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## **Impact of Family Expectations on the Marital Practices of Haitian-American Couples**

Kencia Mele

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**Impact of Family Expectations on the Marital Practices of Haitian-American Couples**

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of  
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Kencia Mele

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

May 2022

Dissertation Chair: Pearl Stewart, Ph.D.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

**Impact of Family Expectations on the Marital Practices of  
Haitian-American Couples**

of

Kencia Mele

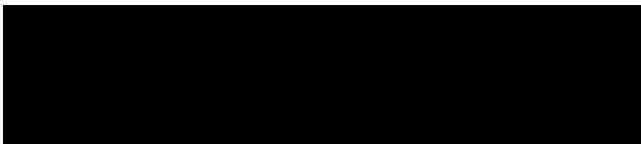
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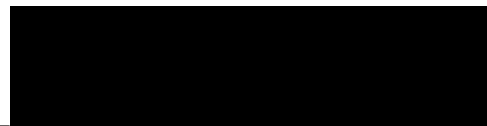
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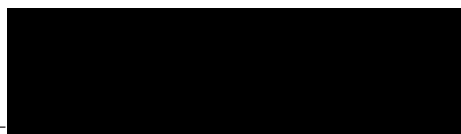
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### **Abstract**

This paper analyzes how family expectations from the Haitian culture manifest in the marriages of middle-aged Haitian-American couples. This study emphasizes that the evolution to bi-culturalism is a major factor in the adjustments of cultural expectations. Four middle-aged Haitian-American couples were interviewed via Zoom individually. They were asked to describe how they believed Haitian culture and family expectations influenced their family and marriage life. The results indicate that the middle-aged Haitian-American couples adhere to explicit and implicit family expectations set out by their families of origin; these expectations were influenced by Haitian culture. The major themes from the study were: continued but modified gender roles, the expectation to get married, upholding Haitian traditions, stoic love expression, and the importance of religion. The participants in this study also mimicked similar family expectations for their children by presuming they will marry and uphold Haitian traditions just as they learned from their parents and elders. Ultimately, the participants in this study have taken elements of Haitian and American culture coupled with their family expectations and the influence of their peers' expectations in America to form a new culture for themselves, Haitian-American. This shows up in their marital practices and decisions as well as the way they choose to raise their children.

*Keywords:* marriage, Haitian-American, family expectation, culture, traditions, marriage practices, gender roles, love expression, acculturation, Life-course, kinscripts

### **Acknowledgments**

First I would like to thank my committee for their time and energy in helping me endure to the end. To my family- thank you for passing along the culture to me. Everything that you have taught me has made me who I am today and I'm forever grateful. Next, I want to shout out all of the people that heard my stories along this journey and encouraged me through prayer and/or just a listening ear! My personal friends that took care of me during my darkest hours during these years of development, I'm forever grateful and when you need me- you know I got you!! I also must express my gratitude for each of my participants that so graciously volunteered their times to share their stories. Thank you for trusting me to share your experiences and use it to amplify the Haitian-American experiences in the literature. I will use these and future findings/studies to make you proud that you were my "day ones." Lastly, I have to shout out the angels in my path that helped me tremendously in this journey- Mera, Sacha & Jenny! You all have been so generous of your time and spirit along the way! I am forever grateful for your compassion and patience. Also for calming my anxiety and showing this first generation college student how to proceed in such a lonely place like this journey has been. So for all of you that played any roll in helping me whether that was calling, texting, praying or feeding me- I can never thank you enough!! May God repay each of you in His own special way for the selfless kindness and generosity you all have shown me.

### **Dedication**

This is dedicated to all my Haitian-Americans and other bicultural peers that don't feel Haitian or American enough. I see you and I hope my future work will highlight your experiences. It's also dedicated to the couples balancing cultural and religious expectations and trying to find their own new mix. May the findings from this work encourage you that you are not alone. It's normal, keep praying for clarity & guidance and you both will find a way to incorporate aspects of *all* your cultural influences and religious convictions. This one is for the culture and for y'all!

## Contents

<b>Chapter I</b>	1
<b>Introduction</b>	1
Background & Context	2
Brief Literature on Influence of Culture on Haitian Marriage	5
Problem Statement & Research Question	8
Purpose Statement	9
Significance of Study	10
Explanation of Key Concepts and Terms	11
Organization of Chapters	13
<b>Chapter II</b>	14
<b>Literature Review</b>	14
Marriage	15
Marriage Practices and Traditions	15
African American Marriages	19
Cohabitation	22
Religion & Marriage	23
Marriage Duration & Stability	25
Haitian Culture	28
Family Structure	28
Family Function	29
Influence of Immigration	30
Family Expectations & Cultural Transmission	33
Haitian Culture and Marriage	36
Theoretical Perspective	37
Life Course Perspective	37
Acculturation Theory	42
<b>Chapter III</b>	46
<b>Methodology</b>	46
Qualitative Methodology	46
Phenomenology	46
Participant Recruitment	49
Eligibility Criteria	49
Participants of the Study	50
Recruitment Procedures	54



Research Design	56
Data Collection	56
Data Analysis Process	58
Step 1: Acquiring Sense of the Transcribed Data	58
Step 2: Extracting significant statements	59
Step 3: Formulating meanings	59
Step 4: Organizing formulated meanings into cluster themes	59
Step 5: Describing the investigated phenomenon	59
Individual and Couple Interviews	60
Interview Protocol	61
Reflexivity	62
Researcher Positionality	62
<b>Chapter IV</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Findings</b>	<b>64</b>
Theme 1: Gender Roles	65
Learned Gender Roles	65
Modifications to Traditional Gender Roles	67
Husband provides and protects wife and family	70
Theme 2: Family Expectations of Marriage	74
Expectations to Get Married	74
Expectations for Couples to Have Children	81
Respect as a value	82
Honor and Submission to Husband	84
Theme 3: Upholding Haitian Traditions	87
Haitian Foods	87
Observing Haitian Celebrations	89
Teaching Children Creole	90
Theme 4: Love Expression	94
Theme 5: Importance of Religion	97
Summary	102
<b>Chapter V</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Discussion</b>	<b>104</b>
Theoretical Connections	105
Life-Course Perspective	105
Acculturation Theory	108
Family Expectations	111
Marriage decisions	112

Expectation to Have Children	115
Family Values	115
Gender Roles	117
Traditional Gender Scripts	118
Modification of Gender Roles	120
Upholding Haitian Traditions	126
Family Bonds	128
Food	130
Language	131
Importance of Religion	133
Love Expression	138
<b>Limitations</b>	139
<b>Implications and Future Research</b>	140
<b>Conclusion</b>	141
<b>References</b>	143
<b>Appendix A: Interview Protocol</b>	163
<b>Appendix B: Recruitment Email/Phone Prompt</b>	166
<b>Appendix C: Recruitment Flier</b>	167
<b>Appendix D: Screening Questions</b>	168
<b>Appendix E: Follow-Up Interview Questions</b>	169
<b>Appendix F: Identification of Significant Statements</b>	170

## Chapter I

### Introduction

As a Haitian-American woman, learning from and accepting both cultures, I have come to see that many of my life choices are influenced by my Haitian culture. While being born in the USA makes me American, my Haitian family's traditions, trends, and customs heavily influence my identity, thus making it imperative that I identify myself as Haitian-American to embrace the fusion of the cultures that affect the person I am today. I hail from a Christian background and my parents were divorced before I was a teenager. Their decision to divorce was due to a history of domestic violence and a difference in religious views -which some call being unequally yoked. Although the Bible does not exclusively discuss marriage or relationships in this verse about being unevenly yoked, it commands believers not to be *yoked together with unbelievers* (Holy Bible, New Living Translation, 1996/2015, 2 Corinthians 6:14). Theron (2004) describes unequally yoked partners as a couple where one is a believer in God and the other is not, thus causing them to be unequal in their religious views. My parents' decision to divorce was frowned upon by the church, and other religious members of the family network, despite the scope of the irreconcilable marital issues because they were *expected* to make their marriage work despite the challenges. All of these experiences have made me significantly interested in marriage, how culture (which religion and community values are distinct in Haiti) and family expectations influence the practice of marriage, and the characteristics of Haitian culture that shape those practices among Haitian-Americans.

## **Background & Context**

Historically, the concept of marriage began before the word was used to describe it. Anthropologists believed that marriage was present thousands of years ago, before Christ, where families would conduct ceremonies to unite or marry a man and woman (The Week Staff, 2015). Gallagher (2002) described marriage as more than an intimate declaration of love but a public legal act; it is a normative act in complex societies heavily governed by societal law. Marriage is a key institution recognized among most civilizations and groups of people and the purpose of marriage has changed throughout history from culture to culture. Some believed the purpose of marriage is political, economic, or social, while others described the purpose of marriage as influenced by love, personal fulfillment, religious motives, family expectations, or procreation (Manap et al., 2013). In a typical North-American home, couples tend to be legally married, live in a household with their biological children, and follow American culture (Smith, 1993). Culture has a significant influence on what marriage looks like (Davoodvandi et al., 2018). Culture is defined as the knowledge of the beliefs, traditions, values, and habits of a group of people (Derbaix & de La Ville, 2021). Cultural values impact the decision to marry, the choice of partner, and how to raise children. Cultural considerations can also influence the choice to have children (Davoodvandi et al., 2018). Culturally specific marital practices vary but include traditions based on cultural, religious, and personal factors (Maesle & Lakshmanan, 2021; Snow, 2021). For example, some choose to complete the marriage license at the local court simply for the legal documentation while others prefer a traditional marriage ceremony to honor their culture or religion. This study examined the influence of Haitian culture on marriages of middle-aged Haitian-American couples.

Despite the high divorce rate, couples choose to get married for a chance at happiness in the new life cycle of marriage with their partner (Manap et al., 2013). People may choose to get and stay married for many reasons. Some may choose to get or stay married for financial security, social status or simply to avoid divorce. One common reason couples choose to stay married is for the sake of children. The choice to get/stay married for the sake of the children may initially seem to be the *right* choice. Parental divorce can set off a negative chain of events such as psychological and behavioral consequences for the couple and their children and/or reducing child life expectancy by four years (Gallagher, 2002). Children raised outside of a stable marriage are more at risk of personal, emotional, and social issues later in life (Gallagher, 2002; Li et al., 2018; van Schellen, 2012). Deciding to remain married seems to satisfy the needs of the children and help the social status of the parents. Research notes marriage also benefits society- due to many couples reporting they are happier, healthier, and wealthier citizens (Manap et al., 2013; Watch & By, 2012; Hawkins et al., 2013; Yardley, 2019; Wood et al., 2012). In reviewing divorce and relationship habits for different age groups, Grundström et al. (2021) compared young adults (ages 20-39) to middle-aged adults (ages 40-60). In this study, they noted that young adults were more likely to be exploring their options with multiple partners, while middle-aged adults from ages 35 to 55 were likely already married.

Since marriage, as it relates to Haitian culture, was not specifically discussed in the literature, this document examined research available to groups in the African Diaspora. The African diaspora described all members that derived from Africa (Njemanze & Njemanze, 2011). While this included African immigrants, it also included others whose slave ancestors were traded and sent to various countries (e.g. Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Haiti, etc.) thus many members of the African diaspora identified as a descendant of a secondary culture but they

derived much of their culture or traditions from Africa (Njemanze & Njemanze, 2011; Palmer, 2018). Haitians are the 4th largest group of immigrants in the United States from the Caribbean (Olsen-Medina & Batalova, 2020). According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey Brief, in 2009 there were about 830,000 people with Haitian ancestry in the United States (Buchanan, Albert, & Beaulieu, 2010). 56% of the Haitian immigrants to the U.S. were women. 46% of the Haitian immigrants migrate to Florida, 25% to New York, 8% to New Jersey, 7% to Massachusetts, 2% to Georgia, and 2% to Maryland (Pierce & Elisme, 2000; Shillingford et al., 2018).

After Haitians migrated to the United States, they usually would reside in compact city blocks like Little Haiti in Miami or Queens/Brooklyn, New York where they were close to other Haitians that migrated to the U.S. (Holcomb et al., 1996). These compact communities were often called ethnic enclaves. The ethnic enclaves played several roles for their members. It created a safe space for the people as they could speak in their native language(s) because most of the people in the ethnic enclave spoke the language openly. An enclave was also a place where people that have been in the U.S. a while could get a fresh influx of the language and culture (Xie & Gough, 2011). As new individuals began to visit or migrate to the enclave, they exposed the others to new vernacular, idioms, and cultural practices from the home country. This helped the people in the enclave keep the cadence of the language to not dilute the language and culture. In the ethnic enclaves, people of the same cultural background “isolated” themselves in a section of the city where they lived and worked within the enclave (Xie & Gough, 2011). There is a cultural exchange in the enclave, where visitors from the homeland (e.g. visitors from Haiti to Little Haiti) brought goods exclusive to that part of the world to the U.S. Then when they returned to their homeland, they usually would carry some of the goods exclusive to the U.S.

back to their home country. While many people chose to live in the enclave, it is important to note that not every Haitian lived in the ethnic enclave. Some people were living outside of the enclave but visited for access to fresh goods from Haiti that were exclusively found in that enclave. The Haitians outside the enclave also had the option to visit for personal entertainment with the enclave locals.

Marital practices describe who one marries, why they marry, and how they choose to marry. Marriage practices also include the choice not to marry. For Haitian couples, marital practices were likely to be influenced by culture and family expectations. Examples of the influence of culture or family expectations were evident in the type of marriage ceremony a couple had, the choice of primary language used in the home, the assignment of duties within the couple, and more decisions made throughout the marriage of the couple. Haitian culture focuses on food, art, music, language, and religion (Civian, 1994; Pierce & Elisme, 2000; Derbaix & de La Ville, 2021) Haitian couples typically were religious (Pierce & Elisme, 2000), thus they followed religious practices in their marriages. Later, in this text, there will be more examples of heterosexual marriage traditions in Haitian-American culture. Thus, the current study examined the impact family expectation had on the marital practices of heterosexual Haitian-American couples in the United States.

### **Brief Literature on Influence of Culture on Haitian Marriage**

Marriage is an institution with many rituals, traditions, and expectations that are shaped by culture, history, and legality. Marital traditions are a significant factor in the practice of marriage where couples (and their family) decide how, when, and if they will marry (Snow, 2021). Marriage traditions are customs and practices surrounding marriages- this may include weddings, pre-marriage costumes, and cultural ceremonies related to marriage (Monger, 2013).

Although marriage traditions may vary, we do know that the marriage customs of individuals, regardless of their cultural background, influence the way individuals view and behave in marriage (Monger, 2013; Davoodvandi et al., 2018; Wardle, 2017).

The literature on marriage focuses on subjects like the history of the institution, marital satisfaction/quality, divorce, and marital traditions. Marriage research historically has focused on populations like White couples, Hispanic couples, and Black couples, however as it relates to more specific racial-ethnic populations of couples, there was less research available (Bryant et al., 2008). Black or African American marriages were discussed in marriage research significantly less than White, Hispanic, or Asian marriages (Vaterlaus et al., 2017), but when it came to more specific ethnic cultures within the Black community, there was even less research available. Some differentiate Black Americans and African-Americans by noting African-Americans were people of African descent directly from the African continent and identified Africa as their homeland where their language, history, and culture stemmed from. While Black Americans may have also identified with African history and roots historically, they were descendants of African slaves in America (Muhammad, 2011). In this paper, Black-American, Black, and African-American is used interchangeably to describe the population of any member of the African diaspora or Black people in America. Literature available on Afro-Caribbean families generally focused on social mobility, immigration, or discrimination (Lincoln et al., 2008; Bryant et al., 2008) but there was little information on the marriages- Caribbean marriages, more specifically Haitian couples.

In this paper, there is mention of *traditional American* families or culture; Smith (1993) described this as the Standard North-American Family or SNAF. SNAF is a model of the *normal* or traditional American family. SNAF constitutes a legally married couple and their biological



children sharing a household (Smith, 1993). Usually, SNAF families adhere to American culture and standards. While this idea of *normal* may not look the same for every American family, the SNAF model is a model that people aimed for when they thought of the life of a traditional American family. If they had any extended family, they usually lived in a separate home. This language is used in this document to describe normative (socially accepted) American customs and practices as it relates to marriage and family.

For this study, the life-course perspective was used to examine Haitian family expectations for middle-aged, first-generation Haitian-American couples that were legally married for at least 5 years. The tenets that were used include agency, kinscripts, and normative/non-normative behaviors. The life-course perspective focused on the linked lives of individuals in a family unit, this was evident through family roles (Elder, 1975). As individuals began to choose their paths in life, they either linked their lives or chose separate life paths. Kinscripts are a type of family role assigned to individuals (Stack & Burton, 1993). As individuals in the family unit began to choose their life paths, some may have enacted agency by choosing a path different from the one expected by their family or culture. Agency is the act of making decisions that help one achieve their personal goals (Roy, 2006). Executing agency might seem like a powerful act of independence but can be difficult for members from certain cultures, like Haitian families, because they may feel that enacting agency is equivalent to going against their tribe. Kinwork duties are family expectations that must be upheld by each member of the family unit (Stack & Burton, 1993). Normative behaviors are predictions of the direction one's life should take, usually these are socially acceptable behaviors (Furstenberg, 2005). Non-normative transitions are unscheduled transitions that upset the norms of the culture or society which may come with a social disadvantage (Furstenberg, 2005). Later in chapter two, these

tenets of the life course theoretical perspective are explained in more detail with examples of how it may relate to Haitian-American families.

### **Problem Statement & Research Question**

Marriage is a highly regarded institution among people of Haitian descent. Religion is an important factor in Haitian culture, and much like others within the African diaspora (Jean-Baptiste, 1991; Pierce & Elisme, 2000; Marks et al., 2008), religious Haitians tend to revere the marital practices and teachings of their religious doctrine. Haitians generally recognized traditional church marriages or common-law marriages/arrangements- known as *placé* (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). The country's national religion is Catholicism which follows the teachings of the Bible where divorce is described as a sin (Ulrickson, 2020). According to the Old Testament in the Bible, wives could not divorce their husbands because this was considered detachment from his honor and brought shame to him (Vorster, 2015). Religious individuals were more likely to be committed in marriage and less likely to get a divorce if confronted with marital issues (Cutrona et al., 2011). Some religious belief systems anticipated divorce although it was not generally an acceptable act. For example in Judaism, the husband provided the wife with a contract of her duties before marriage. If she did not fulfill them, she could be released to remarry within the Jewish faith (Scheuerman, 2010). Also in Catholicism, women or men could seek an annulment of the marriage after consulting with a priest for very specific reasons such as infidelity (Scheuerman, 2010).

While the American government has noticed a significant difference in the divorce rate through the census in low-income populations (Edin & Reed, 2005; Marks et al., 2008; Cutrona et al., 2011) and among people of color (Lincoln et al., 2008; Vaterlaus et al., 2017; Marks et al., 2008; Bryant et al., 2008) compared to White, middle-class couples, there is very little

information about the divorce rate on Haitian or Haitian-Americans available. We do know that Haitians make up a significant portion of the population in some low-income areas in states like New York, New Jersey, and Florida (Holcomb et al., 1996; Pierce & Elisme, 2000; Shillingford et al., 2018). There is marital research available on low-income populations, religious populations, and/or immigrant populations which may have included Haitians that are also a part of these populations. However, none of the research focused solely on this population. This has led me to the gap in marriage literature about Caribbean marriages, more specifically Haitian-American couples. While there is research on many areas of marriage that needed to be addressed specifically to Haitian culture, this study began by examining the influence of family expectations on marriage practices. The research question that guided this research was: How do family expectations impact the marriage practices of Haitian-American couples?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research was to study how Haitian culture and traditional family expectations influence marriage for individuals that are either Haitian immigrants or first-generation Haitian-Americans. Qualitative methods were used to investigate the traditions, individual behaviors, and marital practices that the couples exhibited and attributed to their Haitian culture and/or upbringing. For this study, first-generation is used to describe the first individuals that were born in the U.S. to Haitian parents or those that were the first in their family to migrate to the U.S. from Haiti. This study focused on the following questions:

1. What is the impact of family expectations on the marital practices of Haitian-Americans, if any?

**Sub questions to address are:**

(a) What characteristics in Haitian culture are demonstrated in the marriage practices of middle-aged Haitian American couples?

(b) How has the traditional family expectation impacted first-generation, middle-aged Haitian-American couples?

### **Significance of Study**

This study is significant because it informs marriage research as it relates to those in the Haitian diaspora. This study contributes to marriage research while focusing on Haitian family expectations. Although there is research available on marriage in general, it is important to have representation for more specific groups of people that have different cultural backgrounds and experiences. This study informs marriage literature specifically about Haitian-American couples and the influence of family expectations on marriage.

The marriages of others within the African diaspora may look similar to Haitian marriages but lack the culture-specific aspects of this particular group. While there were studies that focus on Black couples with few Afro-Caribbeans represented in the participant pool (Bryant et al, 2008), there was little to no research that focused solely on Haitian marriages. The literature must be inclusive and representative of all or as many different groups of people as possible. As people advocating for those of Haitian descent look at the literature, it is beneficial to find literature specific to the Haitian culture to be informed on ways to better serve this population. One of the goals of this study was to add to the limited body of research available on Haitian marriage and culture.

While much of the empirical research on marriage and divorce was conducted with White non-Hispanic participants, the information was supported by research specific to Black couples (Vaterlaus et al., 2017; Edin & Reed, 2005; Marks et al., 2008). Culture has a heavy influence on

marriage and/or divorce. Culture influences many things that an individual does including the type of food one eats, the music they listen to, religious affiliation, and the choice to get or stay married (Derbaix & de La Ville, 2021). Thus researchers must consider cultural influences on all major life decisions such as marriage. While we know that marriage is influenced by culture (Davoodvandi et al., 2018), it is important to discover exactly what ways culture specifically challenges or positively influences marriage. Although Haitian people may be considered Black, it is important to have research specific to the subgroup and their culture. Another goal of this study was to learn how and why the family expectations of Haitian descendants influence their marriage, then contribute to the marriage body of literature as it relates to culture. The results of this study have implications for future marital education seminars for communities that serve members of the Haitian diaspora.

### **Explanation of Key Concepts and Terms**

Below are key concepts that are discussed throughout this text. All terms when referenced are defined as follows. Note that although some of these terms may hold several meanings, for this document, the following is the explanation that is used when these concepts are mentioned.

***African Diaspora:*** this refers to people with ancestral origin from Africa. This usually includes Africans from the continent and those whose slave ancestors were dispersed and settled in another country. A few examples of these locations are Haiti, the Caribbean, and the United States.

***Cohabitation:*** refers to a non-legal union or simply a never-married couple living together without a recognized religious ceremony or a legal marriage certificate.

***Family Expectations:*** this document, refers to the designated roles and responsibilities assigned (overtly or covertly) by the family member(s) to an individual. These known *kinscripts* (often unspoken expectations of duties) must be fulfilled.

***First-Generation:*** First-generation Haitians in this study is defined as those born in Haiti that migrated to the U.S. and have spent a significant portion of their lives in the U.S. [sometimes known as generation 1.5 (Eckstein, 2019).] or those who are born in the U.S. to Haitian immigrants.

***Formal Marriage:*** this refers to a legal union (must obtain a legal marriage certificate from the government) of a heterosexual couple often but not always accompanied by a ceremony (whether religious or societal).

***Haitian:*** this refers to people that were born in Haiti. They may be living in the U.S. or still living in Haiti.

***Haitian-American:*** Haitians are members of the African diaspora from the land of Haiti. For this study, participants must identify as Haitian-Americans. This refers to people that are either born to parents of Haitian descent but born in the U.S. or people that were born in Haiti and then became naturalized citizens of the U.S. This can mean that the participant was either born in Haiti and raised in America or they are first-generation, American-born Haitians—meaning their parents immigrated to the U.S. It is important to note that first-generation Haitian-Americans who migrated to the U.S. have attended school or spent a significant portion of their lives in the U.S. This may influence their upbringing, thus they will likely have a grasp on both the Haitian and American cultures.

***Plasaj:*** this *noun* is a term in Haitian Creole that refers to the process of cohabitation.

***Placé:*** this *verb* is a term in Haitian Creole that means to cohabit.

*Societal Marriage*: refers to a non-legal marriage in Haiti recognized with a religious ceremony. This may include religious ceremonies from Christian, Protestant, Voodoo, or other faith religions. An example of societal marriage would be when slaves had to jump the broom to announce their marriage publicly in their community but could not receive legal documentation for their union.

### **Organization of Chapters**

Chapter two reviews the literature related to marriage and Haitian culture. It also reviews general marriage topics such as marital traditions, impacts of marriage, general information on divorce, and marriage information on specific cultures (i.e. African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Haitians). The literature also explores factors that influence Haitian culture such as religion, family structure/experiences, and immigration. Additionally, chapter two will discuss the life course theoretical perspective that guided this study. In chapter three, the methodology is described.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

This chapter reviews the current literature on the factors that might influence marriage practices for Haitian-Americans/Haitian immigrants. Literature available on the Haitian population was very limited so in this document, where Haitian specific information is not available, information about groups that were closely related such as African Americans, Black Caribbeans or other members of the African diaspora will be reviewed. Members of the African diaspora share similar cultural characteristics. African immigrants refer to anyone with a physical or cultural presence in Africa (Njemanze & Njemanze, 2011). African slaves were dispersed and settled in various locations; for example, in the Caribbean and the United States. Although some of the practices and traditions are unique to the lands where African slaves settled, the culture they transmitted to their descendants was still directly connected to African culture; when the slaves left Africa, they brought their culture, ideas, and worldviews which were adopted into the new cultures (Njemanze & Njemanze, 2011; Palmer, 2018). Members of the African diaspora, no matter what island or country of origin, may have comparable characteristics that mimic that of African culture. Thus this document will examine and note similarities in African-American and Afro-Caribbean marriages as they are members of the African diaspora. This review of literature begins with a brief discussion on marriage and traditions. Then, African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and low-income marriages will be reviewed followed by a brief discussion on cohabitation, religion, and marriage stability. Next, there will be a presentation of literature relevant to the Haitian population including family structure, family function, and the influence of immigration. In conclusion, this document



describes the gap in the literature and how it relates to the purpose of this study and research questions.

