The Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships (JBSR) is a refereed, interdisciplinary, scholarly inquiry devoted to addressing the epistemological, ontological, and social construction of sexual expression and relationships of persons within the African diaspora. The journal will be used as a medium to capture the functionality and dysfunctionality of individuals, couples, and families as well as the efficacy in which relationships are negotiated. The journal seeks to take into account the transhistorical substrates that subsume behavioral, affective, and cognitive functioning of persons of African descent as well as those who educate or clinically serve this important population. For additional information about the JBSR, you can visit TheJBSR.com, follow us on twitter @TheJBSR, like our Facebook page, or review current JBSR trends on LinkedIn.

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Editor’s Note

“We have a lot of work to do . . .”: The Emergence of
The Association of Black Sexologists and Clinicians

I pondered for some time about what this editorial note would be about now that the Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships launched this past October, 2014. In the first issue, I discussed how the Journal is finally here and how it emerged out of a necessity for scholars and clinicians to engage in ongoing dialogue about sexuality and relationship issues that have transhistorically woven themselves into the experiences of persons of African descent. When I wrote my last Editorial Note, I must confess that I did not imagine how much work we would collectively need to do in order to frame/reframe academic and lay discourse around sensitive issues (I say this after taking a deep breath while I write). There were several events that happened across the country that merit formal conversation between us and the communities we serve. Given that, at the conclusion of this article, I will offer a rationale for the development of an organization that specifically advocates for healthy sexuality expression and relational experiences of persons of color through scholarship and informed practices. I believe it to be necessary that our discussions and movements be intentional as we try to critically evaluate circumstances that are sensitive and have always been a part of the collective social fabric and consciousness.

For the past few months, the media and other social entities strategically used Black families, Black relationships, and Black sexuality as a means to uplift and empower . . . create additional chaos, toxicity, and stereotypes over dysfunctional patterns that exist in all races/ethnicities. I satirically use the strike through feature because there was minimal national dialogue about how to strengthen and improve all families who experience injustice, survive in abusive relationships, or engage in developmentally appropriate parenting. Conversations between viewers/listeners and “expert” panels in mainstream media outlets continuously pathologize Black males and fe-
males, Black relationships, and the social response of the Black community. Please keep in mind that the social pathology is meticulously sculpted by tools of privilege (McIntosh, 1988; Pulido, 2000), ignorance, tokenism (Dawson, 2014; Laws, 1975; Linkov, 2014; Roper, 2011; Wright, 2001), and systemic oppression (Applebaum, 2005; Feagin, 2013). These tools are fashioned by stereotypes and assumptions that seem to minimize, negate, and/or ridicule individual functioning and governance. As scholars, clinicians, and leaders it would be up to us to offer divergent viewpoints. It is also our responsibility to offer our expert perspective about potential familial and systemic shifts in society that may increase the likelihood of healthier decisions and functioning.

Police brutality/homicide, intimate partner violence, and variations in disciplining children were opined about on all major television channels and serve as conversation points in college classrooms, corporate break rooms, coffee shops, social media, and in our homes. Using the series of unfortunate events that happened in Ferguson, Missouri, the national spotlight on domestic violence among professional athletes, and the punitive disciplinary strategies of some families, here are a few assumptions that could be garnered over the past few months of 2014:

1. Some Black males will follow/not follow directions when detained by law enforcement and it is legally okay to use excessive forms of coercion (e.g., use of a Taser, gun, baton, tear gas, etc.) to subdue the individual. Families and communities will have minimal or no means of recourse. If they respond, it should be voting at the next election (which may be several months away).

2. It is okay for law enforcement officials to use excessive amounts of force (e.g., tear gas) when trying to control crowds who demonstrate peacefully.

3. Some people enjoy privileges and special treatment even when they have broken the law or done harm to another individual. Society is willing to look the other way or sweep despicable acts under the rug . . . as long as there is no video proof of what really happened.

4. It is okay for some Black men to be violent towards Black women as long as it is not caught on camera.

5. A strong Black woman should stand by her man even if her personal safety is compromised.
6. Black males have a difficult time governing their emotions appropriately and are verbally and physically reactive when confronted or challenged by their partners (or anyone else) (refer to item 1).

7. When a man becomes a father, it means that he knows how to be a father and has a sound understanding of developmentally appropriate discipline.

8. Only Black heterosexual relationships involve intimate partner violence.

9. Black children should not have a voice or have any decision-making capabilities because they never really know what they are talking about.

10. Black couples and families never need help from mental health professionals.

11. Only Black families use corporal punishment towards their children.

12. Media personalities, professional athletes, and talk show hosts have academic and professional backgrounds in mental health and can provide direction to society about familial and relational challenges.

13. When in doubt, it is okay to blame politicians, professional sports administrators, and society for our familial social challenges and shortcomings.

14. Professional athletes who are in dysfunctional relationships should apologize to the general public by means of a press conference when they are wrong.

15. Professional athletes should be socially and emotionally mature and make good decisions when they are in their early to mid twenties.

These assumptions and others keep our country socially and emotionally paralyzed because they do not enable constructive dialogue to occur between partners, parents, organizations, and institutions. One of the aims of my colleagues and I who put together the *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships* is to challenge these assumptions and engage in collective activism about the aforementioned sensitive topics. Keep in mind though, that culturally and racially sensitive conversations must be specific, intentional, and tailored to persons of African descent. If discourse becomes anything
other than addressing the specific needs of Black folks, then there exists the possibility that ideas and belief systems may become confounded. Please understand that I am not trying to create a monolith of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors regarding the expression of Black people. Actually, I am suggesting that the conversational efforts be more relativistic, fluid, and socially constructed to each participant who is active in the social exchange (Irvine, 1995). I am also advocating that there should be institutions and organizations that cater to facilitating both formal and informal discussions between scholars, clinicians, and educators with the lay community.

There are a number of professional sexuality and clinical mental health organizations that invite ongoing dialogue between its members and the lay community. Some of them even have credentialing processes that certify that some members are more capable than others at executing a particular clinical, counseling, or educational related task. From a transhistoric and evolutionary standpoint, these organizations emerged out of a need for scientists, scholars, practitioners, and other professionals to come together and exchange research and best practices in the field of sexology. The “need” emerged from a lack of understanding about human development and individual physiological response; inhumane and discriminative treatment of women, persons with mental health challenges, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered communities; and an effort to advance contraceptive technology.

One organization, the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality (ssss) was “founded in 1957 to encourage the rigorous systematic study of sexuality.” According to the ssss website (2014), there are over 700 individuals who are members in this society. The mission statement reads:

The Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality (ssss) is dedicated to advancing knowledge of sexuality and communicating scientifically-based sexuality research and scholarship to professionals, policy makers, and the general public. ssss fosters a worldwide community of diverse professionals committed to a scholarly and scientific approach to acquiring and disseminating accurate knowledge of sexuality. As a Society, we believe that freedom of inquiry is essential for the promotion of human welfare and the reduction of ignorance and prejudice about sexuality.

ssss has been a pillar in the field of sex research and training “the new generation” of sexologists. The promotion of freedom of inquiry and rigorous research are strong maxims offered by the organization. The organiza-
tion offers *The Journal of Sex Research* which invites scholars to submit articles of contemporary sexual inquiry.

Another organization, the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT) was founded by Patricia Schiller in 1967. The following passage is taken from the AA SECT website (2014):

The story of the founding, and growth of AA SECT (American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists) is inextricably mingled with the story of Patricia Schiller, its founder, along with other important contributors. As the new field of sex education, counseling and therapy began to emerge, and the need for some kind of order and direction became more and more apparent, Patricia Schiller was on the spot, with a wide background in social concerns, with the specialized training that qualified her as a professional and leader of professionals, in this field, and with the administrative experience, drive, and creative talent needed for undertaking the job at hand.

In September 1967, Patricia Schiller became the unpaid Found-Executive Director of the American Association of Sex Educators and Counselors (AASEC), eventually to become the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT). With the full support of her husband, she devoted three rooms in their house to office space for the fledgling organization, and loaned it $1,000 from their personal funds to make it operational. A gift of $500 from Philip Stern, a Washington philanthropist, paid for a mailing announcing the first annual meeting in April 1968. Closely associated with her from the days of the Washington Project in the District of Columbia, was Rosalie Blasky, her good friend who came with AA SEC on a part-time basis at its inception, and who remained as her part-time aide until April 1980. Two additional factors helped launch the new organization. One was a strong Board of Directors, with Warren Johnson, Ed.D., as its first president. Other members included Jed Pearson MD, obstetrician and gynecologist; Berkley Hathorne, ThD, pastoral counselor; Susan Roth, MSW; Nancy Berliner BA, researcher and writer for Planned Parenthood; John Chandler MA, Executive Vice President of the National Association of Independent Schools; Elizabeth Nichols BA; Majorie Shumacher MS, Executive Directors of Planned Parenthood; and Florence Yohalem MA, social scientist. Morton Yohalem served as legal counsel from the beginning until his death in October, 1979. Thus, was born an interdisciplinary group dedicated to a worthy cause.
Like SSSS, AASECT was formed to promote healthy sexuality and provide a professional outlet for educators, counselors, and therapists to become leaders in the field of human sexuality. Scholar practitioners from around the world are members within both of these organizations.

Another organization, the Society for Sex Therapy and Research (SSTAR), was founded the following decade in 1975. Similar to SSSS and AASECT, it is an organization devoted to growing and refining the field of human sexuality by galvanizing its professionals. SSSS arose for sexuality research, AASECT was developed for improving sexuality education, counseling and therapy, and SSTAR emerged out of the need to:

. . . facilitate communication among clinicians who treat problems of sexual function, sexual identity, and reproductive life. SSTAR strives to provide a forum for exchange of ideas between those interested in research in human sexuality and those whose primary activities are patient care through annual meetings, fall clinical conferences, membership newsletters, and an e-mail list-serv for members. SSTAR membership is multidisciplinary. Members must be actively involved in treatment or research of sexual disorders/sexuality and possess superior clinical competence and high ethical standards (2014).

Like the other two organizations, SSTAR serves the field of human sexuality by offering scholarship and clinical opportunities to its membership and the community.

While these three organizations (SSSS, AASECT, SSTAR) help advance the field of human sexuality, they may not have adequately addressed the needs of some targeted populations (e.g., persons of African descent). To illustrate this point, none of them have a history of electing leadership who are persons of African ancestry. Moreover, none of them have offered public position statements that address contemporary issues of intersectionality that have affected our country over the past year (e.g., events in Ferguson, Missouri; intimate partner violence among Black couples; the use of corporal punishment by Black parents; sexual decision making of Black adolescents and young adults; high level of violent Black crime among some Black men in Chicago, Illinois; high levels of incarceration of Black men; disproportionate HIV infection rates of Black women; etc.). Thus, it seems necessary that an organization be formed that specifically targets the socio-systemic and individual needs of persons of African descent.

A group of professionals have had ongoing conversation over the past
year about developing a journal and organization that intentionally address the confluence of race, sexuality, and mental health needs through research. The Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships (JBSR) was recently published in Summer/Fall, 2014 to serve as a medium in which inquiry and scholarship could help advance information about the experiences of persons of African ancestry. In the same vein, members of the JBSR editorial board voted on an organizational name, The Association of Black Sexologists and Clinicians in order to organize, share, collaborate, and network with professionals who have a research and/or clinical interest in the sexual expression and mental health issues of Black people. The organization specifically targets the sophistication, complexities, and layers that exist when discussing sensitive issues about the intersection of race, sexuality, and gender. There are other organizations that aim at the psychological functioning (American Association of Black Psychologists), social work care (National Association of Black Social Workers), and scholarship (National Association of African American Studies) targeted at the history and experiences of Black people. While these organizations have served our communities for decades, none of them have consistently addressed sexuality functioning of persons of African ancestry.

My colleagues and I are proud to welcome you into our professional family and into the Association of Black Sexologists and Clinicians (ABSC). The ABSC is an interdisciplinary professional organization dedicated to improving the sexual expression and lives of persons of African descent. The organization was formed out of a need to formally address the juncture of race and sexuality through research, clinical practice, and social discourse. The organization is comprised of sociologists, social workers, psychologists, professional counselors, mental health practitioners and coaches, clergy members, marriage and family counselors and therapists, family planning specialists and researchers, as well as students in various relevant professional disciplines.

The mission reads:

The Association of Black Sexologists and Clinicians promotes the sexual health of individuals, couples, families, and communities by advocating for culturally sensitive research, informed clinical practice, and culturally sensitive educational curricula. The organization seeks to foster ongoing dialogue in an effort to reduce and or prevent adverse sexual health outcomes. As a welcoming and affirming organization, we advocate for sexual, racial, and gender equality.
The organizational vision asserts:

The Association of Black Sexologists and Clinicians will change or enhance the way you think about intersectionality. In addition, we strive to offer research, clinical, and educational opportunities that revolve around sexuality and race. We seek to empower our community by engaging, informing, dialoguing, learning and collaborating about sexual health issues.

It should be noted that there are other organizations that have sprouted that target the healthy sexual expression of persons of color including (but not limited to): The Society of Black Scholars in Human Sexuality; LGBTQ Scholars of Color Network; and the Women of Color Sexual Health Network. What’s exciting about these organizations, as well as the Association of Black Sexologists and Clinicians, is that all of them seek to provide scholarship, education, and informed clinical mental health practices towards populations that have been misrepresented, underserved, and/or marginalized.

We hope that you share your research, clinical best practices, conceptual essays, book reviews, and letters to the editor with our community through the Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships. Troubling and challenging events across the country and the globe will continue to occur. The ABSC and this journal will strive to remain sensitive to the social and sexual health needs and expression of persons of African origin as well as advocate for equality across the lines of racial, gender, and sexual orientation.

In this issue of the Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships, Dr. JaNelle Ricks of Emory University and her colleagues, qualitatively explore condom use and negotiation and the impact of several factors (social, economic, and political context). Their manuscript, “‘I Don’t Have a Problem With It, But Other Guys Do’: An Exploration of Condom Negotiation among Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men in the South,” is profound as it discusses the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and its influence on sexual decision making. The authors are able to uncover some of the attitudes and intentions of condom use among Black men who have sex with men.

Similarly, the next article, “In the Context of Concurrency and Monogamy: Ideal Partner Matching in Predicting Coital Behaviors among African American Adolescents,” by Dr. Candace Best and her colleagues, examines the connection between coital frequency, condom use, and partner matching. The authors were able to gather compelling data from 268 African American young women and 173 African American young men.
The following article, “Sex as a Concealed Weapon: Race, Gender and Incivility of Office Politics” also examines men’s attitudes about sexuality. Dr. Leah Hollis surveyed 141 employed, Black men and asked about their use of flirtation as a work advancement strategy. She offers insight into some of the historical, economic, and sociological substrates that may underpin flirtatious behavior in the workplace by some Black men.

Within a similar light, Dr. Dianne Brown of Widener University offers us, “Grounded Theory: Exploring Sexual Attitudes and Beliefs Influencing Black Fathers’ Decisions Not to Marry.” What is intriguing about this qualitative inquiry is that she uses focus groups to capture some Black fathers’ decisions to marry or not marry the mothers of their children. Her research gives voice to this phenomenon and she offers several recommendations for the field.

Finally, a new component has been added to the JBSR. It is a “Perspectives” section. This portion of the Journal is devoted to members of the JBSR Editorial Board who choose a topic and engage a mentee for writing. It is important that we offer an opportunity to the next generation of scholars to publish their perspectives about how the field has shifted over time as well as offer their insight on current issues. Dr. Bridgette Peteet, of the University of Cincinnati, and mentees Caravella McQuistian and Quiera Lige present their perspective about Black online dating. “Something New: A Scholarly Review and Clinical Perspective of Black Online Dating” explores some of the parameters, nuances, and barriers to internet courtship processes.

We are looking forward to hearing from you and welcome your feedback. Finally, we would like to extend an invitation to you to come to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on October 1–3, 2015 to share your research and/or clinical best practices with our community. The Black Families, Black Relationships, Black Sexuality Conference will host scholars and clinicians from around the world who will continue to shape the field of sexology and sexuality consultation. I hope that you will join us and celebrate the work that you have already done or currently do. More information is available at theabsc.com and at thejbsr.com.

HAPPY NEW YEAR AND BEST WISHES!!!

REFERENCES


“I Don’t Have a Problem With It, But Other Guys Do”
An Exploration of Condom Negotiation among Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men in the South

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ABSTRACT—Condom negotiation among young Black men who have sex with men in the Southern United States was explored using the theory of reasoned action. Fifty-four (18- to 29-year-old) males participated in nine focus group interviews. Discussions elicited condom use and negotiation attitudes, beliefs and social norms. Positive personal attitudes (respect of self, personal health concerns) and high negotiation self-efficacy was emphasized. Conversely, social norms revealed non-prioritized condom use behavior. Divergence between individual and community indicates theoretical models targeting sexual communication must address external factors (social, economic, political context), which intersects with individual intentions, attitudes to influence HIV prevalence in this community.

KEY WORDS—Blacks; young men; condom use; communication; high-risk sex; HIV/AIDS; theory

CONTACT—Correspondence for this article should be addressed to JaNelle M. Ricks, DrPH, Emory University Rollins School of Public Health, Department of Behavioral Sciences and Health Education, 1518 Clifton Road Northeast, Room 426, Atlanta GA 30322, 404-727-8673, janelle.ricks@emory.edu.
Introduction

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that Blacks Americans bear the greatest burden of HIV in the United States. Nationally, Blacks account for 44 percent of all new HIV infections in 2009, although they constitute only 14 percent of the U.S. population (CDC, 2014). By race and risk group, young Black men who have sex with men was the only population in the United States to experience a statistically significant increase in new HIV infections between 2006 and 2009 (CDC, 2012). Results of a six-city survey of MSM aged 15–29 years showed that 91 percent of young Black MSM were unaware of their HIV infection status, compared with 68 percent of Hispanics and 60 percent of whites (CDC, 2008).

The dramatic increase in HIV incidence observed among young Black MSM is likely fueled by many factors including very high background incidence and prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in this population indicating the necessity for developing a targeted intervention to reduce HIV/STI risk. Although biomedical innovations are gaining efficacy in the United States, condom use remains as the frontline defense against the HIV/AIDS pandemic and has the potential of reducing the transmission and acquisition of other STIs (Crosby, 2013). Communication about condoms is an important precursor to use (Bowleg, Valera, Teti, & Tschann, 2010; Diclemente, 1991; Noar, Morokoff, & Redding, 2001). A meta-analysis found partner communication about condom use to be the strongest correlate of subsequent use when compared with other intrapersonal factors (e.g., attitudes toward condoms, barriers to use) (Noar et al., 2006). This suggests promise in tailoring behavioral HIV risk-reduction interventions designed to improve communication about condom use to high-risk groups such as young Black MSM.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)
The theory of reasoned action (TRA) has proven useful in predicting individual intention to use and negotiate use of condoms (Albarracín et al., 2001; Bennett & Bozionelos, 2000; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TRA holds that an individual’s intention to perform a behavior (e.g., negotiate condom use) is the best predictor of subsequent behavior. Intention can be assessed in terms of attitudes toward the behavior and perceived social norms about performing the behavior. In 2000, Fishbein included the construct of self-
efficacy as an additional predictor of intention in a model specific to behaviors relevant to STI and HIV prevention (Fishbein & Pequegnat, 2000).

In the current study, we explored condom use and negotiation among young Black MSM through use of the TRA. Previous studies demonstrated that individual condom acceptability issues may interfere with a desire to practice safer sex (Harawa, Williams, Ramamurthi, & Bingham, 2006). Peer support for condom use decreases the likelihood of HIV sexual risk behavior among Black MSM, and significantly lower perceived condom use approval in social and sexual networks is evident (Bakeman & Peterson, 2007; Jones et al., 2008; Peterson, Rothenberg, Kraft, Beeker, & Trotter, 2009). Low condom use self-efficacy (i.e., high likelihood of giving in to partner’s desire for unprotected sex) is associated with HIV infection in this population. To our knowledge, no studies have applied a theoretical framework to examine personal attitudes, self-efficacy, and social norms in tandem.

Methods
Young men presenting for STI/HIV screening or treatment to an urban public-funded STI clinic in Mississippi were screened for eligibility by clinic staff after receiving clinical care and were invited to participate. Participants were also recruited from a local community-based LGBT outreach organization during sponsored programs and events. Young men were eligible to participate if they 1) were 18–29 years old; 2) self-identified as Black/African-American; 3) reported penile-anal sex with a male partner in the past three months. Following informed consent procedures, nine focus group discussions were conducted with young Black MSM (N = 54) between November 7 and 9, 2011.

