

## **Five Types of African-American Marriages**

**William D. Allen & David H. Olson**

**This study developed a marital typology based on a non-random, national sample of 415 African-American marriages who took the ENRICH marital assessment inventory. Five types of African-American marriages were identified through cluster analysis of positive couple agreement (PCA) scores in ten relationship domains. Relationships between marital satisfaction, marital stability and the five marital types were then analyzed. The five types (from highest marital satisfaction to lowest) were labeled as Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional, Conflicted, and Devitalized. The resulting typology was compared with a similar sample of about 7,000 marriages (who also took ENRICH), including distressed couples and those seeking marital enrichment. The study replicated the number and characteristics of marital types found in predominantly European-American marital samples, including the percentage of African-American marriages in each type.**

### INTRODUCTION

Major changes in marital quality and stability have occurred in the African-American community in the last century. As recently as the late 1950's, nearly all African-Americans married and raised their children in traditional, two-parent households. However, currently, an increasing number of African-Americans postpone or forego marriage. Given the societal ramifications of major shifts in marital relationships, African-American marital quality and stability have not received sufficient empirical scrutiny. In addition to the paucity of marital research based on representative African-American samples, much of the existing literature ignores the potential for similarities or differences in couples' marital characteristics based on ethnic diversity.

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This trend is problematic in view of the potentially divergent marital experiences of African-American couples (in part due to ethnic and cultural influences). A new focus on African-American marriages grounded in cultural and socio-historical contexts has begun (see Tucker & Mitchell-Kiernan, 1995.) Marital typologies that explicitly deal with ethnicity may better explain what factors promote or hinder successful African-American marriages. In general, the family field would also benefit from a deeper understanding of both the unique and common aspects of marriages.

The main objective of this study was to develop a typology of African-American marriages. The authors were also interested in replicating marital typologies previously developed with similar samples of marital couples who had taken the ENRICH marital assessment inventory (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1987). The present study used a type development approach previously reported by Olson & Fowers (1993) in a much larger study of nearly 7,000 couples describing five marital types. Three specific research questions were:

- 1) Do African-American marriages exhibit relational patterns or “types”?**
- 2) Are African-American marital types related to marital satisfaction and marital stability?**
- 3) Are African-American marital types similar to those found in samples of predominantly European-American marriages.**

This study’s ethnic focus (on African-American marriages) was designed to provide an appropriate sociocultural context for type development. Given the diversity within the African-American community (diversity that often is obscured in cross-ethnic comparisons), the potential to uncover unique ethnic nuances in these marriages was enhanced. Moreover, by extending the typological approach to an African-American sample, the authors hoped to provide further evidence of the general utility of marital typologies, and a further exploration of their utility in an increasingly diverse society.

### ***Typologies of Couples***

Family researchers and therapists began developing typologies in the early 1950’s to simplify the complexity of marital characteristics. Optimally, marital typologies would uncover “natural” groupings in samples of married couples. Salient information about such groups or *types* might then be summarized. However, all typologies represent a balance between economy and the need for attention to unique characteristics (Miller & Olson, 1990). Type developers must make intelligent choices about which individual case characteristics to include or emphasize in the type development process. Thus, a lack of explicit attention to contextual sociodemographic factors (for example, ethnicity) can compromise a typology’s utility.

Researchers have attempted to improve the stability and reliability of empirically developed marital types (Lavee & Olson, 1993; Olson & Fowers, 1993; Snyder & Smith, 1986). Miller & Olson (1990) identified two basic approaches in marital type research: *intuitive* and *empirical*. The *intuitive* integrate observations of clinical and non-clinical samples as the bases for typologies. Examples of this approach include Cuber & Haroff (1965), who found five types based on the interactional styles of affluent couples, and Lewis, Beavers, Gossett, & Phillips (1976) who based their typology on the extent of

conflict in the marriages of their subjects. Shostrom & Kavanaugh (1971) were among the first researchers to explicitly incorporate couples' perceived *strengths* in their development of a typology based on self-reports of expressed love and anger. Researchers also used specific psychological theories to develop typologies (Hawkins, Weisberg, & Ray, 1977; Ravich & Wyden, 1974 [interactionism]; Sager, 1977 [psychodynamics]; and Bell, 1979 [gender role]).

**Empirical** approaches to marital types have become more popular as researchers employ increasingly powerful statistical analysis on larger and more representative samples. Goodrich, Ryder & Rausch (1968), Ryder (1970), and Fitzpatrick (1988) each developed typologies based on factor analysis of individual (as opposed to dyadic) characteristics within couples. A growing number of studies have used cluster analysis to integrate multiple relational factors, and thus more accurately account for marriages and their complexity (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996). Gottman (1979) using the **Couples Interaction Scoring System** (CISS), and Miller & Olson (1990) using the **Inventory of Marital Conflict** are two examples of cluster analysis of observational data.

Along with the shift from intuitive to empirical methods, there has been move away from basing typologies on relationship deficits towards a greater appreciation of relationship strengths. Snyder & Smith (1986) advocated the use of individual spouses' subjective appraisals of their relationships, and warned against basing marital types solely on global measures of marital distress. Researchers have also attempted to assess marriages at the relational (rather than individual) level of analysis. Fowers & Olson (1992) used the PREPARE premarital inventory to identify four types within a sample of 5,030 premarital couples. (These were described as *vitalized, harmonious, traditional, and conflicted*.) Later, Fowers, Montel, and Olson (1996) demonstrated the predictive validity of these four types by examining relationship outcomes of 393 couples over a three-year period. The results indicated there was a significant relationship between a couple's premarital type and their marital outcome.