## **Marriage**

Marriage is a partnership that usually includes a legal or spiritual ceremony for two individuals that intend to have a domestic and/or sexual relationship (Masele & Lakshmanan, 2021). While marriage may not be a life-long partnership in all cases, it is socially or spiritually recognized as a *durable* relationship between two individuals (Bryant et al., 2008; The Week Staff, 2015; Monger, 2013; Masele & Lakshmanan, 2021). This study examined legally married couples although many Haitians recognized *plasaj* or cohabitation as a form of marriage. The U.S. Census (2002) notes that eventually over 80% of Americans will be married at some point in their lives. Due to the scarce amount of research available about Haitian marriages, this section reviews the literature available on African American and Afro-Caribbean marriages as these populations are closely related to Haitians but may not share the same characteristics or expectations. While marriage can look very different from culture to culture or even within different families, some shared traditions exist within cultural and/or family units. This section briefly discusses African American marriages, then Caribbean marriages before describing some common themes within marital traditions in these groups.

### ***Marriage Practices and Traditions***

Marital practices are ways in which couples fulfill traditions before, during, and after the marriage ceremony. Practices may include beliefs, rules, customs, rituals, and attitudes about marriage. Marriage practice both influences and is influenced by several factors. For example, engagements, arranged marriage, dowry, the longevity of marriage, and divorce are influenced by marriage practice, while mate selection, family marriage traditions, and church/religious

traditions influence marriage practice (Vandana et al., 2020; Snow, 2021; Masele & Lakshmanan, 2021). Marriage traditions vary by culture, but some customs are similar across cultures.

Each culture also recognizes different types of marriage. Some cultures (e.g. some African or Asian cultures) believe in arranged marriages- which is an arranged alliance between two families through marriage; while others with a more Western view of marriage believe in love marriages- which is a marriage that begins with romantic love (Monger, 2013; Yoo & Joo, 2021). Love is commonly associated with marriage although it is not necessarily needed to choose a partner to marry (Monger, 2013). Christians describe marriage as the process in which a man *takes* a woman as a wife for *procreation* (having children) to carry forward their family name (Monger, 2013). Some customary Western traditions are wedding ceremonies, cohabitation, engagements, love marriage, and arranged marriage. Arranged marriages, however, are not openly recognized in the Western marriage traditions but are adopted by those whose culture plays a significant role in mate selection and the idea that two families are entering into a contractual arrangement rather than two individuals (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). In a Western marriage, a bride and groom participate in a ceremony where they exchange vows before the public- usually family and friends (Monger, 2013). Each ceremony, like any tradition, will differ based on the preferences of the couple and the cultural practices they intend to honor.

**Mate Selection.** Mate selection is accomplished in the context of the marriage market (van Schellen, 2012). Rich (2015) described the marriage market as a coupling tool for individuals to find a partner. Although this market was not a physical place, it was the process of looking for a partner (Rich, 2015). In some cultures, this was done in a traditional way where the parents sought a suitable partner for their child (Monger, 2013; Rich, 2015); while in other cases,

individuals sought out a suitable partner for themselves. When entering the marriage market, couples treated the courtship process as a trade where they sought to exchange values and/or qualities that they desired in their mate (Billari & Liefbroer, 2016). The marriage market could change as more people were physically or financially unable to get married but there was also less availability of single individuals as more desirable men and women chose marriage and made the options fewer for those who remained on the market.

The mate selection process included evaluations of financial status, education, physical well-being, and character evaluations, before deciding on what traits were most important when choosing a marriage partner. Evaluation of these options to make the choice was not always left solely to the individual. In some cultures, the selection of mates could be determined by the family through an arranged marriage. Other families would offer their opinions on the mate they believed was best suited for the individual based on the availability of options on the marriage market. In African American communities, high incarceration and unemployment rates caused Black men to be less desirable prospective mates for Black women, causing a smaller pool of mates and ultimately a decreased interest in marriage (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011).

Mate selection could be influenced by numerous factors. Individual preferences for mate selection are usually based on the evaluation of resources that the potential partner should have. Many individuals chose to marry because it enhanced their social, emotional, or even physical well-being (van Schellen, 2012). Education and economic achievement were also relevant factors in the marital selection process for persons entering the marriage market (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). As Black women were becoming more educated and self-sufficient, they were getting married later which caused a feeling of emasculation in men (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Highly educated Black women or high earning Black women have been categorized as

“bougie,” which has resulted in a negative impact on their ability to find a qualified mate as some men may have felt uncomfortable selecting such a mate (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Tulp (2017) described the derivation of the word bougie from the bourgeois meaning upper class translated today to describe a person aspiring to be in a higher class than someone else, sometimes also known as the materialism of the middle class. One who is called bougie is someone who is seen as having expensive taste. If a man viewed a woman this way, he may have believed he would not be able to meet her expectations or satisfy her urge for materialism. For Haitians, marriage tends to be an institution for those in the higher social class (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Although marriage arrangements were not common, singles were usually encouraged to consider social class and potential social advancement when thinking about a marriage partner (Burnham, 2006). Ultimately, the choice was perceived to be left to the individual but the family would give their options and vote for the mate they deem best suitable to join the family as the individual's mate.

**Gender Roles.** Gender roles are an important factor when it comes to mate selection for marriage. While gender roles have been a significant factor in separating responsibilities within the marriage, this may also have caused frustration as mates determined what their role would be in a new marriage. Historically, women performed domestic tasks like cooking, cleaning, or agriculture while men acted as breadwinners for the family through manual labor and other activities such as sports, law, religious leadership, or even duties like warfare (Greenwood, 1984; St. Bernard, 2003; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). More recently, many women have taken on traditional male responsibilities like earning a living for the family by working outside of the home in the labor force (Latifa et al., 2021); while men have been normalizing more participation in the domestic realm (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015).

There is a strict differentiation of roles by gender amongst Afro-Caribbean immigrant families (St. Bernard, 2003). Traditionally, Haitian women cared for the household and the children while men upheld the position of the decision-maker (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Women in Haiti usually did not work outside of the home but when they arrived in America and needed money, they had to adapt to the new customs which included working in the labor force to take care of the needs of the home (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Working in America changed the role of women who now had financial freedom. This disrupted the familial system and function of the woman, which potentially caused issues in the family. Fjellman & Gladwin (1985) mentioned that progressive women in Haiti fulfilled roles equal to their male counterparts when it came to establishing family links and preparing family members to migrate to the U.S. They held power over the family because they maintained economic responsibilities and freedoms that allow them to have decision-making power (Pierce & Elisme, 2000).

### *African American Marriages*

There is little research that focuses on African American Marriages (Vaterlaus et al., 2017) however, the research available can be contradictory. Research informs us that African Americans have had the lowest marriage rate, yet the highest divorce rate of any ethnic-racial group in the U.S. (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). In general, African Americans believed that rather than be unhappily married, it was better to remain unmarried (Vaterlaus et al., 2017). Be that as it may, Black women were more likely than their White counterparts to choose to get married because they believed their lives would be better if they married (Edin & Reed, 2005). The limited research on Black couples showed that they were more likely to desire to choose marriage than their White, Asian, or Hispanic peers (Mayol-Garcia et al., 2021). African Americans who were married experienced higher levels of well-being than their unmarried

counterparts (Vaterlaus et al., 2017). While there were limited partners available in the marriage market, Black couples would choose a union but were not likely to maintain a long union (Lincoln et al., 2008).

There is a high divorce rate and low marital satisfaction amongst African American couples (Lincoln et al., 2008; Vaterlaus et al., 2017). African Americans were also more likely to be separated or divorced and less likely to remarry (Lincoln et al., 2008). Marks et al (2008) described lack of trust as a common concern that prevented marriage and promoted divorce among African American couples. Additionally, Black couples were more likely to have higher marital expectations before the actual ceremony which could be damaging to the actual marriage. Usually, the cause of damage was that the couple had higher expectations but inadequate relational skills- such as communication or conflict resolution skills, ultimately resulting in lower marital satisfaction (Vaterlaus et al., 2017). Since religion is an important aspect of culture for people of the African diaspora, African American marriages usually resembled that of religious couples because they avoided divorce by delaying the choice to get married. The shared importance of religious tradition in marriage was a commonality shared between Haitian marriages and African American marriages.

The history and foundation of African American marriage are complex. Concerning African American marriage traditions, this population did not have control of their courtship or mate selection during slavery. They also were not allowed to marry legally. During times of slavery, the African Americans were expected by slave owners to produce more slaves for labor by having children, but they wanted to honor their religious beliefs and spiritual roots by getting married. Because they were not legally able to get married they began a tradition of *jumping the broom* to symbolize their bonds in private ceremonies amongst themselves (Allen, 1997; Parry,

2015). In the broomstick wedding ritual, two friends of the couple hold the broom off the ground while they jump over it to solidify their bond (Parry, 2015). The slaves used this ritual to honor their unofficial marriages because they could not have a “White preacher” officiate but believed that the broom was just as binding (Parry, 2015). Post Civil War, African Americans were legally able to marry the person of their choice (Stewart, 2020; Hill, 2006). The lack of privilege to marry taught the African American people that marriage was not the center of love (Hill, 2006). Nevertheless, marriage is an important part of African American tradition whereby the couple can have legitimate children, and share property rights and household responsibilities (Hill, 2006). Most of the other traditions such as having an ordained minister or pastor preside over the wedding, prayers at the wedding, weddings taking place at a church, wearing traditional African attire commonly seen in African American marriages stem from African culture, the Church, or American culture in general (Allen, 1997).

**Caribbean Marriages.** While there is limited literature available on Black married couples, there is far less literature available on Caribbean marriages or any subculture populations of Blacks (Bryant et al., 2008). Much of the literature on Caribbean marriages and African American marriages is comparable. As the Black population in America became more diverse, it was imperative to recognize the demographic and cultural differences amongst those that identified as a specific sub-group of Black, like Haitians (Lincoln et al., 2008). Literature on Caribbean newlywed families was mostly focused on social mobility, immigration, and discrimination (Lincoln et al., 2008). One finding that was specific to Black Caribbean mothers revealed that they had higher rates of marital satisfaction than their African American counterparts (Lincoln et al., 2008). In an article about Jamaican marriages, Altink (2019) noted that light-skinned spouses were “prized possessions on the marriage market” in the 1960s

(p.609). Historically in Haiti, lighter skin color was associated with upper-socioeconomic status making light-skinned individuals highly valued (Pierce & Elisme, 2000).

### ***Cohabitation***

While some Americans sought to get married, some chose to cohabit as a step towards marriage or cohabit with no intention to marry. Cohabitation is the fastest growing living arrangement in the U.S. (Wardle, 2017). Cohabitation refers to a non-legal union or simply a never-married couple living together without a recognized religious ceremony or a legal marriage certificate (Rodman, 1966; Monger, 2013). A similar concept is a common-law marriage which is a marriage-like relationship in which the couple has not legally married or had a ceremony but have lived together for a certain number of years depending on the state (Nowlin, 2018). Common law is only legally recognized by a few states in the U.S. One possible explanation for choosing cohabitation instead of marriage was that marriage changed the meaning of relationships, resulting in couples having higher expectations regarding relationship quality and in the couple's finances (Vaterlaus et al., 2017). Lower-income couples married at a slower rate because they were unable to meet the high standards that came with marriage (Edin & Reed, 2005). While some have called cohabitation a rejection of marriage, for others, it was also seen as a happy medium between remaining single and choosing to make it official through the court system (Wardle, 2017).

Research on African American relationships informs that cohabitation is an important context for child-rearing (Cutrona et al., 2011) yet a preferred alternative to marriage (Lincoln et al., 2008; Bryant et al., 2008). Cohabitation was recognized as a normal stage in the relationships of African Americans, as the women saw it as an alternative to remaining single (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). While African American women had a higher probability of cohabitation



compared to their White peers, African American cohabitating relationships rarely resulted in marriage (Lincoln et al., 2008). Many of these cohabitating couples said that they desired marriage but delayed because they wished to spend time living with their future spouses before deciding on marriage (Wardle, 2017). Caribbean women were more likely to settle into common-law unions and delay marriage until late in the life cycle in hopes that this arrangement would improve their chances of marriage (Coppin, 2000).

Legal marriage for the Black Caribbean population was for those that were economically stable, consequently, lower-income Caribbeans were more likely to be in a nonmarital romantic union (e.g. societal marriage, common-law unions, or cohabitation) which might explain why cohabitation was becoming a popular alternative to marriage ( Lincoln et al., 2008).

### ***Religion & Marriage***

In general, religion plays a dominant role in the lives of individuals and is typically reinforced through family expectations (St.Bernard, 2003). The church and faith communities both serve a substantial position in the Black community by offering resources to Black couples (Marks et al., 2008; Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). Religion also plays a significant role in the marital practices of Caribbean families (St.Bernard, 2003). Through religion, African Americans derived a sense of shared values, strength, and community to help cope with adversity (Cutrona et al., 2011). African American couples, more frequently than other racial and ethnic groups, employed spiritual and religious coping when confronted with difficulty (Cutrona et al., 2011), thus causing them to attend church services more often. Church attendance has historically been a predictor of marriage endurance (Marks et al., 2008). Thus, religious individuals have been more likely to stay committed in marriages longer than non-religious persons (Cutrona et al., 2011).

Religious couples believe that marriage is an institution created by God (Vorster, 2015). Marriage is a Jewish tradition adopted by the Christian church and deemed important by the teachings of Jesus (Monger, 2013). The institution of marriage is regarded as a *covenant* for couples who come from a religious background. Covenants are viewed as more restrictive than legal marriage contracts based on a commitment made between humans and God in the Bible (Wall & Miller-McLemore, 2002). Couples entering a covenant marriage had to undergo marital training or counseling (usually through the church), while couples in a legal marriage contract were not required to attend premarital training but were mandated to receive divorce education training before couples with children could exit their marriages (Wall & Miller-McLemore, 2002; Schramm & Becher, 2020). One tradition of Christian marriage was allowing sex for procreation (Wall & Miller-McLemore, 2002). Sex is only permitted within a marital union (Potter, 2020). The church emphasizes that marital sex is endorsed by God and any form of sex outside of the marital bed would lead to disaster. This included social danger or humiliation from the church and/or community (Potter, 2020). Some said that religion could even pressure one into marriage because of the strict views on sex. Divorce is frowned upon by religious communities. Based on the Bible's Old Testament traditions, wives could not divorce their husbands because they would be detaching from his honor and bringing shame to him, however, men could give their wives a divorce document for infertility, adultery, violation of his honor, neglect, and/or due to public humiliation (Vorster, 2015).

As it relates to people of Haitian descent, religion is an important part of the culture (Jean-Baptiste, 1991; Pierce & Elisme, 2000). While Catholicism is the official religion in Haiti, many Haitians are Protestant, Baptist, and some practice Vodou/Voodoo. Vodou can be described as serving the spirit(s) in exchange for the spirits to help with everyday problems such

as offering sound advice, attracting love, newlyweds, or giving the individual insight on who has stolen from them (Landry, 2008; Verner, 2008). Although voodoo is not an official religion, many Haitians observe the practices and rituals of voodoo as religious Haitians observe the teachings of the Bible. Regardless of religious preference, Haitians are viewed as very devout believers, especially women (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Haitians commonly seek healing from religious leaders, spiritual healers, spirits, and/or herbalists (Shillingford et al., 2018). They use religion and their relationship with God to soothe their mind, body, and soul; it also influences their daily life decisions. More Haitian women attend church each week than men and they play critical roles in the various ministries, while the pastors/ministers are mostly men (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Religion gives individuals a sense of shared values, derived from the Bible (Cutrona et al., 2011). These values that originate from religious doctrine help religious individuals create daily habits and traditions.

### ***Marriage Duration & Stability***

Marriages have often been categorized by the number of years a couple has been married. While the literature may not distinctly describe the marriage categories by year, usually those married 0-3 years are known as newlyweds, while those married past the “7-year itch” have surpassed the marriage life crisis and can say they have been married long. After the first few months of marriage, marital quality tends to decline thus causing the couples to move from a lower risk of divorce to the highest risk (the peak) by the seventh year (itch) the risk begins to decline again (Hill, 2014). By year seven, couples have created a flow within the household and have significantly lowered their chances of divorce, although later in the marriage the risk may rise again.

There is limited research available about the factors that contribute to relationship satisfaction or stability in Black couples (Cutrona et al., 2011). Marital satisfaction tends to be lower for Black couples than for their White, Latino, or Asian counterparts (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). Black couples experience more difficulties in sustaining their marriage than their peers. Black married couples experience more marital instability than their White or Latino counterparts (Raley et al., 2015). 55% of married Black women (regardless of what age they married) were divorced by age 40, compared to 45% for Latinos and 40% for Whites (Raley et al., 2015). Partners may expect different kinds of rewards in a marriage that attribute to the overall experience of marital success. If couples work early at maintaining or enhancing intimacy it encourages the continuation of marriage (Dzara, 2010). Intimacy is one of the most common threats to relationships. Having and feeling intimacy (whether physical/sexual or emotional) is beneficial to the mental health, physical health, and overall well-being of the person, ultimately the relationship (Sassler, 2010). American couples believe that sex is a critical part of marital intimacy and relationships that lack adequate sexual interaction may result in one of the partners seeking other options like the dissolution of the relationship or seeking someone else to fulfill their sexual needs (Dzara, 2010). For Haitian couples that consider themselves religious, prayer contributes positively to the couple's sexual satisfaction (Felix, 2007). Making prayer a form of intimacy within those couples; illustrating that couples who pray together are more likely to experience higher satisfaction within their marriage (Felix, 2007).

It is important to mention divorce when discussing the topic of marriage. The divorce rate is commonly discussed in the literature on marriage. Divorce is defined as the "stressful process of termination of a meaningful relationship which often involves ...negative feelings and emotions" (Asanjarani et al., 2021, p. 23). Divorce is associated with negative outcomes like

lower academic success, poor psychological well-being, and increased depression and anxiety (Scott et al., 2013). As recent as 2020 post the pandemic, the divorce rate - although a slight decline in number, is about 50%. In 2019 there were about 2.2 million marriages and 1 million divorces recorded (Steverman, 2021). Individuals usually enter the marriage market intending to *gain from trade* (exchange of qualities they want from their partner) and remain married (Billari & Liefbroer, 2016). A study conducted on divorced couples that attended relationship training in their earlier years in marriage showed that the common reasons for their divorce were growing apart, not being able to talk to one another, and the other spouse's handling of money. When asked for my specific reasons, the most common responses were infidelity, financial issues, incompatibility, lack of commitment, lack of love, conflict, and drinking/drug abuse (Scott et al., 2013). Communication and finances are key reasons why these couples divorced within a decade of marriage. Financial issues include debt management, budgeting, and credit issues (Bryant et al., 2008). Marital communication and conflict resolution are two factors that marriage research says play a critical role in determining the quality of a couple's relationship (Li et al., 2018). Not only is communication the ability to interact verbally every day, but it is the ability to interact well emotionally, especially considering any major ups and downs that the couple will face. Effective communication within a couple can shape the perception of marital quality (Li et al., 2018).

In the earlier years of marriage, many couples tend to have higher levels of marital quality (Li et al., 2018) because there are fewer conflicts. Over time, couples may begin to have long-standing issues that cause marital conflict. The interactive process within a relationship consists of communication and the ability to resolve conflict. In general, marital conflicts are triggered by lingering and major problems in the relationship (Li et al., 2018). As a response to

conflicts, spouses are more likely to experience high blood pressure, heightened levels of distress, and anger (Li et al., 2018).

### **Haitian Culture**

As the population of individuals of Haitian descent continues to grow in the US, it is important to understand the historical, cultural, and social contexts in which that population lives. Factors such as family structure, marriage, and religion play an important role in the lives of people of Haitian descent. Culture influences the decisions we make throughout our lives, including the types of food one eats, their religious affiliations, and their choice to marry (Davoodvandi et al., 2018; Wardle, 2017). Haitian culture consists of art, music, poetry, storytelling, and food. Storytelling and Haitian proverbs play an important part in the cultures' oral traditions. (Civian, 1994).

### ***Family Structure***

Haitians place significant value on family life, whether that is the family of origin or the family created through marriage (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Haitian families consist of their family of origin and extended family, which can be described as a community of origin. The extended family includes community and church members in addition to individuals related by blood, marriage, or adoption. Each member of the extended family network has social, emotional, and instrumental functions within the unit and those relationships within the network are interdependent and dynamic (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985; Nicolas et al., 2009; Verner, 2008). African American families have fictive cousins- which are individuals who are not biologically or legally a member of the family (Cutrona et al., 2011); Haitian families also have extended fictive family members that they call "*kouzin*" as a way of honoring their close ties with them (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985; Nicolas et al., 2009).

When discussing family structure in Haiti, the topic of respect (*respe*) cannot be omitted as it is one of the major characteristics expected of all members within the Haitian family network (Kivland, 2014). Any member of the family network must demonstrate respect to demonstrate they were *bien elvé*-raised right. Children are not allowed to question the authority of their parents, they learn this early because parents respond quickly and firmly against disrespect in Haiti (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Respect is not simply exemplified in backtalk by children, in Haiti disrespect is any offense to the elders in the community such as not obeying the requests of the elders or not greeting the elders. In Haiti, corporal punishment is an accepted practice for those presumed to be disrespectful (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). This behavior of honoring by respect is important in the Haitian culture and transferred from generation to generation, even in Haitian-Americans (Kivland, 2014). The expectation is that one must always show respect to an elder they meet or encounter. Simply failing to say hello when entering a room is deemed disrespectful and will not be tolerated in the family structure. When seeking a mate, the influence of the family is important in mate selection. Although arranged marriage is not the norm in Haiti, one must present their future spouse to their family and get their blessing. If the blessing is not given, they should honor respect and seek another spouse. Additionally, when it comes to marital affairs, Haitian elders- which often includes those in the community or church- will offer their advice to younger couples expecting them to heed the marital counsel.

### ***Family Function***

For Haitians that have migrated to the U.S, supportive family relationships are critical as they adjust to the stressors of racism, a new culture, country, language, and overall lifestyle. Usually, this new support system is people that have also migrated to the United States that play a significant role in their family system (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985). In addition to being

intensely loyal, members of the network provide instrumental support such as child care and financial support (Nicolas et al., 2009). Haitian families conduct routine check-ins on their families in Haiti, perhaps more frequently than they have social family gatherings with their family network in the U.S. (Nicolas et al., 2009). During the routine check-up calls to Haiti, they determine the needs of the family, in an attempt to honor their commitment of loyalty to continue supporting the family network back in Haiti.

Financial support is one of the most significant functions of family members for Haitian Immigrants (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985). The Haitian-Americans that were raised in America with parents who live in Haiti are expected to provide financial support. Those with less connection to the extended family in Haiti, have less of an obligation to family in Haiti. Family members may still reach out if the need is great but the role in the family system for the Haitian-Americans that are not directly connected to Haiti is far less than the Haitians that grew up in Haiti then migrated to the U.S. Nicholas et al (2009), conducted a study about family experiences and family stress on 134 Haitian immigrants in Florida and more than half of the participants noted that they believed that their family in Haiti depend on them financially.

### ***Influence of Immigration***

Immigration is an experience that has become part of the lives of a significant number of Haitian family networks. Migration to the U.S. for the Haitian people became popular in the 1970s and 1980s as the residents of Haiti were searching for work and relief from the political uproar in their homeland (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Haitians are the 4th largest immigrant population in the United States (Olsen-Medina & Batalova, 2020). As more Haitians migrate to the U.S, they face difficulties such as adjustment to the American way, potential racism, learning the language, and the maintenance of family roles and ties in Haiti (Nicolas et al., 2009). It is



also noteworthy that Haitian immigrants may experience household stress due to separation from their family members in Haiti (Shillingford et al., 2018). The household stress creates depressive symptoms for the couple, these symptoms can be slightly higher for Haitian women that are financially accountable for the family (Nicolas et al., 2009). Ultimately, differing views on which gender or family roles to maintain after migrating to the U.S. may also create a strain on the marriage (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985).

**Literacy & Employment Post Immigration.** Due to the language barrier and the lack of American education, the options for work may be limited, leaving immigrants to start with low-wage employment (Belizaire & Fuentes, 2011), despite one's occupation or social status in Haiti. Many of the adults that have immigrated to America from Haiti have very limited literacy skills (Verner, 2008). Countless families in Haiti cannot afford to send their children to school, so they must stop attending, causing them to grow up as illiterate adults (Verner, 2008). When women, in particular, stop attending school, they usually take on domestic household work for their families while their men look for work in the labor force to support the financial needs of the family (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985; Pierce & Elisme, 2000; St. Bernard, 2003). Due to the lack of education in Haiti, adult illiteracy is a common problem especially because it is more difficult to teach adults these skills than children (Verner, 2008). In 2008, the adult illiteracy rate was 39.5% in Haiti (Verner, 2008). Some of them are illiterate or what Huettig, Kolinsky & Lachmann (2018) call ex-illiterate, which are people who learn to read as an adult and did not have formal schooling as a child. About 80% of the Haitians in Haiti are classified as the low-income population and take on manual jobs (e.g. artisans, market sellers, or lottery ticket sellers) to help support their families (Milfleur, 2010), while the others are highly educated and have jobs associated with high status. Upon arrival to the US, even the highly educated in Haiti are not

afforded the same opportunities they had in their home country because they do not have American accredited education. A few examples of stressors that Haitian immigrants face in The U.S. include discrimination and prejudice while they adjust to the American culture (Nicholas & Smith, 2013). As Haitian immigrants migrate to the U.S, they will face many stressors that can impact their transition and their lives in America. This can certainly lead to marital disturbances especially if the roles and/or functions of the partner must change when they arrive in America. In this study, the participants will be asked about their immigration experiences and if it has impacted their marriage.

**Finances & Immigration.** An increase in socioeconomic status is a major motivator for Afro-Caribbean immigrants. When Black Caribbean natives migrate to the U.S. they are in search of financial expansion that they were unable to obtain in their country of origin. They achieve this through the creation of housing niches (ethnic enclaves) and labor niches where they assist incoming immigrants to obtain jobs and establishing themselves (Lincoln et al., 2008). Black Caribbeans that migrate to the US, tend to do much better financially than African Americans in the US. This can be caused when their initial motivation to enter the U.S. was being economically successful thus they tend to focus heavily on their economic achievements (Bryant et al., 2008). The motivation behind making the most financial advancement for Haitians has much to do with their family's expectation to financially support their current household in the U.S. and their family in Haiti (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985; Nicolas et al., 2009). The pressure of this type of family expectation can be positive or negative.