The focus group discussion guide is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Focus Group Interview Guide, African-American MSM aged 18–29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 1</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do you interpret being asked to use a condom/what does it mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are your “rules” about condom use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have you ever thought about using the female condom for anal sex?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. How confident do you feel in your ability to apply condoms correctly? What are some of the mistakes you have made in the past few months?

5. If you were given a variety of condoms and lubricants to try at home (with or without a partner) and asked to provide feedback, would you be willing to do that?

6. What do you need to practice safer sex?

7. Do you feel comfortable asking your partner to use a condom? Confident?

8. What would help you intensify an orgasm while using condoms?

9. How would you handle the following situations . . .
   a. Your partner is STI positive.
   b. Your partner is HIV positive.
   c. You are unsure of your partner’s STI status.
   d. You are unsure of your partner’s HIV status.

10. Do you feel that homophobia ever interferes with you having safer sex? Please elaborate in detail.

11. Some MSM say that condom use is a way to express “self-love.” Please describe how you feel about this statement.

12. How important is an orgasm in the sexual experience with other men?

Part 2

13. What are the “rules” about condom use among MSM in Jackson?

14. Do MSM in Jackson use condoms for oral sex? Why or why not? If so, do they use flavored condoms for oral sex?

15. Where do the majority of young (under 30) MSM in Jackson find potential partners (e.g., clubs, Internet, etc.)? Where do they have sex?

16. Do men in Jackson discuss STI/HIV status prior to the initial sex act? If so, under what circumstances do these discussions occur and how do these differ based on local status (e.g., gay family member, late, trans, trade, bougie, etc.)?

17. Do young (under 30) MSM in Jackson frequently skip condom use for anal sex to “prove love”?
Part 3

18. Do you ever attempt to determine if someone is HIV positive just by looking at them? What do you look for?

Part 4

19. What type/brand of condoms do men in Jackson prefer?

20. What type/brand of water-based lubricant do men in Jackson prefer?

21. For research study educating MSM about the importance of correct and consistent condom use/STI risks, please provide a description of what the ideal “health educator” would look like (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, gender, etc.)?

22. What is your preferred method of contact (e.g., email, text, etc.)?

23. Where do you get condoms? Do you have a variety? Are condoms expensive in your area?

24. Would you feel comfortable having your STI test results delivered via text message (e.g., 0 = everything is fine; 1 = call the clinic)?

Discussions were facilitated in a quiet private room within the clinic to ensure participants’ privacy and confidentiality. Groups ranged in size from 4 to 12 participants per session. The duration of each discussion lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. Focus group discussions were moderated by one or two moderators who were assisted by a note-taker with experience in focus group discussion settings.

Data Analysis

After transcription, the data were imported into NVivo 9 software for coding and categorizing (NVivo, 2010). After several line-by-line readings, key categories and themes from the participants’ narratives were developed. The codes were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992). Coding was performed by two coders and was assessed for consistency and inter-coder reliability. The calculated inter-rater agreement was in the 90th percentile range. Finally, after initial coding was completed, constructs from the TRA model were then used to thematically analyze responses. The data were interpreted within the TRA model framework and NVivo quotations were selected to illustrate particularly vivid examples of emergent themes throughout the subsequent discussion of the resulting data. This
protocol was revised and approved by the University of Kentucky Institutional Review Board.

Results

Attitudes

Of the three predictors of intention, attitude was most often expressed in positive terms. To these young men, being asked to use a condom indicated prioritization of partner and personal health. For example, when asked about his reaction if he were to be asked to use a condom by a male partner, one young man said:

I look at it as a positive thing because they looking out for the both of us. They want to make sure that we stay protected, make sure we stay healthy and I feel like that's a good thing if somebody asks.

Initiating a discussion about condom use seemed to indicate attainment of a certain level of sexual education (“or they [at least] know a lot about different STIs and HIV”), according to another young man. Almost every person also associated an ethic of respect with condom use negotiation. According to one young man:

When asked the question [about using a condom], that makes me feel that they have a sense of self-respect for themselves. Meaning they don’t lower themselves and just do whatever with whomever. That makes me know that they are safe, not just with me but their previous encounters. So basically they care about my life and theirs.

General attitudes about condom use underscored these positive attitudes toward negotiation. Although a few men reported problems with effectively using condoms, many reported enjoying sexualizing condom use, particularly with main partners. The opportunity to experiment with varying textures, flavors, colors, and sensations of lubricants and condoms “stimulated enough it doesn’t matter” whether a condom was being used. Even for those men who did not mention pleasure in sexualizing condom use, almost all of the men described personal rules for condom use that included: “using them at all times;” “if you ain’t got no rubber, you don’t get to tap;” and “condoms are like my best friend—I should wear one like I wear socks, pants, and shirts.” Respondents clearly understood that consistent condom use reduces the risk of STI/HIV transmission.
Several young men maintained positive attitudes toward negotiating condom use regardless of whether a partner’s STI or HIV status was disclosed (“I treat everyone as if they are infected with something, anything, everything. And I just feel like you should protect yourself first so you should treat everyone as if they are infected.”) or whether they are engaging with multiple partners in a single time period (“I think that actually makes me want to use condoms more, by having multiple sexual partners; I think that’s when you’re most prone to use condoms.”). To these men, condom use was a necessary aspect of any sexual encounter, revealing that these men shared a de-stigmatized and overwhelmingly accepting attitude toward condom use.

**Self-Efficacy**

Consistent with patterns emerging from analysis of young men’s personal attitudes, focus group discussions about self-efficacy to negotiate condom use were also characterized by positive outlooks. Men expressed high levels of self-efficacy in their ability to discuss condom use with a partner. A few indicated that they “took classes in high school that showed them how” to negotiate condom use. However, the majority of these young men seemed to have “on-the-job training” rather than learning about condom use negotiation through formal sexual education classes in school. In voicing a common theme from the focus group discussions, one man said, “I’ve been through encounters where I did have to bring it up myself so I think I can do it.” When asked about the rationale for their feelings of confidence in performing this behavior, no individual offered any concrete examples, other than school education and general positive attitudes toward sexual health.

Willingness to initiate condom use communication was a theme on which many respondents touched. For example, one man said, “I wouldn’t never wait for nobody to make the first move or ask, I will always be prepared if I’m going to be in that situation,” demonstrating sentiments shared by several of these young men. In fact, condom negotiation seemed to be related to personal responsibility, as exemplified in the following young man’s comments:

I tell people all the time that you should always protect yourself and never rely on anyone else to protect you. I believe you should treat every sex partner as if they are infected and protect yourself by learning how to talk about using a condom. If I contract HIV or any kind of STI, I’m
going to blame myself because I feel like it was more my fault then it was the individual’s—I should be responsible enough to protect myself first.

Among these men, the sense of confidence in initiating and communicating directly about condom use demonstrates high levels of self-efficacy consistent with their positive attitudes toward the necessity of engaging in condom negotiation with sexual partners.

Social Norms
In contrast to personally-held positive attitudes and high levels of self-efficacy, men converged on an overwhelmingly striking consensus that communicating about condom use was not a priority in their community. This was best illustrated by the statement of one man, “I don’t have a problem using condoms or asking my partner to, but other guys do.” In general, the partners of these young men infrequently initiated discussions about condom use. As one young man said, “most dudes in [study city] won’t ask you to use a condom. If you don’t say, ‘well I want to use a condom,’ they won’t.” Self-efficacy in initiating sexual communication is necessary in the face of these unsupportive social norms; according to another man, “sometimes it’s like they waited for you to ask . . . make the first move. You don’t say nothing first and they don’t say nothing first, it just goes right on in.” Although several of the young men verbally expressed self-efficacy in negotiating condom use, in the face of opposing social norms actual communication and condom use behavior might be inconsistent, likely leaving these young men prey to STI and HIV transmission.

In this community, asking a partner to use a condom might be associated with a perception of passive self-disclosure of a positive HIV or STI status. When asked his perception of why sexual communication about condom use is low in his community, one man said:

[. . . that he did not] think it’s because of the fear of catching STIs or any kind of disease. It’s just the fact that people feel uncomfortable asking someone because some people feel like if you ask someone they would be like, “What’s wrong with you, you have something?”

If condom negotiation is linked with an assumption of a positive STI or HIV status, then it might be easier to understand the perceived reluctance individuals described encountering sexual partners within this small community. Avoiding the “infected” label was important in defying stereotypes (as one young man said, “People relate homosexuality or gay males to them having
an STI or mainly HIV and I wouldn’t like to be a statistic so it makes me want to always protect myself.”) and to avoid negative perceptions from peers.

These conversations also suggested that an additional factor underpinning social norms was the belief that condoms physically and psychologically detract from sex. For some men, condoms served as sexual distractions. In his experience, one young man shared that “there’s been times where [partners say] we don’t have to use a condom because [condoms] hurt and they don’t want to use it.” Another respondent noted:

I think the breakdown occurs with the mechanics of . . . you’re [having sex to] feel good. This is like a basic human instinct, a human right to connect with another human being on a physical, emotional level. And so it’s like the condom, that barrier, is somewhat robbing you of that experience and people are almost willing to sacrifice or jeopardize their health and their well-being to have that. Is it stupid? Hell yeah. Will they regret it? Probably. But [it’s difficult] balancing that human instinct and balancing the want to protect and prevent.

In summary, these data indicate an apparent contradiction of themes emerging from the analysis of personal attitudes, self-efficacy and social norms. Men expressed a clear distinction between their own positive attitudes toward and self-efficacy in negotiating condom use and the negative social norms they perceived as prevailing in their community.

Discussion
This qualitative study of young Black MSM in Mississippi was conducted to elicit informative insights regarding how men in this at-risk population perceive condom negotiation and subsequent condom use. Analysis of the data indicated that for these men, employment of a basic TRA model might not be effective in predicting intention to negotiate condom use with sexual partners. The contradictions between messages about personal attitudes and ability and social norms might indicate that external factors, and their relative influence on condom negotiation, might also need to be considered in the application of the TRA model. This conclusion corroborates previous evidence showing that consideration of life context might be necessary to fully describe intention to use condoms among young Black MSM (Beadnell et al., 2007). Indeed, contextual factors such as experiences with stigma and homophobia are central to HIV risk among young Black MSM as they
impact willingness to seek HIV prevention and care, support from family and community, decision-making about sexual behavior, and substance abuse (Balaji et al., 2012; Oster et al., 2011). Failing to reconcile conflicting elements of stigma, personal beliefs and outward appearances might cause these men to internalize homophobic attitudes which may impair their willingness to contest prevailing social norms that discourage sexual communication and condom use.

One of the key strengths of qualitative research design and the phenomenological approach is the rich narrative elicited, especially in exploring under-researched issues like condom negotiation among young Black MSM living in the Southern United States. This sample of fifty-four young men reflects a wide range of experiences, perspectives, and behaviors relevant to our research question. Young men in this study described individual attitudes and self-efficacy as strongly related to intention to negotiate condom use with sexual partners. However, social norms in the local young Black MSM community seem to undermine this intention. Results of the recent study by Oster (2011) suggest that observed low condom use self-efficacy and a high likelihood of giving in to a partner’s desire for unprotected sex was associated with low rates of condom use and HIV infection among young Black MSM living in Jackson, Mississippi (Crosby, Holtgrave, DiClemente, Wingood, & Gayle, 2003). Oster offered the possible interpretation that for these young men, condom use negotiation may differ by partner type (i.e., long-term partner, new, casual). This finding corroborates a likely role for interventions that focus on improving sexual negotiation skills or for partnership counseling approaches.

The disconnect between attitude, self-efficacy, and social norms may be better understood through the inclusion of external factors such as substance abuse, incarceration history, HIV status of participants and their sexual partners, local social capital, and partner norms in an expanded TRA model. For example, evidence shows that social capital (e.g., membership in social organizations) has been associated with sexual risk behavior among youth (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Ramirez-Valles, Zimmerman, & Newcomb, 1998). Of all 50 states, Mississippi ranks 49th on the social capital index (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). In consideration of this abysmal social capital score there is room to question how this structural factor might play into HIV risk for young Black MSM. The intersecting influences of external factors such as this on individual intentions and attitudes might help to explain the low rate of condom use and high rate of HIV prevalence in
this community, as the enactment of individual beliefs is often complicated by sociocultural factors.

Additionally, Davison’s third-person effect hypothesis offers an alternative perspective to aid understanding of the contradiction between attitudes and social norms reported in this article (Davison, 1983). The conceptual underpinning of this hypothesis is that a persuasive communication or concept will have the strongest effect on “them” (the third person), not “me” (the first person) or “you” (the second person). In this study, participants may have perceived other men in their community as being more susceptible to negative perceptions of condom use (e.g., condoms diminish pleasure, condom negotiation indicates a positive HIV or STI status) and thus reported on social norms accordingly. Also, as the third-person effect hypothesis assumes that much of our social behavior is dictated by perception of reality, perceiving an underlying anti-condom sentiment in the community might feed back into personal behavior causing inconsistent or ineffective condom negotiation behavior (Price, 2009).

Results of this study should be interpreted in light of limitations. First, these results cannot be generalized. Second, recruiting from an STI clinic population might offer an over-representation of young men who perceive themselves at high risk for STIs but may forgo primary prevention (condom use) for secondary prevention (seeking treatment). Third, focus groups might have limited what men were willing to share with the interviewer thereby providing a less-than-complete disclosure of men’s beliefs and practices.

Our study found a significant number of young Black MSM expressed overwhelmingly positive attitudes and moderately high self-efficacy for condom negotiation. Conversely, reported social norms within the local young Black MSM community conflicted with these messages, alluding to the influence of unidentified external factors that should be considered in an expanded TRA model for condom use negotiating behavior. Many have noted the theoretical insufficiency of social cognitive health behavior theories such as TRA in capturing contextual factors associated with health behaviors; the social, economic and political context of young Black MSM condom use is one of those situations (Barta W. D., 2008; Buffardi, Thomas, Holmes, & Manhart, 2008; Burke, Joseph, Pasick, & Barker, 2009). Given the promise of improving condom negotiation as a strategy to reduce HIV risk, behavioral scientists working with young Black MSM should consider how an expanded TRA model could be employed to assess intention to communicate about condom use.
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In the Context of Concurrency and Monogamy
Ideal Partner Matching in Predicting Coital Behaviors among African American Adolescents

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Devon J. Hensel, Indiana University School of Medicine
J. Dennis Fortenberry, Indiana University
School of Medicine

ABSTRACT—We examined if ideal physical and personality matching predicts coital behavior among African American young women (AAFW) and young men (AAYM) and how these associations vary by gender and relationship type (i.e., monogamous, concurrent). In all, 268 AAYW (aged 14–17 years) and 173 AAYM completed partner-specific assessments of ideal/actual partners and coital behaviors (i.e., total condom use, condom use at last coitus, coital frequency). GEE models were run separately for gender and relationship type. Personality matching increased total condom use by 83% for AAYW in monogamous relationships (odds ratio [OR] = 4.95; 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.35, 18.17) and reduced total condom use by 13% for AAYM in concurrent relationships (OR = 0.15; CI 0.03, 0.81). Physical matching increased coital frequency by 56% for AAYM in concurrent relationships (OR = 1.25; CI 1.07, 1.46). Overall, ideal partner matching selectively predicts coital behaviors across relationship types among AAYW and AAYM.

KEY WORDS—Sex partner selection; STI risk; Sexual behavior; African American; Gender

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Introduction

African American adolescent/young adult women (AAYW) and men (AAYM) are at a disproportionate STI risk as compared to same aged peers from other ethnic/racial groups (CDC, 2012a, 2012c). These disparities persist even though AAYW and AAYM engage in similar levels of sexual behaviors and greater levels of condom use when compared to other ethnic/racial groups (Dodge et al., 2010; Herbenick et al., 2010; Reece et al., 2010). Interventions have been developed to target sexual health disparities within this population. However, most have yet to demonstrate widespread effectiveness (Sales, Brown, DiClemente, & Rose, 2012), are rarely implemented broadly in community settings (Lewis et al., 2012), and often focus exclusively on AAYW or non-representative samples of AAYM (Choi et al., 2008; DiClemente et al., 2004; Jemmott, Jemmott, Braverman, & Fong, 2005; Wolitski, The Project START Writing Group, & The Project START Study Group, 2006). A frequently neglected element in addressing sexual health disparities is consideration of how the match in characteristics between one’s ideal partner and current partner may influence coital behaviors (Matson, Chung, & Ellen; Polk, Ellen, Chung, Huettner, & Jennings, 2011). Specifically, individuals may consciously or unconsciously compare potential sexual partners to their ideal partner, with the level of matching being indicative of participating in coital behaviors. Understanding the function of these elements is important because behaviors leading to STI outcomes occur within the context of romantic relationships.

Ideal Partner Characteristics

Previous research has noted that adolescents value ideal partner characteristics such as being intelligent, fidelity, having a good sense of humor, trustworthiness, social status, physical attractiveness and financial stability (Eyre & Millstein, 1999; Matson et al.; Polk et al., 2011; Regan & Joshi, 2003). These traits appear to cluster across physical ideals (e.g., physical attractiveness, financial stability, social status, etc.) and personality ideals (e.g., fidelity, trustworthiness, sense of humor, etc.) (Andrinopoulos, Kerrigan, & Ellen, 2006; Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999). Moreover, AAYW have been found to value physical attributes, such as having a nice body, as well as personality attributes, such as being respectful and
nice (Eyre & Millstein, 1999). Research has also suggested that especially among AAYM, physical attributes may be used strategically to identify partners perceived to be free from STIs and who demonstrate the promise of having a good personality (Andrinopoulos et al., 2006).

Although continued work is needed to understand the exact differences between physical and personality partner ideals among AAYW and AAYM, it is conceivable that these domains may have a unique influence on coital behaviors. For instance, individuals with physically matched partners may desire increased coital frequency as compared to those with personality matched sexual partners. Similarly, due to their appearance, physically matched partners may be viewed as a lower-risk partner (Andrinopoulos et al., 2006). Accordingly, individuals may be less likely to use condoms with physically matched partners whom they perceive to be free from STIs.

**Relationship Type and Gender**

One additional consideration is how partner ideals may influence sexual behaviors differently based on relationship type and gender. Monogamous relationships are more common than concurrent relationships among African American adolescents and young adults. Recent estimates suggest that only 9% of sexually active AAYM and 10% of sexually active AAYM reported engaging in concurrent relationships in the past 12 months (Aral & Leichliter, 2010). Monogamous relationships are inherently safer than concurrent relationships, due to a reduced likelihood of STI acquisition from an outside partner (Aral & Leichliter, 2010; Jennings, Glass, Parham, Adler, & Ellen, 2004b). However, condom use rapidly declines as relationship length increases (Fortenberry, Tu, Harezlak, Katz, & Orr, 2002), escalating the potential of STI acquisition in the presence of infidelity.

Concurrent relationships have been associated with both protective and adverse behaviors and outcomes. For example, individuals in concurrent relationships have demonstrated greater levels of condom use as compared to those in monogamous relationships (Fortenberry et al., 2002), despite the fact that concurrency itself increases the risk of STI acquisition (Kelley, Borawski, Flocke, & Keen, 2003; Rosenberg, Gurvey, Adler, Dunlop, & Ellen, 1999). One study found that adolescents in sequential and concurrent relationships endorsed lower levels of condom use and oral contraceptives, higher levels of sexual regret and a greater likelihood of having ever been diagnosed with an STI when compared to adolescents in monogamous re-
relationships (Kelley et al., 2003). Likewise, concurrency has been associated with less perceived relationship power among women, reduced geographic access to male partners, decreased commitment within relationships, higher interpersonal stress and lower marriage rates (Adimora et al., 2002; Jennifer L. Brown, Sales, DiClemente, Latham Davis, & Rose, 2012; Jennings, Glass, Parham, Adler, & Ellen, 2004a; Matson et al.).

Moreover, although monogamous relationships are desired and associated with both emotional and physical benefits, important relationship differences have been noted among AAYW and AAYM. One study found that AAYW prefer monogamy, but may tolerate their partners engaging in concurrent relationships for the sake of emotional closeness. AAYM revealed that engaging in monogamous relationships may be viewed negatively by their peers. However, AAYM who engage in partner concurrency appear to benefit from increased social status (Andrinopoulos et al., 2006).

Little is known about whether partner ideals guide monogamous and concurrent relationships among AAYW and AAYM. However, it is plausible that locating a matched partner may lead to an increased interest in securing that relationship through monogamy. Conversely, individuals with a less matched partner might seek out additional partners to fulfill their ideal partner desires. It is also possible that partner matching varies for males and females, with specific matches being more relevant in determining coital behaviors. For instance, physical matched partners may be significant for both AAYW and AAYM. However, AAYM may have a greater preference for romantic partners who are physically matched because they assume that these partners also have the qualities desired in a personality matched partner. AAYM may also view physically matched partners as less-risky and less likely to have acquired an STI (Andrinopoulos et al., 2006). Individuals within these relationships may engage in higher levels of coital activity, but perhaps lower levels of condom use, especially as the relationship progresses.