Olson & Fowers (1993) also used cluster analysis to identify five marital types from a primarily European-American sample of nearly 7,000 couples. The five types described were *vitalized, harmonious, traditional, conflicted, and devitalized*. In the Olson & Fowers typology, *vitalized* couples were most satisfied with their relationships, while *conflicted* and *devitalized* marriages exhibited low satisfaction and high marital discord. Lavee & Olson (1993), using different clustering and couple scoring procedures, also identified five similar types, and added two more (*financially focused* and *balanced*).

### ***African-American Marriages***

There is convincing evidence that ethnicity and culture play critical roles in shaping the relational experiences of African-Americans. Researchers have empirically linked ethnicity to individual and ethnic group identity (Hunter & Davis, 1994; Myers, 1992), mate selection (Lichter, LeClere, & McLaughlin, 1991), parent-child relationships (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Spencer, 1986; McAdoo, J., 1988; Peters, 1988), and social support networks (McAdoo, H., 1988b; Scott & Black, 1989). Practitioners have also sought African antecedents to prevailing African-American values in their attempts to fashion more effective clinical interventions (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Oliver, 1989).

The term *afrocentric* is defined as *being related to ethnic and cultural roots in the*

*African and African-American experiences* (Asante, 1989). Afrocentric influences on marriages result from African-Americans' shared history (Franklin, 1987) and similar contemporary life experiences (Nobles, 1988; Staples, 1985). Three relationship domains included in the measurement instrument used in the present study may indicate Afrocentric influences on marriage.

The significance of *extended family* in African-American familial experiences has been widely documented (Beck & Beck, 1989; Billingsley, 1993; Farley & Allen, 1987; Hofferth, 1984; Staples & Boulin-Johnson, 1993). Non-familial alliances (e.g., fictive kin) and friendships have also proven to be significant predictors of psychological well being in African-American individuals (Bowman, 1992), couples (Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988) and families (Ellison, 1990; Taylor, Chatters & Mays, 1988).

Research has also suggested that *egalitarianism* is a primary component of African-American adult relationships (Billingsley, 1993; Staples, 1988), a finding corroborated in the clinical literature (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). African-American parenting practices also demonstrate egalitarianism in the relative levels of male and female participation in childrearing, and the extent to which partners cite parenting as a significant part of their lives (McAdoo, J., 1986; Peters, 1988; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor & Allen, 1990).

Finally, many African-American couples profess strong *religious orientation* (Knox, 1985; Lewis & Looney, 1983; Taylor, 1988), possibly attributable to the traditional integration of spirituality and daily life within many African cultures (Mbiti, 1969; Nobles, 1980). Participation in organized religion may have played a critical supportive role in early African-American history (Billingsley, 1993; Staples & Boulin-Johnson, 1993), and continue to be a buffer against stressors such as institutional racism and poverty (Brown & Gary, 1987; Cunningham, 1984; Dressler, 1985). Thus, religious orientation may be an important resource for contemporary African-American marriages (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Taylor & Chatters, 1988).

African-American marriages, though shaped by several unique forces, exhibit much of the economic and social diversity of couples from other ethnic groups. These marriages also are influenced by larger social trends such as increased economic pressures on wage earners, greater participation of females in the workplace (often precipitating re-assignment of gender roles), and the diminishing stigma associated with marital dissolution.

In the first half of the twentieth century the overwhelming majority of African-Americans married (typically in late adolescence or early adulthood) and divorce was relatively rare. However, during the next fifty years these patterns changed dramatically. African-Americans are now less likely to marry during their lifetimes and first marriages now occur in their late twenties and early thirties (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). As with other ethnic groups in the U.S., the rate of divorce among African-American couples has nearly quadrupled from 1960 to 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

In discussing long-term changes in African-American marital rates, Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan (1995) have proposed three critical factors in the decision to marry that may also be related to subsequent marital stability and satisfaction. *Availability of mates* is affected by numerical imbalances in the sex ratio (Glick, 1988; Schoen & Kluegel,

1988) and by economic viability particularly as it relates to men's ability to provide for their families (Bowman, 1993; Cazenave, 1979). As early as the 1980's, Guttentag & Secord (1983) argued that imbalanced sex ratios could result in devaluation and destabilization of marriage(s), higher rates of singlehood, and more transient relationships.

*Feasibility of marriage* is determined by socioeconomic factors that shape the marital prospects for both men and women (Wilson, 1987). Many males base their marital decisions on their economic capability (Darity & Myers, 1986/7; McAdoo, J., 1993; Verhoff et. al., 1993). Similarly, economics may influence females' marital choices based on their perception of their potential partners' economic viability (Tucker & Taylor, 1989). Both genders appear to be delaying or postponing marriage, although females may generally be delaying more and postponing longer than males (Testa, Astone, Krogh, & Neckerman, 1989; Tucker & Taylor, 1989).

The third critical factor, *desirability of marriage*, is more difficult to assess given the often conflicting empirical and anecdotal evidence. Several researchers believe that low marital rates among African-Americans are the result of lower desire to marry particularly among African-American men (South, 1993). Negative expectations about marriage (Broman, 1993) are also thought to play a greater role in the decline of African-American marriages than either economic factors or the sex ratio (Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, & Landry, 1992; South & Lloyd, 1992). However, despite the declining likelihood of marriage, some argue that it is unlikely that the *desirability* of marriage is actually declining (Trent & South, 1992; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993). Instead, the African-American community may be caught between the "rock" of significant levels of male economic inviability and the "hard place" of divergent marital preferences among males and females. Therefore both genders may be finding increasingly less compelling reasons for entering marriages and maintaining marital bonds in the face of economic and social stresses.

## METHOD

### *Sample*

The present study may represent the first use of cluster analysis to develop marital types in an exclusively African-American sample. The 415 African-American couples in this study were drawn from a multi-ethnic database of married couples who took the ENRICH marital assessment inventory from 1993 to 1995. The demographics of this non-random, national sample of African-American couples compared favorably with those of middle-SES African-Americans in the latest US Census (1994) and the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) (Jackson, 1991). Most of the couples took ENRICH as part of either marital therapy or marital enrichment programs. The sample included couples from nearly all fifty states with the majority of the couples living in large urban centers. The states contributing the largest number of participants included CA (10%), TX (10%), IL (6%), MN (5%), VA (5%), and 8% of the couples were from military bases around the world. The average ages for spouses were 33.7 for husbands and 31.9 for wives.