**Immigration & Family Roles.** While the life of a Haitian immigrant to the U.S. may be different from life in Haiti, there is an awareness of and an attempt to maintain culturally appropriate roles and behaviors. Culturally appropriate expectations regarding gender view the

man as the primary decision-maker or head of the household. He assumes the position as head of household not simply because he earns more or is the sole earner, but primarily because of his gender (Charles, 1995). Haitian women tend to migrate to the U.S. before their partners and other family members. They seek to establish financial security in the U.S. so that they might prepare for the rest of the family in Haiti to come to join them in America (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Earning money in the U.S. will allow them to financially support their family network in their home country until they help them migrate and join them in the new country (Nicolas et al., 2009; Bilizaire & Fuentes, 2011). This process which changes women's role from subordinate in a male-headed household to major earner and 'head of household' may require a renegotiation of their gender prescribed role in the family. When the spouses join the wives in the U.S, they depend on their wives financially while they assimilate to the *American way*-gain employment and proper immigration documentation (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985). This can become problematic.

### ***Family Expectations & Cultural Transmission***

Family expectations are an important part of family structures and functions. Expectations can be taught overtly to all members or sometimes can be unspoken assignments given to the members. Each family unit will have different types of expectations/scripts for its members, many of these expectations stem from cultural views. Family expectations tend to begin with the assignment of family roles. Said and Enslin (2020) discuss social roles which are similar to family roles. They describe it as the associated behaviors and assigned roles based on gender, status, and position in society that dictates society's perception of that individual. Each member of the group or family has a defined role (whether outright told the role or simply a known role given/assigned to them) that they are expected to fulfill for the family unit. This

concept is also called kinscripts- assigned expectations of family members. Kinscripts is a framework derived from life-course perspective that was developed from research conducted on low-income, Black, extended families (Stack & Burton, 1993). Though literature does not have much information on Haitian family expectations, much like many other immigrant families, one expectation is that after the child marries, they will not neglect their family role/obligation (Ferguson et al., 2014).

While marriage may be the goal for some, marriage is not always a goal or attained by those that desire it. In the Haitian community, the goal to marry still exists primarily due to the expectation of the church and/or family. Marriage is often a bartering system where families negotiate what trade-offs they are looking for before allowing their children to marry (Billari & Liefbroer, 2016). In America, this is usually looking to marry someone of a similar economic or educational background (Wardle, 2017). In some cultures, marriage can be considered the gateway to adulthood, making it a major requirement before one could be respected in their community (Wardle, 2017). The dilemma about being influenced by outsiders to aspire for marriage, each partner may not make an effort to sustain the union. Marriage should be a private choice between partners, but the government, family, church, and community all need to be aware of that marriage (Wardle, 2017).

Culture influences the decisions we make throughout our lives, including the choice to marry (Davoodvandi et al., 2018; Wardle, 2017). In American culture, the cultural expectation of marriage is being delayed more as many Americans are pursuing economic and educational accomplishments over the milestone of marriage and children (Wardle, 2017). Cultural or intergenerational transmission is defined as how beliefs, knowledge, practices, values, habits, material goods, and resources are passed from one generation to the next (Derbaix & de La Ville,

2021). The purpose of culture and heritage transfer is to ensure engagement, sustainability, protection, and innovation (Macknight, 2021). As culture gets transferred, the next generation can understand the root of the traditions and information passed on, participate in them and make it their own so they can later continue the cycle and become transfer agents for the next generation.

In the Haitian culture, family and community connections are imperative to the culture (Ferguson et al., 2014). The family and community members play a major role in the cultural transmission to the next generation, although traditionally parents tend to be the main agents to transfer culture (Derbaix & de La Ville, 2021). Part of the culture that is transmitted to the new generation is the significance of playing one's role in the family system whether that be back in Haiti or the U. S. (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985). Social media and other media tools are also considered influential agents of cultural transmission as young people use them frequently to connect with people across the world that identify as Haitian (Derbaix & de La Ville, 2021). Haitian people are expected to show their family or community connection through respect for the community and the obligation to help their parents- usually known as a family obligation (Ferguson et al., 2014). Other general aspects of the culture that are expected to transfer to the next generation outside of family roles and obligations are the music- *Kompa or zouk*, the food, the traditions, religion, and the language-*Creole* (Derbaix & de La Ville, 2021). While the food, traditions, and specific religion will vary from family to family in Haiti, they generally are similar throughout the country. Many Haitians practice some form of Christianity- if not Catholicism, Baptist, or voodoo (Verner, 2008) those that are seven-day Adventist may not eat the meats that other Haitian families enjoy like seafood and the popular pork dish-*griot*, thus the intergenerational transfer may look different in each family.

### **Haitian Culture and Marriage**

In Haitian and religious homes, there can be a privilege that married individuals have that their single peers cannot obtain until they are married. This privilege is an unspoken piece of knowledge within the culture. Once an adult is considered to be of marriage age, their family and sometimes religious leaders may begin to urge them to begin considering marriage. Haitian couples tend to follow the Christian marriage traditions as the official religion of the country is catholicism (Monger, 2013; Landry, 2008). Christian weddings tend to be held at a church and officiated by a pastor and witnessed by family and friends followed by a reception. Some Haitians participate in voodoo mystical marriages where they marry a spirit (Monger, 2013; Burham, 2006). For those that cannot afford a lavish wedding ceremony, the couples in Haiti officially mark the beginning of their marriage as the date they establish their home together (Monger, 2013).

Haitians value marriage and recognize both traditional church marriage and common-law marriages (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). In Haiti, it is common for the lower-income population to *placé* -cohabitate or enter common law marriage (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985), while the couples of higher-income status value formal marriages. Poverty and illiteracy are common reasons for poor Haitian women to choose to *placé* instead of traditional marriage (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Individuals who can read and write can get better jobs than those who are illiterate. Thus illiterate women often choose to *placé* with a man who is more educated and can support them financially (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985; Pierce & Elisme, 2000). It is also worth mentioning that some couples choose to engage in a societal marriage (recognized by the community as *plasaj*) where they mimic the institution of marriage but they do not hold a legal marriage license in Haiti. This concept is similar to that of common law marriages in the U.S.

In Haitian families, “*plaçage*” (or *plasaj*)- which is the process of cohabitation or common-law marriage, is very common (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985). Many Haitian families migrate to the U.S. already in a *plasaj* with their partners- which means they continue to cohabit and are not in a legal marriage; while others gain partners in the U.S. but do not marry for various reasons, one being the complications of the immigration process (they may be legally married to someone else) (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985). In low-income Haitian families, *plasaj* tends to be the union method of choice. A *plasaj* is a beneficial arrangement because the wealthier man provides for the woman (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Low-income Haitians will also marry for citizenship in the US, *mariag rézidans* (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). In this arrangement, the person will legally marry someone in America for the opportunity to achieve residence in the U.S. While in the U.S, they will work and send money home to Haiti. If they already have a spouse in Haiti, once they achieve the proper documentation and can legally divorce, they will remarry their spouse in Haiti, legally, to have them join them in the U.S. (Pierce & Elisme, 2000).

### **Theoretical Perspective**

This study is intended to discover what characteristics of Haitian culture influence the marriage practices of Haitian-American couples and how, if at all. Glen H. Elder's Life course theory (Elder, 1975; Elder, 1998) was used as the primary theoretical perspective to examine, describe and provide appropriate insight into the information learned in this study. Additionally, acculturation theory was reviewed to understand the shift from Haitian to Haitian-American.

### ***Life Course Perspective***

The life-course theory has several major aspects that relate to culture and its link to the individual and their family, essentially this perspective describes the “importance of their linked

lives” which is a key principle in the life course perspective (Elder, 1975; Elder, 1998; Crosnoe & Elder, 2002). As individuals from the family unit evolve, their lives can either remain interdependent or life occurrences may cause their lives to shift forcing them into a new life cycle/course (Elder, 1998; Pavalko et al., 1993). This study will be using the following tenets of the life course theory: (1) Agency (2) Normative & Non-normative turning points (3) and Kinscripts. These tenets are relevant in the culture and the life of Haitians in the following ways. Agency is significant in the choices that lead Haitian individuals to major turning points and/or goals in their life course. Normative turning points suggest that significant times or events in the life of an individual are expected to take them on a different course in their life path whereas the non-normative turning points are unexpected events that take an individual on a course different than other members of their family. Migrating to the U.S. or getting married are examples of significant (normative) turning points in one’s life path. An example of a non-normative behavior for Haitians could be rejecting family expectations and/or scripts. Kinscripts describe the (sometimes unspoken) family expectations or responsibilities one has to their family unit. Kinscripts are prescribed to each member based on culture, gender roles, and personal talents that the family believes the person can and should contribute to the unit.

**Agency.** Agency is defined as organizing one's life or making decisions to achieve goals (Roy, 2006). In African American families, women traditionally exercise agency in making family decisions such as avoiding marriage and choosing to focus on success in other areas of their lives (Hill, 2006). The goal for them is success, so they adjust their lives to help themselves achieve this goal by choosing to delay marriage while they attain success academically or in their careers. Haitian immigrants- usually women, enact agency when they choose to change their role in the family dynamic as they work to become financially self-sufficient. Others enact agency in



their choice to marry (whom and how) or not to marry. This study will seek to understand how the decisions to achieve goals are formed, whether the goal is formed by the self or based on adopted ideas from the culture or community.

**(Non) Normative Turning Points and Behaviors.** Timing of events or role transitions are imperative concepts discussed in the life course that describe how lives change (Elder, 1975; Elder, 1998). A turning point, also known as a life transition, is defined as “dramatic changes in life history that separate the past from the future....” and changing the trajectory of their life’s course. Generally, turning points are triggered by a major event that inspires a life change. In turning points, individuals typically “take on a new role(s), enter relations with a new person(s), and/or acquire new self-concepts” (Elder et al., 1991, p. 215; Elder, 1998). A new social role separates one from their past making prior identities they’ve had irrelevant. This is important because many times individuals refer to themselves as their identity before the turning point (Elder et al., 1991). For example, one may say “before I got married, I...” or “before 9/11, I...” Turning points reveal a great deal about age and can suggest what type of person one will become later in life (Elder et al., 1991). The concept of transition is the study of the way lives move after turning points (Elder, 1998). For example, a person can transition from single to married. This study will determine how the timing of the major transition to marriage has changed the trajectory of the lives of the individual and or the couple, if at all. Examples of transitional stages that may occur in marriage are parenthood, child-rearing, widowhood, retirement, and an empty nest (Elder, 1975). For the couples that have been impacted by any of these transitions, the study is aimed to learn about the impact these transitions have had on the timing of their marriage practices. In Haitian families, the path to marriage may not be the traditional route (i.e., school/work to marriage to children). The Haitian path to marriage could

be one of two: the *plasaj* route or the religious route. In the *plasaj* route, the couples could either choose to *placé* then have children or have children then *placé*. Both choices included limited to no schooling. The religious route is not as flexible. Couples can choose to begin school/work before or after family life but the order for family life is marriage and then children- there are no options to do it the other way around without familial judgment.

Normative behaviors, turning points, or transitions in the life course refer to traditionally socially acceptable transitions. Non-normative transitions refer to the unscheduled transitions that often hold a social disadvantage (Furstenberg, 2005). For example, transitioning to a teenage mother/father is likely an unscheduled turning point. While transitions are a natural occurrence in the life course, what is normative is determined by many factors. Common factors include culture, socioeconomic status, age-group expectations, and familial or community normative activities. A normative marriage in a traditional American (SNAF) household can be considered a love-marriage where both partners have a shared sense of intimacy and love before choosing to marry (Chartier, 2007). On the other hand, an example of non-normative marriage in a traditional American household would be arranged marriage or a polygamous marital arrangement, which later can be followed by love (Yoo & Joo, 2021). Determining normative or non-normative marital practices depends heavily on cultural norms. As it relates to Haitian households, following biblical views and family expectations for marriage would be normative for these couples. This study will inquire about some of the normative and non-normative transitions Haitian-American couples make through their life course.

**Kinscripts.** Kin-scripts are the assignment of duties to members of a family or network of people (Stack & Burton, 1993). There are three domains in this framework: *kin-work*- the tasks and duties a member of the family must take on to achieve survival from generation to

generation; *kin-time*- the time or sequence of family transitions; and *kin-scription*- assigning of the kin-work to a family member (Stack & Burton, 1993). In this document, family expectations will be synonymous with kin-work. In any given family, there are cultural expectations and then there are actual family expectations that can be adopted from cultural values yet specific to the needs of the family unit. In this study, kin-script and kin-work will be used to determine the type of duties and responsibilities that are expected of the members and the process of assigning these duties. The aim is to learn from the couples the influence these kin-scripts have on their decision to marry and marital practices.

As it relates to Haitian immigrants, a common kin-script is the financial support of the members in Haiti. Any family member migrating to the U.S. is expected to financially assist the family in Haiti (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). This kin-work should be honored no matter the marital status or even despite the individual's financial responsibilities in America. As this family member's life course begins to transition, they may get married (another family expectation or duty under the kin-work) and then need to make adjustments to the role that they have been assigned. This adjustment could be to send less money home to the family in Haiti, or it could be to enact agency and choose to completely deny the kin-script and cease financial support for the family in the homeland. Another duty under Haitian kin-work is adherence to religious beliefs taught in the home. As Haitian children grow into adults, their parents may check in on them to ensure they are upholding religious views that they were taught in childhood (Nicolas et al., 2009). One significant part of that is the duty of getting married. Although marriage in Haiti may be more about having children and living with a partner that can financially support the family, Haitian elders usually inquire about the marital status of emerging adults, especially women. As women in Haiti, usually get married or *placé* to have the financial benefits of their working

partner (Wardle, 2017). While familial support and pride are cherished qualities, any members that do not fulfill their assigned family responsibilities and/or expectations may risk losing family (emotional) support and be deemed *sans respé- disrespectful* (Kivland, 2014; Pierce & Elisme, 2000).

### ***Acculturation Theory***

Acculturation theory is used to help describe the levels of adjustments that multicultural individuals may face when they have intercultural contact. This theory was developed by John W. Berry to address how one develops within a new cultural context (Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005). The theory explains the possible changes that one can have as they enter a new culture- one can reject the new culture, adapt at some level, completely take on the new culture or form a new culture that includes aspects of multiple cultures (Berry, 2005). There are several types of acculturation methods used by immigrants discussed in the literature. Berry and Hou (2017) name a few examples of ways immigrants acculturate and make cultural shifts: biculturalism, adaptation, assimilation, cultural adjustment, cultural shifts, cultural incorporation, and cultural transmutation. Which or how much of one method one chooses to use to acculturate is dependent on the degree to which they desire to maintain the native culture and identity while also deciding how much they wish to engage with the society of the host culture (Garcia, 2006; Berry & Hou, 2017).

The following terms are key concepts within acculturation theory that attempt to describe levels of cultural acculturations. Harris and Tanksley (2021) described the balance and capacity to hold knowledge of two cultures as *biculturalism*. *Adaptation* is a strategy described within the acculturation theory as ways in which one reacts, adjusts, or withdraws within a new

environment (Berry et al., 1994). *Assimilation* is when one relinquishes their own culture and chooses to take on (assimilate to) the aspects of the more dominant society (Berry et al., 1994).

Kagan et al (1990) use the following definitions to describe the other acculturation concepts:

*Cultural adjustment*: is a process that incorporates levels of association with the host culture and extinction of the native culture.

*Cultural shift*: substitution of one set of practices with alternative cultural characteristics as exhibited by simultaneous assimilation and extinction.

*Cultural incorporation*: adapting to patterns from both cultural groups (without extinction).

*Cultural transmutation*: the alteration of certain elements of both cultures to create a third and unique subcultural entity.

Berry et al. (1994) mentioned that the acculturation process involves both groups of people- the dominant, Americans in the case of this study, and the non-dominant, Haitians in this case. Usually, the acculturation process includes changes to both groups but is more significant in the non-dominant group. Examples of types of changes that can occur in the acculturation process include physical (e.g. moving to a new place), biological (e.g. changes in diet and/or exposure to illnesses), political (e.g. acquaintances to new governing systems and laws), economic (e.g. changes in employment type or availability) social and cultural changes (e.g. discrimination, adapting to the education system, religious beliefs, and cultural practices) (Berry et al., 1994; Berry, 2005). While adapting to a new culture may look different for each individual, when looking for how they *fit* within the new setting, one has many decisions to weigh in order to determine whether they will assimilate and become more like their

environment or attempt to adjust the environment by moving to a more suitable context (Berry, 2005). When it comes to making the decision on which or how much of any culture(s) one is affiliated with, Berry (1997) described two strategies that multicultural individuals tend to utilize. First, *cultural maintenance* is when one decides what aspects and characteristics of the culture(s) are important and should be maintained. The other strategy is *contact and participation* where one decides to what extent they should be involved in these cultural groups. Once the individual utilizes cultural maintenance and appraises how much of either culture they want to participate in, they then establish the level of cultural integration that best fits their needs. In this study, acculturation is imperative in the lives of these multicultural individuals. The participants were asked to describe their views on how much Haitian culture showed up within their families here in America and if it influenced any of their marital practices or decisions.

In conclusion, this literature review examined marriage among African Americans and Afro-Caribbean couples and the influence of culture on marriage. The research demonstrates that culture has a major impact on the choices of who one selects to marry, how they choose to marry, and the roles each partner places in the marriage (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). The acculturation theory and life-course perspective supports the connection of culture and linked lives to marriage and marital choices as a major turning point in one's life (Elder, 1975; Elder, 1998; Kagan et al. 1990; Berry & Hou, 2017). The gap in the marriage literature that was addressed in the present study is the cultural influence for couples in the Haitian diaspora. The purpose of this study was to add to the body of marriage literature by discovering what influence Haitian culture has on the marriages of Haitian-Americans. This study used qualitative analysis to examine the marriages of Haitian- American couples to determine (1) how Haitian culture

influences their marriage practices and (2) what characteristics of the culture are demonstrated in this population's marital choices and decisions.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Methodology**

This study examined how family expectations influence the marriages of couples from the Haitian diaspora. Qualitative research was chosen for this study. Phenomenology was used as the specific qualitative method. This chapter describes the research design and approach. Also, it describes the participants, recruitment eligibility criteria, research site, data collection, and a description of the data analysis process, followed by a description of the participant profiles.

The research questions that guided this research were (1) What is the impact of family expectations on marital practices of Haitian-American couples, if any? (2) What characteristics in Haitian culture shape their marital practices? And (3) How has the traditional family expectation impacted first-generation, middle-aged Haitian-American couples?

#### **Qualitative Methodology**

This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board under IRB# FY21-22-2316. This study was conducted using a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodology has been the preferred choice of the researcher and also is used often in marriage research to gain in-depth information from the couple participants. Through qualitative research, participants can share their experiences while the researcher can capture more information throughout the interview through probing. This method allowed the couples in the study to thoroughly describe their cultural and marriage experiences. A phenomenological approach was utilized to capture details of the lived experiences of the participants.

#### ***Phenomenology***

Phenomenology was established by Edmund Husserl known as the *science of phenomena* (van Manen, 2019). In this type of qualitative design, the research focuses on the essence of the



experiences of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017), allowing the participants to give detailed accounts of their everyday *life-world* (Goulding, 2005). Husserl originally described this method as the “study of the essence” where the researcher would seek to illuminate the hidden ordinary or everyday experiences of individuals (“Phenomenology”, 2018; Norlyk & Harder, 2010). Phenomenology is considered both a philosophy and a methodological approach commonly used when the goal of the study is to *understand* the culture and society the subjects live in— known as their *life-world* (Goulding, 2005; Norlyk & Harder, 2010). Phenomenology seeks to provide rich descriptions that will aid in understanding the dynamics of a phenomenon, individual, or group of people (Norlyk & Harder, 2010). This method explores the *meaning* of the complex issues that may be present but not apparent on the surface for the participants (Goulding, 2005). Phenomenology is the study of how an individual makes sense of their own experiences and the unique meaning that these individuals attach to their experiences (van Maren, 2017; van Manen, 2019). Alase (2017) describes the importance of the ability to gain a bond with the participants before a detailed exploration of their life experiences. Through the “participant-oriented” approach of phenomenology, the researcher can build rapport and explore the lived experiences of the participants to discover how they make sense of major life experiences (Alase, 2017, p. 9). Phenomenology allows researchers to have an in-depth data collection process that will give them a comprehensive overview of the actual experiences of the participants. Thus the questions for this type of study should be open-ended and focused on amplifying the participants' experiences, worldviews, and values (Alase, 2017). The researcher focused on building a rapport with the subjects to create a comfortable environment that would help the respondents gain trust in the researcher so they can open up about their lived experiences as it relates to Haitian culture in their marriage.

In this study, participants had the opportunity to inform findings by amplifying stories of their experiences as it relates to marriage without distortion or judgment, family expectations, and characteristics of Haitian culture in their marriage. Phenomenology studies involve how an individual perceives, remembers and describes a topic (Özyigit, 2017). When participants use a word or phrase, the meaning of that is used for what it stands for in the participants' reality (Colaizzi, 1978; Goulding, 2005; van Manen, 2017). This study explored the way the participants perceive and describe their marital experiences to help the researcher grasp the meaning of those experiences. The researcher established a trusting environment to allow participants to share their experiences freely.

Phenomenology is appropriate for this study because this approach aims to understand and make known the experiences of a population. It aims to share the experience of everyday life as the participants experience it (Colaizzi, 1978; van Manen, 2017; "Phenomenology", 2018). The goal of this study was to understand the lived marital experiences of Haitian-American couples and add this knowledge to the marriage literature. Using a phenomenological approach to gain the details of the everyday life-world experiences of these couples will help inform the literature on what Haitian-American marriage experience is; specifically, making known the everyday experiences of the *life-world* (how they experience culture and society) of these participants. Utilizing a phenomenological qualitative approach helped the researcher learn about the "everydayness" ("Phenomenology", 2018) of being in the world (or marriage) of a Haitian-American. While this population is not heavily studied in the literature, the information gained through the detailed examination of the participants' experiences will inform the literature about the experiences of Haitian-American couples. The use of phenomenology and life-course theoretical perspective (namely kinscripts and non/normative transitions) will aid in the goal of

understanding the marital experiences of Haitian-American couples and how the culture might play a role in their marriages.

## **Participant Recruitment**

### ***Eligibility Criteria***

The couples were eligible to participate in this study if they both self-identify as Haitian-American. Both partners had to identify as Haitian or Haitian-American. The second criterion was that the couple was married at the time of the interview for a minimum of five years. Couples married less than 3 or 4 years are classified as newly-weds (Everlasting Occasion, 2021) and may not be able to share the types of experiences I was looking to address in this study. During the early years of marriage, some couples have difficulty adjusting to married life and may be contemplating divorce (Hill, 2014). Couples married past the *seven-year itch* have been said to survive the highest season for divorce risk in their marriage, barring potential empty nest and retirement issues later in their marriage (Hill, 2014). In this study, the couples were at least past the newlywed stage, thus five years of marriage was the cut-off criterion. While cohabitation is common amongst Haitian people, this study focused on those that have been married for at least 5 years and that did not cohabit prior to marriage. Participants living together more than six months before marriage were not accepted for participation in this study. No previously divorced couples were accepted for this study. The participants in this study were also required to be ages 35-55. Middle adults are likely to be married compared to young adults who are likely to be changing partners more often before they choose to settle down (Grundström et al., 2021; Yoo & Joo, 2021). This study worked with couples in the young to middle adulthood age range. While the age range for middle adulthood can vary in the literature to include ages 29- 59, this study focused on those in the middle of this range. At least one of the partners had to be in the

identified range, given leeway for those couples with an age difference that classifies one partner to be in another age cohort. The life-course perspective describes the shared experiences of people that belong to the same birth cohort. Birth cohort members usually encounter the same historical events at the same time (Elder, 1992; Elder 1975). Members in the same cohort can be recognized by their collective mentality or distinct life pattern (Elder, 1975). This study focused on couples within this age cohort to compare their experiences.

### ***Participants of the Study***

The couples in this study identified as Haitian-American heterosexual couples. Each partner participated in a total of two virtual interviews. An initial individual interview for each partner and then a second individual interview was conducted with the couple separately after the initial analysis to address emerging themes. Couples needed to be legally married for at least five years. The participants were from New York, Florida, and Arizona. New York and Florida are major drop-off sites for incoming Haitian immigrants (Pierce & Elisme, 2000; Shillingford et al., 2018). The couple from Arizona were a product of snowballing from a Florida couple, the wife is from Florida but moved to Arizona to join her husband who was living there for work. Access to the individuals in these states was also convenient for the researcher as there were already social ties established in Florida and New York. When recruiting on social media, the preference was to be Haitians that live in Florida, New York, or New Jersey, but exceptions could have been made in the case that there was difficulty meeting the minimum number of participants for this study.

### **Participant Background and Profiles**

The participants included four males and four females aged between 35 and 52 years. Of the eight participants, four of them were born in the United States while the others were born in Haiti and Canada. All the participants had at least a bachelor's degree, were married and they

identified as Haitian or Haitian-American. Table 3.1 below presents the participants' demographic information. Followed by a brief description of the participants' backgrounds.

**Table 3.1 Participant Demographic Information**

Participant Alias	Gender	Age	Ethnic group	Education	Religion	Marital status	Number of children
Love	Male	52	Black or African American	Master's degree	Christian	Married 20 years	3
Carla	Female	42	Haitian- American	Bachelor's degree	Christian	Married 20 years	3
Andrea	Female	41	Black or African American	Master's degree	Christian	Married 15 years	3

Daiquan	Male	40	Black or African American	Master's degree	Christian	Married 15 years	3
Faye	Female	35	Black or African American	Bachelor's degree	Christian	Married 7 years	1
Piscine	Male	39	Black or African American	Bachelor's degree	Christian	Married 7 years	1
Lydia	Female	36	Black or African American	Doctoral degree	Christian	Married 7 years	3
Smith	Male	40	Black or African American	Master's degree	Christian	Married 7 years	3

### Participant Backgrounds

***Love***

Love is a 52-year-old male. He has been married for over twenty years and he is a Christian. He has three children and he considers himself a Haitian. He was born in Haiti. He holds a master's degree and is completing his doctoral studies. He is a pastor.

***Carla***

Carla is a 42-year-old female. She has been married for twenty years. She considers herself to be somewhat religious. She has three children and she was born in Haiti and she has been in the United States for 31 years. She identifies as Haitian-American. She is a teacher and holds a bachelor's degree.