Accordingly, the present study examined (1) how the match between ideal and actual partners predicts coital frequency and condom use. As past research has demonstrated that condom use during last coitus can serve as a proxy of overall condom use (Younge et al., 2008), we investigated both of these variables to investigate if differences existed in our sample. We also examined (2) how coital behaviors might be influenced by the type of relationship (i.e., monogamous, concurrent) with which an adolescent engages and (3) how these relationships may differ between AAYW and AAYM.
Methods

Study Design and Data
Data were obtained from a 10-year longitudinal cohort study (initiated in 1999 and completed in 2009) exploring sexual health, romantic/sexual relationships and sexual behaviors among young women (ages 14 to 17 years at enrollment) in middle to late adolescence (Fortenberry et al., 2005). AAYW were recruited from three urban-based clinics in Indianapolis, IN. The areas served by these clinics are characterized by high rates of STIs (CDC, 2012b) and early child-bearing (Ventura, Mathews, & Hamilton, 2002) and relatively low rates of HIV (Indiana HIV/AIDS Resources & Statistics, 2008). Enrollment into the larger study required being non-pregnant, although those who became pregnant during the study were allowed to continue.

AAYM included in the study were identified by the AAYW as the most recent coital partner from the previous quarter (2–3 months). AAYM were contacted by the research staff, provided information about the study and enrolled into the study. Participant age was not obtained for AAYM. However, only AAYM who confirmed they were 14 years-old or older (the age of legal coital consent in Indiana) were enrolled.

The present study includes data from independently collected, face-to-face structured interviews. Interviews were collected quarterly and lasted approximately 25 minutes. Interviews included questions about individual demographics, sexual behaviors, sexual attitudes and beliefs. The number of quarterly visits for each participant varied depending on the length of time that they were enrolled in the study. The larger study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Indiana University School of Medicine.

Participants
Participants included 268 heterosexual AAYW with an average age of 17.6 years and 173 heterosexual AAYM. The racial breakdown for the AAYW and AAYM samples was identical with 98% participants identifying as African American and 2% as biracial. Table 1 provides additional details about the study participants.

Predictor Variables

**PARTNER MATCH**
Partner match was developed using discrepancy analysis of two 24-item measures included in the larger study. The first measure asked participants to rate the importance of different ideal partner characteristics on a 4-point
### Table 1. Demographic characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African American adolescent/young adult women (yw)</th>
<th>African American adolescent/young adult men (ym)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>268</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monogamous</td>
<td>2344</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concurrent</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3850</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Condom use last coitus</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1374</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1640</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3850</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at first coitus</strong></td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of completed quarterly interviews</strong></td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of coital partners past 2–3 months</strong></td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lifetime number of coital partners</strong></td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coital frequency past 2–3 months</strong></td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of condom use past 2–3 months</strong></td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 4 (very important). Given the strong theoretical indication that ideal partner beliefs consisted of underlying domains (Fletcher et al., 1999), principal component factor analysis was conducted using the AAYW sample as the template. Criteria were set so items that loaded poorly on any factor (below .46) or loaded on multiple factors (above .4) were excluded. Likewise, factors had to demonstrate excellent reliability (above .8) to be included in further analyses. This criteria yielded seven physical factor items and eleven personality factor items.

The second measure asked participants to rate their actual partner(s) using items identical to the first measure. This measure was also scored using a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Actual partner items were then subtracted from corresponding ideal partner items for both physical and personality factors to assess partner match. Obtained scores were recoded for ease of interpretation. Mean composite scales were then developed for physical matching and personality matching. All procedures were then replicated for the AAYM sample. Items included in each scale for both samples are located in Table 2.

Table 2. Items included in physical and personality matching scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Items</th>
<th>Personality Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A cute face</td>
<td>Treats me with respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A nice body</td>
<td>Wants to get somewhere in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresses well</td>
<td>Easy to talk to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a nice car</td>
<td>Always nice to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has money</td>
<td>Able to take care of himself/herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at sports</td>
<td>Able to express his/her feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular with other people</td>
<td>Smells nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intelligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cares for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has a good sense of humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes to have fun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcome Variables

TOTAL CONDOM USE
Total condom use was assessed at each quarterly visit through the development of a proportion of partner-specific coitus events to partner-specific
condom use events. Specifically, participants were asked how many times they engaged in partner-specific coitus during the previous quarter and the number of those coital events in which condoms were utilized. Reported condom use was divided into total coital activity and then multiplied by 100 to represent a continuous percentage of partner-specific total condom use.

CONDOM USE DURING LAST COITUS
For every quarterly interview, participants were asked if condoms were used (no/yes) during last coitus with each sexual partner. Across all quarterly visits, participants endorsing condom use during last coitus were denoted as 1 while those denying condom use were labeled as 0.

COITAL FREQUENCY
Coital frequency was a continuous measure of participant’s reports of the number of times they engaged in coitus with each partner. Because this variable was positively skewed for both samples, a log transformation was completed prior to conducting formal data analysis.

RELATIONSHIP STATUS
AAYW and AAYM could report up to five coital partners at each quarterly visit. Participants were asked in-depth questions about their coital behaviors for each reported partner. Monogamy was defined as endorsement of only one coital partner from the previous quarterly visit while concurrency was defined as endorsement of two to five sexual partners during the past quarter. Accordingly, relationship status was classified as monogamous or concurrent across all quarterly interviews for each participant.

Covariates
Control variables included sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Both variables consisted of 5-items using a 7-point Likert type valence scales (e.g., very unsatisfying to very satisfying; very bad to very good). Mean composite scales were developed for both variables.

Data Analyses
Generalized estimating equations (GEE) were used to analyze the data using SPSS 20 (IBM SPSS Statistics, 2011). GEE is a form of regression that incorporates robust variance estimation methods to calculate regression parameters, while adjusting standard errors for repeated within-subject
observations. Our basic unit of analysis was quarterly visit, rather than participant. Estimates were considered statistically significant at $p < .05$ if the 95% confidence intervals did not contain 1.0. All outcomes were modeled separately for AAYW and AAYM samples, as well as for monogamous and concurrent relationships to investigate potential differences in predictor and outcomes based on coital relationship status.

**Results**

**Participant Characteristics**

AAYW engaged in up to 30 quarterly visits for a maximum of eight years in the study ($m = 16.4$ visits, 5 years) and contributed a total of 3,850 partner quarters, or quarterly interviews by which coitus was endorsed with a coital partner. AAYM participated in up to 12 quarterly visits for a maximum of three years ($m = 2.9$ visits, 9 months) and contributed 508 partner quarters. Age at first coitus was similar for both AAYW ($m = 14.4$ years) and AAYM ($m = 14.0$ years). AAYW and AAYM endorsed having a similar number of coital partners in the past two to three months, AAYW ($m = 1.2$) and AAYM ($m = 1.90$) respectively. However, AAYM reported twice as many lifetime coital partners ($m = 11.7$) as AAYW ($m = 5.7$).

Across all partner quarters, monogamous relationships were more common among AAYW (60.9%) as compared to AAYM (53.5%) and concurrent sexual relationships were more common among AAYM (44.9%) as compared to AAYW (24%). AAYW and AAYM reported similar levels of coital frequency during the last 2–3 months ($m = 13.3$) and ($m = 14.7$) respectively. AAYW endorsed a higher frequency of overall condom use ($m = 50.0$) as compared to AAYM ($m = 40.3$). However, AAYW and AAYM had nearly identical levels of condom use during last coitus (AAYW, $m = 35.7$%; AAYM, $m = 35.2$%).

**Predictors of Total Condom Use**

Physical matching was not significantly associated with total condom use for AAYW or AAYM regardless of partnership status. Personality matching significantly predicted greater levels of total condom use for AAYW in monogamous relationships (odds ratio [OR] = 4.95; 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.35, 18.17, $p < .05$) but not in concurrent relationships. AAYW within monogamous relationships who endorsed personality matching used condoms 83% more frequently than AAYW who were unmatched. However, for
AAYM, personality matching reduced total condom use by 13% for those within concurrent relationships (OR = 0.15; CI 0.03, 0.81, p < .05). Personality matching did not have a significant influence on total condom use for AAYM in monogamous relationships.

Predictors of Condom Use during Last Coitus
Physical matching did not predict condom use during last coitus for AAYW or AAYM in either monogamous or concurrent relationships. Similarly, personality matching did not significantly predict condom use during last coitus for AAYW or AAYM regardless of relationship type.

Predictors of Coital Frequency
Physical matching was not associated with coital frequency for AAYW participating in either monogamous or concurrent relationships. Likewise, physical matching did not predict coital frequency for AAYM within monogamous relationships. However, greater levels of physical matching increased coital frequency by 56% for AAYM in concurrent relationships (OR = 1.25; CI 1.07, 1.46). Personality matching was not significantly related to sexual frequency for AAYW or AAYM within monogamous or concurrent relationships.

Discussion
The present study investigated (1) how the match between ideal and actual partners predicts coital frequency and (2) how coital behaviors might be influenced by relationship type and (3) gender. Our data demonstrate that physical and personality matching have a selective influence on coital behaviors. We found unique differences when accounting for gender and relationship type. Physical matching appears to vary between AAYW and AAYM. Physical matching was not related to coital behaviors among AAYW, regardless of relationship type. This suggests that although physical attributes are particularly important qualities in an ideal partner (Regan & Joshi, 2003), they appear less relevant in shaping actual coital behaviors among AAYW. Among AAYM, physical matching increased coital frequency by 56%. However, this was only among those in concurrent relationships. Perhaps these AAYM participated in concurrent relationships in an attempt to locate a partner who also matched their personality ideals. Coitus may have been used to improve the connection with such partners (Markham et al., 2010). AAYM may have also engaged in higher levels of coitus with phys-
Partner Matching in Predicting Coital Behaviors

A physically matched partner to assimilate with perceived social norms among their peer groups (Sieving, Eisenberg, Pettingell, & Skay, 2006).

AAYM who placed a lower value on physical matching may have been more interested in pursuing monogamous relationships (i.e., greater relationship commitment). These individuals may be similar to AAYW in several ways. First, these AAYM may value personality attributes more than physical attributes. Second, physical matching may be relevant in the partner selection phase, but have little to do with coitus. Third, AAYM many have already located their physically and personality matched partner. Taken as a whole, physical matching may be an integral element to sexual desire and coital activity among AAYM participating in concurrent relationships, but less relevant for AAYW, regardless of relationship type.
Personality matching influenced coital behavior in a much more complex way than anticipated. AAYW in personality matched relationships were 83% more likely to use condoms. However, this relationship was only observed among those in monogamous relationships. It is possible that AAYW who identified personality matched partners were more willing to engage in monogamous relationships. These AAYW may have been interested in using condoms more readily to protect themselves and their relationship partner against STI acquisition and unwanted pregnancy. Although research suggests that condom use declines as relationship length increases (Fortenberry et al., 2002), personality matching may be an important element to consistent condom among AAYW. To our knowledge, research has yet to explore condom use trends for individuals who are in personality matched relationships.

We were surprised that personality matching reduced overall condom use by 13% among AAYM. Even more, this association was present only for AAYM within concurrent relationships, further increasing their likelihood of acquiring and transmitting STIs. Research has suggested that African American adolescents have beliefs that their sexual partners are using other medium to prevent unwanted pregnancy or are “safe” due to limited sexual experiences and/or negative past STI results (Brown et al., 2011). It is possible that AAYM viewed personality matched partners as safer coital partners and perhaps, even safer than other coital partners. Another possibility is that AAYM who engaged in concurrent partnerships felt that it was acceptable to have both “main” and “side” coital partners, perhaps due to messages received from peers or older family members (Reed et al., 2012). Perhaps AAYM in these types of concurrent relationships maintained their same level of condom use with “side” partners but reduced their level of condom use with their “main” coital partner. Conversely, they may have maintained their level of condom use with their “main” partner while reducing condom use with “side” partners. Moreover, AAYM may have been especially attentive to the social norms of having multiple coital partners (Andrinopoulos et al., 2006). Perhaps, AAYM who identified personality matched partners contended with the potential of a reduced social status by seeking out additional coital partners and forgoing condom use.

These results extend previous research by demonstrating the complexity of protective and coital behaviors among AAYW and AAYM. Our results also promote recognition that targeted sexual health strategies that differ by gender and incorporate varying types of coital relationships may be es-
pecially valuable. Interventions with AAYM may benefit from emphasizing the importance of condom use with all coital partners, regardless of how closely their partners are aligned to their ideals and/or how it may be perceived by one’s social network. Similarly, AAYM may benefit from messages about how increased coital frequency amplifies the risk of STI acquisition, especially when engaging in concurrent coital relationships and limited condom use. These messages may be especially relevant because a disproportionate number of AAYM reside in environments in which monogamy is devalued and sexual promiscuity is promoted (Bowleg et al., 2011; Jennings et al., 2004a; Reed et al., 2012).

Messages to AAYW regarding the physical appearance of coital partners may have little effect on coital behaviors. Accordingly, such messages might not need to be emphasized to the same degree as for AAYM. AAYW may benefit from messages that promote identification of similar personality qualities between themselves and their relationship partner, especially for those in or interested in pursuing monogamous relationships. Additionally, AAYW and AAYM within a personality matched relationship may benefit from messages that highlight other non-coital activities to increase relationship commitment and reduce the possibility of STI acquisition or transmission. Additional research will be needed to examine how these messages influence actual coital behaviors. Even so, qualitative research may be an important first step to examine coital decision-making nuances that have not been adequately captured by previous research or incorporated into current intervention studies.

Limitations
Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, the variables included were limited to those of the larger longitudinal study from which these data were derived. Second, given the homogeneity of the sample and that AAYW were recruited from health clinics, these findings may not be generalizable to other adolescent groups. Similarly, because AAYM were the identified partners of the AAYW, the males participating in this study may differ from other same-aged males. Finally, because age was not collected for AAYM it is difficult to determine an age comparison group. However, it should be noted that direct observation of the AAYM by the study authors indicates that males were of similar age or within a few years of age to the AAYW.
Conclusions

This study is the first known attempt to demonstrate that ideal partner matching predicts different coital behaviors across time for AAYW and AAYM and varies by relationship type. Additional research will be needed to assess the predictors of coital behaviors among AAYW in concurrent relationships or AAYM in monogamous relationships. The complexity of sexual health disparities among AAYW and AAYM suggests that intensive qualitative evaluations that examine ideal partner matching and sexual decision-making are the necessary next step to understand these intricate nuances. Recognition of these nuances may be very influential in refining and tailoring intervention programs to reduce the significant sexual health disparity from which these youth are burdened.

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Sex as a Concealed Weapon
Race, Gender, and Incivility of Office Politics

LEAH P. HOLLI$, Morgan State University

ABSTRACT—Within a highly sexualized American culture, men and women have used sex and flirtation to manipulate coworkers, even at the risk of sexual harassment charges. Therefore, this study will examine the question: Do Black men use flirtation to advance at work? In the fall 2014, 141 employed, Black men, ages 18–65 were asked about their workplace strategies to answer the central research question. The study theoretically considers historical, economic, and sociological parameters as a potential motivation for Black men to use flirtation as a work advancement strategy. Twelve percent confirmed they use flirtation to gain sex from employees, while 15% use flirtation to create a fun workplace. Fifty-three percent did not use flirtation in any part of their careers.

KEY WORDS—Flirtation, sex and office politics, Black male

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Introduction

A phrase coined on the Michael Baisden day-time talk show, “being grown and sexy” in the Black community invites a series of complex dynamics for Blacks at work, at home and in entertainment. The dominant culture continues to buy and sell a gaze on Black bodies and then subscribe to expectations of Black sexual prowess and performance. Some of the most popular contemporary TV shows build on Black sexuality, images of well-tanned, high performing tawny bodies. Whether from the streets of New York City portrayed in the Starz mini-series Power, or from the posh monument interiors of Washington DC illustrated in Scandal, taboo sexual relationships and power fascinate audiences, boost ratings and attract millions of sponsorship dollars. As a result, Kerry Washington is the first Black woman to break into Forbes top 20 of highest paid TV actresses, ranking 8th in 2014 with a $6 million salary (Forbes, 2014). Though broadcast on a secondary cable outlet, Starz Network, the mini-series Power, in its inaugural season averaged one million viewers. Further, Starz reported over 2.5 million watched the Power finale; in turn, the Starz Network has committed to a second season (Kissell, 2014).

In other media sectors, contemporary reports of gun violence illustrate how Black male power remains a perceived threat to mainstream culture. This perceived threat resides front and center in America’s consciousness and in the real lives ended by gun violence. Black men, subject to the assumption of being “too Black or too strong . . .” (Malcolm X, 1963) disproportionately wind up on the butt side of a gun as reported time and again with Michael Brown (Ferguson, MO), Oscar Grant (San Francisco, CA), and Treyvon Martin (Sanford, FL). These stories extend a violent trajectory bearing a countryside abound with ‘strange fruit” in the murders of Emmet Till, Medgar Evars, Michael Griffith (Howard Beach, NY), Amadou Diallo (Brooklyn, NY), James Byrd (Jasper, TX), and Sean Bell (Queens, NY). These stories and the untold stories of 1000s of Black men’s deaths that did not make the front pages can support the conclusion that has likened Black men to an “endangered species” (Lindsay, 2014).

The intersection of race, gender, and economics includes the continual recession status of Black unemployment. The Economic Policy Institute reports that Blacks have endured unemployment rates below recession levels over the last 50 years. The general population recession unemployment rate has hovered just below 7% at 6.7% (Austin, 2013). However, the Black
unemployment rate has been 11.6% on average for the last 50 years, 4.9% higher than the national average. Further, HUD reports that Blacks comprise close to 40% of the nation’s homeless though Blacks are only 13% of the population (HUD, 2012).

Black men economically are one of the most disenfranchised groups in the United States. The American Journal of Medicine reports that the leading cause of death for Black men ages 15–34 is homicide (Hennekens, 2013, para 4). The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that Black men are six times more likely to go to prison than white men and 2.5 times more likely to go to prison that Hispanic men. Further, for Black men ages 30–39, one in ten Black men in this age group are incarcerated (Carson and Golinelli, 2013).

According to the Maynard Media Center on Structural Inequality, “The national college graduation rate for Black men is 33.1% compared with 44.8% for Black women.” However, the national graduation rate for all students is just above 57%. “Black men represent 7.9 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds in America but only 2.8 percent of undergraduates at public flagship universities” (Valrum, 2014, para 3–4).

Regardless, of race, all men graduate at rates lower than the national average. The white male graduation rate is 54.4%, Hispanic males graduate at 41.1% and Native Americans/Alaska natives graduate at 33.8%; nonetheless, Black men show the lowest graduation rates of any male population (Valrum, 2014).

Literature Review

Just as some politicians use flirtation to manipulate the media and cajole voters (Yates, 2010), those with an ulterior motive for their environment may utilize flirtation as a tool to control their surroundings. In the attempt to regain consistent economic standing, despite the constant threats to life and liberty, Black men, as any group given the aforementioned historical conditions, might use whatever means to progress through a system that remains seemingly curious about the sexual underpinnings tied to Black men. At the very least, flirtation is a strategy that might positively affect interpersonal communication and benevolence in an office environment (Frisbee, 2011).

Henningsen et al. (2008) pose the question “Why do we flirt?” Their study deems flirting as an ambiguous activity, yet those who engage in flirtation do such with motive and intent. Some people flirt just to have fun, to advance a cause or manipulate person’s action. Some people flirt to en-
hance their self-esteem or to promote a sexual relationship; nonetheless, flirtation, while ambiguous, emerges from the goal to gain attention or affection from the receiver. A finding concluded, “men, more than women, thought flirting was sexual in nature” (p. 497). Therefore, unwelcomed flirtation, given its sexual base, can morph into sexual harassment.

In regard to workplace power and harassment, the aggressor asserts power to gain favor, position or resources (Cleveland and Kerst, 1993). Note that power isn’t limited to official power in the organizational chart. Personal power, expert power, and political power can be just as potent in establishing a power position. For example, in a United Kingdom study by National Association of Female Executives, findings revealed that 53% of female respondents were the target of sexual harassment from males holding a subordinate position on the organizational chart (Galen, Weber, and Cuneo, 1991). Another study reports 60% of executive women had the same experience (Sendoff, 1992). Adding race to the discourse of subordinates harassing female executives, Fayankinnu (2012) offers specifics of sexual harassment from male subordinate to female executives in Nigerian organizations. Female executives in this context reported the following:

Table 1. Sexual Harassment report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>73.1%</td>
<td>reported Male subordinates grabbing their groin before female executives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.2%</td>
<td>reported Male subordinates bragging of penal organ as hefty before female executives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.2%</td>
<td>reported Male subordinates bragging of their sexual prowess in bed before female executives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fayankinnu, 2012, p. 46.

