and wives have a higher level of adjustment in dyadic consensus than in affectional expression.
Table 6 describes the degree of adjustment between husbands and wives. The mean total scale score for the husbands and wives are 100.4 and 116.3 respectively. The mean of both husbands and wives in the study is 103.4, which is close to the sample norm for marital adjustment reported by Spanier (1976) of 114.8 for married subjects. Overall, the findings show that the study couples are well adjusted. It also indicates that the study couples measure of adjustment is similar to the norm. Wives in the study scored somewhat higher on the dyadic satisfaction and affectional expression subscales than husbands. Scores by both husbands and wives are similar for dyadic cohesion and dyadic consensus.

Discussion of Research Question Five

In explaining the stability of these marriages in the later years using the interactional framework, emphasis is placed on the symbolic as
well as the physical environments as having meaning to the couples. Overall, the couples reported that they were happy with their current relationships. The meanings these couples attach to happiness or adjustment in the later years is significant and relative to them as a couple and as a group but may not be so significant or relative to other groups. Being socialized, reared and married in a culture different from the dominant society have symbolic meaning to these couples that may be quite different from the dominant culture. Hence, interpretations of the concepts of marital success, marital happiness, or marital adjustment may have meanings that are culturally and historically defined.

Because of the increasing longevity, the aging period brings the possibility of not only grandparenthood, but great-grandparenthood as well. This could provide emotional satisfaction of being at the head of a four-generation family. In addition, the attraction in the current relationship could be rewarding, i.e. being the oldest in the community, having home ownership, achieving status in the community and being grandparents.

From the findings in this study, it is clear that family involvements changed over time and roles shifted. Kimmel (1974) has suggested that older individuals' adjustments are reflected in their accumulated experiences. This experience consists of memories of previous situations and habituated reactions. Kimmel (1974) described three types of experience: situation, interaction, and self. In situation experience, a person gains a greater range of past situations from which one can draw possible responses from the present situation. A person becomes increasingly adept at taking the attitude of the other and at interpreting the
significant symbols being used in the present interaction in the interaction experience. In the self experience, a person becomes increasingly adept at seeing him/herself from the point of view of the other and at integrating this awareness in the present moment with the memories of this awareness in past situations. Older individuals have greater amounts of situation, interaction, and self experiences compared with younger individuals. These older persons have the potential to benefit, but not necessarily more insight.

Research Question Six. What factors do the couples perceive as contributing to their marital stability?

In addition to factors previously discussed, i.e. kin ties, religiosity, personality characteristics, demographic characteristics, and marital adjustment, the most frequently reported factors by both husbands and wives contributing to the stability of their marriages were sacriary of the marriage vows, a dominant spouse who was more determined and worked harder at the relationship than the other spouse, and economic hardships. Both husbands and wives reported that they had stayed together fifty years or longer because they honored their marital vows. It was their duty to stay together as long as they both lived. This included: giving and taking, suffering, overlooking faults, loving and honoring, for better or for worse and in sickness and in health. For example, one husband, married fifty-two years, responded:

What other choice did I have? That's why I got married - for better or worse. We were supposed to stay together. The young folks can learn a thing or two from us. It's our duty to stay together.

A wife who had been married fifty years stated:

With the understanding that our marriage would not be all
peaches and cream, we held onto our marriage vows.

Another wife, married fifty-five years, the mother of ten, said:

Mainly I think it was because I made it work by just accepting and overlooking the things that he did that were wrong.

In addition, both husbands and wives reported that the marriages survived because of the determination of the spouses, usually one more so than the other. This spouse was usually the wife (see Table 7). Seven husbands reported that their marriages worked because they had "a good wife", the wife worked harder than the husband at the relationship, and the wife was more mature. Ten wives reported that they themselves worked harder at the relationships than their husbands. These responses have both cultural and religious overtones.

One wife, married fifty-five years, summarized the longevity of her marriage as follows:

I think our marriage has worked out these many years simply because my marriage was based on love and I was determined it would, so I did all in my power, such as taking a lot of things off my husband, such as running out with other women, staying out late at night, and spending most of his time away from home. But since he wasn't mean, we never had to fight. I just went on and accepted it even though it was very painful. He never really neglected his duties as to keeping the house financially, such as food, clothes, utilities, and other things that were necessary. I did everything I could with the Lord's help. I was intending to make it. It has been worth it.