***Andrea***

Andrea is a 41-year-old female who has been married for fifteen years. She is a Christian, she identifies as a Haitian-American and she has three children. She was born in New York and has a master's degree. She is a teacher.

***Daiquan***

Daiquan is a 40-year-old male. He is married and has three children. He has been married for fifteen years and he identifies as a Haitian man. He was born in Haiti and has been in the United States for 28 years. He has a master's degree and he is a school counselor.

***Faye***

Faye is a 35-year-old female who is married and with one bonus child gained from her husband's previous relationship. She has been married for 7 years. She has a bachelor's degree

and she is a life coach and an entrepreneur. She was born in the United States and she identifies herself as a first-generation Haitian-American. Both of her parents were born and raised in Haiti.

### *Piscine*

Piscine is a 39-year-old male. He is married with one son who is 15 years old. He has been married for seven years. He was born in Canada and has lived in the United States for 31 years. He holds a bachelor's degree and he identifies as Haitian. He dated his wife for five years before they got married.

### *Lydia*

Lydia is a 36-year-old female, married for seven years, and has three children. She identifies herself as a Haitian. She was born in the United States and she is a dentist. She met her husband through a friend who was dating her husband's cousin. They dated for seven months before he proposed, they were engaged for another nine months before getting married.

### *Smith*

Smith is a 40-year-old male, married for seven years, and has three children. He was born in Haiti and he has been in the United States for 22 years. He has a master's degree and he is a pastor and a language interpreter.

### *Recruitment Procedures*

The researcher established a gatekeeper couple through personal recruitment at local Haitian church events. A gatekeeper is a person who has access to eligible research participants; they act as a liaison to connect the researcher and the potential participants (Dehghan & Wilson, 2019). Once the first couple was secured, the job of the gatekeeper was to affirm trust in the



researcher and introduce the researcher to other potential participants. The introduction was via text informing parties that the researcher would contact them once their information was shared. The introduction established the researcher as a trustworthy person in which they could feel comfortable during the interviews. Each name and contact information received by the gatekeeper was used to reach out to the targeted participants via email and phone with an explanation of what the study entailed as well as the purpose of the study. The email/phone prompt and flier is attached in *Appendix B and Appendix C*, respectively. If the potential couples agreed to participate, each partner was sent a screening questionnaire (*Appendix D*) via Google forms by email to complete. Once completed, the researcher reviewed the screener forms for each potential participant couple to ensure they met the eligibility criteria. If so, they were contacted via email to schedule the initial Zoom interview for each partner.

After each interview, the researcher asked the participants if they could think of other potential couples that met the criteria and may be interested in participating in the study to snowball and gain more participants. The researcher used word of mouth through the snowball referral process where participants referred others that they believed met the research criteria (Robinson, 2014). Because the targeted number of participants was not met after attempting the snowball method with the couples, the next attempt of recruitment was via social media, specifically Facebook. The other couples were recruited via Facebook posts and the sharing function on the platform. The recruitment posts for social media used the same language from the recruitment email document in *Appendix B* and the research flier in *Appendix C*. This study aimed to interview a minimum of three couples and a maximum of five couples.

## **Research Design**

### ***Data Collection***

Potential participants completed a screening questionnaire to ensure they met the research criteria. The questionnaire was created and sent via Google Forms. All responses were kept in a secure, password-protected Google Drive document that was viewed only by the researcher.

The potential participants were asked to answer questions about their background/demographics, family history, and general cultural information on the screener. Upon acceptance to participate in the study, couples were informed that the process may consist of three interviews. They were sent a consent form via Google Forms to read and sign electronically before interviews were conducted.

The original aim was to use couple interviews in addition to individual partner interviews for triangulation. Conducting the three interviews per couple was intended to allow for triangulation, which Vaterlaus (2017) noted helps obtain a closer view of the truth. Triangulation of perspectives consist of each partners' accounts of events and the interviewer's observations (Marks et al., 2008). After an initial review and analysis of the first individual interviews, the researcher noticed that the couples did not fully address the research questions. After a discussion with the principal investigator, the decision was made to conduct a brief second individual interview to specifically address family expectations. The couple interview was not going to add value to the study, as the questions about family expectations were not a couple experience but an individual experience with their family and/or community of origin. The questions used to guide the second interview are found in *Appendix E*. The researcher reached out to each participant via email to ask for a second individual interview that would last 10-20

minutes to address some information that was missing from the first interview. Participants consented to a second Zoom meeting.

In the first interview, the researcher took time to establish rapport, trust, and comfort with each participant by allowing time for them to ask any questions about the process before the official interview protocol began. The initial interview of each partner was conducted on the same day. I conducted individual partner interviews for each of the couples. After the first set of interviews, the initial analysis began. I reviewed the transcripts for all of the individual interviews. I searched for themes among the husbands, the wives, the couples, those born in the U. S. and/or those participants born in Haiti. After the researcher identified the initial themes, additional follow-up questions were asked with both parties in the next interview. During this meeting, the researcher was able to identify some of the initial themes and findings and verify that none of the information was misunderstood at the first interview, which allowed the researcher to clarify the initial themes.

The interview was designed to gain more knowledge about the influence of Haitian culture on the marriages of Haitian-American couples. Each of our initial virtual interviews took around 60-90 minutes via Zoom. Each partner was interviewed separately, then there was a second interview following an initial analysis of *all* participant individual interviews. The Zoom meeting was audio-recorded and transcribed using an automated transcription service, Otter. The researcher reviewed and edited the transcriptions immediately after each interview. In phenomenology, the participants are to be reflective in their experiences while the researcher aims to interpret the meaning of these experiences by reviewing transcripts as a whole for understanding and then repeating the process to find meaningful themes, patterns, similarities, and differences found in the transcripts (Goulding, 2005). As a result, the transcripts were

reviewed for errors and any accent mistakes from the automated transcript generators. After this series of analyses of the transcripts, I returned them to the participants to cross-check their interpretations and elicit their opinions (Goulding, 2005). This member check was done electronically through an email to each participant. I sent them the charts in Appendix F-H for review of meaning. The participants were offered a follow-up meeting to discuss possible misunderstandings of the meaning of their quotes. Through analysis, in phenomenology, the aim is to scrutinize the transcripts in search for ways to describe central aspects of their experiences (Goulding, 2005).

### ***Data Analysis Process***

Since this research adopted a phenomenological inquiry to collect qualitative data, the analysis followed the Colaizzi (1978) framework for analyzing phenomenological data to analyze and organize it related to how family expectations influence the marital practices of Haitian-Americans. Colaizzi's method comprises seven steps. However, this analysis did not include the last steps in the Colaizzi framework (i.e., description of the structure's fundamentals and returning to the participants). This section presents the four steps followed in data analysis.

#### ***Step 1: Acquiring Sense of the Transcribed Data***

This step involved acquiring a sense of the respondent's experiences from the transcribed data. To familiarize myself with the data, I followed recommendations by Creswell & Poth (2018) that rereading the interview transcripts several times and listening to the recordings two to four times would allow me to become familiar with the data. Hence, I read each transcript two times while listening to the audio recordings, which enabled me to verify the accuracy of the transcripts.

***Step 2: Extracting significant statements***

This step involved identifying significant statements from the transcribed data related to the research questions noted in chapter one of this dissertation (See *Appendix F*). Through reading and rereading the transcripts, several statements were found to reflect the identified statements reflecting the influence of family expectations and Haitian culture on the marriage of Haitian-American couples.

***Step 3: Formulating meanings***

This step involved identifying meanings from the statements appropriate for the phenomenon under study (See *Appendix G*). By critically reviewing the significant statements identified above, I was able to identify the meanings coming forward about the influence of culture and family expectations on the marriage practices of Haitian-American couples.

***Step 4: Organizing formulated meanings into cluster themes***

This step involved organizing the formulated meanings from the significant statements to unveil broader themes (See *Appendix H*). The data relating to how family expectations and Haitian culture affect the marriage of Haitian-American couples, resulting in several formulated meanings. I arranged the meanings into emergent themes.

***Step 5: Describing the investigated phenomenon***

This step involved providing an exhaustive description of the participant's experience with the phenomenon; in this case, the description of the Haitian-American couples' experiences with

the family expectations and Haitian culture. I reviewed the findings to ensure that they provided an adequate description.

### *Individual and Couple Interviews*

In marriage or couple research, there are examples of ways to conduct qualitative interviews with couples. For a better chance of honest responses, scholars advocate for the use of individual interviews in research, even when interviewing a couple (Marks et al., 2008). At the start of each interview, each couple gave consent to be recorded and transcribed. To ensure anonymity, each participant chose an alias at the beginning of the process (during the screening questionnaire) to be identified for the duration of the study.

During the interviews, I took additional notes to help guide my probing. These general notes were limited with the intention to not distract the participants and continue to establish trust and comfort by actively listening during the conversations. In the beginning, I noted that all interview answers were confidential, which meant no information was to be shared with anyone, including their spouse.

To ensure a conversational flow during the interviews, the researcher used a semi-structured interview format. The research protocol was followed and additional questions were asked to clarify statements or subjects introduced during the interview. Participants were given a chance to ask questions before and after the interview about the process in general. They also had the opportunity to decline to answer any question throughout the process or stop at any point during the interview should they wish. After the second interview was conducted, the researcher ensured the trustworthiness of the information gathered by allowing the individuals to review the quotes that had been highlighted for use in the findings of this study. This gave the participant

the chance to clarify meaning and adjust wording before the information was finalized in this document's findings and analysis sections.

Phenomenology mentions the practice of bracketing. Bracketing is a process where the researcher notes their current understandings of the phenomenon or the experiences of the subjects with the intention of not being influenced by their biases (Norlyk & Harder, 2010). Essentially, this is the first step in the analysis process where the researcher intentionally engages in self-questioning and reflection, then suspends their judgment of what they believe the nature of the problem or experiences are to allow the in-depth transcripts to inform the study (Norlyk & Harder, 2010). After bracketing, the researcher reviewed the transcripts openly with the aim to gain as much knowledge as possible about the experiences of the participants. I reviewed the transcripts after each interview to capture the *essence* of the marital experiences of Haitian-American couples by comparing the wives, the husbands, and the couples' responses to the open-ended research questions. When patterns and themes were found, they were categorized.

### ***Interview Protocol***

The interview protocol addressed the Haitian cultural influence on the participants' marriage and any characteristics they believed within the culture that was demonstrated in their marital practices. The specific questions addressed the main research question and sub questions. These questions reflected the literature investigated about the Haitian population and married individuals. Major categories included: 1) Marital experiences, milestones, and challenges 2) Influence of culture and, 3) Influence of family expectations. The protocol was set up to ask general questions and to prompt the interviewees with additional questions if they did not mention specific subtopics. For example, one question in the protocol was: *How does the influence of family expectations show up in your marriage?* The couple was offered a chance to

answer freely. If they did not understand the question or understand, I prompted them by inquiring about the traditions they upheld in their home, any use of Haitian proverbs or sayings, etc. A full list of the questions and the prompts can be found in *Appendix A*.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is an ongoing process in which the researcher must pay attention to their perspectives and experience that may lead to biases in the way they understand and interact with the participants in their study (Smith & Luke, 2021). As a Haitian- American Christian woman with personal experience with divorce, it is imperative to recognize that this may shape the way the study flows. To ensure the least amount of bias, I kept a digital reflexive journal throughout the study to self-reflect; this added to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study (Smith & Luke, 2021). As the interviews began, it was important not to interpret the responses of the participants as my own experience, so I intentionally probed to get clarification and specific examples and to not assume the experience of the participants as similar to mine or what I believed from the Haitian culture.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Holmes (2020) describes positionality as an individual's adopted position about a research topic and their worldview. Identifying one's positionality helps both the readers and the researcher understand their perspective and how that influences their assumptions and biases as it relates to the topic of research. The positionality of the researcher influences all aspects of the research study including the method, its outcome, and results (Holmes, 2020). In this case, I chose a population directly related to my positionality.

I am an American-born Haitian woman that grew up in a single-parent household. My parents were divorced by the time I reached age 12. Before they divorced, I began going to



church with a neighbor because my mother was usually working and could not take us. In an *unevenly yoked* family, I learned very early that only my mom wanted my siblings and me to have a Christian foundation. She also was the parent that spoke to us children solely in Creole, instilling Haitian cultural values in us. Post-divorce, my mom spent even less time at home than before divorcing my father because she had to work an additional job to make up for the lost income. One thing that did remain the focus in the home was that we were required to go to church, stay in school, then come right back home (“L’eglise, L’ecole, Lakay!”). As I got older, I realized that divorce not only had an impact on the way I grew up but influenced the way I viewed relationships in general. I knew that there was literature available on marriage and divorce but I wanted to learn more about the success stories in marriage, Haitian marriages in particular.

Thus, I began to review the literature to learn more about marital success and quality and learned that the research mostly included White or African American families; not much was available on Afro-Caribbean couples and far less available on Haitian couples. After self-discovery prompted by my parent’s divorce, I knew that I wanted to find the key to a lasting marriage so that I could have one myself and also teach these skills to the couples in my community through seminars, thus bringing me to want to discover how Haitian culture influences the marriage practices of Haitian-American couples. My position as a Haitian-American person of faith influenced the population I wanted to study and even the places where I began my recruitment– the church. The way I gathered data may also have been influenced by this as I showed respect to this population the way my culture taught me to honor and respect my elders. I used qualitative research which allowed me to discover the lived experiences of Haitian couples and inform the marriage literature about this population.

## Chapter IV

### Findings

This study proposed to understand how family expectations and culture influence the marriages of couples from the Haitian Diaspora. It is important to note that many of the findings are related to both the couple and their children, thus *family* will include the children of the respondents as well as their spouse. Additionally, middle-age refers to individuals between the age of 35 and 55. In this study, the participants ranged from ages 35 to 52. Note that one of the participants was born in Canada; four of the participants in this study were born in Haiti, then migrated to the U.S; and three of the participants were American-born and have learned Haitian culture and traditions second-hand from their parents. It is important to note that the couple in this study speak interchangeably of their family and their marriage. All of the couples in this study have children so when they discuss the impact of culture on their *family*, they also mean their marriage with their spouse. This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the data collected through questionnaires and interviews. The findings from the data collected pertaining to the research questions are presented in this chapter. The final section presents the summary of the findings.

The question that guided this study was: What is the impact of family expectations on marital practices of Haitian-American couples if any? The two sub-questions were: (1) What characteristics in Haitian culture shape their marital practices? And (2) How has the traditional family expectation impacted first-generation, middle-aged Haitian-American couples? This section presents the results of the analysis of the data collected through interviews. From the data

analysis, the following themes emerged: (a) gender roles, (b) family expectations, (c) upholding Haitian traditions, (d) love expression, and (e) importance of religious belief.

### **Theme 1: Gender Roles**

The review of the data suggests that in the Haitian culture there are roles meant for men and others for women. These ideas of gender roles derive from the way of living in Haiti and were transferred when the people born in Haiti migrated to the U.S. This is evident in the various responses made by the participants regarding gender roles.

#### ***Learned Gender Roles***

All of the participants (both male and female) recalled learned gender roles that were transmitted to them by the Haitian culture through their families. Carla narrated how her father ensured that her brother did not help in the kitchen chores. As a girl, there were gender assignments that she was expected to learn in her childhood from her parents including washing clothes, cooking, and cleaning the house, as she was expected to perform these tasks when married. Carla noted that:

As the girl, we need to make sure you clean the house, make sure you cook, you need to make sure you know, you learn how to wash your clothes and iron the clothes and stuff. And in my house, my dad made it a big deal. When I would be cooking different types of meals in the kitchen and the boys want to come-- He would say, "oh, no, no, you don't belong in the kitchen."

In the above quote, Carla described the way her parents trained her as a child to adhere to traditional gender scripts. Her father made clear efforts to ensure that she and her brothers knew what their gender obligations and limitations were.

Love also noted that as a man he was not allowed to go to the kitchen as a child, and he was only supposed to do work that required physical strength. This response suggests that in the Haitian culture there are kinscripts assigned to men about the use of physical strength to support their families. More specific examples of gender scripts included the kitchen chores belonging to the women while the jobs that require strength belonged to men.

Well, you know, there are certain works that I was not allowed to do. I wasn't allowed to go to the kitchen (chuckles) that was a no-no, as a man, you don't go to the kitchen. And in fact they used to call you gay. When you go to the kitchen-- they wouldn't call you gay, but they would call you *Masisi* in Creole. When you go to the kitchen, [they would say] "what are you doing in there? You are a man. Are you masisi?" (chuckles) [as a result of that happening] *Then-* you stay away from the kitchen. ...There was high expectation on you. And the hard work, anything that included hard work, That's for you.

Gender roles in the Haitian culture are also evident in the response by Faye. The participant noted that her mother was expected to keep up the house while her dad was the family provider and he also took out the trash.

Yeah, my mom was expected to keep up the house and my dad spent the money or made the money and like the only real housekeeping things he did was take out the trash. So that

was probably the only thing I expected a male to---like that I feel like it's more of a male thing just because I don't want to touch it.

Though the above reflection begins with a description of parental behavior, it ends on a more personal note which demonstrates that the participants continue to adhere to traditional gender roles within their marriage that mimic the roles they saw their parents take on.

### ***Modifications to Traditional Gender Roles***

Though participants were able to recognize and articulate household gender roles practiced by their parents, many did not hold strictly to those roles in their marriages. All of the participants noted making some form of modification to the gender scripts they were taught growing up. Smith shared how he is content doing jobs that based on the Haitian culture are supposed to be done by the wife. However, this response by Smith suggests that his wife is somehow holding more strongly to cultural expectations than he. This is evident in her behavior when Smith asks to help her do the laundry and the wife does not accept his help as she did not believe he would do those jobs well.

Okay, so --far it's basically, I help with the children. I work, I provide and I --if I need to clean the backyard, I clean the backyard. The showers--you know, I do these things. I don't do the laundry, I don't do these things not because I don't want to do them -it's just that she took it upon herself to do it. I remember one time asking "Hey I could help you" but she didn't feel like I should. But I'm like "okay, cool." But, for me, I don't feel like I'm restricted.

For this couple, some of the gender-based roles such as childcare shifted and there was some willingness to modify roles but they seemed to hold onto some variation of traditional gender roles

There were several examples of gender role practices that changed over time. The change over time may be due to many factors but one may be on account of adapting to American culture or simply enacting agency by not following the kinscripts that were assigned by their family and/or culture. Love explained how he aids in cooking for their family despite this traditionally being primarily a woman's role, according to Haitian culture. Love attributed his decision to the realization that for a relationship to thrive, the partners should be ready to help each other. Love describes below some of the traditional women roles that he helps within his home despite what his family and Haitian culture taught him growing up.

Taking care of the house, more house manager type of work. Being more active in the life of the kids. That's where --that's the mentality that I brought into the relationship. Over time -- things changed. I became more active at home, I cook more. (chuckles) I walked away from what I've learned, because I realize that if only one person [is] doing it, the relationship will not be healthy. So we have to balance things out. So we help each other.

Smith emphasized the evolution of gender roles in modern times, stating that although he observes his traditionally expected roles as a man by providing for his wife, he is not rigid in the other types of roles he undertakes.

No, because the way I am, the culture that I lived in, is not that flexible. You know, it'll be-- there'll be man jobs, there'll be woman jobs. I think I'm influenced by the culture as well, to be basically like, as a man, gotta be responsible for certain things, you know, take care of the wife, and make sure.. but not as rigid as it was, I think, to the [formal] education that I've gotten.

Smith was the only one to suggest the possibility that acceptance of changed gender roles might be due to formal education. The other participants suggested that the changes occurred because it was equally necessary to share responsibility.

Similar to Smith's view on modifying the gender roles, Piscine notes that he and his wife balance the chores in their home. They do not adhere strictly to the gender scripts their parents *forced on them* but they share responsibilities as needed, depending on who is available to complete the task at the time. This is due to the fact that they believe sharing responsibilities, regardless of gender script previously taught by Haitian elders, would help create a fair balance in the chores at home. Thus they choose to complete all tasks and chores together based on availability, not on culturally designated gender scripts.

Some of the gender roles that kind of show up— Some of the things that come up when I think of that -is that you know, --the kitchen and the house, that's [for] the women. The man is supposed to go out and work. And, you know, he's supposed to put food on the table. And the woman is to cater to him, she is to cook, clean and those are sort of a gender roles that I feel existed or was programmed into me...I feel like those roles that I explained ...that I subscribe to or was forced on me, I feel like we [my wife and I] don't subscribe to those. And we have rewritten the gender role in our house too. And it's to our liking. It's fitting for us. It's not a specific person that is to cook, but it's more so-- could be based on who's available at the time. Sometimes it's me, sometimes it's her. Best case scenario we tackle it together.

Daiquan noted that he helps his wife in cooking but he also attends to the heavy works expected to be done by men such as snow yard work.

My wife cooked, Oh, of course, but because I didn't really have to do cooking. In terms of cleaning, we clean together. It's a --we have household chores. Everybody have a part to play. -- Yeah, household chores. What else? I'm expected to do all the heavy work. Snow, yard work.

This is the same case for Love who during the early days of his marriage only performed men's roles due to his background whereby he was taught that as a man, one was not allowed to go to the kitchen. However, today although his wife is the primary cook, he can also cook.

I started traditional because of my background, and then as we spend more time together, we're getting better. And now it's this- I can cook, she can cook. But she's the primary cook.

Overall, the participants in this study are subscribing to the traditional gender roles that they saw their parents exhibit. However, they are making modifications to these roles to fit the needs of their family while considering the experiences that they have in America that may differ from their families' traditional upbringing in Haiti.

### ***Husband provides and protects wife and family***

Though men described their roles as expanding or as having a willingness to expand they continued to claim the role of family provider and protector. Both the women and the men in this study discussed the gender script of provision coming from men. While the women in this study mentioned that this was what their families expected from their future husbands, the men in this study noted that this was a family expectation that they intended to maintain. From the results obtained, middle-aged Haitian-American men have lived up to these expectations. For example,



Daiquan noted that he provides for and protects his family. Before he got married to his wife he had a conversation with his father-in-law. They discussed the transition of his father-in-law's role as the provider for his family, which included Daiquan's wife up until marriage, to now Daiquan needing to take care of his new wife as she left her previous home. This transition was a continuation of providing from one man to the next man of the house.

Um, in terms of providing, I think that's like a common sense thing. Being a provider, being a protector, for sure. I'm very protective of my wife, my family, my kids. My father in law [expected me] just to continue to protect his daughter and provide for her. For [my kids], it's like--I feel the need to always be ready to defend them if something happens. But at the same time learning to say, "Hey, you got to stand up for yourself".

Smith also confirmed the presence of gender roles in the Haitian culture noting that the culture influences him to be like a man. More specifically, he has to take on some roles that based on his culture are the responsibility of men- such as taking care of his wife.

You know, it'll be -there'll be man jobs, there'll be woman jobs. I think I'm influenced by the culture as well, to be basically like, as a man, gotta be responsible for certain things, you know, take care of the wife...

Love also confirmed that being a family provider was among the roles that he believed to be for the husband. Love then goes on to describe the influence of Haitian culture on his expected role as a man. He says that according to traditional Haitian gender expectations, he was expected to be the decision maker, the primary provider, and disciplinarian while the wife was expected to manage the household.

Oh, when I came into the relationship, I believed that it was my responsibility to be the primary provider for my wife. Because I gave her my name. And because I gave her my name, I'm responsible to take care of her. Cultural expectations say that the man is the decision maker, and the primary provider, the disciplinarian. The mother, the wife is the house manager.

Carla and Andrea's parents expected their spouses to be able to provide for their household and take care of them. When asked what their families expected in their future spouse they noted the following:

**Carla:** Um, no, just that, you know, he would work. He's a worker, he'll take care of, you know, his household. That's the only thing.

**Andrea:** My--(chuckles) so my dad knew that I couldn't pay bills. He knew that--Like, whoever I married has to take care of me. So [before marriage] he spoke to my husband and told my husband, "You need to take care of her."

The data also suggest that middle-aged Haitian-American women are taking on roles that are culturally defined as male roles in the Haitian culture. For example, in Haitian culture, it is the husband's role to provide and take care of the wife and family. In this culture, it is normative for women to take care of the house and household. However, for these middle-aged Haitian-American couples, women are working and they are also breadwinners, meaning they are either the only working person or earning more than their spouse. Faye noted that her dad was always the sole breadwinner. She also noted that she has been a breadwinner in her house on several occasions when her husband was either underemployed or unemployed which is an indicator that there is a shift in traditional gender roles.

..... you know, my dad was the breadwinner. And so there were gender roles-- Honestly, the gender roles that I think about, I am just igno-- I feel like I'm actively trying to break like- the --I've been the breadwinner in our household a couple times. And then with my business, I'm looking to be [a breadwinner] again, you know.

While Faye was not always the sole breadwinner in her home. She noted statements like the one above to reinforce that within her marriage, both partners contribute to the household. This includes finances and household chores. She and her husband note that this system works best for them. Piscine provided a clear and eloquent description of the way they have modified gender scripts to suit their preference within their marriage.

I feel like those roles that I explained--that I subscribed to or was *forced* on me , I feel like we [my wife and I] don't subscribe to those. And we have rewritten the gender role in our house too. And it's to our liking. It's fitting for us. It's not a specific person that is to cook, but it's based on who's available at the time. Sometimes it's me, sometimes it's her. Best case scenario we tackle it together. [We say] Listen, let's put all the gender roles and we're going to put all that stuff to the side. And let's just first and foremost, let's see what's suitable for us in our situation, in our house, for our family, and then we'll go from there.

Lydia also noted that she helps her husband in paying bills. From the review of the findings, it is traditionally the man's responsibility to provide for the family. Lydia's actions are an indicator that middle-aged Haitian-American women are taking on roles that are culturally defined as male roles.

Me and my husband, we don't really say that. "Okay, you do all the working and I just stay home with the kids." We both have equal [responsibilities]--We don't divide that up. It's equal- half and half. You know, I work, he works. And that's how we pay our bills.

In sum, middle-aged Haitian-American couples are taking the traditional gender scripts that they were taught and modifying them to meet the needs within their marriage and family of procreation.

## **Theme 2: Family Expectations of Marriage**

As children, the respondents began receiving messages of family expectations. The data in this study indicates that Haitian families of origin expect their male and female children to get married and have children. Moreover, girls are expected to honor and respect their husbands.

