

AN EXPLORATION OF FAMILY OF ORIGIN AND CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF MEN AND THEIR EXPERIENCE OF
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

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(Under the Direction of Thomas Coleman)

ABSTRACT

African American family life has traditionally been viewed from a deficit perspective (Billingsley, 1992) in which it was assumed that the absence of a residential father figure was equivalent with several detrimental outcomes for children (Gadsden, 1995) and social ills within the African American community (Moynihan, 1965, Franklin, 1950). Explorations of family process that go beyond linking family structure with child outcome have only recently emerged within the literature and these explorations remain rare. Furthermore, qualitative inquiry into the long-term impact of family of origin and contextual influence on adult women's beliefs about men and relationships is rare. This study focuses on the manner in which familial interactions impact African American women's perceptions of men and their experience of relationships. Through open-ended interviews with five African American women, this study demonstrated the impact of non-residential father figures, other early male influences, and the observation of romantic relationships within one's family of origin on black women's perceptions and behavior in relationships. Some environmental influence was also evident.

INDEX WORDS: Family of origin, Contextual influence, Romantic relationships, Beliefs about men, African American women, Qualitative inquiry

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Supportive relationships, inclusive of, albeit not limited to, romantic relationships constitute an important part of an individual's overall health and well being (House, Landis & Umberson, 1988). Healthy social relationships serve as a protective factor for ill health in the presence of stress and such relationships can prolong the duration and quality of life for individuals (House, et. al., 1988). African Americans, as a minority group, may receive added benefit from supportive relationships that helps compensate for the negative aspects of the minority experience (Hatchett & Jackson, 1999; Manns, 1997;1988). While African Americans have traditionally taken their ties to immediate, extended and fictive family members very seriously (McAdoo, 2002), in recent decades lasting romantic relationships and marital unions between African American men and women have declined (Cherlin, 1998). Relationships between men and women in the African American community have been described as "strained" (Rodgers-Rose, 1980) and it has been argued that African American men and women both approach and avoid relationships with one another (Chapman, 1997). African Americans, however, are not less desirous of marriage and intimate relationships than other racial/ethnic groups. Several studies have indicated that African Americans have as much desire for marriage as other groups (Tucker, 2000; Davis, Emerson, & Williams, 1997; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). If this is indeed the case then it becomes important for researchers, clinicians, and others interested in African American relationships and family life to explore possible reasons for a

decline in the potentially supportive relationships that one may find in a marriage or lasting romantic union.

The explanations for the decline in marriage among African Americans can generally be placed into two categories- contextual factors and attitudinal factors. The contextual factors that explain why African Americans are less likely to marry and why they separate and divorce more frequently include decreased economic opportunities (Cherlin, 1998) and higher rates of unemployment among African Americans (Tucker, 2000), higher homicide rates for African American men as well as higher rates of imprisonment among this group (Lawson & Thompson, 1999; Dawsey, 1996; Braithwaite, 1981). These factors make marriage difficult to attain and maintain and they can potentially place a strain upon non-marital romantic relationships.

The attitudinal factors that inhibit relationship formation and maintenance refer to dysfunctional beliefs attained from the dominant society and sustained in one's own microculture that African American men and women bring into relationships. The stereotypes of the "no-good African American man" who engages in relationships with multiple partners for amusement and the "hostile African American woman" who seeks to avoid or dominate men have been particularly damaging within African American communities (Lawson & Thompson, 1999; Chapman, 1997). Cultural myths portray the African American man as unreliable, lazy, irresponsible and womanizing and the African American woman as cold, domineering and contributing to the emasculation of African American men (Bethea, 1998; Lang, 1996). A few studies that have examined the prevalence and awareness of such stereotypes among young African American men and women have found that while both African American men and women are aware of such stereotypes, belief in the negative views about African American men are particularly prevalent among African American women (Cazenave & Smith, 1997).

This study sought to explore two potential sources – the family and cultural beliefs enforced by the media- for the prevalence of dysfunctional beliefs about African American men and romantic relationships among African American women. Symbolic interaction theory proposes that shared meanings or understandings of the world are developed within primary groups such as families and that feelings toward primary group members are often translated into more abstract symbols or ideals (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). It can be assumed then, that feelings about relationships in general and relationships with African American men in particular, are shaped in part, within a young woman's family of origin. Dysfunctional beliefs that society or microcultures uphold may be supported or debunked within a young woman's family.

Depending on the beliefs that are espoused in a young woman's family and the behavior of her father, young women who are reared in single mother homes may be particularly likely to develop stereotypical or dysfunctional beliefs about men. The messages that a girl's mother and other family members put forth following relationship dissolution as well as continued father involvement or lack thereof, potentially shape the beliefs that a young woman holds about the stability of relationships and the extent to which men in general, and African American men in particular, may be relied upon. While there are an array of meanings that a woman may attach to the relationship dissolution of her parents and to her father's absence or lack of involvement in her life, these meanings are likely influenced by family interactions and beliefs.

Ecological theory acknowledges the importance of social interaction (inclusive of family interaction) in shaping human development and further emphasizes the importance of context in understanding human behavior (Klein & White, 1996). It urges researchers to consider the interaction between several ecologies and levels of society that an individual is exposed to (Klein

& White, 1996). Thus, as a young African American woman develops an understanding of men and relationships she is likely influenced not only by the messages and actions of her family members, but by others with whom she interacts or is exposed to.

This study examined four related research questions, which are as follows: 1. In what ways, if at all, do young African American women from single mother homes feel that their relationships with their fathers have an impact on their perception of the other sex? 2. Do young African American women from single mother homes feel that the relationship dissolution of their parents has an impact on their own experience in romantic relationships? 3. How do the messages that young African American women receive in their families of origin concerning the other sex impact their current perceptions of African American men and romantic relationships? 4. In what ways, if at all, are African American women from single mother homes impacted by societal messages regarding African American men?

It is believed that such an exploration provides a substantial contribution to the research community. The literature that is available regarding African American family life has historically been very limited and continues to present a void as it relates to an exploration of how family life shapes the relationship beliefs and experiences of African American women. Links are rarely made between childhood family structure, family process, and experience in adult romantic relationships. African American female headed families have traditionally been viewed from a deficit perspective in which it is assumed that family structure is equated with family functioning (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1993). Many researchers who assume such a structural functionalist perspective, have asserted that disorganization within the African American community is a direct result of family disorganization in general, and specifically homes in which fathers are not present (Moynihan, 1965, Franklin, 1950). Moynihan (1965)

blames matriarchal families or female dominated households for malfunctioning children and the social ills (i.e. crime) present in the African American community. While research in recent decades has advanced beyond such a deficit approach and has begun to explore functionality in African American families based on the context in which these families live, available literature on single mother headed families continues to present a void as it relates to the exploration of certain variables. This study goes beyond viewing African American families from a structural functionalist deficit perspective by exploring family processes and interactions within homes headed by African American single mothers. Hence, a father's absence from his daughter's residence was not equated with the daughter's well-being in adulthood without considering the importance of other factors. As a result, the findings of this study will contribute to the field of family studies by further informing researchers and clinicians of family dynamics in African American homes headed by mothers while placing emphasis on both family interaction and context.

In order to explore the research questions posed, individual interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of five African American undergraduate women. A structured interview guide, which is included in Appendix D, aided the researcher and ensured that all desired questions were addressed. However, slight deviations in topic did occur and are believed to be an important part of the richness of qualitative inquiry. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. Specifically, six principles of salience as outlined by Alexander (1988) aided the researcher in finding themes and patterns within each individual interview. In addition, themes identified in each individual interview were compared to those of other interviews to identify patterns in participant response as well as inconsistencies. Several methods were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings obtained.

This document is presented in the following format. Chapter two is comprised of the literature review. In this section, relevant literature and theory were discussed. The nature and extent of the problem is revealed. First, the researcher has reviewed literature that focuses on the problems in African American romantic relationships and the stereotypical beliefs that African American men and women often hold. Next, the researcher has suggested one's family of origin as a possible moderating influence that may serve to enhance or lessen the impact of negative societal beliefs about African American men and relationships. Thirdly, the researcher has presented literature that specifically explores how women in single mother families may be impacted by a father's absence or the relationship dissolution of her parents. Finally, the researcher discusses important variables to be considered in a study that examines the influence of family structure and process and the contributions that the study provides.