Further, men who use sex as a weapon also use non-sexual aggression to manipulate the work environment (Lim and Howard, 1998). Nonetheless, men who use flirtation make a direct connection with sexuality with ability to control the receiver (Pryor, Lavite, and Stoller, 1993). Some studies have confirmed that women use flirtation and sexual power to manipulate the workplace (Williams, 1999; Parisi 2006; Perper 1985; Berdahl, 2009; Henningsen et al. 2008). In Harper’s Bazar, 86% of women stated they would happily flirt with a male colleague if it meant they got their own way” (Roberts, 2007, para 3).
Bradley et al. conducted a study of 164 female MBA graduates. Close to half admitted to using sexual behavior to advance their careers (2005). However, the same researcher discovered that women who use their sexual prowess to advance actually were not taken seriously, promoted less quickly and earned lower wages. Flirting women might be viewed as competent but viewed as less authentic (Kray and Locke, 2008).

As other studies confirm that flirtation typically has a sexual intent (Abrahams 1994, Givens, 1978, Moore 1985) flirtation even when couched in horseplay (Chan 2001) can emerge as sexual harassment (Baraka 1995, Cleveland 1993). Further, flirtation in the work environment negatively affects work productivity (Kelly et al., 2005), psychological well-being (Bendahl 2009), and job satisfaction for those observing the flirtation (Salvaggio, 2011), even when flirtation is used to manage workplace romances (Boyd, 2010). Typically those who are financially disenfranchised are more likely to use flirtation, yet increase the risk of a sexual harassment complaint (Uggen, 2004).

Central Research Question

In this twisted milieu of fractured access, constant abuse, and sexualized stereotypes, the dominant culture may allow for sexual power to construct a potential pathway to economic empowerment. Most other roads for Black male empowerment have detours, death traps and money pits, while Black sex despite its taboo is commoditized, consumed and savored. In this context with lack of power and economic stability, any disenfranchised group may use the ambiguous power in sexual flirtation to manipulate the work environment. In regard to the research question and throughout the study, the designation “Black” applies to all populations in the African diaspora, African Americans, those of African decent from the West Indies, and other populations who would identify as Black yet outside of the “African American” category. With this historical and sociological context, the central research question is:

**What is the extent of Black men using flirtation and sexual power to advance at work?**

The aforementioned literature offered various insight on the intentions for those who flirt and the impact of flirtation in the office. Therefore, the study has three subquestions:
Do Black men to suppress or bully others at work for economic gain use sexual flirtation?

What is the impact of Black men flirting on the job?

Is there a relationship between women being in leadership and the use of flirtation by Black men?

As the third sub-question in a correlational question the hypothesis are:

H₁: There is a relationship between gender of the person in power and use of flirtation.

H₀: There is no relationship between gender of the person in power and use of flirtation.

The third sub-question is derived from literature in which women admit to using flirtation to get ahead (Williams, 1999, Parisi 2006, Perper 1985, Berdahl, 2009, Henningsen et al., 2008). While these same studies reveal that women who use flirtation were well liked, the women also lost professional credibility.

Purpose of the Study

Workplace incivility and harassment have caught the attention of the American public with sexual harassment and gender discrimination reported at record highs at the EEOC, amounting to 31% of new complaints (Eeoc.gov) with over $100 million of monetary resolutions for the 2011 year. The purpose of this study is to examine if sexual flirtation is a workplace strategy Black men use to get ahead, and if such strategies are prevalent does flirtation lead to a toxic workplace.

Conceptual Frame

United States history continues to suffer from what Condoleezza Rice noted as the “birth defect.” Her statement refers to the racial stain of American slavery upon which the country’s foundation sits (Schor, 2008). Racialized slavery in its brutality was interwoven with sex and desire for the Black body.

Both Black men and Black women were and still are in many cases, subjected to this Black sexual stereotype of being sexually insatiable, morally loose, irresponsible . . . “A freak” (Collins, 2005). The early laws of the
United States forbid “miscegenation” or interracial marriage. White women or men faced a malevolent stigma to openly admit to relations with those of African descent, though such relations still occurred “undercover.” Desire for Black bodies was taboo. Yet Black bodies remain the subject to the gaze of the dominant culture (Collins, 2005). The gaze continues in sports, music, and entertainment, where Black bodies and Black sexuality is still a commodity, bought and sold still by the dominant culture that still has a predilection for the “darker berry.”

In the absence of a legitimate recognition of power, the taboo can yield another type of power for those denied respectful or legitimate access to economic power structures. This power for Black men may emerge from the dominant culture’s desire to achieve or possess that, which should not be had, wanting the forbidden. In turn, the disenfranchised position of the Black male may access this power, which is an amalgam of unfortunate histories and current social economic plight. The intersection of race, gender, economic disenfranchisement and sexual power create the guiding conceptual lenses for this study.

In considering how Blacks may or may not use flirtation to influence work environments, the previous studies do not examine race as a factor, with the exception of the Nigerian study (Fayankinnu, 2012). Many of the studies considered gender, yet studies on flirtation included the use of or impact on women (Galen, Weber, Cuneo, 1991; Sendoff, 1992; Fayankinnu, 2012; Williams, 1999; Parisi 2006; Perper 1985; Berdahl, 2009; Henningsen et al., 2008; Bradley, 2005). This research considers the limiting socio-economic elements that affect Black men, and apply such these aforementioned elements to Black men’s motivation to use flirtation in the workspace. No other study considers the voices from Black men about Black men in regards to flirtation on the job.

**Research Methods**

During a three-week period in the fall of 2014, 141 employed Black men answered a survey regarding flirtation and office politics. The sample was qualified by SurveyMonkey™, which hosts over 3.5 million anonymous participants in its database which are frequently accessed by scholars for primary research. Further, the rationale for only including Black men is to create a voice from Black men about Black men relating to power structures, nuances and behavioral motivations at work.
The ten-question instrument provided data for descriptive statistics. Questions asked about motivation, frequency and results of flirtation on the current job. The second five questions asked about use of flirtation and other strategies to advance in the career overall.

Delimitations
Researchers can control for some elements of a research design, choosing elements for the process. This study was limited to American men, who were employed full time, and with any educational level. Female respondents were purposely excluded from the study (Creswell, 2013).

Limitations
The population was limited to those in the Surveymonkey™ database of 3.5 million people. The sample then emerged from participants who needed a computer to access the survey. Participation was limited to those anonymously solicited for participation by Surveymonkey™, In turn, the general population of people who use Surveymonkey™ typically have some interest in data use or data collection. The population may be associated with education, engaged in marketing research, or another job that requires data collection. In short, while a population emerging from the Surveymonkey™ database may appear totally random, anyone in the population has typically self-selected into the database for some data collection activity.

This data collection procedure also eliminates the ability to collect descriptions of participants. Survey based research often minimizes the ability to gather in-depth information on participants’ backgrounds or motivations, beyond the demographic data collected to qualify for this study. Such rich description typically accompanies qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

Internal and External Validity
The researcher who has a background instrument development created the ten question survey for this study. Such surveys have been previously created to yield sound data collection with human subjects. Once the instrument was developed, three employed Black males, ranging in ages 39–58 beta-tested the instrument. Their employment included a psychologist, a juvenile justice counselor, and a city employee serving as a youth mentor. All three Black men, who beta-tested the instrument, had been gainfully employed over five years.

In regard to internal validity, participants who were randomly selected
received benefits from SurveyMonkey™ to complete the survey. The standard benefit in the SurveyMonkey platform is fifty cents per completed survey which is then donated to a charity. In regard to external validity, the study design did not include a pre and post test, nor an extensive time lapse in which survey was conducted. Further, the data collection only included Black men eliminating the possibility that other demographics’ perceptions on this topic would affect the data collection. Such procedures helped to control for internal threats to validity (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis
The following is a step-by-step procedure for the data analysis. The central research question and first two sub-questions were addressed by analyzing the descriptive statistics and open-ended questions. The third sub-question required a contingency table to examine the frequency of flirtation in relationship to men being in power and women being in power. The discrepancy in the contingency table led to a Chi Square test to investigate if there is a statistical significance related prevalence of flirtation related to the gender of who is in power.

Descriptive Statistics Analysis
The researcher compiled the descriptive states on the demographics and frequency of responses under each of the ten questions. The data regarding the frequency of flirtation, the impact of flirtation and strategies to advance in career were reported in tables. The researcher compiled responses by highlighting key words in the open-ended question regarding the motivation for flirtation.

Contingency Table and Chi Square
The frequency of responses by women and power and men in power were compiled. Under each column is the response to flirting 10% of the time, 30% of the time, 50% of the time, 80% of the time or not at all. By looking at the proportion of responses in the contingency table, the researcher then considered any possible discrepancy. If there is no difference in proportion, regardless if men are in power or women are in power, the rationale for additional for statistical testing would not exist. However, the frequencies of flirtation at the 30% level, 80% and “not at all” warranted further investigation with a Chi Square test to examine if the null hypothesis should be rejected.
Findings

A majority of the Black men completing the survey were ages 30–44 (48%); another 34% of the respondents were ages 45–60. The median income of the sample, 50% of respondents, earned between $50,000 and $99,000. Forty-four percent reported they had “some college,” while 27% held a college degree and another 19% held a graduate degree. The national sample had the highest concentration of respondents from the southern Atlantic states (29%) and another 15% from the Middle Atlantic States. Given the nature of the data collection via survey method, no other information or descriptions are available about respondents’ work experiences. See Tables 2 through 5 for demographics.

Sexual flirtation is used to a minor degree by Black men in the office to advance. The findings reveal that 30% of the sample of Black men perceive that sexual flirtation is used to advance one’s career (n = 42). This finding aligns with previous studies (Cleveland and Kerst, 1993; Bradley et al 2005; Kray and Locke, 2008) that confirm that women use flirtation for career advancement. Specifically 11% use flirtation to manipulate a female boss.

Addressing a central research question about Black men use of flirta-
tion to suppress and bully others, the question was asked, “In your current job, do Black men use flirtation to create a hostile work environment?” The respondents stated the flirtation doesn’t contribute to poor working conditions (83.94%). However a small percentage, 8.76% stated Black men flirting does contribute to a hostile work environment 10% of the time. This finding extends the literature about flirtation in the office and its association with sexual harassment (Galen, 1991; Sendoff, 1992; and Fayankinnu, 2012). See table 6.

In addressing one major research question “What is impact of Black men flirting on the job?” the survey offered the question: “If Black men use flirtation in the office, does it lead to other inappropriate actions?” Twenty-

Table 4. Educational level of participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College / Associates</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than HS</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Location of participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
five percent reported that during their career sexual flirtation led to sexual relationships, 19% reported that sexual flirtation lead to sexual harassment charges, 15% reported that sexual flirtation lead to inaccurate work performance of people manipulated. These findings regarding a hostile work environment are similar to other studies in which flirtation on some level can affect the work environment (Galen, 1991; Sendoff, 1992; Fayankinnu 2012). See Table 7.

Table 7. If Black men use flirtation in the office, does it lead to other inappropriate actions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>58%</td>
<td>In my experience Black men don’t flirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Sexual relationships with staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>Sexual harassment charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>In accurate work performance of person manipulated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In regard to organizational responses, 25% of participants reported that the organization fired the man flirting and 16% reported that the flirting man was transferred. See Table 8.

When asked about strategies used to advance career, Black men also

Table 8. If Black men use flirtation to manipulate leadership or create a hostile environment, what happened to solve the problem?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54%</td>
<td>In my experience Black men don’t flirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Fire man who is flirting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>Transfer man who is flirting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reported that more education than the competition was key (70%), working twice as hard (54%) and self-isolation strategies, or staying away from office politics (31%) were critical. Fifty-two percent reported that creating their own business was a viable option. See Table 9.

Table 9. Question: In your experience, what do Black men need to do to advance in career (may choose three options)?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>Have more education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54%</td>
<td>Work twice as hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52%</td>
<td>Create own business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31%</td>
<td>Stay away from office politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Be submissive to leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>Be physically attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Strategic with other Black men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Be married in a stable relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the Black men reported flirting was not part of their career experience. Sixty-nine percent reported they had not witnessed Black men flirting to gain benefits or resources; 83% stated they had not witnessed Black men flirting to manipulate a boss, and 53% stated that they had not witnessed Black flirting throughout their careers.

Of the 141 participants, 117 offered open-ended comments to the question, “If you flirt what you hope to achieve . . .” This question further explored assertions from previous studies that flirtation, while ambiguous is not happenstance (Henningsen et al., 2008; Lim and Howard, 1998; Pryor, Lavite and Stoller, 1993). Seventeen Black men said they were personally motivated to have sex with the target; twenty-two stated they flirted to create a happy environment or ease tension in good fun. Thirty-one commented that they don’t flirt at all. Table 10 provides a sample of other open-ended comments related to the motivation to flirt on the job.
Table 10. Question: “If you flirt what do you hope to achieve . . .”

| Respondent #1 | Head game |
| Respondent #2 | “In my experience, Black men shouldn’t flirt because they need to focus on their jobs in the first place . . .” |
| Respondent #3 | “I find the flirting with colleagues at work is weird and awkward. |
| Respondent #4 | “Don’t do it, I think this sends the wrong message, like you are trying to get something without putting in the effort” |
| Respondent #5 | “I don’t flirt at work, it’s not professional.” |
| Respondent #6 | “But I’m usually trying to manipulate the person I am flirting with in some way . . .” |
| Respondent #7 | Getting a little sum after work is done . . . |

Contingency Table
One of the sub-questions focused on the gender of leadership as a possible variable is allowing flirtation by Black men in the office. The hypothesis related to this question is:

H1. There is a relationship between gender of the person in power and use of flirtation.

H0. There is no relationship between gender of the person in power and use of flirtation.

The following contingency table outlines the frequency of responses related to each variable (see Table 11).

Table 11. Flirtation proportions related to men/women in power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use Flirtation</th>
<th>Men in Power</th>
<th>Women in Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10% of the time</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>14.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30% of the time</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td><strong>12.20%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% of the time</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>4.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80% of the time</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
<td><strong>4.88%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td><strong>73.00%</strong></td>
<td><strong>63.41%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The contingency table (Table 11) shows a discrepancy in frequency of flirtation in relation to women being in power and men being in power. If the null hypothesis were true

"H_0 There is no relationship between women being in power and use of flirtation," then the discrepancies highlighted in Table 10 at the 30% level, the 80% level and the “not at all level” would not exist; there would be no notable difference in the cell proportions and the marginal proportions. This discrepancy in observed proportions warrants the Chi Square test to determine if the null hypothesis should be rejected. To qualify for the Chi Square test, the variables of the study “women in power” or “men in power and at least five participants answered each question. Men in power were coded as “0” and women in power were coded as “1.” In regard to frequency, Not at all = “0,” 10% flirtation = “1,” 30% flirtation = “2,” 50% flirtation = “3,” and 80% flirtation= “4.” The IBM SPSS Statistical Package was used to calculate the Chi square frequency of expected versus observed. See Table 12 and Table 13:

Table 12. Cross tabulation regarding gender in power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A = .00</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Expected Count</td>
<td>70.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% = 1</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30% = 2</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Expected Count</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% = 3</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80% = 4</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Expected Count</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the Chi Square reveals some association between women being in power and more flirtation, the test for this sample doesn’t yield statistically significant results at the .05 level (P-value of .607). With n = 141, a future study would need a larger sample to further investigate the possibility of a statistically significant relationship between Black men using flirtation to advance and women being in power at the office.

Discussion on Findings
The study revealed that 30% (n = 42) of the sample has witnessed or engaged in sexual flirtation at some time in the career to advance. While the majority of the sample shunned flirtation, some Black men site using flirtation to manipulate staff, create a fun office environment or pursue sex with an office colleague as motivation. While a minority of the sample saw sexual flirtation as a tool for career advancement, even less saw strategizing with other Black men as a career strategy (n = 11). Strategizing with other Black men received slightly less consideration as a career strategy than being physically attractive (n = 12). Further, while flirtation was adopted by a small portion of the sample, respondents (83.94%) reported that Black men’s use of flirtation did not create a hostile work environment.

In a highly sexualized American culture which also historical denies access to Black men socially and economically, a reasonable conclusion might lead one to believe that even sexual flirtation can be part of the “any means necessary” that Black men might use of advance. Further, while these findings also confirm the presence and motivation of flirtation, they do not reveal flirtation as a significant workplace strategy used by Black men. Though the dominant culture might still pursue Black sex in media and sports, Black men do not typically employ this potential power in the workplace.

The contingency table and corresponding distributions reveal a loose association with sexual flirtation and women in power. The data only reveals a discrepancy based on which gender is in power. However, the data does not yield a statistically significant result.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13. Chi-square tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n of Valid Cases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁴5 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.16.
Age or educational level was not a compelling variable in determining who flirted in the office. In short, while popular culture still objectified the Black women a majority of Black men do not use that taboo sexual power in the professional office space. A majority of the respondents struggle within the United States “birth defect” where Blacks feel second class, inferior, and subject to the whim of the dominant culture. Consequently, respondents perceived that having more education (n = 94) and solid work ethic to be twice as good (n = 72) were the viable approaches to transcending the triple threat on Black men, murder, unemployment and lacking education.

In converse, the literature chronicles that sexual flirtation can be a power play, members of this study have confirmed that sexual flirtation is even at minor level, a tool used to advance careers or manipulate the work environment (Frisby 2011, Bradley 2005 Kray, 2008, Henningsen, Braz, and Davies, 2008). The open-ended comments offer a stratum of experiences of respondents who will consider flirtation, or shun the practice altogether. Fifteen of the respondents made over $150,000 and presumably held leadership positions as evidenced by the comment “In my position, it would be highly inappropriate to flirt.”

Nonetheless, as with the general population, flirtation is used by some participants to achieve a goal, even at the risk of a sexual harassment charge. This finding is consistent with previous studies which stated flirtation is motivation laden. While a majority of participants shunned flirtation as career strategy, some participants in the study were seeking sex when flirting; yet for the few who used it, flirtation remained a tool to gain favorable attention or likability.

Recommendations for Future Study

The findings reveal that education and hard work are predominantly the compelling strategies while networking between Black men as a strategy often overlooked. The “birth defect” referenced by Condelezza Rice has subjugated Blacks in all levels of society and formed the basis for race discrimination since this country’s inception. Hence, the participants reporting a need to have more education or a perception to work twice as hard as the competition is consistent with the feeling of being treated or viewed as inferior within the dominant culture. The finding that Black men don’t network with each other also may relate to the “birth defect.” As members of the American society, Black men receive the same messages that Blacks
are lazy, substandard yet oversexed; therefore this premise can potentially dissuade Blacks from partnering with each other.

The contingency tables and Chi Square test examine the discrepancy in flirtation as a tool for Black men depending on the gender of leadership. The sample of \( n = 141 \) is small and expected counts in half of the cells is below suggested values for a proper test. Recommendation for further study would be to examine gender, leadership and sexual flirtation with a larger sample.

Education may be an equalizer in the color struck American society. However, the aforementioned statistics show that Black men are less likely to graduate from college. Given the rising cost of education, alternative credential opportunities through certificate and community colleges can be a pathway for Black men to access educational opportunities.

Enhanced education and working twice as hard, then flirtation to a lesser degree emerged from findings as viable options, while mentorship between Black men is an untapped resource. Over half of this random sample had a college degree or higher and over 70% made over $50,000. Close to 44% were over the age of 45. However, only 11% saw working with other Black men as a way to advance a career. A few studies offer insight for intraracial mentoring between Black men and white counterparts (Wingfield, 2014, Reddick, 2012), yet the possibility of Black men mentoring each other deserves further investigation.

While a pretty face and toothy smile make anyone swoon, sexual approaches while utilized by the sample were not the predominant strategies for success. In the fractured experiences of Black men, life doesn’t appear to imitate art and entertainment. However, though a minority of Black men will use flirtation to advance, even fewer will use collaboration and solidarity amongst themselves to craft a new and productive experience in the workplace.