### ***Expectations to Get Married***

A significant number of participants noted that their families and communities of origin expected them to get married, regardless of their gender. More specifically, five out of the eight individuals interviewed reported that getting married was among the primary expectations their family had for them. Andrea noted that as early as age seventeen, her family members would openly inquire about her relationship status and declare what she should be doing *when she gets married*. This is when she learned that there was an explicit expectation for her to get married.

I feel like they did have expectations that I would get married. They would say "when you get married" (chuckles) in conversations like that, or my mom would say, you don't see anybody you like? things like that. (chuckles) Or anybody that likes you? things like that.

This messaging was not limited to females as Piscine noted that there were certain criteria imposed regarding the women he would marry. Those criteria included ethnicity and religious status. He

was not only expected to marry but he was expected to marry a Haitian woman. He noted that as a young child he had a disdain for the culture and did not want to identify as Haitian due to the bullying from his peers in school, thus never thought he would marry a Haitian woman. The following exchange provides context

**Researcher:** Was there an expectation of what kind of woman or spouse you would bring home to your parents?

**Piscine:** Ah, I think their expectation was that I would bring a Haitian woman home. And I think they were really- really surprised, Happy that I brought a Haitian girl home. But now there was a whole *nother* problem with bringing a Haitian girl home. I thought all I had to do was do that And then I was winning, I was right. But no, so there was a whole *nother* problem. The other problem was that my wife's, father could care less about churches. He could care less about them--

**Researcher:** they expected you to bring a Christian person or a Christian family home?

**Piscine:** So I thought it was just Haitian but NO, Haitian wasn't enough. There was another thing. There was another expectation that --maybe it existed, it just slipped my mind, I just didn't know. But the expectation was that [she] would also be [from] a Christian [family].

The previous passage spoke of the importance of religion in the lives and upbringing of these participants, though that importance may not have been universal. Even as there were criteria for appropriate wives, there were likewise criteria for the men seeking wives. Piscine noted the strict

marriage expectations his parents had for his sister. He described it as more strict than it was for him as a boy.

**Piscine:** But this was pushed on the girls and what I mean by girls, my sister, so what I'm talking about was that my parents said, "*ou pral mayre yon bel ayitienne, ki soti nan yon famni...*" {you're gonna marry a Haitian woman that comes from a family that that's recognized} and this and that, and that ---that was an expectation they had, but I would I feel like it wasn't really really enforced. However for my sister, it that was rule that she you're going to marry a Haitian and not only are you going to marry a Haitian, chances are we're probably going to find who you're going to marry for you. And you're going to live happily ever after -period.

**Researcher:** The expectations for future family were more rigid for your sister, because she is a girl?

**Piscine:** Oh yeah! yes. And the only real ---the only rhyme or reason I can think of is because she was a female.

Moreover, Carla reported that her father expected her to marry, and as a young woman it was understood that she would live in her father's house until she married. She believed that this was a belief that stemmed from her Haitian (and perhaps religious) culture. The fact that Carla would only leave her home through marriage implied that the participant highly observed and respected her culture.

Oh, yes!! He made it clear that you know, I have to get married. I'm not just leaving his house... In our culture, that's not how a young woman leaves their house. They leave the house when they get married. I was going to college- Not even out of state.

Carla wanted to attend a university and live on-campus. She hoped that going to a distant in-state school would be reason enough for her parents to allow her an exception, but they denied her the ability to live in residential dorms. Her father in particular would not accept her living outside of the home before she was married, even for school.

Family and cultural expectation of marriage was evident among middle-aged Haitian-American couples. Haitian elders and parents expected the Haitian-American participants to get married and expand their family. This expectation was passed from their generation to the next where the children would get married and have children to grow the family. Notably, similar to the participants' family and cultural expectations of marriage, these participants also expected their children to get married. Smith provided this example:

I have expectations of my kids, which I've learned from my parents. You know, they go to school, get good grades. And also make sure that you get a good education, and get married and get paid, etc. And especially for my daughter, she better get married. (chuckles) Like I mentioned, I want to be in that wedding and dance with her -so. But, you know, that's an expectation.

Moreover, Smith noted that he learned these expectations from his parents which indicated an intergenerational passing of values and expectations like going to school and getting married, and earning income.

Carla noted that although her children are free to choose whether to get married or not, she would love to see them married. She indicated that she will encourage and coach them toward marriage.

Nevertheless, Carla gave her children an option whether to get married. This is contrary to Carla's father's expectations for his children where getting married was a requirement rather than a choice. Thus pressuring her, as early as age 19, to get married as that was the only way she could respectfully leave her father's home.

**Researcher:** Is there an expectation for [your children] to get married?

**Carla:** I would love for [my children] to get married. but they're free beings to choose.

**Carla:** No, I couldn't stay in the dorm, no. That will not happen! mmmhhh hmm

**Researcher:** Okay, so the only way out of the house *in a respectable manner*, according to the culture is by marriage?

**Carla:** is to get married, yep!

**Researcher:** I see. So it was very clear that you needed to get married?

**Carla:** Mm hmm. Yes it was.

**Researcher:** How old were you when you learned that it was an expectation- That was, like very clear," you *must* get married to leave this house." How old were you when you learned that?

**Carla:** 19



In parallel to Carla's response, Faye would like her children to get married but the child has a choice whether to marry. She said she will be pushing the marriage agenda for her son and nieces and nephews.

Oh, now that you say that-- I guess there is [an expectation of marriage]. But I wouldn't be sad if he didn't, you know. So I think that's a good question. You know, that's a good way to put it. I definitely want to make sure he knows he doesn't *have* to. But I think it's just a yes, I do. I do expect all of my nieces, nephews and my son to get married. But not expect-like they *must* [get married].

Faye shows in the above quote that she did not realize she had an innate expectation for her nieces and nephews to marry. However, she will not pressure them to choose marriage, instead, she will encourage them to have a choice in the decision on whether or not they marry.

Daiquan reported that he is currently teaching his children about marriage both directly and indirectly. He discusses concepts like divorce, communication, and the importance of choosing the right partner but also demonstrates through his relationship with his wife that marriage is a good thing.

Indirectly, or directly? Marriage is good, it's a good thing, finding your--a partner. It's a great thing. I'll talk to them about compatibility, how important that is in a marriage. So--- the thing about our kids, even though we tell them -bout some of those things [divorce & marriage], we are very-- we try to be very careful not to say --not to impose it. Because "if you make a mistake, we don't want you to think you have to be perfect.

Like his parents, Piscine had racial/ethnic requirements for his son's wife. Piscine reported that he not only expects his son to marry but to marry a black woman too.

Um it's, it's funny, you asked that --I have a preference. And not only is it an expectation, but I expect him to bring a black woman and that's just me being honest.

While Piscine did not indicate the reason for the preference of his son bringing home a Black woman, he does also note that he would prefer his son to bring home a Haitian woman if life were perfect and he could choose for his son. Expecting his son to marry and marry someone within the culture is an example of cultural transmission.

Of the eight participants, only Faye reported that she had no marriage expectations for her children. She notes that she wants the children around her to be happy. Whether this includes marriage or not.

No, no I just, -I want them to be happy, whatever they want to do. You, you don't --you don't come to this decision in life until you've been through marriage until you've been through the drama. Until you know, you have to deal with mental health issues within a marriage, mental health issues dealing with a messed up marriage, you know, so I don't want to force anything upon them. Because it's a lot. It's a lot. And, you know.

In sum, the review of the findings showed that there are family and cultural expectations regarding marriage. More specifically, the respondents reported that they believed that their families expected them to get married. The expectations were both explicit and implicit. Furthermore, the findings indicated that these participants maintained similar though less strict expectations for their children.

*Expectations for Couples to Have Children*

Post marital childbearing was a significant expectation for the participants. Five participants reported they were expected to have children by their families. Some participants noted that they felt pressured to have a child immediately after getting married. Andrea was concerned that her family did not give her time to enjoy her spouse as they were pressuring her to bring them a child.

Or I think that's what the culture does. (chuckles) They don't give you any time to just enjoy your spouse, you know? ...it took me some time to have my first child, so it was kind of like, "what's going on?" And so, once again, the family would gather and we would pray, right, like, where's this baby? So yeah, definitely was an expectation with children.

Andrea is a pastor's child, she noted that her family would gather to pray for her to have a child. This is an indication of the various ways that religion enters the lives of Haitians.

Similarly, Lydia identified that she was pressured to have children immediately after getting married. In answer to a researcher prompt about marriage and childbearing, Lydia replied:

Yeah. I think so. I don't think Haitians, or the older generation-Haitians understand that, you know, you want to wait a little bit to enjoy your husband, you know, before you start having those kinds of commitments.

Family expectations to have children after marriage was also evident in the responses by Smith, Carla, and Faye. Carla and Smith reported that they believed their families expected them to have children immediately after marriage. On the other hand, Faye reported that getting married and having children were some of the main expectations her family had for her. The expectation to

have children seems indicative of the importance of children in Haitian culture, possibly to carry forward the culture and bloodlines of each family.

### *Respect as a value*

All of the participants in this study mentioned respect as an important value at some point within the interview. They all mentioned how this valuable trait was something that they strived to have, and gain from their future spouse when they were looking and/or instill in their children.

Faye mentioned that she places value on respect when she enters a room with her elders. So makes a conscious effort to say hello when entering a room full of her elders. While Faye mentioned a strong value for respect, she made it clear that she was against blind respect where she could not express herself freely and get equal respect.

In my mind, [in the]Haitian culture respect is "I say something and you don't say anything back." And I don't believe in that kind of blind respect. But respect is a huge value of mine. For example, [in the] Haitian [culture],it was like, once you start yelling, that's disrespectful- or once you raise your voice or once you show that you're in passion. So...respect is a huge value of mine, but probably not in the Haitian traditional sense. I believe that you should respect yourself first.

Likewise, Andrea mentioned growing up with respect as a value that was demanded within her Haitian household.

I think Haitians do demand respect. I do think they really do demand respect, but I don't think they always give it because that's just the way the culture is. It's unfortunate. But

when it came to me, and in my house, where I grew up, respect was huge. It was huge. And I knew that.

Similarly, when asked about what qualities their family wanted in a future partner, Smith and Lydia both mentioned that their families desired someone who would be respectful.

As it related to marriage and the value of respect, Daiquan noted that he believed the Haitian people had an innate respect for the institution of marriage. Correspondingly, Carla mentioned that according to her biblical convictions women were to respect and submit to their husbands. She noted that within her marriage she practiced these values which aided in a mutual respect between her and her husband.

I believe when I read God's words, -from the newer Testament talks about husband loving your wife as God loved the church, he took care of her. He does this for her, he does that for [the church], women we respect- we submit to our husband- so we mutually love each other. It's not you on the step stool and I'm down here

When it came to rearing children with the values that they received, Smith noted that he wanted to discipline his children to make sure that they had respect and reverence for their elders. In the same way, Andrea noted that one of the ways she believed that she and her husband are subliminally teaching their children an example of marriage is through their expressions of respect.

I feel like just the way we move, like the way we are very respectful to one another– the way we speak to one another. [The kids are] picking up on those things, without us even having to say this is how you should be or this is what it should be like.

It has been an unspoken but clear family expectation for the participants in this study to show respect as a value. While this respect seemed to be more demanded than given while they were growing up, the couples are actively thinking of ways to transfer and instill this important value in the lives of their children.

### *Honor and Submission to Husband*

In addition, the expectation to marry and to produce children within that marriage, Haitian culture and family also influence behavior in the marriage. Three of the four female participants agreed that based on Haitian culture they were expected by their families to honor and submit to their husbands. However, the men in this study did not mention the gender script of wives honoring their husbands. The participants also reported that they honor and respect their husbands indicating that they practice what is expected of them by their culture and family. However, the findings show that honor and respect as practiced by middle-aged, Haitian-American couples is different from that of the older generation. For example, Andrea noted that she was expected to honor and respect her husband as her mother did to her father by frequently serving him food. When she married, she did not intend to do that all the time, but complied mainly on special occasions like birthdays and holidays.

It's not something [serving husband food] that I took to do for my husband all the time. Like, my husband *has* experienced that from me. And it's just to show him that I love him and that I honor him as the man and the head of the house. But being realistic, it's not something that I felt like I could do all the time. And so I think I wanted to infuse some of that into my marriage because of the honor standpoint.

Continuing her conversation about honor and respect, Andrea describes what parts of the tradition of honor and respect she did not want to transfer into her marriage. Below Andrea mentions the way she sees examples of how this traditional act can be taken advantage of by some husbands and become excessive work for the wives.

Because my dad was a very hands on type of person too, but I've seen in other [examples of marriage] like my friends' houses where the dad was literally the king and he sat and did nothing while the wife was up and did *everything*. Thank God, that wasn't my example. But I definitely looked at that. And I'm just like, 'oh, no, you know, like, there's just like, no real balance.' ... You know, and so that's not something that I was willing to bring into my marriage.

Andrea described her father as being hands-on in the marriage partnership where he aided her mother in tasks for the family without the expectation of his wife catering to him like a king would have servants serve them. Thus she chose to replicate this in her marriage by honoring her husband as a sign of respect and love for him but not by obligation.

Lydia reported that she did not adhere to all the expectations present in Haitian culture. Some of the expectations for a Haitian woman as noted by Lydia included making the husband feel he is the head by plating and bringing his food to him and taking care of other chores for him. When asked if she felt required to continue those roles, Lydia replied:

No, I didn't think so. I'm more of a homebody. I'm more of a homemaker kind of person. So I kind of found it interesting. Some of it. You know, it was calming. It was relaxing. It was fun. But um, yeah, I didn't. I didn't really say okay, I have to be able to cook you know,

red snapper. Or I have to be able to cook a certain dish to make my husband happy. No, I just learned things just because I wanted to.

Similarly, Carla showed concern about expectations for women to honor and respect their husbands. She noted that honor and respect in the family should be from both wife and husband. She did not see that when she was growing up. Despite her mother showing honor and respect to her father, she did not see her father reciprocate.

My parents-my mom was always like, she had to be submissive. She had to do this. She had to do that. But I didn't see a response from him. I didn't see the love and the attention and the caringness -I didn't see that.

Carla believes that as much as the wife is required to honor her husband, the husband should reciprocate the honor to the wife. She does not believe in unidirectional honor. She believes that marriage is a partnership where every member brings 50 %.

I bring in 50% you bring in 50%. No, it's together. We come together to make this happen. And with the mentality of 50/50 one of these days, one of us is not going to do our 50%. But so that we('re) supporting each other and we're gonna make it work.

Carla mentioned that both she and her husband have the egalitarian intention of helping one another, although realistically some days may come and one partner may not be able to do whatever part they originally agreed to. However, knowing that they both accept the idea of contributing equally helps both partners feel supported.

In summary, the review of the findings showed that the female participants honored and respected their husbands, indicating that they practice what is expected of them by their culture



and family. However, the findings show that honor and respect as practiced by the middle-aged Haitian-American couples are often different from that of the older generation of Haitians. While the middle-aged Haitian-American couples honor and respect one another, they do not adhere to strict or blind submission of the wife to her husband as some of the respondents witnessed in their parents and/or other elders.

### **Theme 3: Upholding Haitian Traditions**

The analysis results revealed attributes of the Haitian culture in the marital practices of middle-aged Haitian-American couples. More specifically, these couples expressed their desire to maintain certain aspects of Haitian culture even while living in an American context. They also exercised agency to do so. All of the participants noted that they upheld Haitian traditions in a variety of ways including preparing Haitian foods, observing Haitian celebrations, and teaching their children Creole words and phrases where possible.

#### ***Haitian Foods***

Food and the preparation of food was one way that these couples infused elements of Haitian culture into their marriage and family life. Andrea noted that she tries to incorporate Haitian foods into her menu at home to ensure that the family does not lose the Haitian culture.

Haitian with the food, you know, we try to keep some of those elements in– the marriage, although a lot of the food is not the best for you to eat all the time. I (chuckles) –I try to incorporate that into our marriage, at least, you know, once-twice a week, right? Or, I'm not gonna say once or twice a week, sometimes it's not, it's less than that.

The same was shared by Faye who noted that they always eat Haitian food.

And like I said, I feel like food is huge,-- food and language are two easy and very pieces. And I mean, we're always with our family, there's always- we're always half speaking Creole, Half speaking English. We're always eating Haitian food.

Similarly, Daiquan shared that Haitian culture is represented in their foods. He noted that they are very traditional with the food, and their children know about soup jomou and griot.

Very traditional with the food... soup jomou. They know about soup jomou. They know about griot, they know all that stuff. It's like more like [a] Haitian thing. And pastas also, but when it comes to like, rice, these kids love rice.

Smith also discusses the tradition of drinking soup jomou on January 1st and honoring Haitian Flag day in May that he wants to continue celebrating with his young children as they grow older

So we have on January 1- we always drink-eat, what we call soup jomou. So I think it's Pumpkin soup [in English] and Yeah, that's, that's a tradition that we follow Still here. And May 18, which is the flag day for Haiti. I mean, yeah, I like to put the flag ...I like to just have it [hanging] somewhere. Yeah, these are the things I will continue to do for [my kids] to see as they grow up as well.

Likewise, Piscine mentions that he not only loves visiting different family members and friends for a bowl of soup on January 1st, but he specifically loves the fact that it is history that is celebrated today, years after Haitians gained independence.

New Year's I celebrate it by getting a hold of some soup, which is something that's not too hard to do. The soup -I love, love, love, love, love the deep rooted history of the soup and the history till this day is significant and it still exists. The whole intent and purpose of the

soup was for it to travel, for it not to stay in your home but for it to travel and go to multiple houses and feed. And it still happens in 2022, COVID , Omicron, you name it! Multiple bowls of soups are here. I love it.

Notably, soup joumou was mentioned in all interviews. Soup joumou is a Haitian traditional soup that is consumed on January 1st in celebration of Haitian Independence. Griot is fried pork (sometimes other meats too) and is a popular dish that is usually cooked for celebrations and special occasions.

In summary, all the participants agreed that there are elements of both American and Haitian culture in their food preparation choices. As Haitian-American individuals, each partner recognized the importance of continuing to eat and cook the food that they experienced in their homes growing up. While there is evidence that their marriages do not fully mimic the family life they had growing up, food is one of the places that these respondents clearly wanted to ensure that they kept Haitian culture present within their marriage and in their home.

### ***Observing Haitian Celebrations***

A significant number of participants agreed they uphold Haitian culture by observing various Haitian celebrations that are uniquely Haitian. For example, Love noted he and his family celebrate Haitian independence day by *drinking* soup joumou, drinking Haitian hot chocolate and eating Haitian bread, all while they wish each other a happy new year.

Similarly, Lydia shared that they drink soup on New Year's and also celebrate Haitian flag day.

We do celebrate Haitian Flag Day here in Arizona. [On Haitian Flag Day in Arizona], we have events where they have let's say they have different vendors, like Haitian vendors that

they you know, do like--- I don't know what it would -what it would be called --like it's just a gathering of all the Haitian vendors.

Furthermore, Piscine also reported they celebrate Haitian Flag Day and they do soup on January first.

...um, how do I celebrate? New Year's I celebrate it by getting a hold of some soup [soup Joumou], which is something that's not too hard to do. The soup I love, The deep-rooted history of the soup and the history till this day is significant and it still exists.

In summary, the results showed characteristics of Haitian culture in the marriage practices of middle-aged Haitian-American couples. The results revealed that middle-aged Haitian-American couples observed Haitian celebrations as a way of preserving their culture. Preservation of Haitian culture in America may not be a simple task, the few ways that these participants believed they could continue acknowledging their culture was through the Haitian flag day celebrations and honoring Haitian independence day as a family. Thus these Haitian festivities show up in the marriage as the couples make plans to honor and participate in them annually.

### ***Teaching Children Creole***

The participants shared that they sought to maintain contact with their culture by preserving their native language. More specifically, they teach their children words and phrases in Creole to ensure they do not lose this unique aspect of their culture; as language is one of the most important elements of culture passed on from generation to generation. For example, Andrea shared that she is committed to seeing that her children have an attachment with the Haitian culture and language is one pathway she sees as accomplishing that goal. Even though her children do not speak Creole,

she always includes Creole phrases here and there when talking to them. Moreover, she sings Haitian hymns and music in the home so that they can sing along with the Creole lyrics.

We talk a lot about that. Like I try to bring some of the music so that they can sometimes-- we sing some of the Creole like lyrics to songs just because I want them to be able to have some type of attachment to the culture, because I don't want it to be lost completely. Because I know with their kids, it's done, it's gone. (chuckles) Because they don't, they don't --like they don't know how to speak the language. But like, you know, sometimes I'll throw in a phrase here and there and ask- like "What does that mean?" So that's-- those are ways that I try to incorporate it.

Smith shared that he has been teaching his children Creole even though they are very young. With these teachings, the children were able to say a few Creole words. For now, his children speak Creole sporadically, but they are not fluent.

So [the kids] can understand them in Creole and some of them do say few words and stuff but it's just we're not so consistent at teaching them and now being in Arizona, not a lot of Haitians [are] here for them to hear it but ---and also you can't really gauge whether they're learning it or not or---so it's --but yeah I teach them. I teach them as often as I can.

Similarly, Piscine enjoys seeing his teenage son speak Creole. He has been teaching him the language and he is proud that even if his son is not fluent in Creole, he understands the language. Piscine also noted the importance of transferring the culture to his son through language because when he was younger, he detested the Haitian culture and shied away from embracing the Haitian culture by practices such as speaking the language.

...at a young age, I started to see the importance of my side of the family, the importance of my culture, it's in [my son], it's in his blood and and the older that I got I drew closer to Haiti and the Haitian culture. At some point in time I hated it. Detested it. but look- fast forward...the older I got, I heavily leaned on [my Haitian culture]. And I just felt like it helped me identify myself, it helped me see myself. It helped me understand thoughts that were going on in my mind that I felt.

Piscine continued to explain how his son has learned common words and phrases in Creole. He also describes how his son makes an impression of Haitian accents.

[My son's] got a few sayings that he'll--- he's got a--- he can speak English in a Haitian accent in a sense. "Oh, what are you doing? What that's mean?" But that's not really... (chuckles) He's just mimicking his grandparents. He speaks a few -- there's a few things that he'll say I'll hear all over him say "whoosh." I'll overhear him say "Umm wayyyy." "Sak- Sak pasé." There's a few things that he'll say. But you know, Truthfully speaking, he is not fluent in Creole by any means.

Many of the respondents specifically noted that their children were not fluent in Creole because they did not make this a high priority while the children were young. Carla particularly noted that she wanted her children to be proficient in English before teaching them Creole. She waited for the children to get old enough to wish to learn the Creole language after their English skills were fully developed.

I hate to see the kid being scrutinized because when they come in, they don't have the [English] language. There's going to be a day when my daughter wants to learn the

language. That's gonna be more better. Because she wants to learn it. She's gonna want to learn it. Then for me to force her to learn it, She's gonna forget [it].

In a similar fashion, Piscine did not teach his bi-racial son Creole when he was younger due to his own experience in his youth years being bullied for being Haitian. He noted that he did not feel Haitian enough or American enough so had to create a mix of the cultures to exist. But later, he finally taught his son popular words and phrases in Creole.

I was... young, and [my classmates were] like, "ewww Haitian! You got AIDS," and all the teasing, I ended up hating [being Haitian]. And then in addition to that, I felt like I was learning American culture at school, going home and my parents were forcing Haitian culture. And I couldn't apply what my parents was forcing, I couldn't take it--. It didn't apply to school, I couldn't. So I had to create my own culture, I took bits and pieces from the Haitian -bits and pieces from the American culture and pretty much created a little atmosphere where I can exist in. I hated that my parents spoke with an accent, hated that my parents didn't understand [English]. Families on TV didn't have a communication issue.

Piscine describes the importance of Haitian culture and its transmission to the next generation from the elders. He is intentional about teaching his son Haitian and family history, exposing him to the food of the culture, and teaching him as much of the Creole language as he wants to learn.

I feel like the importance and significance [of elders is that] bits and pieces can trickle down to following generations. I plan to pass the Haitian history to the best that I know it. I plan to pass that down to my son. I plan for him to have an understanding of the pride that his grandparents have. I try to teach him Creole. He understands [Creole] more than he speaks.

In summary, the middle-aged Haitian-American couples are teaching their children Creole words and phrases to ensure that they do not lose their culture.

#### **Theme 4: Love Expression**

A significant number of participants shared that their parents were not expressive about love. Lydia shared that she never saw her parents express love to each other either physically or verbally. But she agreed that despite this, her parents demonstrated that they were good partners and best friends within the marriage. Similar to her parents, Lydia is not very expressive. But she is learning with time to be more expressive physically.

But, um, you know...I am more expressive, you know, physically...then my parents were, you know- I will hug, I will grab his hand... I will kiss him...in front of our kids in front of...people. But, you know...it hasn't been easy. It hasn't been something that's [been] from the get-go, it's something that over time I had to learn how to do.

Andrea noted that she watched elder Haitian couples in her church not express love and she learned that she did not want that for her marriage.

Like some people honestly, I didn't even know that they were married to each other. Because they never sat together... I never saw them really talking. And yeah, it was very weird. So I don't know if that's just the culture, if they're just not expressive, you know? And I knew that's not what I wanted. You know...my mom and my dad we would kind of force them to hug and force them to kiss and stuff like that. "Give her a kiss, it's her birthday!" you know-- My dad was a jokester. So he would make jokes out of everything but, he would eventually do it. But it's almost like the culture, its just been non expressive.



And that's not what I wanted. And so that's all I saw in church with the married couples.

And so I was like, "No, I can't look up to any of these people."

Similarly, Piscine shared that growing up he did not see his parents say they love each other. He emphasized that their love was more about actions rather than words.

Ah.(pause)... Not so much. No, the love was more so actions. Verbally? No, it wasn't there.

If anything verbally- unfortunately, it was-- they were verbally abusive, actually is how I would describe it today.

When asked to describe the characteristics of love shown when growing up Piscine said " I feel like the sacrifices that the elders have made throughout the years." This shows that actions of sacrifice from his parents and other elders displayed characteristics of love. In an attempt to describe the direct actions of love from his parents he described what they would say when asked why they did not say *I love you*.

It [Love] wasn't verbally expressive. It was through actions. And it was like, "You don't think I love [you?]..." "I wouldn't--There wouldn't be food in this house, If I didn't love. I wouldn't work as much, if I didn't love you. Read between the lines. [Do] you think I ever got "I love you" growing up?"