Discussion of Research Question Six

Duties, responsibilities and obligations, in part, characterize the longevity of the marriages in this study. Levinger (1976) stated that a firmly committed spouse does not yearn for separation and may never think of divorce. Obligations toward the marital bond and the marital covenant are tied to deep-seated religious beliefs. Both culture and religion
Table 7
Emerging Factors Contributing to the Longevity of Older Black Marriages as Perceived by Husbands and Wives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMERGING FACTORS</th>
<th>FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HUSBANDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sacrity of the Marriage Vows</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For better or worse</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving one another</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving and taking</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlooking bad habits</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting responsibilities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotion to family life</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting each other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companionship</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominant Spouse</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity of Spouse</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good wife or husband</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working together</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Hardships</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

constrain the perpetuity of the marriage tie. Perhaps knowing that a spouse would not desert the other spouse and his family because of the marital commitments may have encouraged the partners to work harder at the relationship, and consequently, to accept and overlook faults in the spouse. In addition, role changes may have influenced the stability of the marriages. For example, both husbands and wives were major breadwinners, but as different times of the year, especially for farm families. Hence, one spouse could exert influence over the other one part of the year and the other spouse could exert influence the remainder of the year. Neugarten (1964) has suggested that in old age, roles converge and reverse. Husbands tend to shift from active mastery to passive mastery,
whereas wives tend to shift from subordinate roles to authoritative roles. These shifts suggest a lessening concern with some kinds of external involvements and more internal involvements, perhaps due to physiological changes, i.e. decreased vision and hearing. Kimmel (1974) has suggested that in old age the husband's role becomes instrumental whereas the wife's role becomes expressive-integrative. In addition, the wife is assigned power by her husband whether she has it or not (Kimmel, 1974).

The dominant women in black families have been the center of much controversy in the study of black families. Yet, in this study, both husbands and wives reported that the dominant spouse, i.e. the spouse who worked harder at the relationship, was the wife. Perhaps, the dominant spouse is reflected more in older black families than in younger black families because of economic hardships throughout the years, the lack of viable alternatives or an immature or inexperienced husband.

Summary

One of the objectives of this study was to describe the life experiences of selected older black couples in terms of demographic data. From the analysis of the data, the subjects in this study have slightly higher educational levels, but similar income and occupational levels as other older blacks across the nation but lower levels compared to older whites. Marriages at early ages, long childbearing periods, and large families characterize the families in this study. The majority of the husbands and wives were either living in rural areas or had spent the majority of their lives in rural areas.

The second objective of the study was to identify factors that older black couples perceive to have affected the stability of their
marriages. Kin ties, personality characteristics, and religiosity have been cited in the literature as influencing marital stability. The results in this study show a similar relationship. High religiosity and close kin ties characterize the couples in this study. Other variables that emerged in the study as contributing to marital stability were the sacrity of the marital vows, a dominant spouse, and economic hardships.

The marital adjustment over the family life cycle demonstrated a curvilinear effect, that is, couples were pleased with the marriages when first married, less pleased during the childrearing and launching stages and more pleased in the later years of marriage. Overall, the couples rated their current marital relationships at the time of the study as satisfactory.
The purposes in the study were to investigate factors influencing the stability of black couples who had been married fifty years or longer and to explore how the couples adjusted to external and internal pressures in the relationship over selected stages of the family life cycle. The demographic factors, i.e. education, income, occupation, place of residence, age at marriage, and number of children were cited in the literature as contributing to marital stability. Other factors identified in the literature as contributors to marital stability included personality characteristics, religiosity, kin ties, and marital adjustment. These factors were cited as the most predictive factors contributing to marital stability; hence, they were included in the study. The study was descriptive and exploratory; consequently, a case study approach was used.

In order to carry out the major purposes, the following two specific objectives provided direction for the study: (1) to describe the life experiences of selected older black couples in terms of demographic data and stages of the family life cycle and (2) to identify factors that older black couples perceived to have effected the stability of their marriages.

Six research questions were investigated in order to meet the objectives in the study. They were as follows:
1. How can older black couples be described in terms of education, income, occupation, age at marriage, number of children, and place of residence?

2. What effect do kin ties, personality characteristics, and religiosity have on the stability of the marital relationships for older black couples?

3. What kinds of adjustments were made in the marital relationships at various stages of the family life cycle?

4. How satisfied with the marital relationships do the couples perceive themselves being at selected points in the life cycle?

5. How satisfied are the couples with their marriages at the present time?

6. What factors do the couples perceive as contributing to their marital stability?

The sample selected for the study consisted of twenty couples who had been married fifty years or more and at the time of the study were living in Pitt County, North Carolina.