Leah P. Hollis is Assistant Professor in the Community College Leadership Program at Morgan State University. Her recent book, Bully in the Ivory Tower: How Aggression and Incivility Erode American Higher Education is based on independent research on 175 colleges and universities. Findings reveal that workplace bullying occurs at an even higher rate in higher education. Her research has helped over 70 schools address incivility on campus. Dr. Hollis has an extensive career in higher education administration where she has held senior leadership and faculty posts. Dr. Hollis has taught at Northeastern University, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, and Rutgers University. Dr. Hollis received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Africana Studies from Rutgers University and her Master of Arts in degree English Literature from the University of Pittsburgh. She received her Doctorate of Education in Administration, Training and Policy Studies from Boston University, as a Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellow. Also, Dr.
Hollis continued her professional training at Harvard University through the Graduate School of Education, Higher Education Management Development Program. She also earned certification in Project Management and Executive Leadership at Stanford University and Cornell University respectively. Further, she has earned certifications in EEO Law/Affirmative Action and Conflict Resolution and Investigation from the American Association for Affirmative Action. Her research interests focus on the healthy workplace and also issues that deal with college athletics, and at risk students.

REFERENCES


Grounded Theory
Exploring Sexual Attitudes and Beliefs Influencing Black Fathers’ Decisions Not to Marry

DIANNE R. BROWNE, Widener University

ABSTRACT—This qualitative study explored the sexual attitudes and beliefs of unmarried Black fathers which influenced their decisions not to marry the mothers of their children. Focus groups were conducted to reveal personal narratives about relationships, unplanned pregnancy and marriage. Two theories emerged: sexual attitudes and beliefs associated with the man’s initial attraction to the mother of his child could impact relationship formation and images of the man’s father could prompt his response in sexual situations including decisions not to marry.

KEY WORDS—Black fathers, African American relationships, unmarried fathers

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Introduction

Sexual attitudes and beliefs influence behavior and relationship choices and stem from family values, tradition and life experience. Attitudes and beliefs guide young adults when making relationship choices (Browning & Olinger-Wilson, 2003; Gilmore, DeLamater & Wagstaff, 1996; Morman & Floyd, 2002; Ohalete, 2007; Upchurch, Anshensel, Sucoff & Levey-Storms, 1999). Research with men between the ages of 18–35, at their procreative stage of development has revealed that counseling and support can promote young men to make healthier decisions about sexual relationships and parenting (Marsiglio, 2003; Marsiglio, Hutchinson & Cohan, 2001). During this age range of emergent adulthood, it is a time when young men can be encouraged to consider their thoughts about sexual decision making and relationships. Young men compare their lives to their fathers, family members, and community members through shared values, traditions and experiences (Browne, 2010).

Young men witness trends in their neighborhoods that suggest being unmarried, Black and a father is an accepted phenomenon. Statistics support the phenomenon. In 2013, the Kids Count Data Book reported that 67% of Black/African American children live in single parent homes (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). In 2011 the Centers for Disease Control reported that 72% of births to Black mothers in the United States were to unmarried women (Martin, Hamilton, Osterman, & Mathews, 2013). Pew Research reported that 36% of Black men have never been married (Wang & Parker, 2014).

Common sexual scripts that identify females as “good girls” who make men wait to have sex or remain abstinent; “dirty girls” or “jump offs” who give up sex easily; or “hood rats” who do whatever a man asks under any conditions, continue to suggest to men that involvement with them is also permission not to marry. Men’s views are based on community norms and expectations (Browne, 2010; Gilmore et al., 1996; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003). Therefore, it is important to explore those influences that stem from family, traditions and cultural expectations which impact men’s attitudes and beliefs and help form their decisions not to marry. The findings may impact relationship education programs, community norms around heterosexual relationships and social services provided to men.
Marriage in the 21st Century

Since the 1940s the decline in number of Blacks marrying has been constant (Elliott, Krivickas, Brault & Kreider, 2012). Researchers, especially those connected to the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study (FFS), have provided documentation about relationships and marriage and cited economic instability (McLanahan & Beck, 2010) as one of the reasons why many couples with children were not marrying.

Numerous articles resulting from the FFS share the narratives of unmarried couples about relationships and marriage. Couples said marriage was the ultimate level of a relationship. The ultimate level of relationship was defined as being financially stable, mature enough to make a lifelong commitment (Edin, England & Linnenberg, 2003), and able to trust the partner (Shafer, 2006). Many couples reported they had not achieved that level in their relationships. Others cited the idea of divorce as a prohibition to marriage (Edin et al., 2003; Gibson-Davis, Edin & McLanahan, 2005; Shafer, 2006). Poor relationship quality was also a deterrent to marriage (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004).

Researchers reported that couples were thinking differently about marriage and that men not marrying and being in relationships with the mothers of their children was not unique in the Black community (James, 1998; Zavodny, 1999). For the Black community not marrying as a result of a pregnancy has been prevalent since the Great Migration of the 1920s. From the 1920s through the 1940s Black people moved from Southern to the Northern states and people shared residences due to high economic costs of housing (Tolnay, 1997). In these settings, relationships developed and children were born without the couple marrying. By the 1950s the development of a Black middle class altered ideas about living together and gave way to a new generation of two parent homes where men and women married and worked together to support their families (Staples, 1972). With the start of the 1960s, the number of Black men marrying began to decline (Elliot et al., 2012) as a result of women marrying later and more Blacks remaining single.

According to the 2013 Child Trends database, the number of two parent African American families with children under 18 was 34% of all married couples with children under 18.

The proposition of this qualitative study suggests that Black communities were in the process of a cultural shift toward the endorsement of non-marital births. Several studies (Bowman & Sanders, 1998; Cohen, 2003; James, 1998; Nomaguchi, Brown & Leyman, 2012; Smith & Beaujot, 1999)
provide a female voice on nonmarital births and marriage, but very few with the male voice. A book by Edin, Kefalas, & Furstenberg (2011) *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage* explored the topic in detail primarily from the female voice. Another proposition was that in the discourse on nonmarital births and marriage the perspective from the male voice was limited. This study wanted to inquire about new scripts regarding marriage from an unmarried father’s perspective. The information gleaned from the study was intended to inform and contribute to the field to enhance and improve services for unmarried fathers and ultimately improve their relationships with the mothers of their children. Improving relationships with the mothers of their children may foster stronger connections between fathers and their children.

**Black Men, Marriage and Sexuality**

The 21st century gave rise to research that focused on the examination of gender roles (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Marriage no longer held the strict attachment to gender roles. It was not uncommon for fathers to care for their children while mothers worked or went to school (Neal, 2006). Educated Black families tended to demonstrate more egalitarian roles in the home, thus teaching a broader context of gender equality to their children (Hill, 2002). Hill discovered that the less education parents had, the more they demonstrated and imparted traditional gender roles to their children. For example, less educated parents wanted both their sons and daughters to participate in higher education, but were still less flexible about their son’s choice in career, such as parents encouraging the son to study medicine, not nursing.

Black males’ ability to articulate the differences in their relationships with women became more prominent in the 21st century (Neal, 2006; Twohey & Ewing, 1995). Gender roles, once clearly defined, were more relaxed than in previous centuries. Thus, it was more acceptable for men to talk about their feelings despite the traditional belief that sharing feelings was considered to be a feminine trait (Pleck & Sawyer, 1974; Twohey & Ewing, 1995).

Many of the changes that were taking place happened in middle class communities where a higher number of Black Americans were educated post high school. This was contrary to the experiences of young Black fathers in low-income communities where education was less of a priority; gender roles remained constant and changes in styles of interpersonal communication was not a focus of their community. Black men in low-income neighborhoods were still being incarcerated at alarming rates (Alex-
ander, 2012), becoming fathers at young ages, and finding it more difficult to shoulder the responsibility that came with fatherhood and relationships (Connor & White, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

Script theory and the theory of Symbolic Interaction provided frameworks for this research. Script theory purported that there are different kinds of scripts. Sexual scripts suggest that people react to sexual situations with expected or prescribed responses from others and their community (Seal, Smith, Coley, Perry & Gamez, 2007; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; Wiederman, 2005). Sexual scripts may be sequenced in nature. For example, a woman is sitting at a bar and bats her eyes to another person. The script is interpreted as an invitation. The expected response is that the person she battered her eyes to will approach. Cultural scripts attach meaning to language that is known among members of a like culture (Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman, & Fraser, 2012; Irvine, 1995). For example cultural scripts may carry different meanings depending on voice inflection or intonation. If one said that someone had on a bad outfit or that the outfit was banging the script suggested that the clothing was attractive or well coordinated. Being familiar with the script brought meaning or purpose to the conversation and could be gleaned from what was shared. Script theory, both sexual and cultural, within the framework of romantic attraction plays the same role. Dialogue between individuals includes scripts. The scripts relay meaning and offer significance about a person’s intention or request.

Script theory provides a framework for understanding the young men’s relationships with the mothers of their children, intentions and attractions to the women, and relationships observed from families and friends in the neighborhood. Scripts were learned from relatives and neighbors. The understanding and use of these scripts demonstrated examples of accepted living.

The theory of Symbolic Interaction helped to describe personalization or the meaning men attached to their interactions with others (Day, 2010; Longmore, 1996). The theory also encompasses aspects of script theory as scripts are part of the symbolism that link the communication or action with meaning (Eshlenman & Bulcroft, 2010). This theory suggested that people use symbols to understand and interact with one another. It also suggested that symbols are important to be able to understand others; symbols such as, the style of clothes one wears, the type of vehicle one drives,
a person’s concept of money and success, all support understanding the individual. These symbols are directly connected to who the person is or the image they want to portray. Symbolic interaction helped to examine men’s behavior related to self-image, personal experiences, and socialization. The symbolism provided by the participants’ father’s behavior as well as the expectations of community members were linked to their sexual beliefs and attitudes about the mothers of their children. These symbolic images were linked to what the men learned from their community and life experiences.

Method

Procedures
Letters were sent to social service programs, community colleges, churches, trade schools and the Department of Corrections explaining the study and inviting them include men from their programs. The letters were followed by phone calls to further explain the research and recruit hosts. Three non-profit organizations with fatherhood services, one faith based organization, one community college and the Department of Corrections expressed interest in participating. Meetings were held with each agency to discuss the purpose of the research, engage them as a partner and identify a contact person (Host). In addition meeting and several phone calls were conducted with the host at each agency. Hosts were asked to recruit young African American/Black men between the ages of 18–35 who had never been married and had fathered a child but no more than two children with only one woman. Host agencies were asked to collect demographic information including name, age, residence, number of mothers of their children. Hosts were also asked to assess men’s comfort in a group setting and willingness to discuss sexual and personal experiences.

Over a nine month period nine focus groups were scheduled. Out of the six hosts, two were unable to secure participants. Seven two-hour focus groups were convened with a total of 34 men in four different locations. A total of eighteen sentence completions were developed to elicit responses from the participants which included telling the story of their relationships with the mothers of the children; discussing sex and being cool; unintended pregnancy; marriage; and decisions not to marry. Questions were developed based on three research questions:

RQ1: What were the sexual attitudes and beliefs of unmarried Black fathers that influenced their decisions not to marry?
This question attempted to understand the men’s relationships with the mothers of their children and glean any influences on their decisions not to marry from their environment.

**RQ1:** What were the sexual attitudes and beliefs of unmarried Black fathers that influenced their decisions not to marry?

When I describe the current relationship between me and the mother of my child I say . . .

When I first met the mother of my child I thought . . .

Before having sex with the mother of my child I thought . . .

When my partner told me she was pregnant I . . .

**RQ2:** What did unmarried Black fathers say was the relationship between an unintended pregnancy and marriage?

As a Black man, having sex or making love is or are . . .

When I think about unintended pregnancy I feel . . .

Marriage as a result of an unintended pregnancy is . . .

**RQ3:** What did unmarried Black fathers say was the relationship between being cool and not marrying?

When I think about sex and being cool I feel . . .

When I think about marriage I feel . . .

Not marrying the mother of my child was . . .

Some closing thoughts I have about sex, unintended pregnancy, being cool and marriage are . . .
Participants
Unmarried fathers were defined as Black men, between the ages of 18 and 35 years old, which had never been married; had at least one child; had not fathered more than two children with the same woman; and had not fathered children with more than one woman. The participants were specifically limited to ‘never been married’ to exclude divorced, separated and widowed fathers. Selecting men that had not fathered children with more than one woman established the man’s choice of not marrying compared to why I did not marry mother one or two or three, etc. Table 2 Participant Demographics provides a description of the participants.

The age of the men was limited to 18–35 to capture young men forming their views of marriage and relationships and men who were not high school students. Men between these ages were considered to be in their procreative identity period, meaning they became aware of their ability to procreate and started to examine the extent of their responsibility as fathers (Marsiglio, Hutchinson & Cohan, 2001).

The backgrounds of the men varied, some lived with the mothers of their children; others were non-custodial fathers who visited their children and still engaged in sex with the mothers of their children; and still others were estranged from the mothers of their children and facing child support or-

*Questions not asked:
- Being cool and having sex are related when . . .
- My belief about sex and being cool came from . . .
- Unintended pregnancy and being cool are related when . . .
- My opinions about unintended pregnancy came from . . .
- Getting married and being cool are related when . . .
- My attitudes about marriage and being cool came from . . .
- When I think of my decision not to marry the mother of my child I think it was because . . .

Emergent topics explored:
- Images of their own dads
- Non-relationship sex
- Unmarried father’s legacy

*Questions not used in the analysis.
ders. A few of the men, regardless of their residential situation, were still in love with the mothers of their children.

The populations within the focus groups were quite homogeneous. Three of the host programs were fatherhood centers focused on assisting men in obtaining jobs, improving parenting skills, and offering personal and professional counseling. Some of the men in each of these programs were also returning from incarceration. Thus, the host agencies were engaged in activities that prepared men for re-entry into society. With the exception of obtaining jobs, the correctional facility had similar goals for the residents.

Sample
This qualitative study was a stratified cluster convenience sample (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005). The samples were stratified to capture men from various geographic areas in New Jersey that met the study criteria. The clusters represented programs that served men from the northern, central, and southern regions of New Jersey. The sample included patrons and employees from the four centers that participated in focus groups with 2 to 8 participants.

Data Analysis
Data was gathered with the use of an audio cassette recorder. Recordings were transcribed at the conclusion of each focus group from recording to text using Audacity®. The content was analyzed using the grounded theory method described by Glaser and Strauss (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory, an inductive method of analysis, facilitated the emergence of theory as the data was compared to what was observed, sorted, and coded, then compared to more data col-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Number of men per site</th>
<th>Number of men by site ever incarcerated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatherhood 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatherhood 2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatherhood 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctional Facility</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Participants n = 34, Age range = 18–35, Mean Age = 27.1
lected which was also sorted, coded and analyzed (Dick, 2005). Grounded theory was used to define things that shaped human behavior and facilitated the examination of cultural meanings as in sexual attitudes and beliefs that influenced the men’s decisions not to marry.

Responses from the men were compared to discover similarities and differences and to gain contextual meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and identify aspects of sexual attitudes and beliefs which influenced their decisions not to marry. After developing lists of similarities and differences from the responses provided for each of the sentence stems, the responses

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**Figure 1. Initial Attraction to the Mother of the Child**

- **Initial Physical Attraction**
  - Sex no more / Sex
  - Relationship
- **Initial Emotional Attraction**
  - Relationship
  - Sex no more / Sex
  - No relationship
- **Initial Sexual Attraction**
  - Need to explain what happened in or to the relationship
  - Rejected marriage

Conflicted about marriage
that were similar were reviewed within the context of the man’s response to determine if the meanings were similar. Responses similar in context were sorted into groups. When three or more responses from these groups were similar in context and language and were provided in more than one focus group, they formed the basis of a category. Some important category comparisons were made leading to the development of theory.

As a result of the analysis, content was sorted into several categories including anecdotes about their fathers; stories about the relationships the men had with the mothers of their children; tales about family members; beliefs about women; communication between males and females; the double standard between males and females related sexual behavior; difference between having sex or making love; disease concerns such as STDs and HIV; responsibility; cheating; disrespect; values; being cool; messages from mom; and stability. As categories were sorted four themes surfaced that influenced the decisions of the participants not to marry: initial attraction to the mothers of their children, images of men’s fathers, role models of married couples and sexual socialization experiences.

Category Detail

The initial attractions of the men to the mothers of their children fell into three categories: physical, emotional, and sexual. Figure 1 illustrates the initial attractions of the men to the mothers of their children after being sorted and compared to the responses in the sentence completions.

Initial attraction to the mothers of their children

Initial attraction as physical was sorted by the men’s comments about how the woman looked, how she carried herself, and the words the man used to describe her, e.g., “beautiful,” “bad” (meaning very good), and “real fly.” Fourteen (41%) of the participants were categorized as physically attracted to the mothers of their children; all 14 of these participants responded favorably to marriage. Men who were initially physically attracted to the woman continued relationships even if the couple stopped having sex. Initial physical attraction was represented on the chart in grayscale because it did not help to answer the research questions. Men whose initial attractions were physical sustained relationships with the mothers of their children over a period of and responded that they thought they would marry at some point in their lives.
Some of these men had reservations, but none were opposed to marriage. For example the following narrative came from a man whose initial attraction to the mother of his child was physical. He was still in relationship with the mother of his child and described her as sexy and beautiful. He shared his views on marriage.

Ah, actually the baby’s mom asked me to marry her before. And being I loved her and she asked me when she was pregnant, too, you know I thought about it . . . cause it really wasn’t on the table but it was a thought . . . can I do this? Maybe I should. Then when I thought hard on it, it just changed, and I knew I couldn’t do it. Not something I want to be doing just now, I’m just 21 years old. I got a lot of life to live and a lot of fun to have.

Men whose attraction was emotional had a relationship for a period of time, but something happened to cause the relationship to deteriorate. Nine (26%) of the participants were categorized as initially emotionally attracted to the mothers of their children. Men’s responses described their feelings for the woman or communicated a sharing between the two people, e.g., “I wanted her in my life,” “She was the one for me,” and “we used to sit and talk for hours.” Men emotionally attracted to the mothers of their children developed a relationship before having sex, thus having the opportunity to engage and join with the female to discover other things about her. Discontinued sexual relations did not contribute to relationship break up but something that affected the men emotionally did. Men found the need to explain what happened in or to the relationship. Five of the nine men were no longer in relationship with the mother of their child and expressed conflicted feelings toward marriage. Four of the men were still having sexual relationships with the mothers of their children and rejected getting married.

This man shares his experience about meeting the mother of his child.

. . . when I first met my daughter’s mother, I felt all those descriptions you hear in movies and read in books . . . meet someone that makes your heart pump, and makes it so you can’t breathe, and makes it so that you are not in control of your emotions . . .

The same man shared his feelings about the break up. “I was becoming insecure and being unhappy and insecure in a relationship is unhealthy and I was the only one experiencing that and I was becoming a sad and de-
pressed and hurting man.” When asked about marriage he said, “When I think about marriage I feel . . . stuff, anxious, fear . . . marriage is a wonderful thing . . . Problem is when you get married you got to deal with the idea of divorce and that is what bothers me the most.”

Another narrative where the initial attraction was emotional shared in this way, “. . . I was in love with her when I first met her but everything just went down . . .” This man’s narrative shared stories of physical and verbal abuse from the mother of his child, but when asked about marriage he responded, “I want to get married and then I don’t.”

Finally, men whose initial attraction to the mothers of their children was sexual were focused on the act of having sex with the woman. Eleven (32%) of the participants were categorized as initially sexually attracted to the mothers of their children. These men’s responses relayed their pursuit to have sex as the basis of the attraction. “I didn’t even think we could be together. All I wanted to do was to get in and out [have sex].” The same man rejected marriage as an option. “Me, personally I don’t believe in marriage. I done seen too many marriages crash and burn.” Another narrative in the same category said, “When I first met the mother of my child, I’ll hit it [have sex].” Then when asked about marriage he said, “I wasn’t planning on marrying her in the first place . . . everything you take into a marriage you supposed to have in a relationship . . . love, trust, all that.” Each of the types of initial attractions identified the reason the men engaged relationships with the mothers of their children.

Initial attraction being sexual was identified by the man’s responses intimating that he wanted to have sex with the woman, e.g., “hit it,” “get in and get out,” “it was a one night stand.” Men in this category did not develop relationships with the women. None of the men in this category were still having sex with the mother of their child or still in relationship with her. The responses from men whose initial attraction was sexual rejected marriage.