Piscine also shared that he has realized the effects of not expressing love to his partner and children and today he makes sure he expresses love to his child and wife.

Researcher: Can you tell me about your home today; are you more expressive about love?

Piscine: I will certainly say yes. Um, I realized the effects of the lack of communication in my house growing up and I can --I can almost see the issues that myself and my siblings have struggled with, are currently struggling with because of that, and what I've done in my home and in my specific family is I am continuously challenging --to having conversations... I express it [love] a lot.

Smith also identified that he never saw his parents hugging, kissing, holding hands or hearing his parents say they love each other. Nevertheless, he noted that he expresses love to his wife by verbally telling her that he loves her, although not often, it is something he is learning to do. The lack of seeing expressive love when growing up has taught him to shy away from expressing love to her partner. This may have negative impacts in his marriage especially because expressive love is highly regarded by the modern generations.

Yeah, I say "I love you." But I'm not-- Yeah, I don't say that -that much, No. That's something I'm-- you know, I'm catching myself, I'm learning to do it. But I don't. Yeah.

Faye shared that she didn't hear her parents say I love you to each other. However, her father would express love to her mother through actions like buying her flowers during Valentine's Day and also writing love poems for her. Faye noted that she feels like the tradition of not saying I love you has made her intentionally say it more. She wants to break this tradition. So she and her husband are very verbal about love.

And I think in my marriage, I mean, we are both verbal. So I started saying "I love you" and asking my parents to say "I love you" back. Probably not til 13. So I have said "I love you" for a long time--. Like I--- like I feel like I started that tradition with my brother and sister now they say it first sometimes like- it was me pushing that agenda. I just say "I love

you” to everyone I know that I love because I feel like you should. And because I wasn't raised that way. And I feel like --we you know, I also like to show it but I feel like the tradition of not saying it has made me want to say it more.

Although the middle-aged Haitian-American couples did not see their parents express love verbally, they are intentionally learning to express love to their partners and children. This non-expressive love from parents was the experience of both male and female participants. While two of the men in this study, Love and Daiquan, did not grow up with their fathers, they also noted that they rarely experienced expressive love from their mothers and they learned to love through the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Bible.

### **Theme 5: Importance of Religion**

Religion plays a major role in the lives of the participants and Haitians in general. All of the participants in this study – except Love who did not grow up in a Christian home but is now a pastor – mention that religion was something their families taught them. They all currently note that religion is highlighted in their marriages. Religion was found to influence marital decisions. Religion influenced the ways of living and the choices these couples made before and after marriage. Prior to getting married, the couples in this study mentioned that they knew they could not have children before marriage because sex was frowned upon. This idea stemmed from the teachings of the Bible.

Piscine mentioned that sex was simply something that his parents avoided talking about. He was 24 years old when he had his son with a former partner outside of marriage.

**Piscine:** I remember as soon as I told my father that he was going to be a grandfather. The very first thing that he asked me was, "well, I don't remember you getting married. So when's the wedding?" And the conversation I had with my dad at that time, I was like, "Dad, I just found out that I'm going to be a father. Let me deal with that first, before a wedding." And he was really disappointed. He says, "Boy, I don't know where you're getting this stuff from. It's really backwards."

**Researcher:** Do you think that they didn't show expectation for you to have children because you had a child so early?

**Piscine:** No, I don't think so. And I think that for some reason or another, my parents --- it might have been intentional, but they avoided the entire conversation of sex. So I think it's only fitting that we didn't need ---that we didn't really talk about kids because then we would have had to eventually had to talk about sex before we could talk about kids. They were selective.

**Researcher:** why do you think they were so selective about the conversation about sex? Was it that they didn't want you to have children before marriage?

**Piscine:** Yes. And also... complicated situations. I felt like they just chose not to even just touch those.

When asked if it were acceptable in their family to have children out of wedlock all of the couples said no. Lydia in particular declared that teenage pregnancy was a taboo situation that she had seen in the church but she knew was unacceptable. Below is her description of her parents' take on the matter.

They would say "okay, you need to wait until you're married to have even sex" okay, if they said that you need to wait to-- for marriage to have sex then of course, you can't bust out with the babies before then. But there were situations where young adults in the church would have babies and it was just, you know, awkward situations. Parents would go home and say- you know, just the usual- the gossip. "So and so...I didn't know she had a kid"... "she's only ..." "You know what, she's not married..." "How does she have all these...?" "Why is she already a mom?" "Does she understand what it means to have children? She's a child herself..." " But yeah, it's just growing up in the atmosphere that I did, in the church, it was really frowned upon. It was really taboo.

Similarly, Daiquan talked about following Christian beliefs being the reason that he and his mother did not believe in having children before marriage.

**Researcher:** Was it ever acceptable practice for you to have children before marriage?

**Daiquan:** Not for me or [my mother] cuz we are 'about that life'- that Christian life-- in sequence.

**Researcher:** What sequence?

**Daiquan:** "First find love, then find marriage. Then you have the baby in the baby carriage." Like the song says. Like I said, I [also] adhere to what the word says.

**Researcher:** Growing up, did [the church or your family] say it explicitly? "Hey, don't you dare have children before you get married!?"

**Daiquan:** [they said] "don't have sex!" --they probably don't even talk about children. have sex before marriage?? You know that's how kids come about in the first place.

In the same token, Andrea mentioned that it was an unspoken piece of knowledge that one should not have children before marriage as that would mean they were having sex.

It was just --"make sure you don't have sex." And in order to have kids, you gotta have sex. So if you're saying if you're told not to have sex, then automatically you know, can't have no kids, you know.

All in all, the participants in this study were following a family expectation that stemmed from the religious teaching of not having sex before marriage.

Religious affiliation was a significant trait that the participants knew were expected of them when seeking a future spouse. Piscine described his parents' expectation for him to bring home a Haitian-Christian wife. He notes that while he did not expect to marry a Haitian woman, when he finally found one, he thought he met the mark but quickly learned that his family also expected him to bring home a Christian woman who hailed from a Christian family background.

At some point in time, [my parents] were ...there was a narrative that they were pushing. I can't say for sure, but I feel like there was. And the narrative was: *fo'w mayre yon ayitienne, Cretian , yon moun ki kwe nan Bon Dieu, nan levangil* {You must marry a Haitian, Christian. Someone who believes in God and in the Gospel}

On the other hand, Love noted that he does not allow culture to dictate how he lives. He shared that his relationship with his wife is founded not on culture but on his conviction from the Holy Spirit.

But as I grew in the Lord, my-- my focus about marriage shifted. ...I do not allow either the Haitian culture [or] the American culture to dictate how I live with my wife. I primarily focus on nurturing my relationship with Jesus Christ, and from my relationship

with Jesus Christ, I draw the resources that I need to provide to my wife with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Additionally, when asked about what they account as the key to success in their marriage so far, most of the couples mentioned God or religious practices like prayer were the keys to success.

Below are some of the responses:

**Andrea:** I think our faith plays a huge role. I think, because we pray and we kind of like put everything in God's hands...So like, anything that we try to discuss, we kind of root it in prayer. And knowing that, listen, we can't do anything on our own.

**Carla:** ummm Keeping God, the Lord Jesus Christ at the center.

**Love:** The Holy Spirit. which I really- I really rely on the Holy Spirit to produce the quality of Christ through me -so that my family can experience that.

**Smith:** My faith in Christ and God, and my belief in marrying for life, and the sense of responsibility. ---cause When I make a decision, when I make a commitment, I see it through. I see through no matter no matter what.

When asked about what their families expected from their future spouse, the participants noted that religion and relationship with God was an expectation that their parents had for the man or woman that would marry their child.

**Lydia:** Of course [they had an expectation for my future spouse], you know, he had to be a man of God. He had to be able to provide for a family, somebody who was respectful... and [they] wanted him to come from a good family too.

**Daiquan:** Um I think my mom always wanted me with someone who was saved, obviously. I think that was primarily "Mayre yon mounne kretien" (marry a Christian) but everything else was never an expectation [for my future spouse]—[like] what kind of jobs [she] should have, things like that. But I think like what's probably like the most thing --it's not even a directive, its more so advice. The whole unequally yoked, make sure you're with someone that you share Faith with.

**Smith:** Oh, yes, [future spouse had to be Christian] that's like common knowledge. That's an unspoken. (chuckles) They had to be.

Therefore, these findings show that religion plays a significant role in middle-aged Haitian-American couples' marriages and marital practices.

### Summary

The findings show that there are attributes of Haitian culture in the middle-aged Haitian American marital practices. The findings also show middle-aged Haitian American couples are upholding Haitian traditions. For example, they celebrate Haitian holidays such as Haitian Flag Day. Also, they teach their kids Creole phrases and they prepare Haitian foods. Additionally, characteristics of Haitian culture were observed in the gender roles by women honoring and respecting their husbands. Furthermore, the findings showed that family expectations have impacted middle-aged Haitian-American couples in different ways. For example, the men are providing for their new family as expected by their family or community of origin. The middle-aged Haitian-American women are honoring and taking care of their husbands as expected by their family and community of origin. Additionally, the findings showed that middle-aged Haitian-American couples have children as expected by their family and/or community of origin. The



middle-aged Haitian-Americans did not see their parents expressing love but they are learning to express love. The results also showed changes in gender roles in middle-aged Haitian-American couples. More specifically, it was observed that although the individuals follow roles as required by their culture they are not rigid in the types of gender roles they undertake. The next chapter presents a discussion of the findings in relation to the existing literature. It will synthesize the findings to support or explain the contradictions of the findings from this study.

## Chapter V

### Discussion

This study examined how family expectations and culture influence middle-aged Haitian-American couples. The term Haitian-American will be used throughout this section. When Haitian-American is used it can either mean that the participant was either born in Haiti and raised in America or they are first-generation, American-born Haitians—meaning their parents immigrated to the U.S. It is important to note that the first-generation Haitian-Americans in this study migrated to the U.S. and have attended school or spent a significant portion of their lives in the U.S., which may have influenced their upbringing, thus they were likely to grasp both the American and Haitian cultures. Thus, the use of a phenomenological research design allowed the researcher to capture details of the varied lived experiences of the participants. More specifically, the research design allowed the researcher to learn about the “everydayness” of being in the world (or marriage) of a Haitian-American (Colaizzi, 1978; Goulding, 2005; vanManen, 2017; “Phenomenology”, 2018). Throughout the interview process, this study was guided by the following overarching research question:

What is the impact of family expectations on the marital practices of Haitian-Americans, if any?

The two sub-questions were:

- (a) What characteristics in Haitian culture are demonstrated in the marriage practices of middle-aged Haitian American couples?
- (b) How has the traditional family expectation impacted first-generation, middle-aged Haitian-American couples?

Results from data analysis uncovered five main themes: (a) family expectations, (b) gender roles, (c) upholding Haitian traditions, (d) importance of religion, and (e) love expression. This chapter is organized around the themes from the findings. Study findings supported the conclusions that first-generation, middle-age Haitian-American couples seek to hold onto the family expectations from their Haitian culture as they assimilate to American culture, which also supports the two sub-questions and primary research question. This chapter discusses the links of the study findings to the life-course perspective, acculturation theory, the limitations of the study, and implications for future research as well.

### **Theoretical Connections**

The two theoretical frameworks that guided this study are the life-course perspective and acculturation theory. In the following section, there is a brief description of what each of these perspectives are. Then in the rest of this chapter, the themes from this study will be discussed as they relate to how these theoretical perspectives apply to this population.

#### ***Life-Course Perspective***

The theoretical framework that guided this study was the life-course perspective. Life-course perspective notes that as individuals evolve, they may remain interdependent, or life occurrences may cause their lives to shift, forcing them into a new life course (Elder, 1998). The current study was guided by three life-course concepts: agency, normative and non-normative behaviors, and kinscripts. Consistent with the life course perspective, the study showed that exposure to various beliefs in adulthood might cause an individual to change his/her attitude. For example, the study showed a change in behaviors of middle-aged Haitian-American women regarding respect and honor. Contrary to the older generations of Haitians, where the wife was

expected to respect and honor the husband with no expectation of reciprocity, middle-aged Haitian-American wives expect their husbands to reciprocate the honor shown to them. The women in this study were vocal about requiring their husbands to reciprocate the honor shown to them. This change in behavior by middle-aged Haitian-American women can be explained through the non-normative life-course tenet. Non-normative behaviors are unexpected events that take an individual on a course different from other family members (Pavalko et al., 1993). This is also an example of enacting agency. One of the participants in this study noted that she believed in more egalitarian practices. Agency is a powerful act of independence when one makes an intentional decision in support of their personal goals, sometimes despite what the tribe, family, or culture has expected of them (Roy, 2006). More specifically, Haitian-American women are enacting agency as they are actively making a decision to organize their lives to achieve their personal goals contrary to family and cultural expectations. They demonstrate their act of agency by considering their own career aspirations instead of solely their obligation to family scripts and duties like taking care of their children and husbands' needs. The agency tenet was also established in the modification in gender roles whereby women were undertaking functions culturally defined for men, and men were also performing roles that were traditionally perceived as women's roles. Thus, middle-aged Haitian-American couples are also teaching their children to enact agency by giving their children a chance to have a say about the decision to enter a marriage.

The study confirmed that as individuals evolve, they may shift into a new life course different from their family and culture. Life-course perspective describes a concept called kinscripts. According to Said and Enslin (2020), each family member has a defined role that they are expected to fulfill for the family unit. Kinscripts are assigned expectations of family

members (Stack & Burton, 1993). The kinscripts are also taught to younger members of the family early in their life based on the talents of the individual, their gender identity, or the need(s) of the family. The study findings established that family expectations impact middle-aged Haitian-American couples differently, such as how women treat their husbands. In Haitian culture, it is expected that women would submit to and honor their husbands. Many female participants shared that they learned spoken and unspoken kinscripts about honoring their husbands. The findings revealed that Haitian-American women do not practice the expectation of honoring their husbands in the ways their mothers did. Contrary to the family and cultural expectations, the wives expect their husbands to reciprocate the honor shown to them.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the tenet of normative and non-normative behaviors. Life-course describes non-normative turning points as a drastic life transition that separates the past from the future (Elder, 1975; Elder, 1998). While in this study, the participants did not detail major events, or turning points, that induced changes in behavior, they certainly exhibited non-normative behaviors that separated their learned Haitian culture to their now transmuted Haitian-American culture. Possible turning points that might have impacted these participants are moving to the U.S (for those born in Haiti) or bullying in school about being Haitian. While these were noticed by the researcher, the participants did not note that these turning points significantly influenced their behaviors. Normative behaviors revealed in this study included continued adherence to gender roles among the participants. Adhering to gender roles is a normative activity. It is an explicit expectation from family and culture (Chartier, 2007). These results showed that women undertook the household roles, and men took on the responsibility for protecting and providing for their families as required by Haitian culture. However, this study showed attributes of non-normative behaviors among middle-aged Haitian-

American couples. For example, an example of non- normative behavior for Haitian couples is when the participants mentioned not having an option to *enjoy their marriage* before being pressured to have children. While having children is a normative progression and even an expectation for Haitian couples soon after they marry, the culture does not find it acceptable to desire taking years between marriage and having children. This is considered non-normative because the normative activity mandates bearing children immediately after marriage.

### ***Acculturation Theory***

In addition to the life-course perspective, acculturation theory was discovered to have a significant influence in the experiences of these participants. Acculturation theory is used to describe the shifts in culture for immigrants or multicultural individuals as they move to the host country from their country of origin (Berry et al., 1994; Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005). There are several concepts within this theory, but two that were specifically relevant to this study are *cultural transmutation*- the fusion of two cultures to create a new subculture (Kagan et al.,1990) and *biculturalism*- the balance of the knowledge of two cultures (Harris and Tanksley, 2021). Study participants described several themes concerning their evolution to biculturalism and cultural transmutation. On one hand, they have learned traditions, behaviors, and expectations from their parents that stem from the Haitian culture. On the other hand, they have absorbed traditions, expectations, and accepted practices that stem from their physical surroundings in the U.S. The participants demonstrated that they thrived in the host culture yet they continued incorporating elements from Haitian culture which then created what is now known as Haitian-American culture. As such the participants are integrating both Haitian culture and American culture into their lives (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). How this presented for each couple in this study may have been different, however, it was evident that these participants enacted

agency and created a hybrid version of the two cultures that they used in their marriage and transferred to their children. This combination of cultures has been most evident specifically in how the participants celebrated American New Year on January 1st while honoring Haitian Independence Day by drinking soup joumou. It was a way that they balanced both cultures through biculturalism. The results in this study showed that the middle-aged Haitian-American participants learned to balance their two cultures and enacted agency to choose the right combination of the cultures that worked best for their marriage and family.

Acculturation theory mentions the two methods one may use when entering a new cultural context. They must decide what aspects of the cultures are important and must be kept through cultural maintenance and they must negotiate how much they want to participate in either/both of the cultures (Berry, 1997). After contemplation of these two decisions, couples then adopt some form of acculturation that best suits their desired level of adaptation to either culture where they will feel some degree of harmonious engagement (Berry, 2005). In this study, the couples had to balance between the Haitian culture that was transmitted to them by their family and the American culture that they were living in. Ultimately, the participants in this study demonstrated the use of bi-culturalism where they were able to function and utilize elements from both the Haitian and American cultures. They did this through the fusion of elements from both cultures, which is considered a cultural transmutation to Haitian-American. This transmutation to operating and functioning in both cultures is evident in the marital practices and decisions made with their family. They modified traditional Haitian gender roles to fit their family's needs with consideration of their American cultural practices. They listen to music from both cultures. They speak both languages within their homes. They eat foods from both cultures. They practice traditions from both cultures. All in all, the participants in this study

have each discovered acculturation through incorporating their Haitian culture with the American culture in ways that make their experiences *fit* both cultures without compromise or having to choose one over the other.

Additionally, the shift in gender roles among middle-aged Haitian-Americans can be explained through the acculturation theory. The acculturation theory offers an explanation of how groups and individuals integrate into a different culture (Schwartz et al., 2010). More specifically, the shift among middle-aged Haitian-Americans can be explained through the integration of acculturation strategy. In this strategy, individuals adopt the receiving culture and retain their heritage culture. This study showed that middle-aged Haitian-American men and women adopt the American culture, but they also retain their heritage culture. For example, it was established that men and women in this study mostly observe the traditional Haitian gender roles.

Another type of acculturation that is relevant in this study is the socialization perspective. The socialization perspective explains the transmission of values and beliefs among generations. Much like the cultural transmission process, this perspective suggests that gender attitudes are instilled from parents to children and that these attitudes remain stable throughout adulthood, implying that immigrants adopt gender attitudes that align with the cultural attitude of the context they experienced during their early socialization (Kim & Cheung, 2015). Glass et al. (1986) argued that family is the primary agent of socialization in childhood. More specifically, the family provides systematic socialization whereby children are taught the norms of social order. Glass et al. also noted that children learn through indirect observations and direct teachings from their parents' attitudes, values and beliefs. Additionally, Glass et al. noted that childhood socialization is so intense and prolonged that these cultural values, beliefs, and



attitudes developed and persisted into adulthood. Therefore, it is expected that parents and children would continue exhibiting similar attitudes across life courses. Putney and Bengtson (2002) also mentioned that the effects of childhood socialization are enduring. Some ways the couples in this study are maintaining their connection to Haitian culture is through incorporating Haitian music, food, and celebrations in their homes. Thus the middle-aged participants in this study are still impacted by the intense Haitian socialization received in childhood as they negotiate modifications and decide how much of the Haitian culture they look to transfer to their families of procreation.

### **Family Expectations**

Family expectations can be transmitted to individuals, during childhood and early development, both spoken and/or by unspoken suggestions. These expectations can take on many forms. They usually stem from Haitian culture and are reinforced by family and/or other community members (e.g. the church or fictive kin). It is imperative to note that Haitian families place a significant value on family and community (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). As part of the strong value and influence the family has in Haitian culture, children must always honor their family and respect their elders (Pierce & Elisme, 2000; Kivland, 2014). For the Haitian community, marriage is a significant goal that stems from strong family expectations, mostly because marriage is a bartering system that families use to marry their children into *good* families (Billari & Liefbroer, 2016). Usually, the families enter the marriage market looking to gain from their trade, hoping to exchange their child's hand in marriage for affiliation with a family that has qualities like status, higher income than their own family, or that are more educated (Billari & Liefbroer, 2016). The characteristics of what a *good* family is –is subjective to the actual family

(Tinnfa"lt et al., 2015). However, some qualities of a good family can include considerations of emotional traits, social class standing, education level, financial security, and/or family values. One Haitian family may consider being Christian and educated as a good family, while another may perceive a good family as one with high earning members that can guarantee taking care of the needs of their child without having to steal to provide, or all of these qualities may be required to be deemed a good family. This section will describe the family expectations that the middle-aged Haitian-American participants described in this study. It will begin with the expectation to marry, then the expectation to have children, followed by the expectations of keeping family values.

### ***Marriage decisions***

Regarding marital decisions, middle-aged Haitian-American couples expressed that they knew that they were expected to get married through both overtly spoken and unspoken expectations by their parents and elders. Consistent with the current study findings, the Ferguson et al. (2014) study established that many Haitian families have high expectations of their children marrying. Through ethnic-racial socialization, the family teaches their children about the expectations of their potential partner- such as where they should come from, traits they should have, etc. (Etienne, 2021; Duchatelier-Jeudy, 2015). Haitians are a part of the African diaspora, therefore there are often similarities in the values and experiences, especially as it relates to religious individuals in the diaspora who share religious views and honor the teachings of the Bible. As mentioned earlier in the literature review on African American marriages, Black couples are more likely to have higher expectations of marriage that could potentially cause damage to the marriage (Vaterlaus et al., 2017). While the couples in the study did not note that the pressure was the sole reason for their decision to get married, they did note that there was

certainly marital pressure present within their homes and communities. In some cases, as early as grade school their mothers would tell the daughters they need to learn specific household skills for *when they get married*, clearly demonstrating an expectation for their daughters not only to marry but to take on normative kinscripts as a woman. One female participant in this study mentioned that she could remember the “*when you get married*” conversations that she had with her mother where she complained about the participant’s abilities to cook and take care of a home. The participant noted that these types of conversations were the indirect but recognizable declarations that demonstrated she was expected to learn the behaviors and scripts of a wife and use them after marriage.

While pressure to get married was mentioned by all of the female participants and most of the men in this study, arranged marriages are not a common practice in Haiti. Although arranged marriages are not common, it is not foreign to have family or church members weigh in on choices for potential partners based on their family of origin, education, social class, economic achievement, and/or ability to advance socially- even if the final choice is left to the individual (Burnham, 2006; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Kivland, 2014). The participants in this study mentioned that they knew there was an expectation to marry but they ultimately made the choice of their partner based on some guidelines from their family. Some of the general guidelines included Haitian cultural background, a religious affiliation that was similar to theirs, and values like kindness and respect. It is important to mention that some of the top reasons the Black marriage literature mention cause damage to marriage (e.g. communication, finances, lack of love, lack of commitment, or incompatibility) were not mentioned by the participants as traits or skills they looked for in their future spouse before choosing them (Scott et al., 2013; Bryant et al., 2008). This does not mean that the couples did not believe compatibility or finances were not

important as those aspects were mentioned in subtle ways when the women mentioned that they wanted someone that could “take care of them” or when the participants mentioned love expression- which is discussed later in this chapter. It was observed that these were simply not the first or most common expressions of what the Haitian-American participants recalled seeking in their future partners. Instead, the choice surrounded factors that were most important and expressed from the Haitian culture.

Within Haitian households, there can be a privilege granted to married individuals; that is not overt but an unspoken piece of knowledge within the culture. Two of the female participants in this study who are married to pastors mentioned that growing up in a religious home, they had less freedom and they chose to marry for more freedom. They both noted that as leaders in the church, they were examples to the younger population of believers and had trouble even dating their husbands publicly in the church. However, when the female participants got married, they were able to step down from the scrutiny of the church and live freely married by going to the movies and having guiltless sex with their husbands. Leonhardt et al. (2020) explain the source of guilt for having pre-marital sex as a form of self-punishment that occurs in religious individuals for violating what they believe is a violation of proper sexual conduct based on the teachings of the Bible.

Similar to the respondents' family expectations that they themselves would get married, the participants also reported that they expected their own children to marry in the future. However, contrary to the older generations, where marriage was a requirement, the respondents within this study said that their children have an option of not marrying. From these findings, it can be concluded that middle-aged Haitian-American couples are enacting and teaching their children agency by giving their children a chance to make their own decisions about marriage.

Furthermore, according to the life-course perspective, giving their children the choice not to marry is a non-normative behavior for the culture, as most Haitian elders expect their children to get married and will not accept or offer the option for them to choose otherwise.

### ***Expectation to Have Children***

The review of the findings showed that Haitian families have numerous expectations for their children from the Haitian culture, including family expansion (Gollub et al., 2016). For example, it was established that family members expect that their children would have children as soon as possible after getting married. This is an issue with middle-aged Haitian-American couples. Some participants noted that the pressure to have children immediately after marriage denied them time to enjoy their partners. This desire to spend time with their spouses prior to marriage is non-normative as Haitians place value on family expansion, specifically after marriage declaring child-bearing as an immediate obligation (Gollub et al., 2016). The findings showed that Haitian families expected their children to marry irrespective of gender and then they should promptly have children. Marriage was deemed imperative in the African American marriage literature, because it was traditionally seen as the prerequisite to have legitimate children (Hill, 2006). In the same way, the participants in this study, as part of the African diaspora that share similar qualities, have known that their family expected them to get married before having children, but that they must certainly aim to have children.

### ***Family Values***

As mentioned above, Haitian families place significant importance on family life (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). This comes with the reverence of several family values. One value in particular that is significant in the Haitian culture is *respe*, (respect) (Pierce & Elisme, 2000; Kivland,

2014). While respect is a basic value that most individuals regardless of cultural affiliation practice, it is imperative to mention respect regarding Haitian families because this is a value that all members in the Haitian community must adhere to as part of normative behaviors within the culture (Kivland, 2014). While respect is certainly taught to and expected from children growing up, no member of the Haitian community outgrows the principle of listening to their elders. Thus the middle-aged participants are still expected to demonstrate they are *bien-élevé*- (raised right), by heeding the counsel of their elders whether in the family or in the Haitian community (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). This was evident for the members in this study. The Haitian-American participants all mention that respect was an important value that their family expected of them to have, gain from their future spouse, and teach to their children. As a result, a form of disrespect that is not tolerated in the Haitian culture is not greeting elders. Some of the participants gave specific examples that mentioned being respectful by greeting their elders while others spoke about minding the advice of their family when deciding what traits were important in a future spouse. Ultimately, the participants in this study all noted how respect was one significant aspect of Haitian culture that was expected of them growing up. Kivland (2014) mentioned that honoring respect is imperative in the Haitian culture and is a trait that is specifically transferred from generation to generation. A few of the participants in this study also directly mentioned that respect was one of the key values that they intended to transfer to the next generation, their children.