An interview schedule, developed by the investigator, comprised of open-ended questions on the stability of the marriages and basic demographic information about each spouse individually and as a couple. Spanier's (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale, which was incorporated into the interview schedule, was used to measure marital adjustment in the study. Data were collected by the investigator within a three-month period. This included interviewing, taping, transcribing, and coding. Measures of central tendency and frequencies were used to provide descriptive analysis of the data. Analyses of data were presented in response to the research
questions. The findings were compared with those reviewed in the literature, using interactional theory as the conceptual framework.

**Summary of Findings**

Research has indicated that high levels of income, occupation, education, older age at marriage and small family size contribute to stable marriages. However, the couples in this study were characterized by low levels of income, occupation, and education, marriage at early ages, long childbearing periods and large family size. Yet, the couples managed to stay together fifty years or more. Research has also reported that individuals having a rural orientation to family life are likely to have stable marriages. The majority of the couples in this study were either from rural areas or had spent the majority of their lives in rural areas.

The findings in relation to the family life cycle indicated a curvilinear relationship, with couples reporting being happy in the childbearing and launching stages and less satisfied during the childrearing stage of the family life cycle. Although the couples experienced the Depression of the 1930's in the early years, most of them reported that the Depression had little or no effect upon their relationships.

Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used to access current marital adjustment. Overall, the couples rated their marriages at the time of the study as satisfactory. The couples reported that the adjustments made in the later years were basically those related to shrinking financial resources.

The findings in this study suggest that kin ties, personality characteristics, and religiosity contributed to the longevity of these
marriages. Kin ties were reported to be important not only between the older parents and their children, but also between older parents and other relatives. The couples reported positive personality characteristics and learning to cope with negative ones as favorable to the stability of the marriages. In addition, religiosity was suggested as contributing to the longevity of the marriages. However, the couples reported little pressure from their religious organizations against divorce. Other factors that emerged during the study as contributing to the stability of these marriages included the sacriﬁcy of the marital vows, a dominant spouse (who was usually the wife), and economic hardships.

In summarizing the ﬁndings, the interactional framework was used to explain the marital relationship as a growing, changing, interacting, and adapting unit. It was suggested that perhaps the couples in the study stayed together all these years, in part, because of survival needs and/or the lack of viable alternatives.

**Implications for Practitioners**

From the ﬁndings in this study and other research on older black marriages, practitioners and researchers in the area of the family have little insight into why older black couples stay together. Since income, education, occupation, and small family size did not contribute to the stability of the study couples as has been suggested for white couples, there is a need to determine the reasons for the differences. Perhaps the structure and value system of the black family accounted for some of this difference. In addition, perhaps if it could be determined why older black marriages do not remain stable and satisfying, such findings
could be transferred to those that do remain stable and satisfying.

Although the religious participation of the couples in this study was considerably higher than reported in the literature for both black and white older couples, more attention needs to be given to the church's role in family life. Perhaps the church could serve as a community-based intervention center for older couples. This means that the church could serve as the basic institution for teaching about the aging process, preparation for death, and consumer decisions. In addition, the church could provide an advocacy leadership role for increasing services and programs for older individuals. Marital and spiritual counseling, however, would continue to be basic functions of the church.

Older persons are particularly vulnerable to mugging, robbery, verbal and physical assault, and consumer fraud both within and outside their home communities. The majority of older persons are physically and sometimes verbally incapable of escaping or resisting the attacker or abuser. These older individuals need both education and legal protection in such areas relating to banking, mail solicitation, false advertising, funeral policies, retirement planning, and police protection in order to protect themselves from being exploited.

The couples in this study, who were a select group in the communities, could become instrumental leaders in policy making. Overall, the total older population has been reluctant to take an active role in protesting their complaints and making their political power effective. However, they represent a sizeable minority group. If they were to vote and become more politically conscious, perhaps politicians would take their complaints more seriously. Thereby, effective social and economic
policies could be implemented. Such policies could include planning, providing, and evaluating services and programs for older persons, e.g. income supplements, health care, and employment. The present Medicare program provides adequate medical care for older persons; however, it does not provide sufficient health care. For example, several items are omitted or a fee is required to obtain some services (care of eyes, prescription drugs, etc.). Older persons may not be financially able to pay for such services.