Chapter three is comprised of the method section. Sample demographics are discussed. The procedure for recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis are discussed. Methods for enhancing the trustworthiness of findings and the credibility of the researcher as these apply to qualitative inquiry are discussed.

Case study data is presented in Chapter four. The findings of each individual interview are discussed. Data is presented through tables as well as text. Although the data was originally reduced using six principles of salience identified by Alexander (1988), each table was later organized in summary form as it related to participant responses to each interview topic. A description of each participant's background as it relates to socioeconomic status, family structure, and family relationships is provided. In addition, participant responses to each interview topic are reviewed and supported by relevant quotes from the participant.

The findings and discussion are presented in Chapter five. The common themes found across interviews as well as unique or contradictory findings are discussed. The researcher provides insight into the research questions originally posed as well as any additional questions that the data have prompted. Relevant text and quotes from participants are used to provide support for the interpretations of the researcher. Any additional insight that participants have yielded where data interpretation is concerned is addressed.

Chapter six focuses on the limitations of the study. Implications for future research and practice are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining the Problem

Marriage is typically a short life stage for African Americans who are less likely to marry than whites and other minority groups, marry later, and separate and divorce more frequently than other racial/ethnic groups (Cherlin, 1998). According to Chapman (1997), the state of African American male-female relations is less than optimal. Several researchers suggest that African American male-female relationships are plagued by fear of commitment, lack of trust and emotional “game playing” (Chapman, 1997; Aldridge, 1991). Chapman (1997) argues that African American men and women both approach and avoid relationships. Rodgers- Rose (1980) supports this contention as she describes African American male-female relations as “strained.” Utilizing multivariate proportional hazards analysis, Kposowa (1998) found that nearly 50% of the marriages of African American women were expected to be terminated by the end of 15 years compared with only 17 percent of marriages among white women. After controlling for covariates such as age at time of first marriage, it was found that African American women were 1.8 times as likely to divorce as their white counterparts (Kposowa, 1998).

Studies have revealed, however, that African Americans, as a group, are not necessarily less desirable of a lasting marriage than other racial/cultural groups. In a 21 city survey of marital expectations and values, findings indicate that there were no significant differences between the races on expectation of marriage and the importance of marrying someday (Tucker,

2000). Among a sample of 135 young African American professionals, most hoped to marry within five years (Davis, Emerson, & Williams, 1997). Utilizing a nationally representative data set, Trent and South (1992), on the other hand, found that African Americans were less likely than whites to agree that it is better to marry than to remain single or that marriage is for a lifetime. By contrast, Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1995), who also utilized a nationally representative data set, found that respondents across all races felt that romantic relationships were important and indicated a strong willingness or desire to marry. These findings suggest that African Americans are not necessarily less desirous of marriage than other groups and that the lower likelihood of marriage among African Americans and the higher incidence of separation and divorce among this group cannot be explained by a lack of interest in romantic relationships or marital unions. Other factors, both structural and attitudinal, have been put forth as explanations for relationship dissolution among African Americans.

Contextual Constraints

Among the structural factors, bleak prospects for financial stability among African American men have been linked to marital instability or avoidance of marriage. Cherlin (1998) argues that while there is no single reason for the decline in marriage among African Americans, economic hardship caused by a decline in semi-skilled jobs is one influential factor that affects the ability of African American men to fulfill the provider role. African American men are underrepresented among college populations (Loury, 2004) and as a result they are often ill-equipped to obtain gainful employment. African American men who live in cities with higher levels of unemployment are less likely to expect to marry than those who live in cities with lower levels of unemployment, as evidenced by a 21 city survey (Tucker, 2000). Along similar lines, Trent and South (1992) found that respondents who were working less (and likely had less

income) were less likely to believe that it is better to get married than to remain single and less likely to disapprove of divorce than men earning better wages. According to Thompson and Lawson (1999) socioeconomic and occupational stressors along with decreased financial prospects of African American men make marital commitment/stability more difficult to attain. Heiss (1997) finds that African American women are more likely than Euro-American women to take practical issues such as responsibilities, income, and quality of life into consideration before marrying. This was particularly true for African American women of low socioeconomic status. Hence, it is evident that both African American men and women regard bleak economic opportunities as a serious hindrance to becoming and remaining married.

In addition to financial instability other structural barriers exist that lessen the likelihood of marital formation and marital stability among African Americans. African American men and women are less likely to marry than other groups as a result of higher homicide rates and a high incidence of drug addiction among African American men and the fact that a large number of African American men are incarcerated (Lawson & Thompson, 1999; Dawsey, 1996; Braithwaite, 1981). In addition, the under representation of African American men among college populations (Loury, 2004) often means that young African American women are unable to find suitable marriage partners who are similar to themselves in education level and career aspirations. These structural factors which are, in part, a manifestation of discriminatory practices, inhibit relationship formation by reducing the pool of eligible African American men. The lower the sex ratio in a given neighborhood (the numbers of men in relation to the numbers of women) the lesser the likelihood that African American men and women will marry (Kiecolt & Fossett, 1997).

Attitudinal Constraints

Relationship formation and maintenance, however, are not only impacted by contextual factors that make it difficult for African American men and women to unite and support one another. Other factors such as dysfunctional or stereotypical beliefs may also contribute to relationship instability. Davis (1993) argues that when African American men and women attempt to establish healthy relationships they must do so while fighting negative media portrayals of themselves. It may present a struggle to some African American men and women not to perceive their partner in terms of racial stereotypes (Davis, 1993). Media images, such as those found in popular films and music may be highly influential in developing negative social norms regarding male-female interaction and marriage within the African American community (King, 1999). Chapman (1997) asserts that many negative forces such as racism have impacted the African American community and perpetuated stereotypes that men and women internalize. Cochran (1992), from her review of the literature, concludes that of the multiplicity of factors that shape how African American men and women view one another, one of the most destructive is the internalization of the negative attitudes and stereotypes held by the larger society. The stereotypes of the “no-good African American man” who engages in relationships with multiple partners for amusement and the “hostile African American woman” who seeks to avoid or dominate men have been particularly damaging within African American communities (Lawson & Thompson, 1999; Chapman, 1997). Recent films, such as “Waiting to Exhale,” “How to be a Player,” “The Brothers” and “Breakin’ all the Rules” have upheld these stereotypes and portrayed African American relationships as hostile, conflict-ridden and full of emotional “game playing”.

Davis (1993) argues that African Americans are rarely portrayed as healthy intimate partners. Cultural myths portray the African American man as unreliable, lazy, irresponsible and womanizing and the African American woman as cold, domineering and contributing to the emasculation of African American men (Bethea, 1998; Lang, 1996). According to Bethea (1998), acceptance of these views creates a barrier between African American men and women. Stereotypical beliefs, when internalized, can influence African Americans as they develop identities and define situations (Aldridge, 1991).

A few studies have looked at the impact that dysfunctional beliefs have on perceptions of individuals of the other sex. Lang (1996), utilizing a sample of ninety-six African American college undergraduates found that respondents who were exposed to negative primes about the other sex prior to the viewing of an ambiguous vignette were more likely than those exposed to positive primes to rate the vignette as hostile and to view it in terms of the stereotypes that had been presented to them. Lang's findings are limited in their ecological validity, however, given the fact that she uses an experimental manipulation (a word unscrambling technique) to prime participants for or against certain myths rather than using the pre-existing myths that participants actually have in order to determine how respondents own attitudes and beliefs impact their perceptions of the opposite gender and male-female interactions. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that within the small amount of time in which the study took place, respondents' perceptions were influenced sufficiently for them to rate an ambiguous vignette as hostile. This has considerable implication for those who are consistently exposed to such negative beliefs.

In a similar study, Cazenave & Smith (1990) sought to examine the degree to which African American men and women were aware of and believed in certain stereotypes regarding African American men and women. Utilizing a sample of 256 African American respondents of

low and working class status ranging in age from 14 to 68, the researchers found that many of the respondents, particularly African American women, were aware of and agreed with the negative stereotypes about African American men. Respondents who agreed with the stereotypes were more likely to perceive their own relationships negatively. Sixty percent of the women and a little less than half of the men agreed with the beliefs that African American men are unreliable and irresponsible and that they exploit African American women. In addition while 60 percent of African American women believe the stereotype that African American men are not satisfied with one woman, only 40 percent of African American men believe this stereotype. While African American men were aware of the stereotypes regarding African American women they were somewhat less likely than African American women to believe the stereotypes about the other gender. It should be noted that half of the women and 42 percent of the men agreed with the statement that within the past 50 years there has been a growing distrust and even hatred between African American men and women.