The couples in this study appeared more educated and better employed than those

in the general population. More than 90% of the both spouses had completed high school and roughly 33% reported some graduate education. The high level of academic achievement carried over into the workplace as 59% of wives and 74% of husbands reported “Full-time” employment. Over half of the spouses reported holding either professional/executive positions, or work in sales, technical, or clerical positions. While many couples (33% wives, 41% husbands) reported individual annual incomes ranging from \$15,000 - \$29,000, 44% of husbands and 34% of wives reported annual incomes over \$30,000. Finally, the overwhelming majority of husbands and wives in the study reported having a strong religious affiliation, most often Baptist.

### ***Assessment Measure (ENRICH)***

ENRICH is a self-report, marital assessment (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1987) composed of sixteen demographic questions (e.g., age, occupation, income), followed by 125 items in thirteen scales that survey the couple’s attitudes on a range of relationship domains. The ten scales used in this study covered *Personality Issues, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Financial Management, Leisure Activities, Sexual Relationship, Children and Parenting, Family and Friends, Equalitarian Roles, and Religious Orientation*. Scales for *Marital Adaptability, Marital Cohesion, and Marital Satisfaction* were omitted from the cluster analysis to avoid colinearity problems. After clustering, the *Marital Satisfaction* scale provided one of several corroborative measures of couple satisfaction.

ENRICH has been empirically validated in numerous studies and demonstrated solid reliability and validity (Fowers & Olson, 1989). Internal consistencies ranged from a low of .68 (*Equalitarian Roles*) to .90 (*Communication*) with average of .81 (n=1,542). Test-retest reliability for ENRICH over a 4-week period ranged from a low of .77 (*Leisure Activities*) to .92 (*Sexual Relationship*) with a mean of .86 (n=115, Olson, Fournier & Druckman, 1987). Construct validity is supported by moderate correlations between ENRICH scales and couples’ self-reported marital satisfaction (.41 to .60) and life satisfaction (.32 to .41) (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen & Wilson, 1989). Concurrent validity is demonstrated by comparisons between ENRICH and the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale, with correlations of .73 for individual scores and .81 for dyadic scores (n=1,200, Olson et al., 1989). Finally, ENRICH scales have demonstrated good criterion validity by successfully discriminating between satisfied and dissatisfied couples with over 90% accuracy (Fowers & Olson, 1989).

### ***Scoring***

ENRICH measurements are made at both the individual and dyadic levels. For this analysis, the level of **Positive Couple Agreement** (PCA) was used. PCA scores are a dyadic measure of the couple’s *positive* consensus on each relationship domain. Each of the ten scales contains ten items that participants respond to using a five-point Likert scale (1-Agree Strongly, 2-Agree, 3-Undecided, 4-Disagree, 5-Disagree Strongly).

Along with the PCA scores, several of the questions from the demographic section were used in the analysis. These included one-item questions regarding past marital status, global marital satisfaction, and consideration of divorce. *Marital Status* was measured by a one-item, six response (Likert type) question. The responses were

collapsed into two groups, “Married, first marriage” and “Other”, to facilitate chi-square analysis. *Global Marital Satisfaction* was assessed by a one-item question with five Likert type responses ranging from “Extremely Satisfied” to “Dissatisfied”. Responses to this question provided another measurement of marital satisfaction to use in evaluating the marital types. *Consideration of Divorce* was determined by the one-item question, “Have you ever considered separation or divorce?” This measure was extended to reflect dyadic consideration of divorce by grouping couples into three categories:

1) *Neither partner had ever considered divorce or separation*, 2) *One partner had considered divorce or separation*, 3) *Both partners had considered divorce or separation*.

### ***Cluster Analyses***

This study used cluster analysis to develop patterns of relationship attributes that constituted the marital types. The data analyses were divided into five stages. First, the sample was divided into two halves in order to enable validation of the cluster solution. Each sub-sample consisted of either 207 or 208 couples. Second, potential cluster solutions were developed through hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis of the first half of the data. Third, these alternatives were narrowed down to an optimal solution through k-means cluster analysis, and evaluation of between- and within cluster similarity of competing cluster solutions. Fourth, the optimal cluster solution was used to classify the second half of the data. Fifth, univariate analysis of the variance (ANOVA) and chi-square analyses were used to examine relationships between the marital types and various relationship domains (as measured by PCA scores and one-item variables; for example, Marital Status). Pearson’s correlations were also used to determine if Afrocentric influences were associated with African-American marital types of more satisfied couples.

A hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis was performed on the first half of the sample (n=207). In order to minimize biases inherent in specific cluster analytical methods, several different methods of clustering the data were used. These included the average linkage (within groups), single linkage, centroid, Ward’s, and various density methods. The outputs of two computer programs (SAS and SPSS) were compared to further ensure the stability of the results.

To determine how many natural clusters exist within a given sample, various *stopping* rules have been developed. Unfortunately, all of these methods have been shown to exhibit sample dependent biases that make their generic use problematic. Since the true underlying cluster structure of the present sample was unknown, a strategy seeking the consensus of a variety of methods was adopted.

The consensus suggested that there were probably more than 4 but less than 7 clusters. The SAS Ward’s and Two-Stage suggested five or six clusters; SPSS analyses were less conclusive pointing to four, five, or six clusters. A series of k-means cluster analyses helped determine which of the possible cluster solutions ( $k=4, 5, 6$  and 7 clusters) was most appropriate. Imposition of a minimum cluster membership rule (at least 5% of total sample) eliminated cluster solutions that exhibited clusters of only 2-3 couples. After examining the k-means analyses, two five and six cluster solutions were selected as prime candidates for classifying the sample.