Increased training and funding for minority students and staff to work with older black persons is needed. Training programs in all institutions of higher education, but especially in black colleges and universities, are vital to achieve goals in providing direct and resource services to the older black population. Programs and training are needed in the areas of rural-urban renewal, community development, home care, health care, and nutrition as they relate to older individuals.

More programs and research are needed on the basic mechanisms and social aspects of aging, cultural variations, and environmental influences. Such programs are important for advancing understanding of the aging process and for equipping professionals to work with the aged. In addition, more funds are needed to establish and maintain clearinghouses and centers for information about the rapidly growing field of gerontology.

Individuals need to be taught at younger ages about aging, retirement, and how to cope with change. The public schools, community organizations, and the media could serve as vehicles to obtain these goals. In addition, these agencies could aid in helping the black family to become less of a stigmatized group.
Marriage and family enrichment programs are entering a period of rapid growth, especially in the white community. There is every indication that such programs could make a significant contribution in the black community. Black family counselors, knowledgeable of black culture and styles of living, could be instrumental in establishing and maintaining marriage and family enrichment programs in the black community.

Implications for Researchers

Given the findings of this descriptive and exploratory study of a selected group of older black couples, further research needs to be done on older couples to identify other factors that make for stable black marriages. The factors cited in the literature and those that emerged during the study need further investigation in order to explain stable black marriages. Both older black and white couples who have high levels of marital stability should be studied. Such studies should include stratified descriptive and verificational research with large, randomly selected samples of older couples.

Although the current study found high levels of kin ties and religious participation and affiliation in church-related activities, the data suggest that additional research is needed on these and other support systems that may be indicative of marriages in the later years. The study reported that children gave aid to their older parents. There is a need to determine if older parents give aid to their children and the extent of such aid. Hence, the role of the older parent is not clear. Additional research is needed on the role of older parents and the effect of transitions from one stage to another or from one role to another.
The findings in this study were compared to research studies reported in the literature. It should be noted that the majority of the subjects in those studies were white middle-class and in the earlier stages of the life cycle. The data in the present study suggest that both black and white families are diverse in areas of social-economical status, motivation, and perception. Comparing older blacks with young, middle-age whites does not provide an adequate view of marital stability. Since research comparing older blacks with older whites and middle-class older blacks with middle-class older whites is lacking, more research of a comparative nature is needed.

From the findings in this study, it was indicated that the perceptions and definitions of marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, and marital happiness varied among the couples and between spouses. This variability may be due to the variance in the conceptualization of the terms "marital happiness" and "marital adjustment". Consequently, research is needed on the conceptualization of these terms by aged individuals and their relation to stable marriages. The present research did not study the relationship of companionship, intimacy, empathy, and sympathy to marital stability. However, need for such studies exists.

This research was based on the perceptions, emotions, and feelings of the couples who were in the later stages of the family life cycle; hence, the reported information was subject to memory loss. More research is needed using methodology which is not as subject to memory loss.

The black families in this study gave evidence that they were adaptive, changing, and adjustable. These qualities were necessary for survival. The present study suggested that this adaptation was culturally
related. It is conceivable that past experiences, hardships, and support systems encouraged the couples to use their cultural heritage to adapt to the dominant society. This may imply that the couples had developed survival mechanisms for two cultures, the black and the dominant society. There is a need for additional research on the adaptive mechanism and survival influences of black families in the later stages of the life cycle.

The literature has suggested that the number of older minorities will increase. Given the labor force participation of older black people and the high cost of living, older individuals may have to depend more on a job for financial support than has been necessary in the past. More evaluative research is needed on the role performance of older wage earners and its relationship to successful adjustments to aging.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

From the findings in this exploratory study, some suggestions for further investigation of black stable marriages are presented. They are:

1. Identify factors that make for high happiness-high stability marriages and low happiness-high stability marriages.

2. Identify external pressures and cultural pressures that impinge on the marriages of older couples.

3. Replicate the present study using larger samples, wider geographical areas, including both rural and urban subjects, and both black and white couples.

4. Investigate differences of marital stability across various class and racial lines.

5. Conduct cohort studies covering married black couples from the
early stages of marriage to the later stages.

6. Further investigate older couples to determine if they are successfully adapting and adjusting to the aging process.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Periodicals and Articles


Government Publications


Unpublished Papers


APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS

ORAL EXPLANATION TO SUBJECTS

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FORM
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

I consent to participating in a study entitled "Factors Influencing the Marital Stability of Older Black Couples." Cynthia Johnson, principal investigator, has explained the purpose of the study and procedures to be followed. Possible benefits of the study have been described as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent without prejudice to me. The information obtained from me will remain confidential and anonymous unless I specifically agree otherwise.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I have signed it freely and voluntarily and understand a copy is available upon request.