While societal messages likely have considerable impact on the way in which African American men and women view themselves and one another, messages that are perpetuated within the family in which one is raised are also likely to have an influence on the perceptions and behaviors of African Americans as it relates to romantic relationships. Messages about relationships and the other sex transmitted both verbally and non-verbally may be influential in supporting or debunking the stereotypes that are put forth by the larger society.

Theoretical Background

Symbolic interaction theory proposes that families are social groups in which meanings or interpretations of the world are constructed (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). This theory proposes that family members arrive at a more or less shared sense of the world, a symbolic reality that

consists of a shared set of goals, values, beliefs and norms. Shared meaning is constructed within families through interaction and observation of the socially constructed roles that group members play. Feelings toward primary group members are often translated into more abstract symbols or ideals (Cooley, 1956 as cited in LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) assert that families may convey to members that certain roles are more important than others. The researchers assert that symbolic interaction theory is useful when examining the significance that group members attach to intimate interactions. While this theoretical perspective acknowledges the importance of personal perception and construction of meaning it also emphasizes how shared meanings are constructed within families (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Symbolic interaction theory, with its focus on subjective realities does not assume that all families construct the same reality, but instead allows for an examination of the interaction between race/ethnicity, class, gender, age and time as they relate to family life (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

While symbolic interaction theory assumes that shared meaning is cultivated first and foremost within primary groups (the family), this theory also acknowledges that there is a constant interaction between the individual and society (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). In support of this assumption made by symbolic interactionists, ecological theory has as its guiding principle the notion that individuals grow and adapt through interactions with individuals and groups who are proximal to them (i.e. the family) as well as more distant environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to ecological theory, one cannot understand the actions of individuals and families without considering the larger context within which they live (Klein & White, 1996). Ecological theory assumes that “human beings are social and thus are interdependent on other human beings” (Klein & White, 1996, p.219). In connection to symbolic interaction, this theory

says that one manifestation of their social nature is language (hence interaction) (Klein, & White, 1996). Secondly, ecological theory assumes that “human interactions are spatially organized” (Klein & White, 1996,p.219). In other words, we interact more often with things in our immediate environment, while at the same time being influenced, though to a lesser extent, by the larger environment. Thus, as a young woman constructs the meaning she attaches to her father’s behavior, to men and to relationships, she is influenced not only by interactions with her family, but also, to some extent, by beliefs that exist within the larger society and the microculture to which she belongs.

The Influence of Family Structure and Relationships on Women

Stereotypical beliefs regarding African American men and male-female relations within the African American community that are perpetuated by the larger society, as well as African Americans themselves, are of particular concern given the fact that many African American girls are reared in homes where no father is present (Carter, 2001). Given the proposition of symbolic interaction theory that feelings toward primary group members are often translated into more abstract symbols or ideals, a young woman’s feelings toward an absent or uninvolved father may translate into her perception of males in general. Over 60 percent of African American children are born into or later become a part of a female headed single parent family (Carter, 2001) and females are more likely than males to be reared in homes that have no father as a regular member of the family (Adams, Milner, & Schrepf, 1984). Young women reared in homes where fathers are absent and uninvolved may be impacted in at least three ways: (1) they may be less able to develop a relationship with their fathers, (2) they may be less likely to observe healthy interactions between their mothers and fathers, and (3) they may be more likely to receive verbal and non-verbal messages about men that are negative in nature.

Secunda (1992) asserts that fathers make unique contributions to their daughters' development. She argues that fathers provide an opinion and a perspective that is inherently different from the mother's as well as male validation and attention. Fields (1983) contends that when a father displays love and appreciation of the daughter's attributes and abilities she will develop early self-esteem on which to build self-confidence. Fields further contends that "a father's imprint marks a woman's identity for all time- her sense of self, her work, her love relationships and her understanding of the sexual differences" (p.29). Fields (1983) describes the father-daughter relationship as essential as it shapes the way the daughter sees men. She argues that because of the fact that a girl's first perception of the other sex comes through her father, he ultimately shapes the way she sees men and her expectations of male behavior. She further argues that father presence contributes to a daughter's ease and confidence in efforts to establish relationships with men. Sharpe (1994) proposes that girls' relationships with their fathers inevitably influences the way they approach men, the type of husbands and male partners they choose, and the kind of relationships they have with their husbands and male partners. Secunda (1992) argues that without a father's contribution, women have less opportunity for rehearsals of male-female relationships.

Fields contends that when girls are abandoned by their fathers, they constantly worry about abandonment in relationships as adults. In support of this contention, attachment theorists assert that children learn to trust others based upon whether or not they were able to place trust in their parents during infancy and childhood (Bowlby, 1988). A few researchers have theorized a link between one's attachment style to parents during childhood and adult attachment style to romantic partners (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1987).

Several researchers contend that girls who are unable to establish healthy relationships with their fathers have trouble establishing intimate relationships with males in adulthood (Scheffler & Naus, 1999; Genuchi, 1997; Secunda, 1992). Among the intimate related outcomes that women with absent fathers may exhibit are fear of intimacy (Scheffler & Naus, 1999; Secunda, 1992), emotional detachment (Genuchi, 1997; Secunda, 1992), lack of trust (Secunda, 1992), fear of depending on one person, over-dependence on one person (Secunda, 1992), attention-seeking behaviors (Genuchi, 1997; Adams, et. al., 1984), anxiety about sex (Scheffler & Naus, 1999), the selection of a partner who can play the father role (Genuchi, 1997; Secunda, 1992), or the selection of a partner who really isn't available whose desertion will not hurt as much (Secunda, 1992).

While several researchers have not found a link between father daughter relationships and adult relationship intimacy (Farbman, 2001; Morgan, 2001), the findings of other studies have yielded support for this link. Genuchi (1997) found that young women from father absent homes who did not feel that there was a father surrogate present were more likely than women from father present homes to report a higher number of sexual partners prior to age 19. Interestingly, he also noticed that many respondents in the study commented that they looked for qualities their fathers had when looking for husbands, lovers, or boyfriends. Appleton (1981), through his retrospective qualitative interviews, found that the types of relationships women had with their intimate partners were similar to the ones they had with their fathers while growing up. Those who experienced a distant relationship with their fathers were more likely to be distant towards intimate partners. From her literature review, Kleinman (1998), proposes that there is evidence that women who experienced father absence in childhood may demonstrate significant problems in heterosexual relationships and other areas of adjustment as adults. Kleinman uses object

relations theory in her explanation of how past relationships (including those from childhood) that have taken on negative associations may contribute to failure to achieve intimacy in one's early adult relationships. Wineberg (2000) suggests that adolescent girls whose fathers were absent may exhibit proximity and attention seeking from males or they may exhibit inhibition, rigidity, avoidance, and restraint around males.

Scheffler and Naus (1999) linked self-esteem to adult relationship quality in their study which explored father influence on adult daughter's adjustment. They found a positive relationship between perceived fatherly affirmation and self-esteem and a negative relationship between fatherly affirmation and fear of intimacy. Hence the more affirmed women felt by their fathers, the higher their self-esteem and the less affirmation they felt, the more fear they had of intimacy. The researchers propose that those who felt more unconditional positive regard from fathers may be more trusting of others and comfortable with themselves. While this study was correlational in nature and the findings do not imply causation, they have important implications for the relationship between fatherly affirmation and women's self-esteem and comfort with intimacy.

Secunda (1992), through her qualitative research, argues that a father's affirmation of his daughter's positive attributes may serve as an indicator of whether or not men in general will be affirming and accepting of her. Cangelosi (1988), in a study comparing the intimate relationships of daughters of divorce and daughters of two-parent families found that women from both father "absent" and father "present" homes who felt greater emotional closeness with fathers indicated greater emotional intimacy in their adult romantic relationships. Among women who had experienced parental divorce, perception of father's dependability and consistency in the women's lives was related to their ability to achieve emotional intimacy with

heterosexual partners. The results of the study indicate that fathers serve as role models for young women that may form her perceptions of whether men are dependable, consistent, and emotionally available.