The initial attraction responses showed that there was a connection between a man being in a relationship with a woman and a man’s opinions about marriage. These responses showed up consistently in the constant comparison process of grounded theory. Men that were initially physically attracted to women were open to marriage compared to men who were initially emotionally or sexually attracted to women were less likely to be in favor of marriage.
Images of Their Fathers
A total of fourteen men (42%) provided unsolicited comments about their fathers. Comparisons were made between the unmarried father’s image of his own father, his attraction to the mother of his child, his relationship with the mother of his child, and his decision not to marry. The fathers’ images of their dads were sorted into three categories: neglected and/or abandoned, glamorized and/or sexualized, and responsible. Positive or negative images were based on the men’s description and reaction when talking about their dads. The category descriptions for abandoned/neglected were based on the situation described by the father. Glamorized/sexualized was based on the description of the father being idolized, the unmarried father reacting with pride when he talked about his dad, or when a sexual connotation was provided in the description of the unmarried father’s dad. Men describing their dad as responsible described what they learned from them. Images of the participants’ fathers were connected to father absence or presence in the participant’s life, neglect and abandonment, fathers’ demeanor, and something they gained from their dad. The images ranged from fathers’ as a sexual being, to fathers that abused, neglected or abandoned their sons. Some men also shared that it was their intention not to repeat their father’s behaviors.

A father initially sexually attracted to the mother of his child described his own father in this way, “I didn’t really trust women, because my father he was a [stud] . . . he [father] was a real pimp type dude. You know all the Cadillac’s, you know what I mean. He was a lady’s man.” The man was

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Favorable toward marriage</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unfavorable toward marriage</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage took understanding</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage was age related</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressed doubt about marriage</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marriage was about commitment</td>
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<td>Marriage was about trust</td>
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<td>Marriage was a trap</td>
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proud of his father’s image. When he talked about his attitudes about women and specifically the actions of the mother of his child, it was similar to his image of his father. “When I met my baby’s mom, it was just a little one night stand . . . don’t think I would have ever married her.”

One of the participant’s emotionally attracted to the mother of his child recounted an image of being neglected by his dad. He compared it to an unintended pregnancy. “Unintended pregnancy, I kinda think of my father that way . . . something you didn’t want, something you didn’t want to deal with, or something you choose not to deal with.” He also felt that marriage was something he was not able to deal with. “. . . when I met my daughter mother, I knew I wanted her in my life, like wanted her in my life forever . . . marriage is a lifelong commitment . . . I knew at the time I wasn’t prepared for none of that.”

Another participant, also emotionally attracted to the mother of his child suggested that his father taught him responsibility and that was demonstrated in the care he had for his child of whom he had custody. “I remember . . . from my dad certain responsibilities which I took from his death . . . if my seed was gonna’ be there then I was gonna’ be there regardless.” He was not opposed to marriage as long as it meant the woman accepted his child. “We want to be married, but the young lady . . . have to understand that it is we . . . as in me and my son.”

One of the incarcerated participants emotionally attracted to the mother of his child reflected on his image of his father.

I never had no pop . . . My pop come . . . he’d drop off a little couple rocks [cocaine] . . . but that’s not what I needed. I needed that love and affection, know what I mean? . . . Dad always running here and there always locked up, worrying for this, worrying for that. So when I came of that age [to do] time . . . I was ready . . . and I was going to do time. I knew this all came with it so it’s like I took that oath like, it is what it is.

Father images resonated with the men and illustrated similarities in fathers and sons attitudes and relationships with the mothers of their children.

**Missing Married Couples as Role Models**

Men talked about marriage and role models for marriage. Twenty-five (74%) of the men provided responses about marriage and married couples. Table 3 Participant Responses About Marriage lists categories and the number of responses men offered about marriage.
Some responses were direct such as, “Marriage ain’t nothing but a license and a ring.” Other responses suggested a lack of readiness. “It’s like when you’re in a relationship, it’s like now you go out or whatever, when you married, where you going?” This suggested the man’s desire to have a social or private life, or his own time was something he did not think was possible in marriage. Then there were also suggestions of feeling or being trapped.

I mean, like I don’t like feeling trapped. I need to get loose . . . no I don’t even think that’s why marriage don’t even come to my mind because I don’t even got time for myself why would I think about marrying somebody? Marriage is like you deal with [stuff], but to me it ain’t really no difference because you still can do the same thing in a relationship.

Men talked about the discouragement of seeing very few Black married couples.

I’m envious because I don’t see any old Black people walking down the street hand in hand helping each other cross the street without having to say something demeaning or, or disparaging to one another. I mean an eighty year old or ninety year old couple walking together makes me feel happy like I wish I was them because I would want to see Black people like that, but unfortunately I don’t . . . see folks married for sixty years that are Black. So I don’t even look at color no more I just look at marriage and I am envious of that kind of set up.

Men who acknowledged knowing married Black couples said they did not see it among the younger generation. Lasting marriages was something that took place in the past. There was an indictment that the younger generation was part of the cause of the demise of marriage.

My grandmother and grandfather been together since they were 17. They [just about] died together, man. At like seventy, eighty years old, know what I’m talking about? The more that time goes on and the generations [don’t marry] it’s like certain [a] hit they installing in the generations, you feel me?

As men talked more about marriage and relationships, concern for the lack of communication and commitment was discussed. For example, this response about commitment, “Marriage is about commitment. I don’t see folks married for sixty years that are black. Marriage is foreign to our [Black] children, hard to find men and women that are married for thirty, forty, fifty
years.” This man was very concerned about his own level of commitment. “So if I just be married, I can only be with her, so I can’t be married unless I’m serious about her. I just can’t jump into that and not be serious about it.” Still others talked about communication, “. . . to me the best thing that people lack, male and female, in a loving relationship, is the lack of communication.” In one focus group, the discussion about marriage centered on the attributes of marriage so men talked about trust, communication, love, and commitment. “Marriage . . . is trust, man. Like it say in the vows, till death do you part, know what I mean . . .”

Participants’ comments identified a concern for the lack of Black married couples as role models and listed some of their criteria for marriage.

Sexual Socialization Experiences
Non-relationship sex or some may call it casual sex, hooking up, and in some cases friends with benefits, was normalized behavior among the participants. Non-relationship sex was the way men were expected to behave (Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman, & Fraser, 2012; Morman & Floyd, 2002; Pleck & Sawyer, 1974). Not having sex or not having a lot of sex was a reflection of one’s manhood. Thirteen (38%) men provided unsolicited comments about non-relationship sex. They talked about women who had sex the on the first date or the first time they met. A woman who had sex on the first night was not considered to be a good girl. A woman who displayed her sexuality in the same way as a man, having sex without the demand for a relationship, was considered to be a jump off (secondary relationship). This attitude was expressed by several men. The feedback came up without prompting. “She had a track record of being a jump off. A jump off is a female that’s fast, out there in the streets, you know sleeping with any and everybody.” Another respondent expressed his attitude as it related sex with a woman who is considered a jump off, “I just get in and get out . . . whether the woman gets pleased or not I just get mine and get out.” Along the same lines men spoke of sexually assertive women.

. . . it’s like it’s a turn off . . . If that’s what you want, it’s like a girl just throwing it at you. Make you feel like something wrong with that. Why you so easy? It’s a turn off. If it’s just too easy, then it’s something wrong with that.

Men compared non-relationship sex to making love and explained that there was a difference in the two. The following narrative provided one explanation.
The first one, [non relationship sex explicative] is just a jump off . . . I’m done, thank you, I got mine, you got yours, nice knowing you . . . Sex, it’s just like . . . you’re worried about feelings . . . and a little more . . .
Making love is just some old thing that is hard to explain. It’s slower.

Another said that making love was reserved for a special woman. “However having sex to me is just pleasure. Making love is just to that one you call your queen or your wife.” As they defined the special women, they defined them as good girls. These were women who made them wait to have sex.

. . . she gained my respect first cause she’s one of the rare women that I didn’t get real, real quick, you know what I mean. It took a couple weeks and stuff. With other women it don’t take that long, but with her, I kinda expected that with her because I had to get to know her and stuff, know what I mean. So she kinda gained my respect.

The discussions of non-relationship sex encouraged conversations about the double standard around gender. “Yeah but when they [women] do it; the way we [men] do it, they be considered whores, tricks, and all the other names. We [men] just considered dogs.” Men seemed to accept male sexual behavior without an emotional connection though there were differences in sexual behavior related to gender. When men were asked where these attitudes came from they said, “From the hood,” “from older cats,” “I learned it from my cousins and my uncle.” They learned from their kinfolks, their families, and their communities.

In all of their examples men were socialized by others to have sex. The sharing of oral traditions from their relatives and peers helped formulate the men’s sexual attitudes and beliefs.

Discussion
What were the sexual attitudes and beliefs of unmarried Black fathers that influenced their decision not to marry the mother of their child? Collectively, as men told their stories, the sexual attitudes and beliefs about the mothers of their children were influenced by the men’s initial attraction to the women, the role men’s fathers’ image played in their lives, what the men learned from society about sex and relationships, and the message men received as a result of the absence of married couples in the community in which they lived. Messages received from the community or the sex-
ual scripts now being conveyed had changed in the community as marriage was no longer the expected behavior as a result of an unplanned pregnancy.

Not Marrying: Social Factors and Their Meaning
The narratives of the participants revealed that social factors such as initial attraction, images of their fathers, exposure to married couples and sexual socialization, played a role in men’s decisions not to marry. The motivation of the man’s initial attraction to the mother of his child took place before he had sex with her and thus established the reason why he wanted to be with her. The images of the participants’ fathers were replicated in him, the participant, whether his father was absent or a constant figure in his life. These images showed up in how men described their fathers and in what the man observed or learned from their father’s interactions with women. Interactions men observed helped to formulate sexual attitudes and beliefs about women. Men replicated the behaviors of their father’s interactions with women with the mothers of their children. Men’s narratives revealed similarities in how their attraction to the mothers of their children was similar to examples provided by their father’s treatment of women.

In the conversations about marriage men had very little exposure to or experience being with married couples, but they had opinions and feelings about marriage. Role models of married couples were not available to these men; they had not lived with marriage as a cultural norm. Very few men talked about knowing or relating to people who were married. There were no coaches to offer advice about marriage as not many people in their circle of life were married. Their ideas about marriage were not favorable and most saw only the negative sides of marriage from a vantage point of what they lived.

Men expressed the potential challenges they anticipated if they married, such as finding the right woman, the possibility of divorce and finding a woman who understood him. Men made several references to how they met women and how they learned about engaging in relationships with women as a result of their socialization. The socialization came from parents, kin folks, peers, and the community. The social factors repeated in the narratives suggested that men were prone to follow the scripts they learned related to sex, relationships, and marriage.

Attitudes and beliefs about sex and women with common words and themes were consistent across focus groups. Men only wanted to be in relationships with women they thought were good girls. Men defined good
girls as wifey, queen, better half, and the one they wanted to be serious with. The language was positive about partner choices and intimated they had given relationships some thought.

Contrary to the literature indicating that men are socialized to refrain from showing or sharing emotions (Jourad, 1974; Levant, 1997; McClean, 1997), these men expressed their feelings openly and without hesitation. As a result of their narratives, men could define what they thought marriage was supposed to be but had not experienced someone in this type relationship therefore they had no vision for it in their future.

Conclusions

Two theories emerged as a result of the research. The first theory suggested that sexual attitudes and beliefs of the man associated with initial attraction to the mother of his child impacted relationship formation. Assumptions of the theory included: initial attractions that were emotional or simply sexual were single focused and not formed on establishing a relationship; when initially emotionally attracted to women men experienced challenges in the relationship; challenges posed difficulty with men’s ability to cope with problems or an inability to resolve issues.

Script theory posits that people react to sexual situations with expected or prescribed responses learned from various variables such as community, culture, internal reflections and social roles (Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman, & Fraser, 2012). The scripts between the fathers and the mothers of their children were not synchronous. The responses to the relationships were not what they expected. Men felt remorse, sadness, and confusion when the relationships ended making it difficult for them to imagine the possibility of marriage and in some cases future relationships. Men found the need to explain what happened in or to the relationship and were conflicted about marriage. Some doubted that they would ever get married.

Men sexually attracted to women were getting their needs met thus did not have a reason to get married. They did not need the woman once she participated in providing the level of sexual gratification the man wanted, nor did he want to engage with her in something long term. Narratives from men whose initial attraction to the mothers of their children were sexual did not offer prospects of marriage or possibilities for ongoing relationships.

In both cases the scripts used between the men and the women were not aligned. According to script theory there is an expected response in the
sexual situation (Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman, & Fraser, 2012). For men initially emotionally or sexually attracted to the woman, the scripts did not seem to provide the expected response in the romantic or sexual situations. Narratives revealed abusive partners, relationships deteriorating over time and fear about marriage.

The second theory suggested that that an unmarried Black father’s images of his father could prompt his response in sexual situations including decisions not to marry. Assumptions of the theory include: not all men have good relationships with or know their fathers; men examine their fathers’ attitudes and behaviors from a distance based on their experiences or exposure to them; and men raised by their fathers know their fathers and internalize lessons learned from their fathers. The theory of symbolic interaction purported that people’s sexual behavior was related to their self-image and personal experiences (Longmore, 1998). Men’s sexual attitudes and beliefs about women were related to the images of their fathers. There were three basic images provided by the men; abandoned or neglected, glamorized or sexualized, and responsible. All of the images were related to personal experiences men had concerning their fathers.

The first image that men shared about their fathers reflected being abandoned or neglected. These were painful images including behaviors that men did not want to repeat. Men talked about the nagging what if question, wanting to know what went on between his parents that caused them not to stay together. The men who shared negative images were also initially emotionally attracted to the mothers of their children. They appeared insecure about their relationships, and conflicted or resistant to marriage, but responsible when it came to their children. They reflected on their self image and the message it transmitted to them as the symbolic interaction theory suggested. The social script in action for these men was fathers were men who took care of their children, men were providers.

Men who shared glamorized/sexualized images of their dad repeated the behavior of their father. They reacted to the script as they learned it. Their self-images were strong in that they were confident about their actions. They were proud to refer to their dad as cool, pimp like, or having a swagger (confidence). These men were all initially sexually attracted to the mothers of their children and none of them established a relationship with her. They talked about the mother of their child as a jump off, wanting to get in and out of the sexual interaction, and having a one-night stand. The self-concept of the unmarried fathers was likened to that of their image of their dad, thus they continued to respond to the script as they learned it.
These men rejected marriage as it was part of the script as well. The social script in action for these men was non-relationship sex was the expected behavior for men.

The fathers whose image of their dad was one of responsibility were also carrying out the script they learned. Two of these men were initially physically attracted to the mothers of their children and one was initially sexually attracted to her. One of the men established relationships with the woman, but all of the men were engaged in caring for their child. One man had custody of his child, one was still living with the mother of the child, and the other one participated in the life of the child. These men defined what they believed it would take to marry. Two of them rejected marriage with the mothers of their children, but did not reject marriage for their future. The man living with the mother of his child did not reject marriage to the mother of the child. The self-concept of the unmarried fathers whose dads’ images reflected the lessons of responsibility showed that they learned responsibility from their dads and were repeating the script. The social script for these men was the American idiom, like father like son (Boatner & Gates, 1975).

Recommendations for the Field

The conclusions from the men’s conversations offer suggestions for the field. Men experiencing emotional break-ups may benefit from interventions that strengthen their ability to assess their feelings and interpretations of various relationship statuses (e.g., casual, committed, marriage, etc.) and what goals they want to accomplish in their lives and relationships. Activities that cause men to respond to questionnaires or personal inventories could help men discover aspects of self of which they are not cognizant. Creating men’s groups, facilitated by men identifying as both married and single that included experiential learning would give participants the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills from others. Married facilitators could serve as role models especially when married men shared their stories. Such small group experiences facilitate the ability for participants to learn from one another. This style of learning promotes normalization of questioning attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, cultivates a deeper understanding of self (Hedgepeth & Helmich, 1996), and may be a start to thinking differently or possibly reinventing themselves.

Seminars that educate men about feminism, the fluidity of sexual relationships and women as sexual beings might diminish some of the men’s
sexual attitudes about women and help debunk the double standard. Doing this might allow men to re-examine some of what they have learned over time from kinfolk and family. Activities such as developing genograms and eco-maps that cause men to explore family dynamics may allow them to examine patterns in their lives. Examining family patterns may encourage men to consider different ways of thinking about women, sex, and relationships.

Men who were conflicted or uncertain about marriage might benefit from the opportunity to attend fatherhood programs that also involve relationship education. These programs expose participants to the range of emotions expressed in relationships, provide realistic exercises to address conflict, deal with emotions, and engage in empathic listening (Hawkins & Ooms, 2010). Relationship education programs establish safe spaces for individuals, or individuals and their partners to practice relationship skills. Relationship education programs help to improve communication skills between partners. Programs that inform and impart skills rather than encourage or promote marriage would help men learn about relationship development and gain perspective about what they wanted from emotional and romantic relationships. This is very important as the cultural script in the community does not support marriage as a result of a nonmarital pregnancy.

One of the significant components of this study was the ability to hear men speak in their own voices about sex, relationships, and marriage. The narratives of the men offered insight into what Black men learned in their neighborhoods and how that impacted their intimate and friendship relationships with women. Even more important, the men’s voices provided an introduction to understanding things that influence men’s sexual attitudes and beliefs about marriage in the 21st century.

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Something New
A Scholarly Review and Clinical Perspective of Black Online Dating

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ABSTRACT—For many busy and transient Black professionals, online dating may seem like a viable social option yet qualitative inquiry in a clinical setting revealed apprehensiveness to meeting potential partners on the internet. Perceived personal barriers included an interest in dating others who were similar (e.g., homogamy) in class, race, and/or religion. An exploration of quantitative research findings supports the broad existence of these perspectives among some Black professionals. Economic considerations, such as the cost of computers and online dating memberships, are also outlined as potential barriers. Additionally, soft research techniques (e.g., internet search results describing a topic subjectively, culturally, or opinion-based) were implored to fill the gap left by the limited hard research on the process of online dating, the challenges associated with its use (e.g., discrimination, digital deception), and the cultural norm differences in face-to-face versus online dating. Research on online dating is growing but minimal attention has been given to the experiences of Blacks who might be increasingly utilizing these social networking tools. The present paper examines these perceptions in the context of the sparse literature on Black online dating. Implications for future research and recommendations for Black online daters are provided.

KEY WORDS—Black online dating, social networking, social homogamy

CONTACT—Correspondence for this article should be addressed to Bridgette Peteet, PhD, University of Cincinnati, Department of Psychology, PO Box 210376, Cincinnati OH 45221-0376, bridgette.peteet@uc.edu.
As a licensed clinical psychologist and academic researcher with nearly a decade of experience, I can attest that there is consistent evidence of the importance of establishing social support for clinical clients. In fact, research demonstrates that social support improves mental health outcomes (e.g., depression and anxiety) (Resick, 2001; Taylor, 2011; Travis, 2004). As a Black therapist, I am often privy to the parameters and limitations of developing such networks for Black professionals. Most notably, professionals tend to be geographically transient, often finding themselves in cities where diversity is scarce or the pool of diverse professionals is perceived to be limited. Busy lifestyles are also a significant contributing factor impacting the pursuit of social outlets. Moreover, my professional clients report low availability of similar others and negative online interactions. Though the realities of restricted dating prospects persist, many of my clients refuse to utilize contemporary technology, such as online dating, to broaden their prospect pool.

The present paper supplements the conversation about diversity in online dating with a particular emphasis on Black professionals. Gaining a new understanding of online dating amongst Blacks is crucial, due to the increase in popularity of this method (Smith & Duggan, 2013), which could have the potential to drastically change the cultural norms of dating/courtship and relationships (e.g., friendships and romantic relationships). In addition, researching Black online dating is a benefit to the users and providers of this contemporary social engagement by understanding and providing tools to overcome the perceived barriers. We use social homogamy theory, described in numerous studies (e.g., Kalmijn, 1998; Trost, 1967) in this clinical and scholarly perspective to examine the difficulties Blacks face while using online dating sites. Social homogamy suggests that individuals are more likely to date/marry others with similar characteristics. These could include, but are not limited to, socioeconomic, racial, religious, or even cultural similarities. For some Black professionals, finding a mate with such similarities may be perceived as difficult. There exists the possibility that if Black professionals were to use online dating to expand the pool of potential mates, then their selections may be more likely to in accordance with desired traits and qualities. In this essay, we first describe the process of online dating, followed by a discussion of barriers in Black online dating, and conclude with recommendations for clinicians, online daters, and future research.
Online Dating

Compared to the newspaper personal advertisements that were used in the past, the use of online personal ads is rapidly growing. Researchers have found that over 40 million individuals visited these ads in 2003 (Mulrine, 2003) though upwards of 90% of profile are inactive (Hong, 2013). In 2013, the digital dating service industry reached $2 billion in revenue. The major dating sites include Match, OKCupid, and eHarmony (IBISWorld, 2013). All online dating websites share the common goal of connecting compatible people for the purpose of meeting and dating. This is accomplished through a series of components that are consistent to all online dating sites. These components include a self-description or profile made by users; users viewing descriptions of others; and users making interpersonal connections whether online or potentially in person (Rocco Tresolini Fiore, 2004).