Date: _______________ Signed ____________________________

(Participant)

(Investigator/Project Director or Authorized Representative) (Person Authorized to Consent for Participant - If Required)
Oral Explanation of Study to Subjects

I am a student in the Family Relations and Human Development Department at The Ohio State University, and am conducting a study on the marriages of black older couples. My purpose is to find out as much as I can about the things which have made these marriages last. I also want to find out what changes happened in these marriages due to pressures both in and outside the family.

I appreciate the help you are giving me by taking part in this study. If you are like the many others who are a part of this study, you will find the questions interesting and easy to answer.

This is not a test. I will be asking you questions about your marriage—from the time you were first married to the present. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to these questions. I want you to be as frank in your answers as you can. I want to know how you feel about certain things.

This interview is completely confidential. Your name will never be used with any of the information you give me. Your answers will be summarized with all of the answers obtained from the other people in the study.

I need to make sure that you understand why I am doing this study and that you are willing to participate. Before we begin, are there any questions you would like to ask me?

(Hand respondent the consent form. Read to respondent, if necessary). Please read (or listen as I read) this consent form and sign it if you are willing to take part in the interview.
Factors Influencing the Marital Stability of Black Couples

Jean Dickerscheid

Home Ec/Family Relations & Human Develop.

131 Campbell Hall/1787 Neil Ave.

1. Who will be doing the actual interviewing? 
   - Graduate student

2. Participants should be informed beforehand:
   a. The interview will be quite lengthy and they should feel free to take breaks or stop at any time.
   b. They will be asked questions about their marriage and should feel free to omit questions.
   c. There will be some taping of the interview.

3. Adequate facilities will be available to accommodate participants.

4. Confidentiality will be observed.

Principal Investigator:

Jean D. Dickerscheid

Date: Dec. 21, 1979

Form PA-725A
Ohio State University
Behavioral & Social Sciences
Human Subject Review Committee
Research Involving Human Subjects

Action of the Review Committee

The Behavioral and Social Sciences Review Committee has taken the following action:

1. Approve (___ X___ waiver of written consent)

2. Approved with conditions

3. Disapprove

With regard to the employment of human subjects in the proposed research entitled: Factors Influencing the Marital Stability of Black Couples

Jean Dickerscheid is listed as the principal investigator.

The conditions, if any, are attached and are signed by the committee chairperson. If disapproved, the reasons are attached and are signed by the committee chairperson.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to retain a copy of each signed consent form for at least four (4) years beyond the termination of the subject's participation in the proposed activity. Should the principal investigator leave the University, signed consent forms are to be transferred to the Human Subject Review Committee for the required retention period. This application has been approved for the period of one year. You are reminded that you must promptly report any problems to the Research Committee, and that no procedural changes may be made without prior review and approval. You are also reminded that the identity of the research participants must be kept confidential.

Date: December 14, 1979

Signed: [Signature]

Chairperson

CC: Original-Investigator
Ken Sloan
Development Officer
File

Form PA-325
Rev. 10/79
APPENDIX B

OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE SCALE

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION SCALE
DISTRIBUTION OF PRESTIGE RATINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1963</th>
<th>1963</th>
<th>1963</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Supreme Court Justice</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Owner of a factory that employs about 100 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Building contractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear physicist</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>Artist who paints pictures that are exhibited in galleries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>Musician in a symphony orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government scientist</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>Author of novels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State governor</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>Owner--operator of a lunch stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet member in federal government</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Economist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College professor</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Official of international labor union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. representative in Congress</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Railroad engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomat in the U.S. Foreign Service</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>Owner--operator of a printing shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>Farmer and operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County judge</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>Undertaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologist</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Welfare worker for a city government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Newspaper columnist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of the board of directors of a large corporation</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Policeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor of a large city</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Reporter on a daily newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priest</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Radio announcer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of a department in a state government</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Bookkeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil engineer</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Tenent farmer—one who owns livestock and machinery and manages the farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airline pilot</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Insurance agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banker</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biologist</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Manager of a small store in a city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociologist</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>Accountant for a labor business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor in public schools</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Mail carrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain in the regular army</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Railroader conductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant for a large business</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Mail carrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public school teacher</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Railroader conductor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This chart shows the results of a national survey conducted in 1961 to determine the prestige ranking of various occupations. The figures were arrived at by averaging thousands of responses. These rankings differ only slightly from those of a similar study made in 1947.
Social Stratification Scale
A Simplified Version