Two additional criteria were used to make the final determination of the optimal number of couple types. The first criteria was a measure of homogeneity developed by

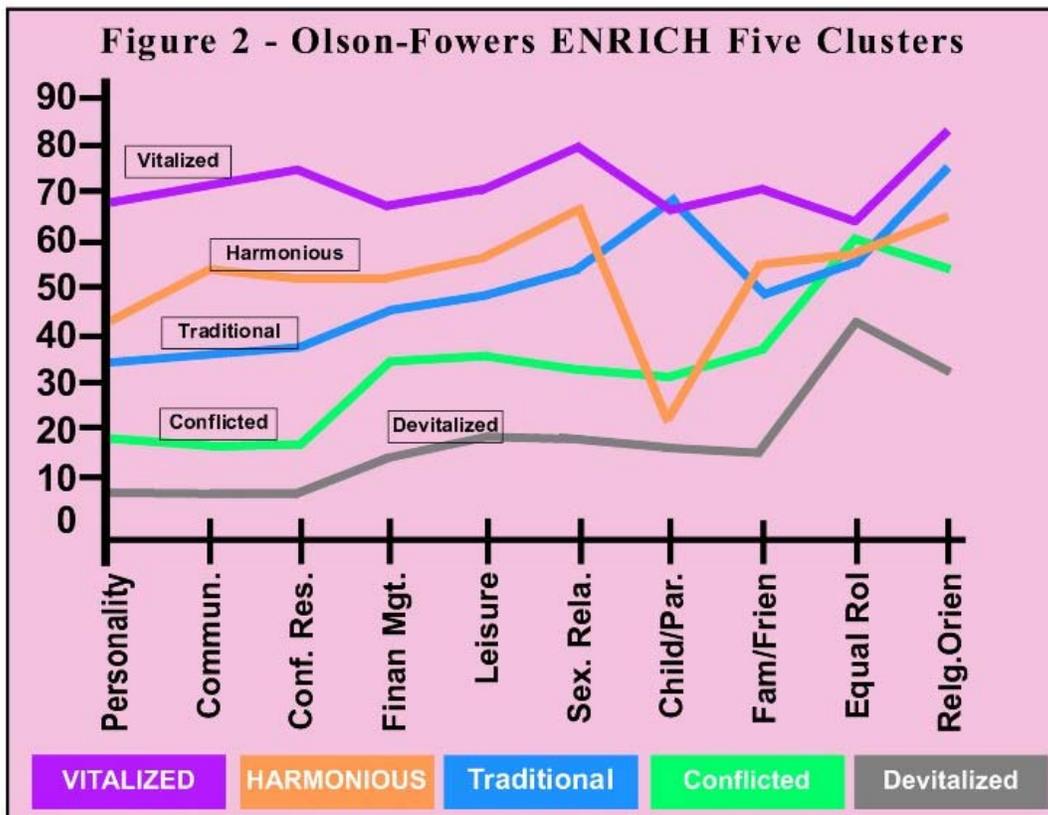
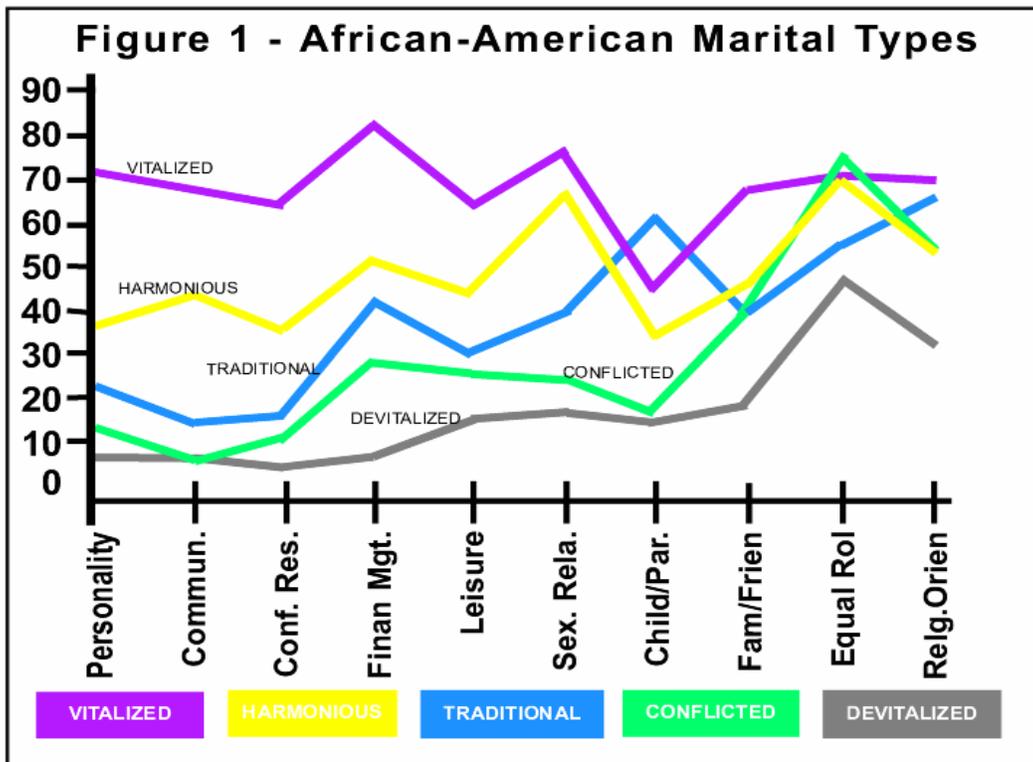
Tryon & Bailey (1970). Their *homogeneity index* ( $h = \sqrt{1 - [\text{Total Variance} / \text{Within Cluster Variance}]}$ ) uses cluster variances to assess the similarity of members *within* clusters. Overall homogeneities for alternative cluster solutions (as indicated by the average of their individual cluster homogeneities) were also compared. The additional cluster in the six-cluster solution was expected to provide greater homogeneity than the five-cluster solution, but this was not the case. Five cluster solutions were as efficient as six cluster solutions in classifying the couples.