In a similar study, Southworth and Schwarz (1987) found that, in general, women from divorced and two parent homes did not differ on the degree to which they believed that men could be trusted in heterosexual relations. However, when the researchers examined the interaction between parents' marital status and father involvement, findings indicated that among women from divorced homes, those who received less acceptance or consistency from fathers experienced less trust in heterosexual relationships. Hence, it appears that healthy father-daughter relationships, or the absence thereof, may play a critical role in how young women perceive and experience relationships.

In addition to having decreased opportunities for the development of a relationship with their fathers, young women reared in single mother homes may also be at a disadvantage where the witnessing of male-female romantic interactions is concerned. Biller (1993) argues that the mother-father relationship is one of the most significant models of male-female interactions. According to Secunda (1992), children learn about male gender roles as well as how men and women interact (or do not interact) through observing their parents interact. Thus, girls learn male gender roles as well as how men and women interact (or do not interact) from observing their father and his interactions with the mother (Secunda, 1992).

The parental relationship has been found to have an influence on the perception of relationship stability among children who experienced parental divorce. It has been argued that at least within the dominant culture there exists an intergenerational transmission of relational beliefs (Amato, 1999). Contratto (1987) contends that where a daughter views her parents'

relationship as negative, she may actively avoid relationship formation. Larson and colleagues (1998) in their study of family of origin influences on marital attitudes and readiness for marriage among predominately white adolescents found that respondents whose parents were divorced indicated less readiness for marriage as evidenced by a longer time in number of years before they would be ready to marry. While several factors may possibly explain a desire to delay marriage, increased caution about forming marital unions is one possible explanation. The findings of this study also suggest that anxiety about relationships is transmitted within families.

In addition to demonstrating less readiness for marriage, individuals from divorced homes may hold less favorable attitudes towards marriage as an institution (Jennings, Salts & Smith, 1992). Sinclair and Nelson (1998) in their examination of the impact of parental divorce on college students' dysfunctional relationship beliefs and ability to achieve intimacy in relationships, found that while it was possible for children of divorce to achieve intimacy within relationships, they may bring dysfunctional beliefs into their relationships. The researchers did not find support for the hypothesis that students from divorced families would experience less intimacy in their relationships than students from two-parent homes. Where relationship beliefs are concerned, students from divorced families were only likely to hold the dysfunctional belief that disagreement is destructive. This may have been a result of witnessing disagreement that eventually led to divorce among their parents. Interestingly, Sinclair and Nelson (1998) found that within intact families, increased paternal bonds lead to healthier relational beliefs and higher levels of intimacy. The researchers did not discuss the racial composition of their sample which inhibits generalizability.

Greenberg and Nay's (1982) investigation of the effect of parents' marital status and marital happiness on college students' attitudes toward love, marriage, and divorce did not find

significant differences between individuals from intact and divorced homes on their attitudes regarding love and marriage. The only significant difference among the three groups (intact, separated/divorced, and parent deceased) was in regards to respondents' attitudes toward divorce. The respondents whose parents were separated or divorced held the most favorable attitude toward divorce. It may follow, then, that young men and women who witness their parents' relationship dissolution are not less likely than young people from two-parent homes to desire relationships. They may be more likely, however, to hold more favorable attitudes toward relationship dissolution. Greenberg and Nay (1982) failed to discuss the racial composition of the sample and thus it is not certain whether the results are generalizable to African American young men and women. Trent and South (1992), through the use of a nationally representative data set, found that childhood family structure did not appear to influence respondents' attitudes toward marriage.

Studies examining the long-term influence of experiences within African American young women's family of origin as it relates to the experience of romantic relationships in adulthood have been sparse. Rouse (2001), in her qualitative investigation of how experiences in young African American women's family of origin influenced their sexual values, found that as a result of parents lack of affection displayed towards one another and lack of affection expressed between parents and children, participants had trouble expressing intimacy in their relationships as adults. Participants whose parents experienced relational difficulties were cautious in their own relationships.

The Impact of Familial Messages

Girls and young women who are reared in single mother homes are not only impacted by their relationships with their fathers (or lack thereof) and their observation of the parental

relationship or its' dissolution. They may also be impacted by messages that they receive from their mothers and other family members following relationship dissolution. Gadsden (1995) suggests that parents are capable of transmitting their feelings to their children. A mother who either feels she is unable to maintain successful relationships (and thus that relationships are unstable) *or* that relationships are not really valuable can transmit these feelings to her children. McAdoo (1997) asserts that identification with either or both parents leads to an incorporation of that parents ideas, attitudes and beliefs. If a daughter identifies with her mother, it is assumed that she may incorporate many of her mother's ideas and beliefs into her own understanding of the world. Secunda (1992) argues that daughters of single mothers often adopt their mother's attitudes about men. Thus, she contends, they may develop ambiguous attitudes about men,- i.e., that women need men for assistance but that men are often untrustworthy. Adams and colleagues (1984) assert that, especially among children whose mother was never married to their father, the effect the father's absence has on the child is shaped by the mother's attitudes towards the father. The child sees or perceives the father's absence in the way that the mother shapes it. Adams and colleagues (1984) explain that often, when parents become divorced (or were never married) the children think one parent is bad and the other one is good. Because girls reared in single parent families are typically raised by their mothers, the girl's father may be seen in a negative light. It must be understood, however, that not all mothers who experience relationship dissolution pass on negative messages concerning their children's fathers, men, or relationships in general. If a mother does indeed espouse negative messages regarding a girl's father or other African American men, however, she may be further enhancing the negative societal messages that the girl is exposed to.

There are very few studies which go beyond parents' marital status and examine whether or not parents' relational beliefs influence the relational beliefs of their children. One such study, composed primarily of white respondents from two-parent families, examined the influence of observation of the parental relationship *and* parental attitudes about love on adult children's beliefs about love (Inman-Amos & Hendrick, 1994). Findings indicated that parents do have an influence on the way their children conceptualize love. Results indicated that fathers who believed that love was about friendship were more likely to have children who also believed that love was about friendship. To the contrary, children whose mothers believed that love was based on dependence were less likely than other respondents to believe that love was based on dependence. It appears that while the beliefs of parents are influential, children do not always internalize the beliefs of their parents. Currently, there are no known studies that examine whether or not beliefs about relationships or expectations of male behavior are similar among African American mothers and their daughters.

Father Involvement

While it is important to remember the disadvantages that a girl raised in a single mother home may have as she attempts to form and maintain relationships with men (decreased opportunities for father-daughter bonding and observation of a healthy male-female romantic relationship as well as potentially negative messages), it is also essential to be aware of the fact that a father's absence from a daughter's residence is not always equated with his lack of involvement in her life. Way and Satuber (1996) found that among a sample of forty-five urban adolescent girls of various ethnicities, eight percent did not live with their fathers. African American girls were more likely to live with their mothers only. Of those who lived in single mother homes, 15% reported frequent contact with their fathers and 22% had occasional (a

couple of times per month or per year) contact with their fathers. Twenty percent of the fathers were deceased or entirely absent. Many of the girls in the study indicated that they did see their fathers on a regular basis and ambiguousness or resentment towards fathers mainly occurred as a result of the father's inconsistency in his daughter's life and not solely his absence from her residence.

While many researchers (Wineburg, 2000; Genuchi, 1997; Secunda, 1992; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991) realize that involvement matters more than mere presence, they argue that a father is more likely to be involved in his children's lives when he is physically present. In a longitudinal study conducted by Furstenberg and Harris (1993), the researchers found that "absent" fathers were only likely to be highly involved while their child was in preschool. Only one sixth of the children had regular contact with their father at seventeen year follow-up. When looking at the degree of closeness with fathers, Furstenberg and Harris found that half of the children who lived with their biological father felt close to him, whereas only twenty percent of children felt close to non-resident fathers.

While the results of a qualitative study conducted by Way and Stauber (1996) did indicate that many of the non-resident fathers were somewhat involved in their daughter's lives, results also indicated that a father's lack of involvement in a young woman's life may in fact cause her to generalize his behavior to the behavior of other males. One of the girls, whose father was absent and not highly involved, said that she did not like to be with her father "because he is a man." When asked if she confides in her father she reports, "I don't talk to males about any problem that I have. [I'd] rather keep it to myself [than talk to a male about it]" (p.144). This young woman's sentiment, which may or may not be indicative of similar

unexpressed sentiments among her peers, is in line with the assumption of symbolic interaction theory that feelings toward family members may generalize to others.