1. Professional persons

2. Proprietors, managers, and officials
   a. Farmers (owners and tenants)
   b. Wholesale and retail dealers
   c. Other proprietors, managers, and officials

3. Clerks and kindred workers

4. Skilled workers and foremen

5. Semiskilled workers

6. Minimal or unskilled workers
   a. Farm laborers
   b. Laborers, except farm
   c. Servant classes

Middle-class
Working-class
Lower-class

APPENDIX C
DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE
INTERVIEW
DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Always Agree</th>
<th>Almost Agree</th>
<th>Occasionally Agree</th>
<th>Frequently Disagree</th>
<th>Almost Disagree</th>
<th>Always Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Handling family finances</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Matters of recreation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Holiday plans</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Demonstrations of affection</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Friends</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sex relations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Consensual manner (not proper behavior)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Philosophy of life</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Ways of dealing with parents and in-laws</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Art, goals, and things believed important</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Amount of time spent together</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Making major decisions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Household tasks</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Leisure time interests and activities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Career decisions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| How often do you discuss or have you consulted divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship? |
| All the time | Most of the time | Occasionally | Rarely | Never |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight? |
| All of the time | Most of the time | Occasionally | Rarely | Never |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well? |
| All of the time | Most of the time | Occasionally | Rarely | Never |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| Do you ever regret that you married? (or lived together)? |
| All of the time | Most of the time | Occasionally | Rarely | Never |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| How often do you and your partner quarrel? |
| All of the time | Most of the time | Occasionally | Rarely | Never |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| How often do you and your mate get on each other's nerves? |
| All of the time | Most of the time | Occasionally | Rarely | Never |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| Do you kiss your mate? |
| Every Day | Almost Every Day | Occasionally | Rarely | Never |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| Do you and your mate exercise or maintain clothes together? |
| All of the time | Most of the time | Occasionally | Rarely | Never |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate? |
| Less than once a month | Once or twice a month | Once or twice a week | Once a week | More than once a week |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| These are the last things about which couples sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinion or were problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. (Check yes or not) |
| Yes | No |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| The statement reflects the degree of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happily," represents the degree of happiness in most relationships. Please circle the one which best describes the degree of happiness of all things considered in your relationship. |
| Slightly Unhappy | Fairly Unhappy | A Little Unhappy | Happy | Very Happy | Extremely Happy |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| Who of the following statements best describes how you look at the future of your relationship? |
| I am very much looking forward to the way my relationship is going, and would do almost anything there to make it succeed. |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| I am very much looking forward to the way my relationship is going, and do almost anything there to make it succeed. |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| I am not looking forward to the way my relationship is going, and would do almost anything there to make it succeed. |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| I am not looking forward to the way my relationship is going, and do almost anything there to make it succeed. |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| The relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going. |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

131
Interview Schedule

Marital Stability

Section I. INTRODUCTION: The first group of questions will give me some information about you and your spouse.

1. What city/town are you living in now? __________________________
   a. rural  b. urban

2. Did you spend most of your life in a rural or urban area?
   Husband ____________  Wife ____________

3. Have you moved since you first married? Yes ______ No ______
   How many times? ______

4. What was your age on your last birthday?
   Husband ____________  Wife ____________

5. What is the highest level of school you completed?
   (Read each name but not response).
   Husband  Wife
   1. less than 8 years  1. less than 8 years
   2. 8-12 years  2. 8-12 years
   3. some college  3. some college
   4. technical  4. technical
   5. BA/BS  5. BA/BS
   6. MA/MS  6. MA/MS

7. In what religious faith did you grow up? (Specify—Probe)
   Husband ____________  Wife ____________

8. Do you belong to an organized religion now?
   Husband ____________  Wife ____________

9. Which one? (Specify)
   Husband ____________  Wife ____________

10. Did you attend religious services when first married?
    Husband ____________  About how often? ____________
    Wife ____________  About how often? ____________

11. Do you attend religious services now?
    Husband ____________  About how often ____________
    Wife ____________  About how often ____________
12. Do or did you feel pressures from you church or own religious beliefs against separation or divorce?
   Husband  1. Yes  2. Somewhat  3. No
   Wife  1. Yes  2. Somewhat  3. No

13. Briefly, tell me in your own words why you think your marriage has worked out. (Probe).

For interviewer only:
1. Maturity of one, or both
2. Value or personality compatibility
3. Economics
4. Noninterference from the outside (fidelity, friends)
5. Good health
6. Other (Specify)

Section II. The next few questions are about your work patterns.