The self-description typically includes key demographic and personal questions such as gender, age, ethnicity, number of children, education, and body type. Once a profile is created, users can search for others and sort by a specific type of person. Often, the dating systems will also select potential matches and suggest them to the user through matching algorithms (Rocco Tresolini Fiore, 2004).

Online dating is often stigmatized as a resource for desperate people and viewed as a socially awkward exchange (Ahuvia & Adelman, 1992; VanAllen, n.d.). Contrary to this idea, contemporary results show that such stigmatizations may not hold true. Users are no longer lonely, introverted individuals who have difficulty in social interactions. Instead, users of these sites represent a more broad range of individuals (Ahuvia & Adelman, 1992). Online dating can also be stigmatized in ethnic minority populations. Some minority, especially women, users perceive that online dating leads to more positive experiences (e.g., meeting possible mates) for White people (Ashleigh, 2014; Young, 2011). In spite of the stigma, the diversity in ethnicity has increased in many online social environments.

Despite an upward trend in use, some Blacks are reluctant to use social networking. A sense of mistrust and possibly a stigma exists among some Blacks towards online dating (Ashleigh, 2014; VanAllen, n.d.; Young, 2011). Some common undercurrents between the two may be the fear of sharing too much with strangers and questioning the effectiveness of both therapeutic and dating strategies. Online dating advocates argue that online dating broadens the dating pool beyond chance public encounters (McGraw, 2005). The pros and cons of meeting people online are still hotly debated by the media and potential online daters. However, despite its prevalence, lit-
tle research has been done on cyber-courtship and cyber friendships. This is especially true for users of color, in this case, Black professionals. In fact, a literature search of online dating yielded few results specifically including Black participants.

Black Myths and Online Dating

Scholarly and lay discourse frequently enforces ideas of dating scarcity for Black professionals. These messages report statistics that 42–70% of Black women have never been married (ABC News, 2009; Kreider & Ellis, 2011), that education decreases the chances of getting married (Alexander, 2009; Young, 2010), and that successful Black men prefer White women (Davis, 2009; Young, 2010). Researchers, Toldson and Marks, reexamined the census data that yielded these results through a different lens (Desmond-Harris, 2011). After excluding those not likely to be married, Toldson and Marks found that that 75% of Black women married by age 35. Baccalaureate education actually increased the odds of being married from 60% to 70% for Black females 40 and under. For Black males, marriage increased from 63% to 76% when compared to individuals with a high school education. Even further, 88% of all Black men were wedded to a Black woman regardless of their education or salary. It is also noteworthy that much of the research on Black relationships omits same sex relationships and those who report being single. Despite these omissions and contradictory research findings, anecdotally, the myths of the aforementioned Black relationship statistics prevail.

While some Blacks are turning to online dating websites to find a mate, others are still reluctant. Dating sites that are aimed at persons of African descent like BlackSingles.com and BlackPeopleMeet.com indicate that there is a rise in the number of Black women using their sites, though no specific data was provided. Though Blacks are reportedly increasing their online presence, many barriers to online dating still exist including a desire for social homogamy (e.g., a mate of a similar race, complexion, social class, and religion), undesirable online behavior, and access disparities.

Social Homogamy Theory

Social homogamy theory suggests that people are attracted to others who are similar. By definition, homogamy has been suggested as an expression of
same-sex relationships and “heterogamy” in heterosexual couples, but class-
cic uses of the former term persists in male-female relationships research
(Cohen, 2011). People typically select mates who are similar to themselves
in appearance, age, race, religion, education, and socio-economic status
(Cohen, 2011; Watson, Beer, McDade-Montez, 2014). Further, people make
choices based on shared interests and role expectations. Notably, Watson
and colleagues (2014) found that agreeableness, emotional stability, intellect,
and attractiveness outweighed religious and political preferences. Thus, the
aspects of homogamy that are perceived to be most salient remain debatable.

The concept of social homogamy can be dissected into various compo-
nents. The three major areas examined here include class (e.g., socioeco-
nomic status, education), race, and religion. Evidence suggests that people
are interested in dating individuals of a similar economic class (Sprecher
& Regan, 2002). Racial matching preferences occur on an interracial and
intra-racial level and religious homogamy is also evident. In addition, any
combination of the aforementioned matching preferences adds to the com-
plexity of dating preferences.

Socioeconomics and Homogamy

In Graham’s controversial (2000) book, Our Kind of People: Inside Black Amer-
ica’s Upper Class, he outlines the continued economic segregation within the
race. The Black elite, those making over $200,000 annually, make up less
than 1% of the Black population. Often consisting of physicians, lawyers,
businessmen and women, he notes a continual emphasis among the Black
elite on the “right” skin tone, family, schools, and social clubs often at the
exclusion of lower and middle class Blacks. Yet these “preferences” for the
right mate seem to extend into the middle class.

For professional Black women seeking other professionals, the per-
ceived obstacles continue with educational differences between the gen-
ders. The U.S. Department of Education (2012) reported that men earned
34% of bachelor’s degrees awarded to Blacks in 2009. Employment status
may also be a deciding factor for Black professionals. Given the current
state of the economy and its disproportionate impact on Blacks compared
to Whites (Desilver, 2013), unemployment and underemployment may be
legitimate concerns. Social class is often based on perception and misper-
ception of education, income, or social activities that may cause daters to
unduly eliminate dating prospects.
In my clinical practice, some of my clients report desiring a “professional” mate though no clear definition is provided. For some, obtaining a college degree is important, while for others, it is maintaining full time job. One professional in her mid-30’s, said, “I just want someone who I can take to professional events and he can go one way while I go another and I do not have to worry about him embarrassing me.” The expectation is that another professional will be able to exercise independence and have a sense of social awareness/sensitivity.

Just as Watson et al. (2014) found in their study with college students, the prevailing clinical theme is that clients report a preference for someone who is similar to themselves. Socioeconomic and educational preferences are often cited first among Black professionals, but are quickly followed by racial and religious predilections.

**Racial Homogamy**

Dating prospects may be further limited by the avoidance of interracial dating and colorism (e.g., prejudice based on social ascription of skin tone value) (Duke & Berry, 2012; Lewis, 2013). Based on one’s racial identity and the sense of belonging and identification with a particular group (Phinney, 1989), the race/ethnicity of a potential mate may range from extremely important to irrelevant.

Interracial dating has doubled in the last 30 years. Over 15% of all new marriages are between individuals of a different race compared to 8% of existing marriages (Passel, Wang, & Taylor, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Interracial relationships are on an upward trend yet online daters still show preferences for same race matches (Lewis, 2013). Hitsch, Hortaçoğlu, and Ariely (2010) found that regardless of age, income, and education, most online daters prefer to date within their race. Some groups are more open to interracial matches (Mendelsohn, Shaw Taylor, Fiore, Cheshire, 2014). Some of these groups more open to interracial matches include Blacks more than Whites; males more than females; and younger people compared to older people. Other research found that people were less likely to initiate contact with a user of a different race but were more apt to respond when contact was initiated (Lewis, 2013). Lewis extrapolates from these trends that preemptive discrimination is often the culprit. This form of discrimination is based upon the expectation of negative interactions that may have occurred in prior life experiences with racism and oppression.
Similarly ‘cultural paranoia’ accounts for the expectation of how people of other races will treat you based on past experiences (Grier & Cobbs, 1968). Beyond interracial dating preferences, skin tone preferences still exist in Black communities (Duke & Berry, 2012).

Colorism is still evident in many Black social exchanges. Dark Girls (Duke & Berry, 2012) is a contemporary documentary film on the issue of colorism. The film explores the intersection of class, race, and self-esteem and it also highlights the continued within-race prejudice. The documentary reveals that many Black participants indicated a preference to date other Blacks with similar skin tones. Even further, throughout their commentaries, some participants perpetuated negative perceptions of Blacks of other skin tones. These sustained ideologies may limit intraracial dating prospects. People with strong race-based preferences may also hold other preferences that could impact their online interpersonal connections, such as religious homogamy.

Religious Homogamy
Religion and spirituality are often salient values in the Black community. People often seek relationships with people of the same religious background with the assumption that religious compatibility is essential to romantic success. There are even dating websites dedicated to Christian daters (e.g., Christianmingle) and specific religions (e.g., JDate, Catholicsingles, BlackAdventistSingles). While some perceive a baseline level of comfort with shared religious affiliation, others may find minimal success with such a narrow scope of potential partners. When discussing religion and online dating, a 45 year old, Black male client said, “I go to church but am not super religious. Many [Black] women online ask too many questions about what church I belong to or what denomination I am.” Similarly, another male client asserted, “I do not want to be beaten over the head with the bible.”

CNN contributor Liane Membis (2010) explored one blogger’s suggestion that Black women are sometimes “blinded” by strict adherence to religious beliefs fashioned by Black churches. The religious term “equally yoked” is translated into equally extensive time and participation in church activities. Prospects met outside of church are often immediately disregarded, which may further limit dating opportunities. Alternatively, others suggest that Christian Black women are single because there are fewer Black
men in church (i.e., 1 in 5 have no religious associations) and that men are less willing to assume a “submissive” role under the pastoral leadership of another man (Membis, 2010). The necessity of religious homogamy may seem farfetched but research finds support for improved marital outcomes (Cornwall & Thomas, 1990; Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee, 2012).

Cornwall and Thomas (1990) examined the Mormon religion and marriage and found that couples that attended church regularly reported higher marital satisfaction and commitment attributable to adherence to religious guidelines and the social support found within the congregation. Regular attendance in non-denominational or denominational church has a twofold effect of close social support and the fear of stigmatization if a couple separated (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee, 2012). Additionally, Curtis and Ellison (2002) found greater consensus on family issues among couples who choose religious homogamy. Religion and values are often intertwined and online daters may have an expectation of shared values and appropriate online behavior.

Undesirable Online Behaviors

Sexual innuendo is very prevalent in face-to-face and online dating. Non-verbal cues like hand gestures, eye contact, posture, and other forms of body language are lost during cyber courtship and dating. Thus, online daters are relegated to profile pictures and written narrative to elicit attraction. Moreover, the anonymity of online dating likely reduces inhibitions of people and written communication produces a fabricated sense of personal familiarity (Hong, 2013). Many females report sexual innuendo too early in online dating connections (Dating Goddess, 2010). Examples range from provocative answers to profile questions such as “what do you think is sexy” to direct references to one’s sexual prowess. Unless sites are designated for “hook-ups” (e.g., casual sexual encounters), early sexual advances sometimes derails future face-to-face and intimate encounters.

In live dating, there is no running commentary on the internal dialogue of a prospect. However, online dating is unique in that it allows users to post comments, “poke” (i.e., to say hello or show interest; Wickman, 2014), or “wink” (i.e., a sign of flirtation). Comments, in particular, can prove deleterious to online users. Sexist and racist commentary is boldly declared under the guise of “preferences” perhaps without recognizing the impact on the
human recipient. Willoughby (2014) blogged about the hazards of online dating for Black women expounding on the endless reminders of our perceived unattractiveness, such as users making guessing games out of her ethnicity and suggesting she be more physically fit. Hong (2013) proposes that the flood of matches causes users to quickly filter based on trivial rather than meaningful perceptions. Given this high negativity, it is no wonder many of my clients avoid online dating. If clients already experience personal struggles, additional online negative comments are not the antidote. Perhaps fear of negative evaluation drives online daters to deception.

Deception and Perceived Deception in Online Dating

Upon direct questioning about perceived digital deception (knowingly transmitting false information), one mid-40’s, Black female professional stated, “You can be whomever you want online, I could never trust them.” Another client insisted, “it’s too easy to lie online.” On the surface, the research supports their position. In fact, 81% of people do not accurately describe themselves online (Toma, Hancock, Ellison, 2008) and a third of online data photographs are not accurate (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Women are more likely to post inaccurate pictures that are older, enhanced/professional, or are inconsistent with their present appearance (i.e., hair color, weight), while men are more likely to lie about height. Additionally, some users of dating websites are also deceptive about their relationship status (e.g., single and unattached). Deception on the Internet is so prevalent that new terms, trolling and catfish, have now been used to describe people who use the Internet for fraud, deception, or bullying (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014).

At a glance, deception seems quite rampant but it is notable that humans also frequently lie in face-to-face interactions. Some people will make changes to hair color, eye color, get cosmetic procedures, and use body-shaping garments. Inasmuch, others may lie about their name or other personal information in awkward social interactions. Generally, people lie about once or twice a day in face-to-face communication (DePaulo et al., 1983; Hancock, Thom-Santelli, & Ritchie, 2004). It could be surmised that fears about deceit on the Internet are disproportionate with reality.

Online, the decision to be untruthful is more common than fraud. Some lies are perceived as “safer” in the event that users meet in person. Researchers even suggest that some amount of dishonesty is socially acceptable in the online dating arena and that in some cases it may serve as
inspiration to blend the ideal online self with real self (Ellison, 2006). The moral boundary between protecting one’s identity and intentional deception is unclear. Clinically, I frequently suggest to my clients that the best way to reveal and uncover the truth is through communication and meeting in person sooner rather than later.

The challenges with online dating are complex and multilayered and there are no universal answers to address all of the implicit and explicit expectations with online dating. One problem that has not heretofore been discussed is disparities in Internet access in Black communities both on broad-band internet and mobile devices (Horrigan, 2009; Smith, 2014). These access disparities do not exist among high income and college educated Blacks and is more prevalent in individuals who are older and low income (Smith, 2014). Since Blacks are represented across the economic spectrum, the present discussion is briefly broadened to consider the implications of access disparities in online dating.

Financial Implications in Black Online Dating

Fewer Black households have Internet access (62%) at home compared to 74% of Whites (Smith, 2014). Despite plummeting prices for computers and Internet, the high cost often accounts for the absence of a computer. Infrequent access likely influences computer literacy, which further reduces the utility of online dating systems. This also limits the pool of eligible singles. Over the years some of my clients have reported low computer literacy, grammatical errors, and/or Internet slang is often perceived as a red flag in the online world. Both older and younger users should be aware of these opinions to avoid misperceptions.

Internet dating also costs money and time. Membership fees often cost hundreds of dollars per year. Using one or more of these sites can become costly. Deals are often advertised such as a free trial week but the fine print may require lump sum payments or automatic renewal. Premium services such as private calling or profile development assistance might be tempting but also add to the cost (Lacy, 2010).

A cost-benefit comparison of the value of time may also be useful. An hourly wage estimate applied to the number of hours spent on dating websites may reveal an imbalance and may not justify the cost. Assessing one’s general use of time is relevant too. The estimated time to create a profile ranges from five minutes to an hour (Lacy, 2010). Having enough free time to create profile, look at other profiles, contact others, and date all add to
an already complex work/life balance for professionals. It is pertinent to consider whether online dating is the best use of time and money.

Economic considerations such as computer costs may not be as relevant for Black professionals but the cost-benefit assessment of time versus money is necessary. Moreover, time constraints are universal as few people have excessive free time to spend in cyber communications. Lastly, understanding barriers to access may be salient for the broader audience and for future research considerations.

We have thoroughly described the process, challenges, benefits, and perceptions of Black online dating. The next section provides a case for future research and recommendations for potential online daters.

Implications and Recommendations
As online dating is emerging as a new research arena, special attention should be paid to potential Black online daters. The unique needs and perspectives of this growing subgroup can add to the sparse literature on online dating. Perhaps cultural considerations can be made in the development of matching algorithms. There may also be distinctive needs that users of color may find beneficial; for example, the ability to narrow a search by religion or education preferences, to filter out inappropriate (e.g., racist, prejudice) content, to report negative user behavior, or an express profile creation option. Research including Black users would provide more insight into the needs and adaptations that would be most beneficial.

Online dating may also be a useful tool for clinicians. Therapists should be knowledgeable about specific social support resources that are available to their clients both regionally and through the Internet. A quick google search for “online dating” yields over 11 million results but narrowing searches by client characteristics (e.g., race, religion, interpersonal needs) may provide more usable results. Assisting clients in using technology to identify social outlets and to make social connections may help them meet their therapeutic goals. Knowing the barriers and having the ability to suggest solutions may make this tool more beneficial.

This paper primarily focused on the pros and cons of online dating. We surmise that natural human flaws are replicated in technological mediums. Despite the challenges, online dating may remain a practical alternative to meeting people in the community. For those considering and using online dating sites, a few recommendations are offered to overcome the obstacles addressed in this paper:
• Establish whether there is a desire to fill a short-term need (e.g., dating) versus a long-term commitment (e.g., cohabitation, marriage). Dating needs may include companionship and social outlets whereas marriage requires love, financial considerations, and a needs assessment for future partnership (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004). In dating, complete compatibility is not required and people have the option to try “something new.” Dating may be more expansive if one is amenable to meeting people with different characteristics. It is noteworthy that some online applications, like Tinder.com, are perceived to be for hook-ups. Conduct background research on the various sites and ask friends with similar interests for recommendations.

• Weigh the time/cost equation of online dating. One should consider the amount of time and financial investment required to date online before taking on this additional responsibility. If time and resources are limited, one may want to consider low cost or free community events to engage in to meet others.

• Internet dating may be costly, but keep in mind that some paying members may be more serious about establishing friendships and/or committed relationships.

• Monitor time appropriately. It is easy to lose track of time and/or spend too much time in the process of creating and searching profiles on dating sites. Set limits and balance online activities with live human interactions.

• Believe nothing that is heard and half of what is seen. One should be cautious and not perpetuate deception in his/her profile. It should be kept in mind that deception is very prevalent on the Internet and it may be imprudent to emotionally invest in online relationships without meeting users in person early on.

• Avoid sharing too much personal information too soon. Pay attention to suspicious behavior such as few connections, absent or professional photos, alleged traumatic injuries or serious illnesses, inaccessibility at certain hours, or unwillingness to video chat or talk by phone.
• Use websites that target demographic interests (e.g., BlackPeopleMeet.com, ChristianMingle.com, OurTime.com). Be clear about what the site offers and whether or not it is aligned with personal expectations.

• Use technology for purposes other than dating. Online search tools can connect people with social, community, and religious events that target intended demographic groups. These events may include professional socials, alumni meetings, concerts, athletic events, book clubs, or holiday festivals.

• Stay safe when taking the next step! Many online dating platforms list tips for protecting yourself, both on and offline. One should take certain precautions during the first meeting with someone. Some precautions include meeting in a public place, use of own personal or public transportation; alerting a friend of family member about where the date will be and who it will be with; and remaining sober.

Summary
Creating a robust social support network is a significant buffer to the effects of psychological distress. Online dating and networking may be a viable tool to broaden social outlets. While there may be an increase in social options, there are many perceived obstacles. This paper sought to provide assistance for successfully navigating these barriers thereby expanding social prospects. The diversity of users will continue to increase and research on effectiveness of this tool will surpass individual anecdotes of negative personal experiences of Black online dating.

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Editorial Board

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Andrea Davis, PhD, is the former director of the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC) and an associate professor in the Department of Humanities at York University in Toronto. She teaches courses in literatures and cultures of the Americas and has published widely on Black women’s fictional writing and constructions of gender and sexuality. She is also interested in questions of engaged multicultural citizenship, in particular, the role of minority youth and women in reconstituting national identities. Her current research partnership, “Youth and Community
Development in Canada and Jamaica: A Transnational Approach to Youth Violence,” funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) builds on this research priority. The partnership, which brings together researchers from five Canadian universities and the University of the West Indies (Mona), as well as Jamaican and Canadian community partners to explore the role of the arts as an intervention into youth violence, was identified for its research excellence by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) and profiled in 2012–2013 in COU’s Research Matters Campaign.

Felicia D. Fisher, MS, is a graduate student at the University of Houston in Houston, Texas. She earned her Master of Science in Counseling Psychology degree at the University of Houston and her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Fisk University in Nashville, TN. Her clinical experience is invaluable as she has served as an individual, couples, and family psychotherapist for many years. She is passionate about her work and the advancement of sexological literature targeted at persons of African descent.

Karen Flynn, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies and the Department of African American Studies Program at the University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign. She received her PhD in women’s studies from York University, Toronto, Ontario, in 2003. Her research interests include migration and travel, Black Canada, health, popular culture, feminist, Diasporic and post-colonial studies. Dr. Flynn’s recent book: Moving Beyond Borders: Black Canadian and Caribbean Women in the African Canadian Diaspora is published by the University of Toronto Press. Moving Beyond Borders won the Lavinia L. Dock Award from the American Association of the History of Nursing. She is currently working on a second book project that maps the travel itineraries of Blacks across borders.