Other Variables to be Considered

Young women who live in homes where no father is present in the home may be able to form positive relationships with male family members despite their father's absence from the residence. Despite the higher incidence of single motherhood among African Americans, this group is also more likely to have family forms that are extended in structure (McAdoo, 2002; Sudarkasa, 1997). These extended families can include grandfathers, uncles, cousins as well as family friends who are male. Several researchers assert that the presence of male extended kin (Murry & Brody, 1999; Morrison, 1995) or father surrogates (Genuchi, 1997) can have a positive impact on child development. While the presence of male extended kin may enhance a girl's opportunity for bonding with a father substitute and potentially shape her perception of males in a more positive light, it does not provide the young woman with a model of marriage or healthy romantic relationships. In addition, Roschelle (1997) has found that proximity to and frequency of interaction with extended family members is decreasing among minorities and thus a young woman in the present point in time may have fewer opportunities to interact with an uncle or cousin than she does with a father with whom she resides.

Young women who are raised in single mother homes with uninvolved fathers may not be the only group whose perceptions of males and relationships are potentially distorted; girls who are reared in homes where they consistently witness interparental conflict may be as disadvantaged, if not more so, than women reared in single mother homes (Amato, 1999; Morrison, 1995; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Adams et. al., 1984). Greenberg and Nay (1982) found that respondents from unhappy intact homes were as likely as respondents from

separated/divorced homes to report pessimistic attitudes toward love and marriage. Sinclair and Nelson (1998) point out that the quality of the parental relationship is important to assess when attempting to determine the impact of parental divorce on college students' intimate relationship beliefs. Jennings and colleagues (1992) found that among Euro-American college students, those from homes with parental conflict had less favorable attitudes toward marriage than those from homes without conflict. In fact, among the variables examined, parental conflict accounted for most of the variance in participants' attitudes toward marriage.

Researchers seeking to examine how relational beliefs are shaped in single mother families must take continued father involvement into consideration despite his absence from the home. They should also consider the potential influence of male family members and extended kin as well as the influence of interparental conflict. Researchers must also be aware of the fact that while many African American children (and children of other races) will spend some time in a single mother home (Carter, 2001), because mothers often enter new relationships or remarry, children often observe relationships between the mother and males who are not their biological fathers. Several of these issues were explored in the current study.

Contributions of the Study

Much of the available literature on single-parent female headed families has focused on the impact father absence has on economic deprivation (Gadsden, 1995), school achievement (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991), conduct problems (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981; Gabel, 1992), self-esteem (Murry & Brody, 1999; Wenk et. al., 1994), socioeconomic attainment (Furstenberg & Harris, 1993; Mizell, 1999), or psychological adjustment (Wenk et. al., 1994; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993). However, little attention has been given to other areas including the effect that father absence has on adolescents or young adults as they enter romantic relationships. Genuchi

(1997) asserts that the significance of the father's contribution to his daughter's development has been overlooked especially where intimate related outcomes are concerned.

The existing literature that addresses the contributions that fathers make to their daughters development and the influence that parental divorce has on children are greatly limited by their use of predominately Euro-American samples. They provide limited insight into how African American fathers or father absence influence African American girls and young women. Researchers know little about the impact parental divorce, relationship dissolution, or the fact that a girl's parents were never married have on young African American women's perception of men and relationships in the long-term as they attempt to form heterosexual relationships. In addition, much of the literature that exists on the long-term impact of father daughter relationships and father absence is theoretical in nature (Sharpe, 1994; Contratto, 1987; Fields, 1983; Appleton, 1981). Empirical investigations in this area are needed.

Much of the literature that examines the intergenerational transmission of divorce focuses on linkages between childhood family structure and adult relationship experience or beliefs, yet fails to consider the influence of parental or societal messages on women's perceptions and behavior. The findings of these studies are limited as a result of the pre-selection of variables and the operationalization of these variables in the way that the researcher chooses. While a few studies have explored the prevalence of stereotypical beliefs concerning African Americans of the other sex and the impact these beliefs have on relationship experience and perception among African American women, these studies did not take childhood family structure or parental messages into account. This study allowed African American women to shape and define their own experiences and to reveal, in their own words, how their upbringing and the environment in which they live influence their perception of romantic relationships and the other sex. African

American women continue to constitute an understudied group, particularly where it concerns their experience of romantic relationships.

While this study was limited to women from single mother homes, it goes beyond a deficit approach of looking at African American families in the sense that father absence is not necessarily linked to negative outcomes in young adult women- the study does not link family structure to an individual's outcome. Family processes (i.e. interactions between family members) and the environment in which individuals and families live are explored. While much of the literature reviewed focuses on stereotypical or dysfunctional beliefs that may arise following parental relationship dissolution or divorce, this study also provides insight not only into how negative parental messages impact young women's beliefs and perceptions, but also how positive messages that women receive from their mothers and other family members serve to buffer them from the negative feelings they may attach to their father's absence. In addition, findings reveal how positive messages regarding African American men and relationships serve to combat potentially negative societal messages.

It is understood that while parents are influential in shaping the beliefs of their children, children do not necessarily assume the beliefs of their parents. Symbolic interaction theory does acknowledge personal construction of meaning and the impact that one's own interpretations have on his or her behavior (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Furthermore, this theory acknowledges the interactive construction of meaning and the reciprocal influence that parents and children have on one another. In addition, ecological theory reminds us that parent-child interaction and interaction within the family is not the sole influence on a child's understanding of the world or the child's behavior. Many contextual variables serve to continually influence one another (Klein & White, 1996). However, both symbolic interaction and ecological theories assume that

families and other groups that a child interacts with have an important influence on perception and behavior.

This study utilizes symbolic interaction theory and ecological theory as guiding frameworks to explore four related research questions: 1. In what ways, if at all, do young African American women from single mother homes feel that their relationships with their fathers have an impact on their perception of the other sex? 2. Do young African American women from single mother homes feel that the relationship dissolution of their parents has an impact on their own experience in romantic relationships? 3. How do the messages that young African American women receive in their families of origin concerning the other sex impact their current perceptions of African American men? 4. In what ways, if at all, are African American women from single mother homes impacted by societal messages regarding African American men? While these questions were the primary areas of concern and served to guide the researcher, other areas were explored during the interviews. This study was guided by existing theory; figures one and two, illustrate the theoretical model. As is depicted in figure one, it is believed that when a father becomes absent from his daughter's residence, the family develops a shared meaning about this relationship dissolution through interactions with one another. The daughter is then influenced by these interactions as well as her own perceptions as she constructs an understanding of her father's absence and the relationship dissolution of her parents. She may then generalize these beliefs to her beliefs about men and relationships in general and this may subsequently impact her experience of romantic relationships. As depicted in the figure however, the biological father's continued involvement in his daughter's life as well as the young woman's relationships with a father surrogate and male extended family members may

serve as moderators which influence both family interaction and a daughter's perception of men and relationships.

Figure two places the young woman in ecological context and emphasizes the influence of the surrounding environment. As young African American women form perceptions of men and relationships they are believed to be influenced by their families, peers, media portrayals, societal views, and the time period in which they live. While the family plays a critical role in shaping beliefs as a result of their proximity to and frequent interaction with a developing child, young women are also impacted by their microculture and society as a whole.