14. What is (has been) you major occupation? (Write description of job).

15. Approximately how many hours a week did you work at the height of your employment? ________

16. What is your present employment status? __________________________

17. Please tell me where you get your money for living. Just tell me yes or no for each source.

   | Full-time job | Yes | No |
   |----------------|
   | Part-time job  |     |
   | Welfare        |     |
   | Disability     |     |
   | Unemployment   |     |
   | Social Security|     |
   | Relatives      |     |
   | Investments/Savings | |
   | Friends        |     |
   | Other (Specify)|    |

18. What was your approximate total family income at the height of your earnings? (before taxes) ________ When was this? ________

19. What is your total family income now? ________

20. In general, how do your finances work out at the end of the month? I end up with--
1. not enough to make ends meet
2. just enough to make ends meet
3. some money left over  
4. don't know

21. During the early stages of your marriage, when you had small children, did you feel financial strain? _____ How so? 
1. a lot 
2. some  
3. none  
4. very little  
5. don't know

22. Did your spouse work full-time or part-time when you had small children? (Probe for answer). ______________________________

23. During the early years of your marriage, who was responsible for managing the money? 
1. husband  
2. wife  
3. both

24. Who has been responsible for managing the money the past years? 
1. husband  
2. wife  
3. both

25. Would you manage your income differently if you had it to do all over again? 
1. yes  
2. no  
3. don't know


Section III. Now I want to talk to you about your marriage.

27. How long did you know your former spouse before you married? _______ (Record months or years).

28. How old were you when you married your spouse? _______

29. How long have you been married to your spouse? _______

30. Do you and your spouse have any children? Yes ___ No ___

31. How many children do you have? ____

32. How old were you when your first child was born? ____  
last child? ______

33. Approximately how often do you visit your children? ______

34. Approximately how often do they visit you? ______

35. Does one particular child "keep an eye" on you? Yes ___ No ___  
Which child? Son _______ Daughter ________
36. How close does this child live to you? _____ miles

37. Many child(ren) help their parents out. How do your children help you?
   1. money  3. live with child  5. other ______
   2. gifts   4. emotional support

38. If you had to do it over again, how many children would you want?
   1. more  2. less  3. same

39. Who usually keeps in contact with the children?
   1. husband most of the time
   2. wife most of the time

40. Do you think that having children brought about a change in your marriage?
   1. yes  2. no  3. don't know

41. What were the changes? (Probe) ________________________________

42. How would you describe your relationship with your children when they were growing up? Now?
   Growing Up    Now
   1. very close  1. very close
   2. somewhat close  2. somewhat close
   3. not very close  3. not very close

43. Who lives in the household with you now?

   Yes    No
   spouse    _____    _____
   own child(ren)    _____    _____
   grandchild(ren)    _____    _____
   great-grandchild(ren)    _____    _____
   in-laws    _____    _____
   brother    _____    _____
   sister    _____    _____
   other relative(s)    _____    _____
   friend(s)    _____    _____
   other (specify)    _____    _____
   pet    _____    _____

44. If you could live anywhere, with anyone in any arrangement you wanted, what would you choose? ________________________________

45. How often do you get together with other relatives beside your children?
   1. daily    3. once a week  5. other
   2. almost every day  4. several times a month
46. How close do your relatives live? 

47. I'm going to read a list of characteristics which people have. Please tell me if you think you had any of these in the early years of your marriage? Now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Early Years</th>
<th>Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. stubbornness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. gets angry easily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. feels easily hurt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. nervous or irritable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. moody</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. jealous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. bossy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. self-centered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48. Please tell me if you think your spouse had any of these traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Early Years</th>
<th>Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. stubbornness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. gets angry easily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. feels easily hurt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. nervous or irritable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. moody</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. jealous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. bossy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. self-centered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

49. I'm going to read you another list of characteristics which people have. Please tell me if you were any of these in the early years of your marriage? Now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Early Years</th>
<th>Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. cooperative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. friendly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. grateful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. respectful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. considerate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

50. What about your spouse?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Early Years</th>
<th>Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. cooperative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. friendly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. grateful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. respectful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. considerate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

51. Do you and your spouse share common interests? What are some of them?

52. What would you say have made your marriage work? (Probe)
53. How would you compare your marriage to most other couples your age?
   Would you say—
   1. much better  4. somewhat worse
   2. somewhat better  5. much worse
   3. about the same  6. don't know

Section IV. This section will allow you to talk freely about your marriage and how it has changed through the years. (Probe all of these questions; show historical pictures). Tape record this section.