The second criteria measured the degree of similarity *between* cluster solutions. The five and six cluster solutions developed in the present study were compared to each other, and to a previously reported five cluster solution by Olson & Fowers (1993). Their study of marital types used the same measurement instrument (ENRICH) and a larger, primarily European-American sample. This referent provided a convenient benchmark for testing the relative strength of the alternative cluster solutions in the present study.

A replication of the typology developed with the first half of the sample (n=207) was then done with the second half of the sample (n=208). Using the same clustering procedures, the analysis of the second half of the sample yielded the same five marital types, including similar percentages of couples in each type. Because of the similarity in the results of the two analyses, in reporting the results of this study, the couples in the second half of the sample were assigned to types based on the typology developed with the first half of the sample.

## RESULTS

Based on the analyses of the 415 couples in this study, there was convincing evidence of five types of African-American marriages. Moreover, these marital types appeared to be related to several measures of marital satisfaction, marital stability, and the consideration of divorce. The relationships were significant for both wives and husbands, and at both the individual and dyadic levels of analysis.



### ***Description of Five Marital Types***

Since the five African-American marital types were similar to the five marital types found by the Olson & Fowers (1993), the earlier study's nomenclature was used in this study. The marital types in descending order of their average PCA profiles are referred to as **Vitalized**, **Harmonious**, **Traditional**, **Conflicted**, and **Devitalized** couples (see Figure 1).

Vitalized couples (n=28 or 6.7%) exhibited the highest mean PCA scores that were generally in a broad range between 60 and 80 (see Table 1). Despite fluctuations within this range, the high scores continued across all relationship domains with one exception, a decline at *Children & Parenting* (to 47). Over ninety percent of Vitalized spouses reported being either Very Satisfied or Extremely Satisfied on the original one-item measure in ENRICH, the highest percentage of any group. Vitalized couples were most likely to have PCA scores in the "Strength Area" (65%) of the Marital Satisfaction scale, and in 21 of these 28 couples (75%), neither partner had ever considered divorce. Vitalized couples were slightly more likely to have reported no children. Both spouses were typically graduate school educated, with no educational level discrepancy. Vitalized wives were slightly more likely to have reported professional positions (than even their husbands), and this was reflected in their higher individual incomes.

Harmonious couples (n=50 or 12.0%), exhibited slightly lower overall scores than the Vitalized type, with peaks and troughs occurring at different points in their profile. PCA scores for most of the first eight domains fell into a broad range between 30 and 50 with one noticeable exception: a peak (68) at *Sexual Relationships*. The scores for *Equalitarian Roles* (69) and *Religious Orientation* (59) were also higher than the baseline. Harmonious couples were least likely to be dissatisfied with their marriages and less than a third of them had ever considered divorce. Harmonious couples were more likely to be childless and less prone to have reported three or more children than most other types. Harmonious husbands were more likely to have graduate educations and their wives were more likely to have college degrees than would be expected by chance. If there were discrepancies, husbands typically reported the higher educational level. Harmonious spouses (particularly wives) more often reported full-time, professional employment.

Traditional couples (n=62 or 14.9%) exhibited a low to high PCA score profile. These included relatively low scores on *Personality Issues*, *Communications*, and *Conflict Resolution* (22, 14, 17), with moderately higher scores on *Financial Management* (41), *Leisure Activities* (30), and *Sexual Relationship* (40). These were followed by a sharp rise to the sample's highest scores for *Children & Parenting* (61). A decline at *Family & Friends* (39) was followed by a rebound on *Equalitarian Roles* (58) and *Religious Orientation* (65). Traditional couples were more often satisfied in their marriages than dissatisfied, although husbands appeared to be slightly *more* satisfied than their wives. Traditional couples were more likely to be in their first marriage than any other type, and least likely to be childless typically reporting two children. Most Traditional spouses reported some college or technical education, were employed in sales, technical, or service occupations.

**Table 1**  
**Mean PCA Statistics for Five Marital Types**

Relationship Domain	Marital Types										
	Vitalized		Harmonious		Traditional		Conflicted		Devitalized		F (p<.001)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Personality Issues	71.1	15.0	37.4	17.1	22.4	15.0	12.6	12.0	7.4	8.9	195.2
Communication	70.4	21.3	42.0	16.0	14.4	12.5	7.1	9.3	4.8	8.4	269.1
Conflict Resolution	62.5	14.6	35.6	16.4	17.3	12.7	10.6	11.1	7.4	9.2	172.3
Financial Management	81.0	15.7	51.0	21.9	41.0	26.2	29.3	21.9	14.2	13.7	94.4
Leisure Activities	65.7	17.9	41.6	17.6	30.0	16.5	26.1	14.5	17.7	12.4	77.8
Sexual Relationship	77.1	16.7	67.6	18.0	40.5	21.2	25.4	19.1	15.7	15.9	134.1
Children & Parenting	47.1	37.8	34.4	29.3	61.5	18.7	18.6	18.9	19.9	17.2	54.8
Family & Friends	70.4	13.5	47.4	18.5	39.4	21.3	40.6	19.6	19.3	15.4	68.7
Equalitarian Roles	72.9	15.1	68.8	17.9	58.4	14.9	77.6	12.7	49.2	15.0	68.7
Religious Orientation	71.8	27.6	59.2	30.8	65.3	22.7	53.2	28.5	34.5	21.6	28.2