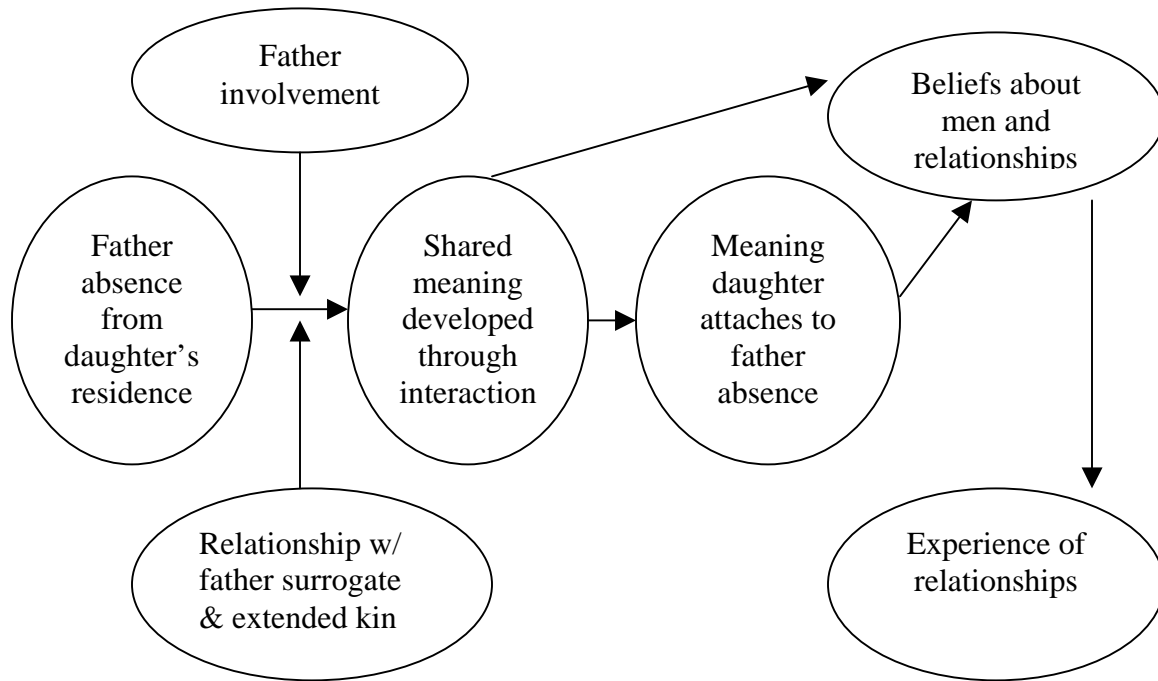


Figure 1: The Process by Which Paternal Behavior and Familial Messages Impact Young Women's Perceptions of Men and Experiences in Relationships

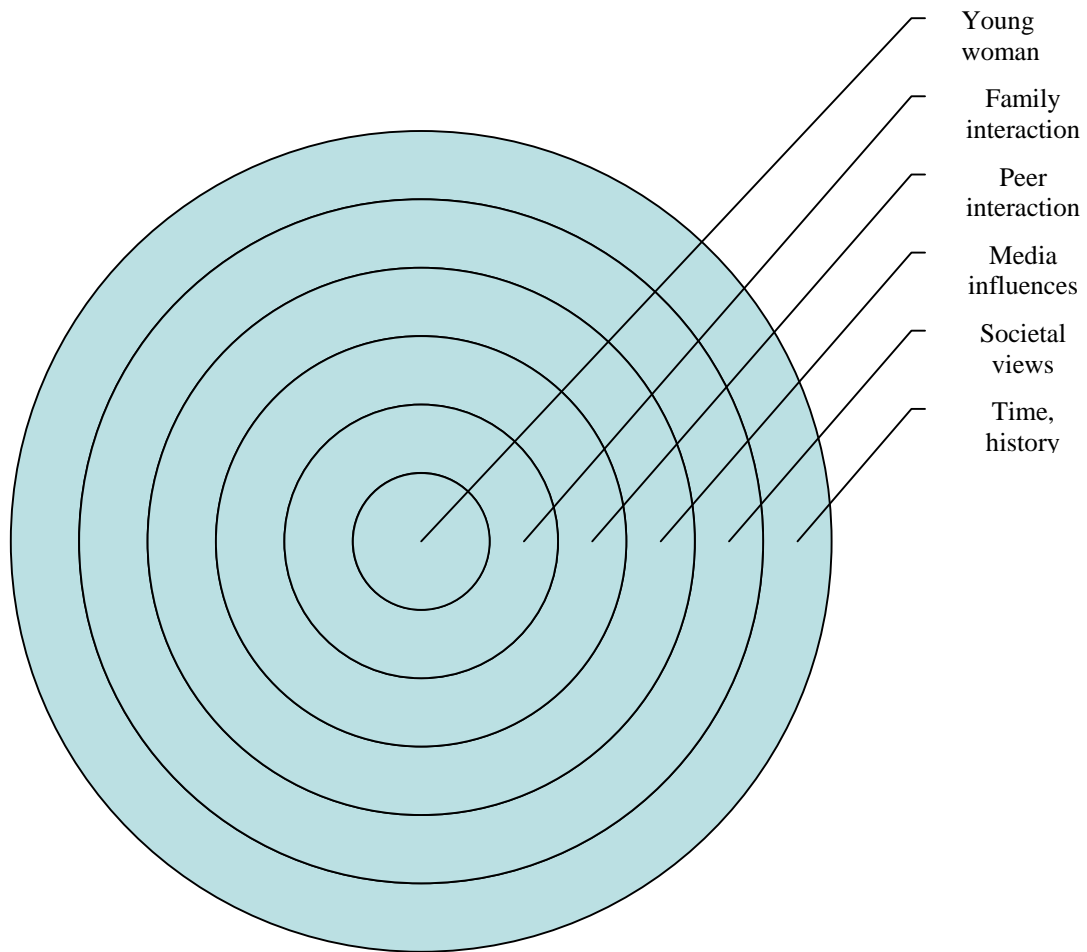


Figure 2: Contextual Influences on a Young Woman's Perception of Men and Relationships

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Sample

A purposive sample of five African American undergraduate women between the ages of 18 to 23 participated in the study. The women were single (non-married) and heterosexual and had spent between four and eighteen years in a single mother home. The women who participated were primarily from working class families and most had spent at least a portion of their childhood living in large cities in the southeast. Three of the women had parents who were divorced, one had parents who were separated and one young woman's parents had never been married. All of the women who participated spent time in a single mother home for a period extending beyond their sixth birthday. Excluded from the study were women whose fathers were deceased or absent from their home due to some other reason besides the relationship dissolution of their parents. The women were recruited by way of flier distribution at a large, southeastern university. Although the sample was small in size and non-representative of all women, it was purposefully chosen based on the research questions to be explored.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the use of individual interviews. Five African American undergraduate women participated in one two-hour interview. Interviews were chosen as the method of inquiry in this study because they provide insight into the way that a participant understands her world. Interviewing is an ideal way to understand participant thoughts and feelings that cannot be directly observed (Patton, 1987). Open ended interviews were ideal given

the aims of the investigation. They allowed participants to go into greater depth than closed ended surveys. They permitted participants to reveal, in their own words, their perceptions and understanding of the world. Through interviews with multiple participants the researcher was able to discover a variety of definitions of similar situations. In the study, it was not assumed that all women who spent time in a single mother home developed negative views of men or relationships based on their father's absence and subsequent messages received in the family and elsewhere – participants revealed how they have defined or attributed meaning to these situations.

In this study the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection. A structured interview guide was used to ensure that all desired areas of inquiry were discussed. Participants were free to elaborate or expand upon the questions that the researcher proposed. A copy of the interview guide is included in Appendix C. Areas addressed include 1. the impact that fathers have on perceptions of men, 2. the impact of the parental relationship on one's own beliefs about relationships, 3. messages received about African American men in one's family of origin, and 4. the impact of societal messages regarding African American men on participants' own perceptions. The topics were discussed in reverse order in order to build participant trust with less personal questions being asked at the beginning of the interview. It should be noted that the researcher was of the same racial background as the study participants and this may have facilitated the participants' disclosure of personal information.

Procedure

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board, African American undergraduate women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three were recruited from around the university by way of posted fliers. Those young women who demonstrated an interest filled

out an informed consent form as well as a demographic sheet that asked for their marital status, sexual orientation, and several family background questions. The women who met the criteria to participate were then able to complete the interview.

Participants received refreshments as well as ten dollars as compensation for their time and willingness to participate. The interviews took place in a comfortable setting inside of a family clinic. The primary researcher conducted all interviews. The interviews were tape recorded. In addition, participant behavior and non-verbal communication were observed though not videotaped. Immediately following each interview (within two to three weeks) the interviews were transcribed. Following data transcription, participants were contacted to verify that what had been recorded was what they recalled saying during the interview. The interviews were then analyzed as outlined in the following section and participants were allowed to comment on any disagreement or concern they had with the interpretation of their interview. Any concern with the interpretation of the interview is noted in the discussion of that participant's interview. Participants were contacted by way of email for both follow-ups. While the researcher has no way of knowing whether or not participants thoroughly read over the analyses of their interviews, participants' comments that the researcher was "right on" in the analysis or that they "learned a lot about [themselves]" while reading the analysis serve as an indication that most participants read over the analysis sent to them. Participant checks were conducted in this study because they are believed to be an important aspect of qualitative data analysis (Fine, Wise, Weseen & Wong, 2000).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed inductively in this study. While the researcher examined the data with a particular theoretical background and specific research questions in mind, no codes or

categories were developed prior to data collection. Inductive analysis allows patterns and themes to emerge from the data rather than having pre-existing categories in mind (Patton, 1987).