The findings also revealed that Haitian families expected the middle-aged Haitian-American couples to uphold other family values such as honor and submission. For example, the study showed that women honoring and submitting to their husbands was a major expectation from the family. In the Haitian culture, the expectation that women would honor and submit to

their husbands was taught explicitly to the youth, and sometimes through unspoken kinscripts given to the girls. For example, the female participants in this study shared that they learned to honor and respect their husbands from how their mothers treated their fathers. Specifically, the mothers attempted to make sure the fathers were honored and well-served through domestic chores like laundry, ironing his work clothes, or serving him food before others were served. It is important to note that the participants do not practice the expectation of honoring their husbands in the ways their mothers did, but they did learn from the model of their mothers that these examples of honoring their husbands are part of the script that was expected for them to practice in their future marriages. Thus, the middle-aged Haitian-American women enacted agency by rejecting the cultural expectation on women for unidirectional honor; this may be due to the influence of American culture.

### **Gender Roles**

The characteristics of the Haitian culture in middle-aged Haitian-American marriages were evident in the gender roles and observation of Haitian traditions. Said and Enslin (2020) described the concept of social roles which they noted are the expected behaviors and assigned roles based on factors like a position in society or gender. These defined social roles can be outright given to an individual or simply an unspoken yet known assignment they are expected to fulfill (Said & Enslin, 2020). St. Bernard (2003) mentioned in an article about major trends that impact families in the Caribbean that there are strict gender roles amongst Afro-Caribbean immigrant families. Consistent with Pierce & Elisme's (2000) study about understanding the working Haitian woman and the influences that guide their motivation to work and how they work (e.g. immigration, remittance expectation, culture, etc.), which revealed the specific gender

roles in the Haitian culture. The findings in this study indicated that there was a differentiation of social roles in Haitian culture according to gender. More specifically, the study showed that women's roles were primarily house-based in this culture. Women's main roles included taking care of their husbands and children (Greenwood, 1984; St. Bernard, 2003; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). The findings of this study show that men continue to be the providers and decision-makers in the family. Consistent with the current findings, women were expected to adhere to the script of caring for the children and the household, while men were expected to hold the position of primary decision-maker and provider (Greenwood, 1984; Pierce & Elimse, 2000; St. Bernard, 2003; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Although they may not be the sole provider or highest earner in their family consistently, the men in this study strive to uphold the gender scripts they were taught regarding decision making and providing.

### ***Traditional Gender Scripts***

The findings revealed that middle-aged Haitian-American couples observe many of the traditional Haitian gender roles taught to and expected of them. For example, some of the men shared that in their family they took on some roles, which according to Haitian culture, are the sole responsibility of a man; these roles include providing for and taking care of the wife. Additionally, the men in this study highlighted that their wives did not allow them to help in tasks like doing laundry as their wives believed a man might not do such jobs well. While it might be true in their homes that their husbands did not do chores like laundry well, it might also be true that the women were taught that they should take care of the household laundry. Thus, they grew to believe that laundry was not done well by the men, thus discouraging their husbands' participation in such gendered assignments and leaving it for themselves to do.



The continued observation of the gender roles by the Haitian-American couples as revealed in this study can be explained through the socialization perspective. As for Haitians, socialization around racism, race, roles, and responsibilities are specifically learned from family (Etienne, 2021). Duchatelier-Jeudy, (2015) noted that the Haitian immigrant families' socialization process for their children includes speaking Creole to the children, regularly sending the children to Haiti, as well as frequently exposing the children to Haitian foods and music. These findings from the socialization literature offer insight into the continued influence of Haitian culture and how gender roles are observed by the Haitian-American couples in this study. As their Haitian elders and parents explicitly taught the participants, as children, their cultural values regarding gender roles and script responsibilities, the Haitian-Americans grew up and continue to exhibit similar attitudes, values, and beliefs taught from the culture and expected by their families. In the previous family values section, a few examples of socialization were mentioned—teaching children honor, submission and respect. In addition to those types of values being socialized in young children, the participants in this study all mentioned periods of times in their younger years where they *knew* their gender script. For example, one man mentioned that he was called gay just for entering the kitchen as a child. In this instance, the children made fun of him enough about simply entering the kitchen that he decided to succumb to the pressure, thus choosing to stay away from the kitchen because it was not socially acceptable.

An example of a traditional gender script or tradition is men providing for their wives. Providing is a socially normative behavior expected of men (Lambrecht, 2016). Ghanaians and Haitians are a part of the African diaspora and share similar cultural beliefs. In an article about the expected gender roles men must take on in Ghana, Lambrecht (2016) noted that a husband must act as the head of household by providing for his wife as she supports him in his role. The

author also described the tradition where a woman is to leave her family and become a part of her husband's family where she is now provided for by him, instead of her family of origin (Lambrecht, 2016). While all the men in this study mention providing for their wives as a role that they all take on, one in particular mentioned the actual transition into this role. This man talked about how his father-in-law had a conversation with him prior to marriage where they unofficially handed off the duties and responsibilities of providing, protecting and caring for his new wife. This was the way the cultural script of men as providers was reinforced and passed on in this family. Now all of the expectations that her father had as provider for his family excluded the married daughter who was not *given away* to the provision and protection of her new husband. In turn, she was also expected to take care of her traditional wifely duties that she was taught (e.g. cooking, cleaning and taking care of the home) (Greenwood, 1984; St. Bernard, 2003; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011).

This study indicated that middle-aged Haitian-American couples observed some gender roles as expected by their family and culture. According to the life-course perspective, adherence to gender roles is a normative activity because it is an explicit expectation from their family and Haitian culture. More specifically, it was found that women continued to be primarily responsible for household roles, and men took primary responsibility for protecting and providing for their families, as required by Haitian culture.

### ***Modification of Gender Roles***

The participants in this study have maintained certain family and cultural expectations but have also modified others. The transmission of the gender attitudes from parents to their children creates continuity from one generation to another. According to Pessin and Arpino

(2018), cultural attitudes towards gender roles vary across generations. In particular, their study revealed that cultural attitudes towards gender roles in the country of origin were weaker among second-generation immigrants than first-generation immigrants. According to Pessin & Arpino (2018), the host country is expected to have a weaker influence on the first generation immigrants' gender attitudes, since the immigrants are exposed to the host country's cultural attitudes in their adulthood. Alternatively, the country of origin's impacts are weaker among the second-generation immigrants since these individuals experience their early socialization in the host country. These differences may illustrate why the participants in the current study reported observing traditional Haitian gender roles. Although the participants in this study made modifications to the gender roles they were taught, they all followed some variation of the gender roles from their upbringing in the Haitian culture. The participants in this study have been in the U.S, the host country, since they were children, thus they have practiced the cultural attitudes from their lives and experiences in the U.S. while still being taught Haitian cultural expectations by their parents and elders. This unique experience of American living while interacting with Haitian cultural expectations has enacted a shift in how Haitian-Americans perform gender roles. Auerbach et al. (1997) noted that Haitian-American men are drawing a new pattern of fathering from these developments in the United States. As a result, Haitian-American fathers are involved in roles culturally defined for women in the Haitian culture. Both Haitian-American men and women are enacting agency and choosing to take on culturally defined roles for the opposite gender; for example, women and men in this study are working outside the home while the men and women are cooking for their families.

The shift from strict gender roles, as evident in the current findings, coincides with Latifa et al. (2021) hypothesis that today women are taking on traditionally male responsibilities like

earning a living for the family. It also coincides with Johnson & Loscocco's (2015) findings that today men are normalizing more participation in the domestic realm (e.g. cooking and taking care of the children). Contrary to the traditional Haitian generation of elders, middle-aged Haitian-Americans do not strictly observe gender roles. More specifically, this study established that women are undertaking functions culturally defined for men, and men are also performing roles that were earlier perceived as women roles. For example, the men in this study reported that they help their wives cook. Also, the study showed that middle-aged Haitian-American women are taking on roles that are culturally defined as male roles in the Haitian culture. For example, one of the women from this study shared that she has been a breadwinner in her house several times during their marriage, while another noted that she helps her husband pay bills. These findings support Zéphir's (2001) study on second-generation Haitian immigrants. Many participants in the Zéphir study reported ambivalent or lukewarm feelings about gender roles as prescribed in their culture. In particular, the respondents noted that they felt that their culture was too rigid. Immigrant women usually come to the U.S. before their spouses and have to earn money by taking on work, especially because their husbands are unable to provide for them when they come to the U.S. (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). This is an example of socialization, where adjustment and flexibility on the traditional gender scripts that note women should be provided for while they care for the home. Some participants noted that they realized improved intimacy with their partners since they shifted from maintaining strict gender roles. As the couples in this study modified the gender roles within their marriage, they were able to work in partnership to complete necessary household tasks.

The shift in gender roles among middle-aged Haitian-Americans as found in the current research can be explained through the life course approach. The approach identifies that

exposure to various beliefs in adulthood and life events may cause an individual to change their attitude (Pessin & Arpino, 2018). Accordingly, Davis (2007) argued that living in an environment that advocates for gender equality may make an individual adopt the egalitarian gender attitude. Davis noted that such an environment might weaken the importance of values that one learns through early socialization. Davis's argument is also supported by Yu and Lee (2013). The authors noted that when individuals were exposed to gender-egalitarian contexts outside their homes, they also tended to develop egalitarian gender attitudes. Pessin and Arpino identified that length of stay in the country of destination plays a role in the evolution of immigrants' gender attitudes. More specifically, Pessin and Arpino noted that long-time residing and second-generation immigrants are highly likely to adopt the cultural norms of the host country. In the same vein on immigrants' gender attitudes, Vargas (2016) established that the influence of the country of origin weakens with the increase on the length of residence at the country of destination and that the influence is more relevant among second-generation immigrants than first-generation immigrants. This cultural shift is true for the participants in this study born in Haiti, as they have spent more time in the United States than in their native country.

Nevertheless, the findings revealed that middle-aged Haitian men and women are not as rigid in the gender roles as the traditional generations. Thus there has been a shift and a modification of how the gender roles exist in marriage. Notably, this study identified that the female participants took on traditional male responsibilities such as earning a living for the family, and the men did household jobs such as cooking. This change in behavior can be explained through the tenet of agency. In this case, the middle-aged Haitian men and women enact agency in making decisions about what roles and tasks to perform to ensure the success of

their marriage. The ideology behind the enactment of agency by the middle-aged Haitian couples in choosing to modify and perform the roles traditionally meant for the opposite gender is captured in the response of one of the male participants in this study on why he helps his wife in household chores. One of the participants in the present study attributed his decision to modify expectations of roles to the realization that the partners should be ready to help each other for a relationship to thrive. This implies that middle-aged Haitian couples are enacting agency when it comes to traditional gender role expectations to achieve success in their marriage.

Consistent with the current study findings, Auerbach et al. (1997) found out that there is a redefinition of the masculine role norms among Haitian-American men. Auerbach et al. (1997) study showed that Haitian-American men are departing from the traditional fathering roles. There is a shift in the direction of role flexibility and power-sharing. In particular, contrary to the traditional Haitian fathers, the Haitian-American fathers are involved in roles traditionally considered to belong to women in the Haitian culture. For example, the study showed that Haitian-American fathers are involved in household management and child care. Auerbach et al. argued that this departure from the traditional fathering roles might have been influenced by the fact that in the United States most mothers are engaged in paid employment, which then requires the fathers to assume the household management and also child care roles. Similarly, Silverstein et al. (2002) identified that some Haitian-American men practice power-sharing with their wives. In particular, they are moving towards establishing egalitarian relationships with their wives.

It is also important to note that this modification in gender scripts is an example of non-normative behavior within the strict gender roles of Haitian culture. Haitian women in Haiti from high socio-economic status usually do not work outside of the home, while the middle-class Haitian women in Haiti can take on additional employment outside of the home such as

secretary, teacher, clerk, or nurse (Buchanan-Stafford, 1984). It is not the norm for women to take on bread winning or men to share in household duties. However, these gender role modifications exhibited by these participants may be explained by the cultural transmutation concept. According to Garcia (2006), cultural transmutation concept is a strategy adopted by individuals who view it as important to maintain their origin culture and also adopt a new culture. As a result, they integrate the native and host cultures into their daily lives. The participants noticed upon marriage that the traditional gender scripts from the Haitian culture did not contribute to an acceptable arrangement for their bicultural Haitian-American family that has influences from their native Haitian culture and the American host culture. Thus, the participants enacted agency and elected to shift the way they chose to complete tasks that would normally be assigned to a specific gender within Haitian culture by electing to find a new balance where they included Americanized views that they believed offered more flexibility for them to exchange roles and responsibilities despite their gender.

All of the male participants in this study were fathers and have described the fatherhood concept within the study. They are balancing gender roles with their spouses to show cultural transmutation, where they take elements from the American culture and the Haitian culture then created a new fusion of the two within their homes. This is primarily evident in the shift from traditional Haitian gender roles within their marriage. It is evident in their choice not to accept the traditional Haitian idea of men being the primary decision-maker, they are now moving to a shared power dynamic with their spouses where decisions are made together (Silverstein, 2002). The men in this study noted the importance of being flexible on traditional gender roles for the sake of marriage success. Therefore, we can conclude middle-aged Haitian-American couples

are not comfortable with the strict traditional gender roles. This influences their decision to perform roles and duties traditionally meant for the opposite gender.

All in all, the results revealed modifications to traditional gender roles in the marital practices of middle-aged Haitian-American couples. This shift from strict adherence to the traditional gender roles they were taught to a modified set of tasks could be due to many factors. All of the participants received college degrees in the United States. The access to American education may have exposed them not only to privilege but also to life views, values, and behavior that differed from the traditional teachings of the Haitian culture. Additionally, the shift could be simply because life in America requires each member of a couple to work, thus there must be a modification to the lifestyle to support both partners in working and completing necessary house chores.

### **Upholding Haitian Traditions**

The participants agreed that they preserve their culture by teaching their children Creole phrases, preparing Haitian foods, and observing Haitian celebrations. The culture and its practices (e.g. language, foods, traditions, gender roles) that Haitians brought with them from Haiti has distinguished them from other Black immigrants (Buchanan-Stafford, 1984). As the immigrants came to the U.S, they maintained the traditions and values they adopted in Haiti and later transmitted them to their children, which include the Haitian-American respondents in this study. Preserving these parts of the Haitian culture help maintain and support the culture for immigrants. When immigrants arrive in the U.S., they often find ethnic enclaves which are surrounded by the language, food, and celebration of Haitian traditions; this helps them remain close to their culture (Xie & Gough, 2011). Ethnic enclaves in the U.S. play a significant role in



the maintenance of cultural practices as this is where fellow Haitians can go to share a cultural exchange, discuss the latest news in Haiti and learn new vernacular, idiomatic expressions, and other cultural practices such as Haitian celebrations. Thus, in cities where the enclaves are not nearby, (i.e. the participants from Arizona) it is imperative for the individuals to uphold as many Haitian traditions as they can in order to preserve the culture within their family unit. The participants from Arizona noted that they do not have access to a Haitian ethnic enclave in Arizona, thus they must be intentional about teaching their children about the Haitian culture through the foods, language, and celebrations. Otherwise, the culture will be diluted and eventually lost by the next generation of Haitian-Americans born in their family.

The participants in this study note identifying as Haitian in American schools in their younger years came with discomfort in claiming their Haitian identity at times. As the participants navigated the cultural shift from Haitian to Haitian-American, there was an increase in tension between the Haitian-Americans and their parents as they showed signs of rejecting Haitian culture while they assimilated to the American culture. Etienne (2021) describes ethnic-racial socialization where Haitian-American families teach their children about racial and ethnic expectations including teaching their children about their heritage, history, native language, and even the perception of other ethnic/racial groups. Etienne mentioned how immigrant families must navigate the pressures of assimilating to American culture while still preserving their Haitian cultural identity. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) classified Haitians as a high-risk group for AIDS in the 1980s (Menos, 2005). In the early 1990s, many Haitian children were stigmatized about their cultural identity thus they attempted to reject Haitian culture due to bullying from their American peers in school (Menos, 2005; Etienne, 2021). At this time, children in the schools associated Haitians with AIDS and would bully any known Haitians by

declaring they or their family had AIDS. Naturally, it was easy to want to disclaim the Haitian culture, making it hard for the first-generation Haitian-Americans to desire association with the Haitian culture. Often many of the Haitians that could pass as African-American would do so to escape the stigma of being Haitian (Menos, 2005; Duchatelier-Jeudy, 2015; Etienne, 2021). The concept of becoming more *Americanized* is a way that many of the participants aimed to reject their Haitian identities and take on the American one. Ferguson et al. (2014) describe this concept of becoming Americanized as a form of acculturation that occurs when someone from a non-dominant culture practices more characteristics from the dominant culture than that of their own. Some of the participants in this study explicitly describe some of the childhood experiences they had related to being bullied about being Haitian and how that aided to their choice to either not speak the language in school (or in public) and even resulting in them hiding their Haitian identity altogether. One in particular noted that as a young child he had a disdain for the culture and did not want to identify as Haitian due to the bullying from his peers in school, thus never thought he would marry a Haitian woman. As they got older and chose to marry Haitian spouses, they began to realize that in order to preserve the Haitian culture, they needed to speak the language, and practice the other attributes of the culture publicly.

### ***Family Bonds***

The function of the family and community connections are paramount in the Haitian culture (Ferguson et al., 2014). This means that family and community members significantly contribute to the transfer of cultural values and traditions from one generation to the next (Derbaix & de La Ville, 2021). The Haitian-American participants in this study place a magnitude of importance on family and their instruction on the appropriate or expected way to establish a family. Transferred cultural values impact the marital decisions and practices of

individuals (Davoodvandi et al., 2018). This is where the family value of respect is highlighted; Haitian individuals are expected to honor and heed the suggestions of scripts and expectations from their elders. The participants in this study have all mentioned the influence of their families in the decision-making process for choosing a partner and raising children. When they were asked to pinpoint qualities that their parents wanted in their future spouse, each participant was easily able to recall traits they knew their family desired of their future spouse. The willingness to comply in finding a spouse with these traits described by their family reveals that even in adulthood, the views and expectations of their family and/or community members are important for these Haitian-American participants. By the same token, the participants in this study also heed the suggestions from their spiritual leaders. Specifically, they all noted that they sought premarital counseling from spiritual leaders prior to marriage and they also attend church services regularly where they obtain guidance from those spiritual leaders.

Again, it should be noted that Haitians place a great deal of importance on strong family and community bonds (Ferguson et al., 2014). An example of a way for Haitians to continue to strengthen their bonds was over a meal where they have meaningful discussions or simply spend quality time together. These bonds often serve as the foundation for establishing loyalty to the community which later obligates them to send remittances back to the community members in Haiti, and overall respect for Haitian elders. Financial support is one of the most important functions of Haitian immigrant family members (Fjellman & Gladwin, 1985). It is important to note that remittance is also a cultural script and expectation for anyone migrating to the United States. They are expected to come to the U.S. to earn money and send a remittance to help the family back home in Haiti. Thus establishing and maintaining community bonds continues to be a significant duty practiced within the Haitian community.

### ***Food***

The participants in this study mentioned the importance of incorporating Haitian dishes in their menu at home. Duchatelier-Jeudy (2015) describes how food is a part of the socialization process taught to children when they are growing up. Some of the common foods that are popular in the Haitian culture are dishes like rice and beans, griot, and soup joumou. Griot is fried pieces of pork shoulder. In some instances, people that do not eat pork will fry other meats like turkey or goat. Soup Joumou is a pumpkin squash based soup with meats, vegetables, and dumplings. Both are usually special occasion dishes. Griot often is a dish for special dinners or parties, while Soup Joumou is primarily a soup that Haitians "*drink*" on New Year's which is Haitian Independence Day (Julien, 2013). While under French control, the Haitians had to serve soup joumou– which was a delicacy only to be served to the French masters but they were not allowed to *drink* it themselves. Once the Haitian people were officially independent from the French colonizers on January 1, 1804, they drank the soup that was once forbidden for the Haitians, and this began the tradition to drink soup joumou every year on January 1st (Julien, 2013 & Green, 2021). The Haitian people often travel from house to house to have a bowl of soup and spend time with friends and family. Today, Soup Joumou has become an ongoing tradition in many Haitian and Haitian-American households where the soup symbolizes the independence of the Haitian people from French colonizers on January 1, 1804 (Julien, 2013).

Reddy and vanDam (2020) supposed that cooking traditional food is one-way immigrants use to preserve their culture. It is imperative to mention that although the participants in this study are intentionally aiming to preserve culture by occasionally cooking Haitian dishes at home, the cultural transmission may not extend past their children as they begin to become more *Americanized* (Ferguson et al., 2014). Ferguson et al. (2014) described becoming Americanized

as a form of acculturation that occurs when someone from another culture, like Haitian immigrants, orient themselves to more practices from American culture than that of their native culture in Haiti. For the respondents in this study that occasionally cook Haitian cuisines, they may not teach their children the complex Haitian recipes, thus when their children are older they may either only make Haitian cuisines on special occasions or choose to assimilate to the American culture and decide not to make Haitian dishes at all. It is also worth noting that in the heavily populated Haitian enclaves, it may be easier to purchase Haitian food occasionally (even if this is as often as weekly or only a few times a year) than it is to cook. Likewise, Fischler (1988) noted that food is central to an individual's identity.

### ***Language***

As the children learn their ethnic heritage, language, and history they are socialized to the values and norms of their culture (Menos, 2021; Duchatelier-Jeudy, 2015). Furthermore, the study established that middle-aged Haitian-American couples uphold Haitian traditions through language. The findings from this study echoed Zéphir's (1996) study involving Haitian immigrants living in New York. The author investigated how the Haitian immigrants in New York portray themselves. The study revealed that the participants used Creole as their first language of interaction. The participants noted that they used Creole to mark their ethnicity and prevent losing their cultural identity. They noted that the Haitian Creole helped them distinguish themselves from other people of color.

Speaking to the children and teaching them their mother tongue is one way of preserving cultural connections (Duchatelier-Jeudy, 2015; Mejía, 2016). Consistently, the participants noted that they teach their children Creole words and phrases to ensure they do not lose their culture.

Furthermore, celebrating traditions helps immigrants preserve their native cultural identity (Wojtynska, 2011). It is noteworthy that the next generation (children of the middle-aged Haitian-American respondents) are likely to lose this aspect of the culture. This does not mean that all culture is lost by the second-generation, but the culture will need to be intentionally reconnected by re-introducing the Creole language and other Haitian customs to the next generation in order to continue the preservation of the Haitian culture. The children of the respondents do not speak the Creole language fluently but they recognize words and phrases and understand more than they can respond, in the language. When those children speak to the Haitian elders, they do what they can to speak in the few popular phrases and words they know, but it is likely that if they have children, the culture may not be transmitted and the language may be lost. Pessin and Arpino (2018) noted specifically that the culture transmitted to the second-generation has a weaker influence than culture transmitted to the first-generation. Thus the children of the first-generation Haitian-American participants in the present study will likely have a weaker tie to the Haitian culture.

All in all, maintaining culture is imperative as this is the connection that groups of people have to their *roots*. This finding is in agreement with Stepick's (1998) study involving Haitian immigrants from Miami. The study established that Haitian immigrants observe Haitian traditions to mark their heritage. The Stepick study also revealed that second generation Haitian immigrants were ambivalent in portraying Haitian culture. The author noted that, contrary to the first generation Haitian immigrants, the second generation immigrants reported feeling the pressure of un-acceptance from their peers. In particular, young Haitian (high schoolers) refused to be recognized as Haitians. In this current study, one of the participants showed that he once had a disdain for being Haitian due to bullying when he was in school, but grew to love the

culture and has even transmitted some parts of the Haitian culture to his bi-racial son. In instances like this, the aim to preserve the traditions, language, and food is sought after but may not be sustained as the child is forced to recognize multiple cultures (Haitian, American and Hispanic) and attempt to choose what cultural practices they want to accept and continue. Individuals that navigate multiple cultural identities usually do so based on the social circles they are in (Zolfaghari et al., 2016). For example, when they are at work or school, they behave consistently with whichever culture they find appropriate or accepted. While they are with their Haitian, Hispanic, or American relatives or peers, they adjust accordingly by choosing the identity to best adhere to the situation. Such a cultural barrier can be combated if the child is intentional early on about practicing the language, cooking the meals and observing the holidays and celebrations of their multiple cultures. Without the use of these types of strategies to maintain culture, the transmission of Haitian culture may end at this generation. While certain aspects of the culture may remain through continuous exposure, such as the importance of religion and the respect for elders; aspects like the language and the customs or traditional practices may be lost.

### **Importance of Religion**

Haiti is a religious country. Religion is central to Haitian culture. For much of its history, including today, Haiti has been a Christian country (Nicholls, 1970; Jean-Baptiste, 1991; Pierce & Elisme, 2000; Felix, 2007; Verner, 2008; Landry, 2008; Monger, 2013; Ulrickson, 2020). Faith shapes the fabric of the everyday life of Haitians. In Haiti, church organizations are the primary form of social infrastructure. People have high trust in churches, and participation in these organizations results in faith development. Research by Rey & Stepick (2013) involving

Haitian immigrants in Miami concluded that Haitian immigrants' religious beliefs are transnational. The study showed that Haitian immigrants keep their faith after relocating to the host country. Mooney's (2009) study involving Haitian immigrants in Paris, Montreal, and Miami found that religion plays a significant role in the survival and thriving of Haitian immigrants. The study revealed that religion provides the immigrants hope for life. The study also revealed that Catholic Church offered services and advocacy that helped the immigrants succeed. For religious Haitians, prayer as a couple contributed to higher marriage satisfaction (Felix, 2007).