**Conflicted** couples (n=111 or 26.7%), reported low PCA scores (below 20) on *Personality Issues*, *Communications*, and *Conflict Resolution*. A moderate rise (to upper 20's) on *Financial Management*, *Leisure Activities*, and *Sexual Relationship*, was followed by a drop on *Children & Parenting* (19). Sharply higher scores for *Families & Friends* (41), were followed by the study's highest score for *Equalitarian Roles* (78), and a moderate *Religious Orientation* (53). Conflicted couples were more likely to report individual and dyadic marital dissatisfaction and were more likely to have considered divorce than most other couple types. More Conflicted couples reported being childless, and fewer reported three or more children than did other types. Conflicted spouses were most likely to have reported graduate educations, with a greater frequency of divergence between the spouse's educational level. (In these discrepancies, more wives reported higher levels than their husbands.) Conflicted couples were also more likely to be working full-time in a professional occupation than spouses in other types.

The largest cluster, **Devitalized** couples (n=164 or 39.5%), exhibited the lowest overall, mean PCA scores, ranging between 8 and 20 on nearly all ten relationship domains (see Figure 1). Only in *Equalitarian Roles* (49) and *Religious Orientation* (35) did their PCA scores rise above their low baseline. Devitalized spouses were much more likely to report marital dissatisfaction and both spouses had typically considered divorce. They also reported larger families (three or more children) more often than other marital

types. Devitalized spouses also reported lower educational levels and less full-time employment or professional occupational status more often than the other marital types.

### ***Marital Satisfaction, Marital Stability, and Marital Types***

Harmonious and Vitalized couples reported high marital satisfaction and high positive couple agreement on most relationship domains (see Tables 1 and 2). These couples were more satisfied than would be expected by chance. They were more likely to have reported that they were “Very Satisfied” in their marriage than other marital types, by a factor of two. They rarely reported having considered divorce. These two marital types were followed closely by Traditional couples, who reported moderate marital satisfaction, infrequent divorce consideration, and consensus on most relationship domains. In contrast, Devitalized and Conflicted couples reported high marital *dissatisfaction* and exhibited low positive couple agreement on most relationship domains. One or both had typically considered divorce, a probable indication of low marital stability.

Strong relationships were found between marital type and marital satisfaction (both individual and dyadic)(see Table 2). The one-item, five-level (Likert type) question on individual satisfaction was reduced to a dichotomous variable reporting either *Satisfaction* or *Dissatisfaction* with the marriage. Chi-square analyses produced significant differences for both wives ( $x^2=118.2$ ,  $p<.00$ ) and husbands ( $x^2=73.7$ ,  $p<.00$ ). Vitalized, Harmonious, and Traditional couples reported *Satisfaction* more often than would be expected by chance, whereas Conflicted and Devitalized couples reported *Satisfaction* less often.

The first of two dyadic measures of marital satisfaction combined the spouses’ individual scores (on the 5-point Likert measure of marital satisfaction) and trichotomized the sum into: *Very Satisfied*, *Mixed Ratings*, and *Dissatisfied*. This split facilitated analysis of the relationship between extreme satisfaction or dissatisfaction and marital type. Chi-square analysis demonstrated significant differences between marital types based on whether couples were *Very Satisfied* or *Dissatisfied* ( $x^2=213.24$ ,  $p<.00$ ). The second dyadic measure condensed the couple’s Marital Satisfaction PCA score from ten levels into four summary categories: *Growth Area*, *Possible Growth*, *Possible Strength*, *Strength Area*. Chi-square analysis verified a strong relationship between this dyadic measure of marital satisfaction and marital type ( $x^2=364.96$ ,  $p<.00$ ).

A strong relationship was also established between the five marital types and marital stability. Responses to the question, “*Have you ever considered divorce?*”, were used to construct dichotomous variables (*Yes* or *No*) for both spouses. Chi-square analysis of these responses produced significant differences for both wives ( $x^2=88.18$ ,  $p<.00$ ) and husbands ( $x^2=65.19$ ,  $p<.00$ ). A majority of the wives (72%) and husbands (63%) in this study indicated they had considered divorce at some point in their marriages. However, Conflicted and Devitalized partners were more likely to have considered divorce while Vitalized and Harmonious partners were more likely to have *never* considered divorce.

**Table 2**

**Summary Statistics on the Five Marital Types (Percentages)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Vitalized</b>	<b>Harmonious</b>	<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Conflicted</b>	<b>Devitalized</b>	<b>Avg.</b>	<b><math>\chi^2(p&lt;.00)</math></b>
<b>Marital Satisfaction</b>							
<i>a) Individual Satisfaction</i>							
As reported by wives	96.4	94.0	62.9	35.1	24.4	46.3	118.2
As reported by husbands	100.0	94.0	80.6	50.5	45.1	61.4	73.7
<i>b) Dyadic Agreement (%)</i>							
Both Dissatisfied	0.0	2.1	16.1	50.5	59.7	39.5	213.2
Both Satisfied	92.6	66.0	35.5	3.8	3.2	22.0	
<i>c) PCA Measure</i>							
Growth Area	0.0	14.0	41.9	80.2	93.3	66.3	364.9
Strength Area	67.9	18.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	7.0	
<b>Divorce Consideration</b>							
Both Partners	10.7	20.0	53.2	65.8	62.8	53.5	118.4
Neither Partner	75.0	50.0	24.2	7.2	7.3	19.5	

A dyadic measure of divorce consideration divided the sample into three groups: *Neither partner had considered divorce* (19%), *One partner had considered divorce (either spouse)* (27%), and *Both partners had considered divorce* (54%). Chi-square analyses revealed significant differences between marital types based on this measure ( $\chi^2=118.43$ ,  $p<.00$ ). In Conflicted and Devitalized couples, it was more likely that *both partners had considered divorce*, whereas in Vitalized and Harmonious couples, it was more likely that *neither partner had considered divorce*.