Content analysis was used to locate themes, patterns, and coherent and important examples in the data collected. Six of the nine principles of salience outlined by Alexander (1988) were used in the study to identify important themes in each individual interview. These principles of salience were primacy, frequency, uniqueness, negation, emphasis, and omission. Primacy refers to what is revealed first in an interview or in response to a particular question. Frequency involves the number of times a statement or theme arises in the course of an interview. Uniqueness refers to the unusualness of a statement in the context of other statements a participant has made. A statement is unusual if it differs from the usual language or expression of the speaker or if it goes against societal norms (i.e., laughter following the recollection of a death). Negation refers to a participant's refusal to discuss something or the attachment of minimal significance to an issue that they have revealed. Emphasis is based largely on whether the participant places emphasis on a statement by calling attention to it. Finally, omission occurs when a participant leaves out an important detail that makes a story or recollection incoherent. These identifiers of importance put forth by Alexander were used as guides in the analysis. The themes identified in each individual interview are presented in chapter four.

Following analysis of individual interviews, the researcher further reduced the data by looking for common themes or patterns found across interviews as well as unique ideas expressed by participants. These themes were identified using three of Alexander's principles of salience: frequency, emphasis, and uniqueness. These three identifiers aided the researcher in identifying regularities as well as points of divergence or distinction between participants. The data was examined by topics explored during the interview and presented as it answered the

research questions originally posed. The themes and patterns that the researcher identified were substantiated through relevant quotes from participants. The regularities that were induced from the data were discussed as they related to existing theory and research.

While examining the data for regularities, the researcher also focused on inconsistencies and themes that opposed one another. An important aspect of qualitative inquiry is elaborating on inconsistencies and interpreting unexpected or contradictory statements (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Contradictions that exist in the data must not be viewed negatively as they represent the complexity of participant experience (Fine, et. al., 2000).

Trustworthiness of Findings

Validation in inquiry guided research can be understood as the trustworthiness of observations, interpretations, and generalizations; it is not to be equated with truth (Mishler, 1990). While the analysis of qualitative data does contain a degree of subjectivity, all forms of research in which the researcher interprets findings and brings pre-existing knowledge and beliefs to scientific data are subjective in nature (Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000; Mishler, 1990). In this study the researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection as well as the primary interpreter of the data collected; this does not, however, render the results invalid. Validity depends on the quality of the craftsmanship during the investigation which involves continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings (Kvale, 1996). The data was questioned for alternative explanations while examining individual interviews and while seeking regularities across interviews.

The small, purposive sample that was selected may be seen as a limitation and indeed it does limit generalizability. However, the purpose of a small qualitative study is to make no claims about generalizability, but rather to go in depth into a particular topic and to provide

descriptive information on an understudied issue (Krueger, 1998). African American women are an understudied group particularly where it concerns their experiences in romantic relationships as explained in their own words.

The researcher enacted several methods to increase the trustworthiness of the findings obtained. These did not eliminate subjectivity but they increased the credibility of the researcher and the weight that can be given to the findings. The researcher provided data within the body of the report in the form of texts used in the analysis. Data was analyzed immediately following the conclusion of the interviews. A lapse in time between data collection and analysis may have caused the researcher to forget important details- prompt analysis of data aided the researcher in the memory of participants' verbal response and behavior.

Furthermore, the researcher demonstrated how linkages were made between the data, findings, and interpretations. In addition, as data was analyzed, alternative explanations or diverse ways of answering the research questions were explored with the data collected. This gives greater weight to the final explanations provided by the researcher. Reporting the alternative explanations that were considered and how those explanations were considered lends credibility to the researcher's final set of findings. Finally, participant checks enhanced the trust that can be placed in the researcher's interpretations. Following each interview, participants were asked to verify that what was recorded was what they recalled saying. In addition, participants were provided with copies of data interpretation and encouraged to comment on the interpretation and to follow up with the researcher. It is believed that with these safeguards in place, the research community can place greater trust in the findings obtained.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY DATA

Renee

Renee is a twenty-three year old African American young woman from a middle income family. She was raised in a small town in the south where both she and many of her family members still reside. Renee appears to have very close relationships with many members of her immediate and extended family and she appears to place a high value on family and its importance in her life. The importance that Renee places on her family is evident in the fact that she is aware of the exact number of family members who live in the town in which she resides. In fact, Renee's fondest childhood memories involve a time when most of her extended family members resided near her grandmother and they were able to get together frequently. Renee appears to be closer to the males in her family than she is with her female family members. She describes very close relationships with her father, oldest brother, and uncles but feels that she is not as close to her mother or her aunts. Renee is the youngest of four children and she is the only girl in her immediate family. As a result, her brothers and uncles are very protective of Renee. Renee has always been a self-proclaimed honor student who has excelled in academics and strove for excellence in education. Renee appears to be both assertive and laid back and she appears to hold strong convictions about the things that she believes in. Renee's biological parents are separated and their first separation from one another occurred when Renee was seven years of age. Renee describes their relationship as inconsistent- they separated and reunited frequently during her childhood but her father has always been highly involved in her life.

Renee reveals that there were times when both of her parents were unfaithful to one another.

Renee is currently single with no children. She prefers relationships with men and she has been involved in a romantic relationship with a member of the other sex.

Overall, Renee reveals that her family members' opinions and behavior have had a strong influence on the way she views men and how she experiences relationships. According to Renee, she is extremely cautious about entering romantic relationships because of the infidelity that she has witnessed in her family. Renee reveals that she compares potential romantic partners to her family members before entering a relationship and that during her romantic relationships she continuously "keeps an eye out" for signs of infidelity. Renee feels that she must decipher a man's motives before entering a relationship; this is an implication of her belief that many men have ulterior motives when entering relationships. The behavior of her brothers appears to have had the strongest influence on Renee. In lines 255-262, Renee reveals:

I guess I'm moreI uh, when entering a potential relationship...I always rate that person...by how closely they relate to my family...being the youngest of uh four and being the only girl...I've seen my brothers put women through a lot so...you know?...you just, one day it's Suzy, the next day it's Jane, the next day it's Mary...you know what I'm saying? I've seen the games they play...I, I try(emphasis) to catch on to the lines they use... and so if I hear a line I'm like no, I'm not even going to waste my time, you know?

Renee also believes that the infidelity of her father and uncles has had an influence on how she experiences relationships. This is conveyed in lines 189-194:

and my father [was unfaithful]...apparently because he was married...when he and my mother, you know, got together...and had me and my brothers...so his actions speak..... and uh, my uncles and every-...I don't think it's been like a stable relationship.. you know, that I can say like oh, I wanna be like them in my family...I just always known them to be players... and you know, do little things...

Renee places emphasis on the fact that within her family of one hundred and fifty members, she has only witnessed one lasting relationship. The experiences that Renee has had in her own romantic relationships have served to further enhance her distrust and caution in relationships. Thus far, she has not had a positive experience that has contradicted what she learned in her family. Renee explains that while she would like to be less cautious in relationships and be able to be emotionally open and vulnerable, in each of her romantic relationships she has been correct in her assumptions about the unfaithful behavior of her partners.

The messages that Renee received from her family members about African American men, relationships, and marriage were somewhat similar and primarily negative in nature. Most of the messages that Renee received were non-verbal and resulted from the behavior of male family members. It appears that Renee received most of her messages about men and relationships from the males in her family and she did not receive as many messages from female family members. However, she does frequently mention her relationship with a close female friend with whom she discusses her romantic relationships. While the specific impact that Renee's friend has had on her perceptions and experiences is unclear, it is evident that this friend has had an influence.