Religion is typically reinforced through family expectations and plays a significant role in the lives of individuals and in the Haitian culture (Jean-Baptiste, 1991; Pierce & Elisme, 2000; St. Bernard, 2003). As mentioned in the literature review on Haitian culture, regardless of religious affiliations, Haitian people are devout believers (Pierce & Elisme, 2000). Much like the other individuals a part of the African diaspora, the church and faith communities play a significant role for Haitian individuals (Marks et al., 2008; Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). Marks et al. (2008) disclosed that church attendance was historically a predictor of marriage endurance for Black couples, while Cutrona et al. (2011) asserted that religious persons were more likely to stay committed in marriages than non-religious individuals. As it relates to the participants in this study, the Cutrona et al claim may be one rationale as to why the participants in this study were all married for over 7 years. In connection with the reinforcement of religious qualities within family expectations, the teachings of the Bible are intertwined in what the participants believe are cultural and/or family expectations. Some of the expectations and Bible teachings seem to match. For example, marriage being a prerequisite to having *legitimate* children (Hill, 2006). While the Bible does not explicitly mention not having children before marriage, the



notion for Haitian believers is that one must not have sex before marriage. If they are not having sex, then the expectation is that they would not be having illegitimate children. This and other expected family values resemble teachings from the Bible. For example women were expected to honor and submit to their husbands. This is referenced in the Bible where it says

*For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.*

( Holy Bible, New Living Translation, 1996/2015, Ephesians 5:22-23)

For the participants in this study, they were taught and expected to adhere to values that they learn as part of Haitian culture but have roots in the Bible. This means that St. Bernard (2003) was indeed correct when noting that the culture is heavily influenced by religion and reinforced by family expectations.

The review of the findings showed that religion plays a huge part in the participants' lives. In particular, religion influenced the participants' marital decisions and practices. For example, the men of this study all mention their parents' expectations of bringing home a Christian wife. One man in particular described that his parents wanted his future wife to be both Haitian *and* Christian. Another man in this study noted religion changed his perspective about marriage. He shared that his marriage was dictated by Haitian culture at the beginning. However, as he grew in his spiritual connection, his focus on marriage changed. He noted that today, he does not allow Haitian or American culture to dictate his marriage; his marriage is anchored on the teaching of Jesus Christ and conviction from his spiritual beliefs.

Another religious consideration is the concept of sex and marriage. While this was not mentioned explicitly, the participants in this study do note that it is frowned upon to have children before marriage within their Haitian family. One example is from a female participant that noted it was an unspoken understanding that pregnancy prior to marriage was forbidden because everyone knew that you could not have sex before marriage. Thus her parents never said “don’t get pregnant” but they always mentioned not having sex before marriage because the Bible said so. While the Bible verses on sex do not clearly reference abstaining until you are married, many of them speak of the consequences of having sex with someone who is not their wife (e.g. spiritual impureness, social disadvantages like sexual immorality, or forced married). For instance:

*“If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to anyone and has sex with her, he must pay the customary bride price and marry her.”* (Holy Bible, New Living Translation, 1996/2015, Exodus 22:16)

*“God’s will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin”* (Holy Bible, New Living Translation, 1996/2015, 1Thessalonians 4:3)

*“But because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband”* (Holy Bible, New Living Translation, 1996/2015, 1 Corinthians 7:2)

As mentioned above, family expectations are the way in which religious beliefs are reinforced and passed onto the next generation. Participants in this study knew that sex was frowned upon and that religion backed up this family expectation. Thus an unspoken motivation to get married may have also been to freely have guiltless sex with their partner.

Another biblically-based concept that shows up in the Haitian culture is the importance of the institution of marriage. One participant in this study emphasized that there is respect for the institution of marriage within the Haitian community. He mentioned that the Haitian people emphasize getting married before having children. This is not unique to Haitian culture, it is a concept that is drawn from the Bible. The following verses from the Bible are a couple of examples of how the Bible emphasizes the importance of marriage.

*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous (Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 1996/2015, Hebrews 13:4)*

*Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him. (Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 1996/2015, Genesis 2:18)*

*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! (Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 1996/2015, Ecclesiastes 4:9–10)*

Overall, the institution of marriage is an important religious value that is reinforced as a family expectation for the religious Haitian community.

Religion is certainly an aspect that is culturally transmitted in the homes of these middle-aged Haitian-American couples that played a significant role in their upbringing, marriages, home life, and in the way that they rear their children. All of the participants in this study described how they transferred religion to their children by attending church services regularly, doing bible studies as a family, and praying with their children.

### Love Expression

In voicing their thoughts about love, these participants unknowingly described Chapman's love language concept about love expression. Gary Chapman describes different ways that people can receive and express love through his research and work on the *5 Love Languages*. They are words of affirmation, quality time, gift-giving, acts of service, and physical touch (Chapman, 2004). It is also imperative to note that the love expression the participants note they have received from their parents has been solely in the form of action. This is known as *acts of service*- when love is expressed by completing tasks that convey a love for someone (Chapman, 2004; Hughes & Camden, 2020). The Haitian-American participants in this study have grown to decide that acts of service are not enough alone and that it should be coupled with a different type of love known as *words of affirmation*-which is using words to show love. This can be done through compliments, encouragement or simply using the words, "*I love you*" (Chapman, 2004). In the Haitian households where these respondents grew up, their parents displayed love primarily through acts of service by providing needs like shelter, food, and clothes for their family. Thus, they neglected to express love verbally through words of affirmation. Now the respondents have intentionally decided to enact agency and change the way love is expressed in their families of procreation.

Silverstein et al. (2002) research revealed a new fathering paradigm among Haitian-Americans consistent with the current study findings. Silverstein et al. study showed that Haitian-American men adopt nurturing father roles and move away from the traditional model of Haitian fatherhood that emphasized emotional stoicism and physical toughness. Haitian-American men are now actively involved in taking care of the children, and they are emotionally connected to their children. Similarly, Auerbach et al. (1997) study established that Haitian-

American fathers are involved and physically present for their children, and they express love to the children both verbally and physically. In particular, the study revealed that Haitian-American children's relationships are characterized by emotional closeness rather than the emotional distance that prevailed in the traditional Haitian relationships. In this study, the participants mentioned that despite lacking verbal love expression from their parents, they intentionally express love to their children in ways they did not receive growing up rather than to repeat the cycle of stoic love expression by solely exercising acts of service.

Moreover, this study revealed that although middle-aged Haitian-American couples did not see their parents express love verbally, they are intentionally learning to express love to their partners and children. Hence, middle-aged Haitian-American couples intentionally enact agency to change the way love is expressed in their current family.

### **Limitations**

As a qualitative study with limited participants, these findings from this research cannot be used to generalize to the population of Haitians or Haitian-Americans. The sample size for this study was small and may not be the experience of every Haitian-American couple. All of the participants in this study have a college degree. This presents a limitation as the study shares the experiences of those of a certain status that is accompanied with being college educated. Another limitation was the method in which the study took place. Although Zoom meetings made this convenient for couples that lived in other states to participate in the study, this also may have excluded anyone that does not have internet access or is unable to use technology. It is noteworthy to mention that the participants may be of a certain socio-economic and educational standing. Also, the participants in this study were interviewed separately and never together.

While interviewing individually had its advantages, it is possible that getting the perspective of the couple together may have had different results, this could be advised for future research. Additionally, the small sample came from different regions where their experiences may differ from people living in other states outside of New York, Florida, and Arizona. Lastly, it is imperative to mention that the couples in this study all identified as religious. While this study has identified that religion may be a major factor in Haitian culture (no matter the sector of belief), the couples in this sample were snowballed through a religious couple and may be the reason for the heavy religion component. Despite the limitations of this study, the results and information gathered were valuable additions to the literature.

### **Implications and Future Research**

This study enhanced our knowledge with respect to the shift in gender roles in the current generation of Haitian-Americans. Given the importance of observing gender roles in Haitian culture, it is vital to explore how this shift affects the lives of the modern generation of Haitian-Americans.

One of the study's findings is that middle-aged Haitian-American couples are learning to use words of affirmation through the expression of love verbally to their children and partners. Future study with respect to the effects of expressed love on marriages to understand how the change in love languages has affected the marital relationships seems in order. Additionally, specifically examining how Haitian culture impacts the changes in the use of different love languages, besides acts of service.

Further research on the impacts of family expectations on Haitian marital practices among the second generation of Haitian-Americans is in order. In the current study, all the

participants were the first generation of Haitian immigrants or first-generation Haitian-Americans. As culture is transmitted from one generation to another, changes are likely to happen to the traditions and information transferred. Therefore, it is important to replicate this study with other generations of Haitian-Americans other than the first generation.

### **Conclusion**

During this research, numerous findings concerning the impacts of family expectations on the marital practices of Haitian-Americans were discovered. First, the study revealed that family expectations for respondents to have kids immediately after they marry negatively affected the couples' good moments as it denied them time to enjoy each other. Second, the expectations influenced gender roles and responsibilities among middle-aged Haitian-American couples. More specifically, it was evident that both genders observed their roles but not as strictly as expected. A shift in gender roles was identified in the findings whereby both genders were taking responsibilities traditionally believed to belong to the opposite gender. Furthermore, the findings revealed that family expectations impacted marital decisions made by middle-aged Haitian-American couples. More specifically, the expectations influenced the couple's marital practices with respect to what duties each member is expected to perform, what to cook, what language to speak to the children, and how to express love. It is noteworthy that although these participants come from 8 different Haitian families, they have similar experiences. Thus the results of this study could imply that something more than family expectations are influencing the actions of these couples such as the expectations from the Haitian and/or American culture as a whole or simply religious beliefs and expectations. The balance of biculturalism and religious beliefs or practices can be a difficult feat but these participants have shown the evolution of the teachings and expectations from their parent's culture to include a combination of both Haitian

and American cultures along with their religious views. While the Haitian culture has influenced some of the decisions and practices in their marriage, they have also balanced it with the American culture they continue to live in. Merging these two world views from Haiti and America have given Haitian-American couples an evolved view of the culture that impacts their family practices, traditions, and decisions.



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### Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Tell me your 'How I met you' story
  - a. How did you get from that first meeting to *X* years of marriage?
    - i. Tell when did you know that you would get married
  - b. Did you date before you were married?
    - i. How long did you date?
  - c. How long have you been married?
2. What is you/ your partners' cultural identity? (more Haitian than American/ vice versa?)
  - a. How does culture influence your marriage?
    - o What aspects of Haitian culture show up in your marriage?
      - Give an example
    - o To what do you attribute your perspective on marriage?
      - When was the *first* time you learned about marriage? Who? How?
    - o How has culture influenced your decision to marry?
      - What took/brought you to the marriage market?
        - How did you decide to move from dating to marriage?
        - Age? Expectation?
  - b. What Haitian culture characteristics do you have in your family?
    - o Food?
    - o Haitian Proverbs?
    - o Do you celebrate Haitian Holidays?
      - Independence day
      - Flag day
3. Tell me how religion impacts your relationship, if at all?
  - a. What religion do you identify with? What sector?
  - b. Do you participate in forms of worship?
  - c. Are you active in the church? (volunteer)
  - d. Do you pray?
    - i. Together? Separately?
  - e. Mediation with a religious leader?
    - i. Only on (escalated) occasions
  - f. Do you participate/celebrate religious holidays?
    - i. How?
    - ii. Describe Christmas eve/day to me?
    - iii. What is your family tradition for Easter?
4. Please define what love means to you.
  - a. What are the guidelines for love?
    - i. What cultural traditions/characteristics help you understand love?
    - ii. What messages did you receive about marriage growing up?
      1. How did you receive them?
        - a. parents? church? unspoken/just known?
  - b. How does love play a role in your marriage?
    - i. Why/How?
    - ii. Has this changed over time?

5. Do you have children?
  - a. How has having children changed your marriage?
  - b. How do you share responsibilities in rearing your child(ren)
    - i. Do you teach your children about religious beliefs?
      1. How? Who does this?
  - c. How do you share your culture with your children, if at all?
    - i. Do your children speak the language?
    - ii. Have they visited Haiti?
    - iii. Do you teach them Haitian proverbs?
    - iv. What Haitian traditions do you uphold with your children?
  - d. What messages do you teach your children about marriage, if at all?
    - i. Do you talk about divorce/marriage?
      1. Is there an expectation to get married
6. What do you believe has had the largest impact on your relationship?
7. Tell me about a recent challenge you have faced, how did you overcome this?
  - a. Was there ever a time you regretted this marriage- to the point you would consider terminating the marriage?
8. What would you describe as the 'key to success' in your marriage, thus far?
9. In my research, I have come across *plasaj*. Do you know what this is?
  - a. What does this *plasaj* look like?
  - b. Why do you think *plasaj* is a thing done in Haiti?
10. Is there anything you want to add that we have not yet discussed?

**Appendix B: Recruitment Email/Phone Prompt**

Subject: Searching for Participants for Haitian Culture & Marriage Study

Hello, my name is Kencia Mele. I am a doctoral candidate at Montclair State University. I am searching for participants for a research study on Caribbean culture and marriage. You are receiving this email because you are a **member of ...**

The purpose of this research is to see how married Caribbean couples are influenced by their culture and to identify the characteristics of the culture that may influence your marriage. If you take part in this research, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire and participate in a 60-90 minutes virtual interview. There will be a total of 3 interviews, one for each spouse-separately, then a final interview with the couple.

If you or anyone you know would like to participate in this study or have any questions, please contact Kencia Mele at [melek1@montclair.edu](mailto:melek1@montclair.edu) for more information.



### Appendix C: Recruitment Flier



Kencia Mele

E-mail: meleK1@Montclair.edu



### Haitian Culture & Marriage

#### Who:

We are recruiting married Haitian couples to participate in a research study about culture's impact on their marriage. Couples must be Haitian and married at least 5 years. At least one partner must be middle-aged (35-50).

#### Why:

The purpose of this research is to see how married couples are influenced by your culture. This research will explore the impact Caribbean culture has had on your marriage.

#### When & What:

Participants will be asked to complete 1. A brief questionnaire 2. Participate in a total of 3 virtual interviews, one individually for each partner and then potentially one as a couple. (60-90 minutes).

#### Benefits & Risks:

The primary benefit is helping other Caribbeans in the future; by participating in this research, you will help us gain knowledge that will be used to help create seminars for the Caribbean population. There are no significant risks for couples that participate in this study.

#### How?

If you or anyone you know would like to participate in this study, please contact Kencia Mele at melek1@montclair.edu for more information.

**This study has been approved by  
Montclair State University's Institutional  
Review Board IRB-FY21-22-2316**

**Appendix D: Screening Questions****Screening Question**

1. Marital Status?
2. Do you Identify as Haitian or Haitian-American?

**Participant Information**

1. Name
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Racial/Ethnic identity
5. Level of education
6. Occupation
7. Income range
8. How long have you been married?
9. What is your religious Affiliation?
  - a. Christian
  - b. Jewish
  - c. Mormon
  - d. Other
  - e. None
10. What Denomination do you identify with?
11. How often do you attend church?
  - a. Once a week
  - b. Practically every time the doors are open
  - c. Monthly
  - d. On special occasions
12. Do you consider yourself highly religious? Why?
13. Do you have children? If so how many?
14. Where were you born?
15. If born outside of the U. S. How long have you been in the U.S?

Link to Screener Form: <https://forms.gle/drUmgJnas45sNkKm6>

**Appendix E: Follow-Up Interview Questions**

- Would you say that your family had expectations for you growing up or even now??
  - What would you say are some expectations your family had/has for you?
- How about adhering to gender roles, what/where did you learn what you were “supposed to do” as a Wo/Man?
  - What does your marriage partnership look like? Who does what in the marriage?
- How have family expectations shown up in your marriage?
  - Did your family have expectations for your future spouse?
  - Did your spouse’s family have expectations for you before you both got married?
  - Was having a child an expectation? By who?
    - Did your family expect you to have children shortly after marriage?
    - Was it acceptable to have children before marriage?
  - Would you say family expectations have impacted your marriage?

### Appendix F: Identification of Significant Statements

<p><b>Andrea:</b> There are some part-- parts of the Haitian culture when it comes to marriage, that I that I respect, but in part, okay, winning so like for it, for example, <u>like I love the way my mom would serve [her] husband, [her] husband--- my dad.</u> right. I did like that. I liked that. She was very, like, you could tell that, you know, <u>she honored him,</u> you know.</p>
<p><b>Researcher:</b> Okay, so your mom kind of just <u>went along with what your dad was saying?</u></p> <p><b>Carla:</b> Whatever. Yep. Whatever <u>my dad decided.</u></p>
<p><b>Faye:</b> And like I said, I feel like food is a huge,-- <u>food and language</u> are two easy and very prevalent pieces. And I mean, we're <b>always with our family, there's always,</b> we're always <u>half speaking Creole , Half speaking English.</u> We're <u>always eating Haitian food.</u></p>
<p><b>Carla:</b> As the girl, we need to make sure you clean the house, make <u>sure you cook,</u> you need to make sure you know, you learn how to <u>wash your clothes</u> and iron the clothes and stuff. And in my house, my dad made it a big deal. When I would be cooking different types of meals in the kitchen and the boys want to come-- He would say, "oh, no, no, you don't belong in the kitchen." And I would say "What do you mean, he doesn't belong in the kitchen. You know, he's gonna have a wife, he needs to help his wife, unlike you, who want to sit there all day and do nothing."</p>
<p><b>Love:</b> Taking care of the house, more house manager type of work. Being more active in the life of the kids. That's where --that's the mentality that I brought into the relationship. Overtime -- things changed. I became more active at home, <u>I cook more.</u> (chuckles) I walk[ed] away from what I've learned, because I realize that if only one person doing it, the <u>relationship will not be healthy.</u> So we have to balance things out. So we <u>help each other.</u></p>
<p><b>Lydia:</b> Yeah, yeah. I think so. I don't think I don't think Haitians, or the older generation, Haitians understand that, you know, you want to <u>wait a little bit enjoy your husband,</u> you know, before you start having those kinds of commitments. I don't know if--- what is that term that they say? It's timoun se joa fwaye'a . Okay. So “kids are the joy of the of the household” And I mean, basically, if you don't have no kids, you know, the household is just empty and, and sad. That's probably exaggerating. But yeah, that's --they really have that <u>expectation for you to have kids</u> in order to complete the family unit.</p>
<p><b>Smith:</b> Yes. And they made it -they made it known. Other things they didn't make it known, that-yes, they made it known. they harass you about that too. Every time they see you too. <u>they're like,</u></p>

"Yeah, you need to have kids." you know, But yeah, that's something --that's something they do expect.

**Love:** Culture --the food, the language. Mainly the food and the language .and the clothing as well, the way we dress. We valued dressing nicely.

**Andrea:** You're right, right. Um, 90% of the time, I serve Him, you know. So that's one way that the Haitian culture has kind of translates into mine-- into my marriage. Um, Yeah. And I guess also when I --when I create like, the Haitian cuisines, like, that's another way it translates into my marriage. But yeah, but other than that, we're pretty- I would say American and how we do things.

**Andrea:** We do Haitian flag because that's my my husband's mother,--mother's birthday. So my mom in law's birthday is on Haitian Flag Day. So that's why we celebrate it. (chuckles).

**Smith:** "Yeah, I say "I love you." But I'm not-- Yeah, I don't say that that much, No. That's something I'm-- you know, I'm catching myself, I'm learning to do it. But I don't. Yeah."

**Appendix G: Meaning Formulated From Identified Essential Statements**

<b>Identified significant statements</b>	<b>Meaning formulated</b>
<p><b>Andrea:</b> There are some part-- parts of the Haitian culture when it comes to marriage, that I that I respect, but in part, okay, winning so like for it, for example, <u>like I love the way my mom would serve my husband, my husband--- my dad.</u> right. I did like that. I liked that. She was very, like, you could tell that, you know, <u>she honored him,</u> you know.</p> <p><b>Carla:</b> Okay, so your mom kind of just <u>went along with what your dad was saying.</u> “Whatever. Yep. Whatever <u>my dad decided.</u>”</p> <p><b>Andrea:</b> Well, um serving my husband, Yeah. And I just think that's just an honorable thing to do. But I saw it all the time. One thing that I did see all the time that I don't do, I think, because I'm like, I'm like, I'm different like, and I think - -we're in a different time as well. Like, my dad was served on on glass plates all the time. I serve my husband on paper plates, and it's okay, because the food is good. That's all he nee--he doesn't need the plate.</p>	<p>Honor and respect for husbands is significant in the Haitian culture. The middle-aged Haitian-American couples have adopted it</p>
<p><b>Faye:</b> And like I said, I feel like food is a huge, - - <u>food and language</u> are two easy and very prevalent pieces. And I mean, we're always with our family, there's always, we're always <u>half speaking Creole , Half speaking English.</u> We're always eating <u>Haitian food.</u></p> <p><b>Love:</b> Culture --the food, the language. Mainly the <u>food and the language .and the clothing</u> as well, <u>the way we dress.</u> We valued <u>dressing nicely.</u></p> <p><b>Andrea:</b> <u>You're right, right. Um, 90% of the time, I serve Him, you know. So that's one way that the Haitian culture has kind of translates into mine-- into my marriage. Um, Yeah. And I guess also when I when I create like, the Haitian cuisines, like, that's another way it translates into my marriage. But yeah, but other than that,</u></p>	<p>Haitian-American couples observe their culture through foods, dressing up, language and celebrations</p>

<p><u>we're pretty, I would say American and how we do things.</u></p> <p><b>Andrea:</b> We do Haitian flag because that's my husband's mother,--mother's birthday. So my mom in law's birthday is on Haitian Flag Day. So that's why we celebrate it. (chuckles).</p>	
<p><b>Smith:</b> Okay, so --far is basically I help with the children. I work, I provide and I --if I need to clean the backyard, I clean the backyard. The showers--you know, I do these things. I don't do the laundry, I don't do these things not because I don't want to do them -its just that she took she took it upon himself to do it. I remember one time asking "Hey I could help you" but she didn't feel like I should. But I'm like "okay, cool." But, but for me, I don't feel like I'm restricted.</p> <p><b>Lydia:</b> I do a lot of the roles that my mom taught me, I do a lot of cooking a lot of the home management. Um, me and my husband, we don't really say that. "Okay, you do all the working and I just stay home with the kids." We both have equal, you know, equal working-- Yeah, we don't we don't kind of divide that up. It's equal half and half. You know, I work, he works. And that's how we pay our bills. Um, let's see. Yeah, mostly homemaking and home management. I do a lot of handiwork around the house, though (chuckles).</p> <p><b>Love:</b> Taking care of the house, more house manager type of work. Being more active in the life of the kids. That's where --that's the mentality that I brought into the relationship. Overtime -- things changed. I became more active at home, <u>I cook more.</u> (chuckles) I walk away from what I've learned, because I realize that if only one person doing it, the <u>relationship will not be healthy.</u> So we have to balance things out. So we <u>help each other.</u></p> <p><b>Smith:</b> No, because the way I am, the culture that I lived in, is <u>not that flexible.</u> You know, it'll be there'll be <u>man jobs,</u> there'll be <u>woman jobs.</u></p>	<p>Haitian-American couples observe gender roles. But this is changing in attempt to be more flexible with the needs of family and partner</p>

<p>I think I'm influenced by the culture as well, to be basically like, as a man, gotta be responsible for certain things, you know, <u>take care of the wife</u>, and make sure.. but not as rigid as it was, I think, to the education that I've gotten.</p>	
<p><b>Lydia:</b> Yeah, yeah. I think so. I don't think I don't think Haitians, or the older generation, Haitians understand that, you know, you want to <u>wait a little bit enjoy your husband</u>, you know, before you start having those kinds of commitments. I don't know if-- what is that term that they say? It's <i>timoun se joa fwaye'a</i> . Okay. So {kids are the joy of the of the household} And I mean, basically, if you don't have no kids, you know, the household is just empty and, and sad. That's probably exaggerating. But yeah, that's --they really have that <u>expectation for you to have kids</u> in order to complete the family unit.</p> <p><b>Smith:</b> Yes. And they made it they made it known. Other things they didn't make it known, that- yes, they made it kNown. They harass you about that too. Every time they see you too. <u>they're like, "Yeah, you need to have kids."</u> you know, But yeah, that's something --that's something they do expect.</p> <p><b>Smith:</b> I have a expectations of my kids, which I've learned from my parents, you know, they go to school, get good grades. And also make sure that you get a good education, and get married and get paid, etc. And especially for my daughter, she better get married. (chuckles) Like I mentioned, I want.</p>	<p>After marriage, family members expect the couples to have children and the Haitian-American couples expect their children to get married too.</p>
<p><b>Lydia:</b> “No, my parents--- nnnmm they didn't even --no. they didn't even like, you know, kiss in front of us. You know, it was it was weird.”</p> <p><b>Smith:</b> “Yeah, I say "I love you." But I'm not-- Yeah, I don't say that that much, No. That's something I'm-- you know, I'm catching myself, I'm learning to do it. But I don't. Yeah.”</p>	<p>The middle aged Haitian-American couples are learning to express love to partners even though they didn't see that when growing up.</p>



<p><b>Lydia:</b> “But, um, you know, I, I am more expressive, you know, physically, you know, the my parents were, you know, I will hug, I will grab his hand, you know, I will kiss him, you know, in front of our kids in front of you know, people. But, you know, it's, it's, it's it hasn't been easy. It hasn't been something that's, you know, from the get go it's something that over time I had to learn how to do”</p>	
<p><b>Andrea:</b> I feel like they had expect, I feel like they did have expectations that I would get married. They would say "when you get married" (chuckles) in conversations like that, or my mom would say, you don't see anybody you like? things like that. (chuckles) Or anybody that likes you? things like that. (Andrea)</p>	<p>Haitian families have expectations that their children would get married</p>

**Appendix H: Emergent Themes Based on Formulated Meanings**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Dimension(s) of meaning</b>
Gender roles	<p>Wife expected to serve husband</p> <p>Men provide for family</p> <p>Women take care of the house</p> <p>Perceived need for doing away with traditional gender roles</p>
Family expectations	<p>Expectations to get married</p> <p>Expectations to have children</p> <p>Respect the marriage institution</p> <p>Wife respect and honor husband</p> <p>Wife to be submissive to husband</p>
Upholding Haitian traditions	<p>Preparing Haitian foods</p> <p>Observing Haitian celebrations</p> <p>Teaching kids Creole</p>
Love expression	<p>Preference for expressing love</p> <p>Learning to express love to partners and kids</p>
Importance of religion	<p>Practice of prayer</p> <p>Guidance/direction by Holy Spirit</p> <p>Participation in church/religious activities &amp; ceremonies</p>