***Background Characteristics and Marital Types***

Relationships between the five marital types and most of the other demographic and relational measures were less convincing than those mentioned above. Marital Status proved to be a relatively weak predictor of marital type ( $\chi^2=6.5$ ,  $p=.16$  for wives;  $\chi^2=4.1$ ,  $P=.39$  for husbands). The number of children reported by spouses proved significant for wives in Devitalized and Harmonious couples, and for husbands in Devitalized and Conflicted couples. In both of these cases, the Devitalized partners reported having more children. Chi-square analysis of a dyadic estimate of the couple's number of children also indicated that Devitalized couples were more likely to have reported three or more children.

There were also moderate relationships between education level and marital type ( $\chi^2=19.8$ ,  $p=.01$  for wives;  $\chi^2=16.1$ ,  $p=.04$  for husbands). Chi-square analysis of a variable measuring divergence in couples' educational attainment revealed small differences ( $\chi^2=23.6$ ,  $p=.10$ ). Fewer Devitalized wives were more educated than their husbands, while more Conflicted and (to a lesser extent) Traditional wives were more

educated than their spouses.

Unlike previous marital studies, the marital types in this study did not prove to be significantly related to either spouse's age. Similarly, neither the number of years a couple had been married nor the length of time they reported having known each other prior to marriage distinguished one type from another. Chi-square analyses of two variables measuring the couples' involvement in the world of work proved difficult due to numerous cells with less than five occurrences. Recoding the variables produced only moderately significant differences between marital types. Similarly, differences in types based on individual income were only moderately significant, regardless of how the data were summarized.

### ***Comparison with Previous Studies***

The five African-American marital types developed in this study were very similar to five types reported by Olson & Fowers (1993). This is true even though the present study followed a slightly different cluster analytical procedure due to its use of a smaller sample, and though ENRICH (the assessment tool used to develop the marital typology in this study) was developed using a predominantly European-American sample. The marital cohorts for the two studies were approximately a decade apart, and thus may have experienced their marital relationships differently. Also, the percentage of African-American couples was 100% in the present study compared to only 2% in Olson & Fowers. Still, couples in both studies demonstrated patterns of low scores in similar relationship domains. Also, the percentages of couples in each type were similar in both Olson & Fowers (1993) and the present study. Thus, the congruence between these two marital typologies should promote confidence in the five cluster solution.

**Table 3**  
**Comparison of Two Marital Typologies:**  
**Current Study versus Olson & Fowers, 1993**

<b>Marital Type</b>	<b>Current study (n=415)</b>	<b>Olson &amp; Fowers (n=6,508)</b>
<b>Vitalized</b>	<b>6.7%</b>	<b>12.3%</b>
<b>Harmonious</b>	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>
<b>Traditional</b>	<b>14.9%</b>	<b>16.3%</b>
<b>Conflicted</b>	<b>26.7%</b>	<b>25.4%</b>
<b>Devitalized</b>	<b>39.5%</b>	<b>34.9%</b>

## DISCUSSION

Profiles of PCA scores for the five African-American types found in this study looked strikingly similar to those in the Olson & Fowers study, but there were some differences. Among these, this study's mean PCA scores on the first three relationship domains (*Personality Issues*, *Communications*, and *Conflict Management*), were lower than those reported in Olson & Fowers. The declines at *Children & Parenting* for the African-American Vitalized and Harmonious couples, and the peak at *Equalitarian Roles* for African-American Conflicted couples were also more pronounced. The numerical distribution of couples across the five types also differed between studies. There were similar percentages of Devitalized (39.5% versus 36%) and Conflicted (26.7% vs. 25%) couples in the present study, but fewer Vitalized couples (6.7% vs. 12%).

Lavee & Olson (1993) used different couple scoring and cluster analytical procedures to develop seven marital types. Despite these differences, five of their types were similar to those found in the present study and were similarly labeled. There were several other interesting similarities. In both studies, the largest groups were the Devitalized couples (40.5% in Lavee & Olson and 39.5% in this study). This type also exhibited the lowest overall PCA scores. This might be expected as both studies were based on samples that included large numbers of couples in marital therapy. The second largest group in the present study were the Conflicted couples (26.7%), who exhibited the second lowest overall scores. The second largest group in Lavee & Olson, Conflicted couples (13.7%), had the third to lowest overall scores.

At the high end of both typologies, the Vitalized groups exhibited the highest overall scores. Their profiles were somewhat different due to the inclusion of *Equalitarian Roles* in the present study, peaks (instead of troughs) at *Financial Management* and *Sexual Relationships*, and a slightly higher baseline. The Vitalized group in Lavee & Olson was somewhat larger than the Vitalized group in the present study (9.0% versus 6.7%). Traditional and Harmonious groups in both studies appeared similar, although given the differences in methodology it was difficult to draw direct comparisons. The two additional marital types identified by Lavee & Olson (*Financially-Focused* and *Balanced*) did not appear related to any types found in the present study.

### *Clinical Impressions*

As others have previously noted, types are of little use unless they offer practitioners some clinical utility. The present study supported several of the findings reported in recent studies on marital typologies. One of these was the link between marital types and the level of marital satisfaction (or *dissatisfaction*) within the types. Other relationship issues such as financial problems or parenting concerns, though important, were less indicative of overall marital satisfaction. They were also less predictive of a specific couple's marital type.

Spousal consideration of divorce was another factor found to be significantly related to marital type. Partners in dissatisfied couples had typically considered divorce, while those in satisfied couples had not. Partners who were very dissatisfied with their marriage were likely considering divorce, even if they had not expressed this to their spouses. Helping these couples to build more effective communication skills might

facilitate their ability to monitor and discuss the health of their relationships. It might also promote their faith in the relationship's ability to withstand conflict without resorting to separation or divorce.