54. What kind of adjustments did you make in your marriage and family during:
   1. hard times—like the depression, when jobs were few and money was scarce?
   2. when your children were babies and/or small children?
   3. when your children started leaving home?
   4. when times were good, when there was money and a regular job?

55. Why have you and your spouse stayed together all these years?

56. What was the best time of your married life?

57. How pleased or satisfied were you with your marriage when:
   1. you first got married?
   2. you had small children?
   3. the children grew up and left home?

58. Would you say that your kin (relatives) had anything to do with your marriage lasting? How so?

59. Are there other things that you can think of that have made your marriage last all these years?

60. We sure have talked a lot. Is there anything else you wish to say?

Section V. This last section is about some of the disagreements many people have in their marriages. Please tell me the approximate agreement between you and your partner for these items. I will read them to you. You can read along with me if you wish. (Hand a copy of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale to respondent). (Explain choices and procedures). Administer the scale.

Thank the respondent for answering questions about his/her marriage.
Table 8

Descriptive Data Concerning Age, Length of Marriage, Persons Living in the Home, and Home Ownership by Older Black Couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couples</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Length of Marriage (years)</th>
<th>Persons Living in Household</th>
<th>Home Ownership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td></td>
<td>Owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>gg child*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>g child**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>boarder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>g child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>g child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* gg child = great grandchildren
** g child = grandchildren
Table 9

Frequency and Percentage of Educational Attainment of Husbands and Wives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>HUSBANDS</th>
<th></th>
<th>WIVES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N*</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N*</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 8 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 - 12 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One couple did not respond to this question.

Table 10

Husbands' Occupations at Height of Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proprietors, managers and office farmers - owners and tenants</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical, skilled workers and foremen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-skilled</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal or unskilled, laborers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11

Present Employment Status of Husbands and Wives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</th>
<th>HUSBANDS</th>
<th></th>
<th>WIVES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Fulltime</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Parttime</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12

Frequency and Percent of Rural-Urban Differences of Husbands and Wives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLACE AND TIME OF RESIDENCE</th>
<th>HUSBANDS</th>
<th></th>
<th>WIVES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N(20)</td>
<td>% (100)</td>
<td>N(20)</td>
<td>% (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural* Now</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earlier</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban** Now</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earlier</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Rural = community of 2,499 or less persons
** Urban = community of 2,500 or more persons
Table 13
Frequency of Negative Characteristics for Husbands as Perceived by Wives and for Wives as Perceived by Husbands in the Early and Later Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEGATIVE PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>Husbands as Perceived by Wives</th>
<th>Wives as Perceived by Husbands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stubbornness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets angry easily</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings easily hurt</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous or irritable</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bossy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-centered</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The total number of responses in each column represents those spouses who responded to the items. Some spouses refused to respond to this section.
Table 14

Frequency of Negative Characteristics of Perceived Self in the Early and Later Years of Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEGATIVE PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Husbands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stubbornness</td>
<td>7  2  2  8  9  4  8  6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets angry easily</td>
<td>7  2  5  6  5  5  5  4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings easily hurt</td>
<td>6  3  3  6  3  9  2  9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous or irritable</td>
<td>3 16 17 7 5 7 5 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>6  5  4  4  6  6  3  6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>5  3  2  8  4  7  3  6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bossy</td>
<td>2  3  2  6  5  4  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-centered</td>
<td>2  5  3  6  6  3  5  7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>38  29  22  51  43  45  33  47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15

Frequency of Positive Characteristics for Husbands as Perceived by Wives and for Wives as Perceived by Husbands in the Early and Later Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVE PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>PERCEIVED HUSBANDS</th>
<th>PERCEIVED WIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early  Later</td>
<td>Early  Later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>11  2</td>
<td>10  3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>13  0</td>
<td>12  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grateful</td>
<td>12  1</td>
<td>12  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>11  2</td>
<td>11  2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerate</td>
<td>11  1</td>
<td>11  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>58  6</td>
<td>56  8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16

Frequency of Positive Characteristics of Perceived Self in the Early and Later Years of Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVE PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>HUSBANDS</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>WIVES</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Later</td>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Later</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grateful</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>