In addition to her academic work, Dr. Flynn has published numerous editorials in Share, Canada’s largest ethnic newspaper, which serves the Black and Caribbean communities in the Greater Metropolitan Toronto area. She was also a freelance writer for Canada Extra, and most recently for Swaymag.ca where she wrote passionately about contemporary issues considering issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, age, and nation. Dr. Flynn is currently a Dean’s Fellow for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, a program geared towards strengthening and expanding the cadre of leaders in the College.
John J. Gordon Jr. is the National Clinical Trainer at Phoenix House Foundation. He received his Master of Human Service degree from Lincoln University. He currently holds a New York State Credentialled Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor (CASAC) and is an Internationally Certified Alcohol & Drug Counselor (ICADC). He has 20 years of experience in the field of substance abuse in clinical, managerial, and training capacities. He is a former member of the New York City HIV Prevention Planning Committee (NYCPPG) which partnered with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and was tasked with translating President Obama’s HIV National HIV Strategy into a comprehensive HIV prevention plan for New York City. He is a former Adjunct professor at Lehman College Continuing Education Department CASAC Program.

Beverly Guy-Sheftall, PhD, is founding director of the Women’s Research and Resource Center (since 1981) and Anna Julia Cooper Professor of Women’s Studies at Spelman College. She was for many years an adjunct professor at Emory University’s Institute for Women’s Studies where she taught graduate courses in their doctoral program.

At the age of sixteen, Guy-Sheftall entered Spelman College where she majored in English and minored in secondary education. After graduation with honors, she attended Wellesley College for a fifth year of study in English. After a year at Wellesley, she entered Atlanta University to pursue a master’s degree in English. Her thesis was entitled “Faulkner’s Treatment of Women in His Major Novels.” A year later Guy-Sheftall began her first teaching job in the Department of English at Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1971 she returned to her alma mater, Spelman College, and joined the English Department.

Guy-Sheftall has published a number of texts within African American and Women’s Studies which include the first anthology on Black women’s literature, Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature (Doubleday, 1979), which she coedited with Roseann P. Bell and Bettye Parker Smith; her dissertation, Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Toward Black Women, 1880–1920 (Carlson, 1991); and Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought (New Press, 1995). Additional anthologies include Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality (Indiana University Press, 2001), coedited with Rudolph P. Byrd; I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde (Oxford University Press, 2009), with Rudolph P. Byrd and Johnnetta Betsch Cole; and Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women’s Stud-
ies (Feminist Press, 2009), co-edited with Stanlie James and Frances Smith Foster. She has also completed with Johnnetta Betsch Cole a monograph, *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Equality in African American Communities*, which was published by Random House in February 2003, and *Who Should Be First?: Feminists Speak Out on the 2008 Presidential Election* (SUNY Press, 2010). In 1983 she became founding editor of *Sage: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women* which was devoted exclusively to the experiences of African descent.

Guy-Sheftall is the recipient of numerous fellowships and awards, among them a National Kellogg Fellowship; a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship for dissertations in Women’s Studies; and Spelman’s Presidential Faculty Award for outstanding scholarship. She has been involved with the national women’s studies movement since its inception and provided leadership for the establishment of the first women’s studies major at a historically Black college. She is also past president of the National Women’s Studies Association (*NWSA*). Beyond the academy, she has been involved in a number of advocacy organizations which include the National Black Women’s Health Project, the National Council for Research on Women, and the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, on whose boards she serves. In her role as Director of Spelman’s Women’s Center, she has also been involved with the development of student activism around misogynist images of Black women in hip hop as well as a broad range of social justice issues, including reproductive rights and violence against women. She teaches women’s studies courses, including feminist theory and global Black feminisms.

**Anita Hawkins**, PhD, has more than thirty years of experience in the field of health and human services, working with public agencies, health care organizations, institutes of higher education and community-based organizations. Her field work and related research on HIV, substance abuse, and mental health issues have led her to explore the nexus of sexuality and sexual relationships on the health and well-being of the African American community. She earned her BS in psychology from Georgetown University, her MHS from The Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, and her PhD in community health education from the University of Maryland College Park.

**Leah P. Hollis**, EdD, is Assistant Professor in the Community College Leadership Program at Morgan State University. Her recent book, *Bully in the Ivory Tower: How Aggression and Incivility Erode American Higher Edu-
cation is based on independent research on 175 colleges and universities. Findings reveal that workplace bullying occurs at an even higher rate in higher education. Her research has helped over 70 schools address incivility on campus. Dr. Hollis has an extensive career in higher education administration where she has held senior leadership and faculty posts. Dr. Hollis has taught at Northeastern University, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, and Rutgers University. Dr. Hollis received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Africana Studies from Rutgers University and her Master of Arts in English Literature from the University of Pittsburgh. She received her Doctorate of Education in Administration, Training and Policy Studies from Boston University, as a Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellow. Also, Dr. Hollis continued her professional training at Harvard University through the Graduate School of Education, Higher Education Management Development Program. She also earned certification in Project Management and Executive Leadership at Stanford University and Cornell University respectively. Further, she has earned certifications in EEO Law/Affirmative Action and Conflict Resolution and Investigation from the American Association for Affirmative Action. Her research interests focus on the healthy workplace and also issues that deal with college athletics, and at risk students.

Larry D. Icard, PhD, DSW, is a professor in the College of Health Profession and Social Work at Temple University where he also serves as director of the Center for Intervention and Practice Research. His research and publications focus on developing and testing interventions to reduce health problems experienced by at-risk populations including pre-release incarcerated men, African American men on the down low, African American gay and heterosexual men, South African adolescents, South African men who have sex with men, South African heterosexual men, South African adolescents, and HIV-positive African American men and women.

George James is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist who specializes in helping couples improve the quality of their relationship, reconcile conflicts & overcome intense situations such as affairs, lack of communication, parenting struggles, loss of a loved one & much more. He also works extensively with adult men & adolescent boys on various issues including defining manhood, career & work/life balance.

Mr. James is president and CEO of George Talks, LLC, a communica-
Mr. James has taught, presented, spoken and consulted with multiple businesses, organizations, universities and places of faith, including Eastern University, Northern Illinois University, Lincoln University, AOL Black Voices, Villanova University, NCAA Division I Basketball Teams, Cardone Industries, Bethany Baptist Church, Independence Blue Cross, Catholic Health East, Urban Philly and Philadelphia Mayor’s Office of Community Service to name a few. He is also the founder and director for the past ten years of a men’s group that focuses on helping men improve their emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual well-being.

Mr. James has been a reoccurring expert guest on many TV and online programs including: It’s Your Call with Lynn Doyle (an Emmy Award winning, issues-oriented talk show covering various topics with viewers from Maine to Florida); Comcast Network CN8; NBC10’s 10! Show (News & Entertainment morning program on Philadelphia’s NBC affiliate); CBS3; FOX29; AOL Black Voices and NBC10’s (Philadelphia affiliates of CBS, FOX & NBC) evening news. In 2005, Mr. James appeared weekly on CN8’s Morning Show, Your Morning (News & Entertainment morning program on the Comcast Network). Mr. James has also been an expert guest on many Philadelphia radio stations including WURD 900 AM, WRNB 107.9 FM, WPHI 100.3 FM, WPPZ 103.9 FM, Detroit’s WJR 760 AM and Chicago’s WVON 1690 AM. Since 2004, Mr. James has appeared in over 125 television and radio interviews.

Treva Lindsey, PhD, is an assistant professor of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies at The Ohio State University. Her research and teaching interests include African American women’s history, Black popular and expressive culture, Black feminism(s), hip hop studies, Black sexual politics, and critical race and gender theory. Her first book, Colored No More: New Negro Womanhood in the Nation’s Capital, is under contract with University of Illinois Press. She is also the co-editor of a forthcoming volume on Black popular culture studies in the twenty-first century.

Doreen Loury, PhD, is currently Director of the Gateway/ACT 101 Program at Arcadia University in Glenside, Pennsylvania, which is a state EEO (Equal Education Opportunity) program designed to provide access and support to socially and academically disadvantaged students attending college. Dr. Loury is also a professor is the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice at Arcadia where she developed the university’s African American studies curriculum and is currently developing a minor in
Africana Studies. Dr. Loury is the 2010 recipient of the prestigious Lindback Foundation Award for Distinguished Teaching and is the first African American to receive the award at Arcadia University.

Dr. Loury is the Founder and Executive Director of the nationally recognized Black Male Development Symposium. The symposium during its six years has been held annually at Arcadia University’s campus and has offered workshops and speakers to over four thousand students, parents, community leaders, and practitioners in the tri-state and beyond.

**Aretha Faye Marbley**, PhD, is a professor and director of community counseling in counselor education at Texas Tech University. She is a critical global multicultural–social justice womanist activist, scholar, storyteller, and clinical counselor educator whose multicultural-social justice and human rights work has spanned over three decades. As a helper, healer, advocate, and storyteller for women, people of color, and marginalized communities, she critically examines the intersectionality of multiple social identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, nationality, ancestry, age, class, gender, ability, and sexuality) and listens to the experiences, voices, and counternarratives of marginalized women, communities, and people trapped in oppressive social structures, social locations, and social statuses. She is the recipient of numerous awards for her work including a national human rights award, a social justice anti-oppression award, and a research award.

**Kenneth Monteiro**, PhD, is the Dean of the College of the College of Ethnic Studies, the only College of Ethnic Studies in the nation; former University Dean of Human Relations; and, Professor and former chair of the Psychology Department at San Francisco State University. Before teaching at San Francisco State, he was on faculty at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and at Rutgers University at New Brunswick. Dr. Monteiro received his PhD from Stanford University in Experimental Psychology with a specialization in Cognitive Psychology, and his bachelor’s degree (AB) in psychology from Dartmouth College.

He has published in a range of areas including emotion and memory, culture and thought; ethnic, gender and sexual identity; and academic and reading achievement for African, Asian and Latino youth. His edited text, *Ethnicity and Psychology: African, Asian, Latino and Native American Psychologies*, has been used nationally to bridge Ethnic Studies and Psychology courses addressing these communities.
Wilfridah Mucherah, PhD, is a professor of developmental psychology. She received both her master’s and doctorate degrees in human development from the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland. Her research interests include classroom climate and academic achievement, reading motivation and academic achievement in middle school students, self-concept and academic achievement, self-concept and self-esteem among minorities, significance of native languages, and cross-cultural research focusing on adolescents. In addition, she conducts research on teachers’ sense of efficacy and beliefs in immersive learning experiences.

Winnie also developed a partnership with two Kenyan universities involving student and faculty exchanges and research. Through this partnership she takes Ball State students to Kenya in the summer for immersive learning. Winnie also writes grants for a rural primary school in Kenya on various projects like nutrition, barriers to academic success, and health and hygiene among preadolescent and adolescent girls.

Valerie Newsome, PhD, received her doctorate in biobehavioral health from Pennsylvania State University in 2013. Her research addresses cultural influences on sexuality and health behavior, as well as the structural contributors to disparities in health across race and gender. She has co-authored various papers and presentations addressing HIV/AIDS in the United States and South Africa.

Bridgette Peteet, PhD, is an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Cincinnati. Her academic research interests include the impact of racial identity and psychological well-being on ethnic minority achievement. She is a licensed clinical psychologist with a small private practice emphasizing mood disorders, cultural issues, and couples therapy. She also teaches courses on cultural competency in clinical practice and research. In her community Dr. Peteet has served as a cultural competency consultant and conducts an ethnic minority parenting support group.

James Peterson, EdD, is a research scientist with the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at George Washington University, where he teaches a course “Ethnographic Methods as Applied in Public Health” and has participated with and managed ethnographic and qualitative research activities on multiple projects.

His interests are conducting ethnographic research among substance
abusers, HIV/AIDS fieldwork, and using social research strategies to gain access to hard-to-reach populations, applying a variety of ethnographic and qualitative research methods including types of street and institutional interviewing, observations, and focus group research.

Currently, Dr. Peterson conducts ethnographic research with high-risk populations in Washington DC on a CDC-funded National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) study.

Leon Rouson, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary and Special Education at Norfolk State University in Norfolk VA. Dr. Rouson completed both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from North Carolina Central University in Durham NC and his PhD from Old Dominion University in Norfolk VA.

Dr. Rouson has published several research articles in refereed journals and has written many book chapters. His research focuses on issues of diversity and social justice—and most often centered around diversity and oppression, urban Black males, child development, curriculum and instruction, and school culture.

Dr. Rouson is also a renowned national educational consultant and motivational speaker.

Gregory Seaton, PhD, serves as an associate professor at the College of New Jersey in the Department of Education Administration and Secondary Education. He teaches pre- and in-service teachers educational psychology, curriculum design, adolescent learning and development, and research methods. His research is primarily focused on how context informs the developmental and academic possibilities of youth, particularly Black males. Most recently, Seaton’s research has examined the role of student-teacher relationships in promoting positive outcomes for urban youth.

Seaton has served as a youth outreach worker for the Orlando Housing Authority where he was responsible for job readiness and life skill training for public housing residents. Additionally, Seaton served as executive director for Teacher Education for America’s Minorities (TEAM) at the University of Central Florida. As director, he recruited and trained minority teachers to provide high quality instruction in urban and poorly funded schools. Seaton has a counseling-based EdM from Harvard University in risk and prevention and a PhD in educational leadership and human development from the University of Pennsylvania.
Dionne Stephens, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Florida International University (FIU); she also holds affiliated faculty status in the Women’s Studies program and Latin America and Caribbean Studies Center. Originally from Toronto, Canada, she became a faculty member at FIU after earning her doctorate in human development from the University of Georgia.

Dr. Stephens’s research examines socio-historical factors shaping minority populations’ sexual scripting and sexual health processes, with emphasis on gender and ethnic/racial identity development. Her current research study explores young adults’ and parents’ attitudes toward HPV vaccines, and cultural factors influencing intimate partner violence attitudes. She is author of several articles on sexuality issues in racial minority communities. For her work in these areas, Dr. Stephens was awarded the Jessie Bernard Award for Outstanding Contribution to Feminist Scholarship from the National Council of Family Relations and the Carolyn Payton Early Career Award from the American Psychological Association.

Terrell L. Strayhorn, PhD, is a professor of higher education in the College of Education and Human Ecology (EHE) at The Ohio State University, where he also serves as director of the Center for Inclusion, Diversity, and Academic Success (iDEAS) and EHE chief diversity officer. Dr. Strayhorn has faculty affiliations with several centers and academic programs/departments, including Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and Sexuality Studies. Author or editor of eight volumes, Dr. Strayhorn maintains an active and highly visible research agenda focusing on two major foci: assessing student learning and development outcomes and the ways in which college affects students, and identifying and understanding factors that enable or inhibit the success of historically underrepresented, misrepresented, and vulnerable populations in education, with a particular accent on issues of race, class, and gender and how they affect the experiences of racial/ethnic minorities, college men, economically disadvantaged individuals, and marginalized groups in postsecondary education. Finally, he is author of several books including one on gay students of color in college.

Marlene F. Watson, PhD, LMFT is the former Chair and current Associate Professor of the Couple and Family Therapy Department at Drexel University in Philadelphia. She is a licensed couple and family therapist in private practice and the author of the e-book, Facing the Black Shadow. Dr. Watson is
a member of Family Process Institute’s Board of Directors and serves on the Editorial Review Board for the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy. She is the former Chair of the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education and the first ever couple and family therapist to receive the prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellowship where she served as a senior health advisor to United States Senator John D. Rockefeller IV. She is a former columnist for Heart & Soul magazine and the recipient of AFTA’s 2009 Distinguished Contribution to Social Justice Award.

**Joseph Youngblood II**, PhD, JD, is the vice provost for academic affairs and dean of the John S. Watson School of Public Service and Continuing Studies at Thomas Edison State College. Dr. Youngblood has spent the past twenty years working in education, law, and public policy. Dr. Youngblood earned a JD from the University of Iowa College of Law and a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania, where he was a Crawford Fellow and received an interdisciplinary doctorate that combined anthropology, comparative human development, public policy, and education to study issues of race, culture, identity, and inequity in schools, political systems, and society. Dr. Youngblood’s recent research interests include the prediction of resiliency and the influence of identity processes for competence formation among urban children with special needs classifications. Other research and practice initiatives include the ongoing development and implementation of developmentally appropriate, culturally competent, and contextually unique programs for urban adolescents and adults.
The Association of Black Sexologists and Clinicians

Black Families, Black Relationships, Black Sexuality Conference
A Professional Conference for Scholars and Practitioners

The mission of the conference is to showcase research, clinical, and pedagogical efforts of those who seek to shed additional light or improve Black families relationships, and/or sexual expression. The conference invites scholars and practitioners from around the world to share their research and best educational and/or clinical practices. Interdisciplinary by nature, the conference will be able to illuminate the continuum of health disparities as well as the behavioral, affective, and cognitive challenges that persons of African descent experience across the lifespan. Finally, the conference is a scholarly medium for collaborating, networking, organizing, educating, raising consciousness, and charting ideas.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS: January 1 to April 15, 2015.

Conference Strands
Black Families
The Black Families component of the conference sheds light upon the myriad of constellations that exists among persons of African descent. The legacy of slavery, the value of collectivism, the need for communal elasticity/accommodation, and recognition of nontraditional and traditional arrangements are only a few dynamics that make Black families unique and resilient. Below is an abbreviated list of topics that scholars, clinicians, and educators may address with their proposals.
Parenting
Child and adolescent development
Black special needs children
Adult issues
Challenges of the older adults
Family systems
Third generational families
Blended families
Extended families and kinship networks
Same sex parenting

Black Relationships
The Black Relationships component of the conference addresses the continuum and fluidity of how couples arrange themselves. Specifically, it involves the formation, maintenance, and ultimate severance (e.g., break up, separation, divorce, death, etc.) of relationships. Roles, responsibilities, expectations, negotiation strategies, communication, and rules (implicit and explicit) are the fabric of what enables Black relationships to be unique. Moreover, given the national exposure to how power manifests itself in some relationships, it seems important that scholars and clinicians who have explored relational imbalance, dysfunction, and violence (e.g., sexual assault, abuse, manipulation, etc.) be offered an opportunity to share their work. Below is an abbreviated list of relationships that proposals can address:

Romantic relationships
Marriage
Formal partnerships/domestic relationships
Friendships
Peer/collegial relationships
Same sex relationships
Acquaintanceships
Cyber relationships
Interracial relationships
Relational scripts, intimacy negotiation, partner availability/selection, models of courtship, attachment styles and philosophies about love
Black Sexuality

The research and clinical efforts around the sexual expression of persons of African descent has received a considerable amount of formal attention over the last three decades. However, the work of scholars, clinicians, and educators has been systemically fragmented and up until this point, there has not been a forum for professionals to collectively address the unique issues that face this special population. Thus, the concept of intersectionality (e.g., race and sexuality) is a viable and important concept to formally explore and give light to the discourse of an emergent field. The following topics represent an abridged listing of possible proposals that are a part of this strand for the conference:

Aesthetics
Contraceptive technology and usage
HIV/AIDS/STIs prevention, interventions, and programs
Eroticism
Sex trafficking, sex tourism, sex work (e.g., prostitution, erotic entertainment), sexual harassment, and the hegemonic politics that enable these institutions and behaviors
Sex education
Sexuality and the church/spirituality
Gender
Intersectionality
Sexuality history
Sexual decision making;
Sexual orientation and identity
Construction of masculinity and femininity
Alternative lifestyles and sexual expression including kink, BDSM, paraphilias/fetish, polyamory, incest, etc.
Media depictions of Black sexuality
Sexual dysfunctions and its treatments
Power and sexual entitlements
Black Film
The media continues to shape what we think, feel, believe, and how we behave in our families, how we govern our relationships, and how we express ourselves sexually. With this in mind, the conference will have a special component targeted at Black film/media/web series. Black filmmakers are invited to submit their documentaries, web series, media clips, videos, or other forms visual narratives as they will be showcased, judged, and possibly given an award for direction, cinematography, acting, or People’s Selection of Visual Excellence Award. Media clips can be on anything related to Black Families, Black Relationships, Black Sexuality. Short film submissions should be no more than one hour. Feature film submissions should be more than one hour.

WHEN: October 1–3, 2015
WHERE: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
CONFERENCE LOCATION: Cira Center (HUB) (30th and Arch Streets next to the Amtrak Train Station), 2929 Arch Street, Philadelphia PA 19104
WHO THIS CONFERENCE IS FOR:
- Researchers/Scholars
- Psychologists
- Social Workers
- Licensed Professional Counselors
- Educators
- Mental Health Professionals
- Mental Health Administrators
- Behavioral Specialists
- Life Coaches
- Policy makers
CATERING: Steven Starr Catering
CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS: Council for Relationships/Thomas Jefferson University

ALL PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS SHOULD BE SENT TO:
absc1041@gmail.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION: theabsc.com
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