In this study, couples in marital types with low PCA scores on *Personality Issues*, *Communications* and *Conflict Resolution* experienced lower marital satisfaction than couples in marital types that had higher scores on these three crucial domains. There are several possible explanations for this effect. Dissatisfaction with a partner's personality might inhibit one's willingness to be vulnerable, which in turn could lead to a mutually perceived diminution of intimacy. Coaching couples how to respectfully express their concerns about personality issues would be a useful approach for enhancing intimacy in such situations. The efficacy of effective communication and conflict resolution skills within marriage has been extensively researched. In this study, the stratification of marital types according to level of marital satisfaction appeared to confirm the deficit placed on couples who had personality conflicts, who communicated poorly, and who felt unable to effectively resolve their conflicts.

The wide disparity on *Family and Friends* PCA scores between Vitalized and Devitalized couples suggested that though extended family and fictive kin might have been resources for satisfied African-American couples, they may have been liabilities for the dissatisfied couples. It was not apparent whether high PCA scores on *Family and Friends* were the cause or the effect of the couple's level of marital satisfaction. Without such evidence, it is particularly important that clinicians understand the couple's social network. Determining which of the couple's friends and relations have power to affect the relationship, and who might promote (or hinder) the couple's marital satisfaction should be an important prerequisite to formulating effective interventions.

Based on analysis of the correlation matrix of all relationship domains, agreement on *Equalitarian Roles* (whether positively or negatively correlated) was not enough to outweigh more basic interpersonal differences such as personality conflicts. This might partially explain the apparent contradiction between expressions of preferences for egalitarianism, and the prevalence of consideration of divorce among many of the African-American couples expressing low marital satisfaction. Consensus on power-sharing and family responsibilities may not have been powerful enough to counterbalance marital dissatisfaction resulting from personality conflicts, poor communications and conflict management skills.

Spirituality appeared to be relatively important to all the couples in this study, based on the relatively high mean PCA scores of all five types on *Religious Orientation*. Consensus about the role of spirituality in these African-American couples was higher for satisfied couples. This supported the hypothesis that a shared sense of spirituality was an important marital resource. Assessing a couple's religious orientation may be even more important when working with African-American couples, given the significance of spirituality within the African-American community. Therapists that assume that spiritual matters are "too personal" or peripheral to bring into therapy may be missing potentially powerful motivations for African-American couples seeking to improve their relationships.

Except for Traditional couples, the partners in this study reported lower PCA scores on *Children & Parenting* than with other areas of their relationships. This was

surprising given the traditional value placed on children and child-rearing within the African-American community. However, many of the couples in this sample were dual-wage earners and (given the high incomes reported) probably in very demanding occupations. These workplace stressors may have combined with stresses typically associated with parenting to produce lower marital satisfaction. Clinicians seeking to help such couples negotiate mutually supportive roles should help these couples address the high stress levels inherent in balancing demanding work and household domains.

The *total* number of children a couple was responsible for (both inside and outside the marital household) was significantly related to marital types. The number of children individually reported by spouses was a significant determinant of marital type for some couples (for example, Devitalized). Devitalized couples seemed particularly likely to have reported three or more children. Given the societal increase in blended families and non-marital childbearing, awareness of a couples' *total parental responsibility* may be as crucial a therapeutic issue as building parental consensus on how the children should be parented.

### ***Areas for Future Research***

Although Conflicted and Devitalized couples appear to dominate this African-American sample, it is important to consider several separate but related factors. Since the sample is largely made up of couples seeking marital therapy or marital enrichment, it should not be surprising to find a majority of these couples expressed dissatisfaction with their current relationships. This group of the African-American couples in the study may not accurately reflect the universe of African-American couples in other significant ways. For example, the couples in this study were more highly educated and affluent than married couples in the general population. Although there is a need for research on middle- and upper income African-Americans, the socioeconomic profile of this sample may limit our ability to generalize the results of this study to all African-American marriages. Our findings might have been different if the participants had been randomly recruited from shopping malls, union meetings, hair care salons, and street corners.

The results of this study of African-American marital types suggest several potential avenues for further research. As this may be one of the first attempts at systematically developing African-American marital types, it would be prudent to continue to build on previous typology research as well as the growing literature on African-American marital and family relationships. There is a continuing need for studies with larger African-American samples. More frequent use of random, non-clinical samples would enhance confidence that results of such research could be applied more widely to clinical and non-clinical couples. It is also important that future research reflects the underlying diversity within the African-American community. This is especially true for marriages, where there are relatively few studies using middle-income, middle-class samples. More of these studies should also be conducted at the dyadic (rather than individual) level of analysis, to obtain a more comprehensive picture of marital relationships.

There is a void in the clinical literature regarding successful uses of marital typologies, particularly with African-American couples. Perhaps this and subsequent studies will facilitate more discussion of how marital typologies can enhance practitioners' therapeutic interventions. Such discussion should include findings from

marital typologies derived from samples other than solely or predominantly composed of European-Americans. Backed by more studies that specifically focus on African-American marriages, researchers will be in a much better position to make cross-ethnic comparisons.

The authors believe that exclusive focus on either the common characteristics across all marriages (regardless of ethnicity), or the unique ethnic characteristics of African-Americans may obscure the shared marital characteristics that should emerge from analysis of marital type development using inventories such as ENRICH. Future marital typologies should also include both ethnically homogamous and heterogamous marriages. These will prove clinically useful in an increasingly diverse society. Even if such studies do not yield striking ethnic differences, the analyses can provide a more solid justification for wider use of marital assessment tools such as ENRICH.

Finally, research on African-American couples that explores how satisfied couples leverage their relationship strengths to address relationship weaknesses would help those working to improve the lives of such couples. The results of such research will also promote a better understanding of the contexts in which African-American couples live and love, together.

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