While growing up, Renee learned that all (or most) African American men were similar to one another and that they could not be fully trusted. She also places an emphasis on not being "the fool" in the relationship. According to Renee:

215I mean you can go into it [a relationship]
 216 but just keep one eye open...you know... there's always the possibility of...
 217 someone straying away...and you never wanna be the fool...in a relationship

Renee also learned that long lasting marriages were rare. Perhaps more positively, she learned that marriage is a commitment that should not be taken lightly and that couples need time

apart in order to maintain a healthy relationship. It is evident based on Renee's responses that positive messages or lessons can be gleaned from situations that are somewhat negative. While Renee feels that it is significant that there is only one stable romantic relationship within her family, it is also noteworthy that she is able to single out the one lasting relationship that exists within her extended family. This is an implication that Renee does have at least one positive model of marriage and that this model is one that has been significant in her life.

Renee does feel that her parents' relationship taught her several lessons about romantic relationships and that what she learned from her parents was by opposition. She does not feel that they modeled healthy behavior, but instead feels that her parents taught her what she should not do in a relationship. The first lesson that Renee learned was that it is best not to separate and reunite multiple times with partners, particularly when there are children involved. Although not directly stated, it appears that Renee believes that separation or divorce can be positive and that separation is healthier for all involved parties than frequent separations and reunions. Renee expresses this sentiment in lines 335-337 when she says:

..... they've [my parents have] been together and been apart and...you know, it's the back and forth thing...that's...playing with your emotions...if you're gonna, gonna cut loose...cut off ties...

She further explains the damage that frequent separations and reunions can have on children when she says in lines 341-343:

it pulls the children in, it gives them false hope...one minute mom and dad are together, the next minute they're apart...then they're back together again...you don't know what, you don't know what to believe...

The second lesson that Renee learned by opposition was that communication was important. Renee reveals that although communication between most members of her family was good, the

communication between her mother and father was less than ideal. According to Renee, her parents talked with one another frequently but they did not hear one another. As a result, Renee learned that communication was essential in a relationship. The lessons that Renee has learned may serve as evidence that children who are reared in homes where their parents' relationship was less than ideal may be able to learn by opposition and establish a distinct pattern of behavior in their own lives.

Renee is apparently able to distinguish between her father's behavior in relationships and the broader scope of her father's behavior which has been overwhelmingly positive. Perhaps as a result of her continued positive relationship with her father despite the frequent separations between her parents, Renee is able to view her father on a holistic level as opposed to focusing on the negative that he has done in the past. While Renee is aware of her father's infidelity, she describes him as a good father and a man who was responsible enough to spend time with all of his children despite the relationship that he had with their mother at different points in time. While Renee's view of males remains somewhat negative at this point in her life, she is also aware, perhaps as a result of her relationship with her father, that African American men are capable of being responsible and that good qualities can co-exist with those that are less than ideal. In line with the findings of other researchers (Genuchi, 1997; Sharpe, 1994), Renee reveals that she is interested in finding a partner who is similar to her father. Renee has also learned about male behavior from observing and interacting with her uncles and oldest brother and while she feels that their behavior in romantic relationships has been overwhelmingly negative, she also views these men as positive role models in other areas and demonstrates respect for these men. Equally as important, Renee reveals that she is appreciative of the lessons

that these men taught her; she appreciates their help in being able to identify deception in relationships. She expresses this sentiment in lines 608-612:

I mean I thank them for...I thank them in a weird way for letting me see, you know the negative side of stuff...I can spot it more readily than someone who's like so naïve and saying oh guys are wonderful and...we're all gonna fall in love and...it's gonna, you know, we're gonna trust each other fully and nothing's gonna happen...

While she is regretful that it has made her so cautious, she is also thankful that she is not as naïve as others may be.

While Renee appears to hold a somewhat negative view of African American men as it applies to their behavior in relationships, she seems to be aware that despite this shortcoming, African American men are capable of possessing positive qualities. In fact, the first qualities that Renee uses to describe African American men are beautiful and strong. While she also describes them as deceitful, she further goes on to state that she hopes that they possess more positive than negative qualities. While she indicates that many of the messages that she received in her family were that all (or most) African American men were similar to one another, she currently realizes that African American men are unique from one another. Interestingly, Renee describes African American men as vulnerable. This quality is neither entirely positive nor negative but it is unique because to some degree it stands in contrast to her description of African American men as strong. While not explicitly stated, Renee may feel that African American men are capable of being strong in their own families or communities but that they are vulnerable as a result of the prejudice and discrimination that exists in American society. It is also interesting that while Renee describes African American men as vulnerable, she describes African American women as intimidating. These qualities may serve to create tension in a relationship.

Renee feels that the perception that society has of African American men is largely negative. According to Renee, there is a tension between African American men and the rest of the world and society predominately views African American men as dangerous and angry. Renee expresses frustration with these stereotypical images of African American men and she reveals that it is upsetting to her when their behavior happens to be in line with these stereotypes. While Renee is certainly aware of stereotypical images of African American men that exist in society, they do not appear to impact her in such a way that they have informed or shaped her beliefs. The initial descriptions that Renee has of African American men are positive in nature compared with the negative that she feels exists within society. In addition, her total description of African American men, which includes negative qualities, is different from the beliefs that she views are held by society. Thus, it appears that Renee's views about African American men were formed by the qualities of males in her family, the behavior of her romantic partners, as well as her unique understanding of the world. While it cannot be said that negative media images have had no influence on shaping Renee's beliefs, it appears that their influence has been minimal. It should be noted, however, that the environment in which Renee lives and was raised in may have impacted her perceptions of men and experience of relationships. Through Renee's own explanation it becomes apparent that the pool of men that she has to select from is limited and thus the perceptions and ideas that she formed about men while growing up are continually reinforced. Other aspects of Renee's environment, which were not explored in the interview, such as the time period in which she was reared and currently lives in, may have also had an impact.

Renee feels that African American men view African American women as bossy, intimidating, and hard to communicate with. These descriptions are in line with those of other

researchers who found that African American women are very aware of the stereotypes that depict them as matriarchal and controlling (Cazenave & Smith, 1990). Another possible reason that could explain why Renee placed emphasis on African American men's perception of African American women as bossy is that she may be more aware of this view because it has held greater significance in her life than other stereotypical or positive views of African American women. Renee describes the women in her family, particularly her mother and herself, as assertive and somewhat opinionated. In lines 362-365, Renee describes her mother as:

my mother's the more...the verbal one...you know in the whole relationship... she's the...I'm gonna tell you what I wanna say and you're gonna sit there and listen...but yelling at somebody and talking to them...are two different things...

Thus the perception that Renee feels that African American men hold of African American women could have been shaped, in part, by Renee's own experience or by her observation of her mother's interaction with her father. While Renee places less emphasis on the positive ways in which African American men view African American women, she does acknowledge that African American men may view African American women as strong and as the mothers of their children.

Renee feels that it is difficult for people to gain a realistic perception of African American male-female and familial relationships because reality television often depicts relationships between African American men and women in a manner that is hostile and violent and television sitcoms are often written by European American writers. Thus, she feels that the portrayals of African Americans are either entirely negative or they are based on a European American model as opposed to one that is reflective of African American family life and marital

relations. While Renee feels that the depiction of African American romantic relationships as predominately hostile and violent is unfair, she does acknowledge that there is tension between African American men and women.

There are several inconsistencies that arose during the interview with Renee that should be considered or elaborated upon. First, Renee expresses the belief that African American men are unique and different from one another in one portion of the interview. At a later point, however, she expresses the belief that African American men are all (or mostly) similar to one another. There are several explanations for this apparent contradiction. First, as was previously stated, it appears that Renee describes African American men as all being similar during her description of messages that she gained in her family. In her earlier description of African American men as being different from one another she was describing her current understanding of African American men. It does appear, however, that Renee uses the early message that she learned within her family to some extent in her current relationships as she often generalizes the behavior of her brothers to that of all (or many) of the males that she meets. It appears that while Renee has a logical understanding that people are individuals and that African American males differ from one another, the early message that she learned within her family has some impact on her behavior. A second explanation is that while Renee may feel that all African American men behave similarly in relationships, or more specifically that all (or most) African American men will be unfaithful to their partners, she may simultaneously believe that in other aspects of their lives or relationships they may be different from one another.

A second inconsistency that arose during the interview concerns the relationship that Renee has with her mother. Renee appears to be very close to her family and she places a high value on the opinions of her family members and she also feels that her family is one that is very

open with one another. According to Renee, however, she rarely informs her mother of her relationships or of the men that she dates. Renee offers her own explanation for this inconsistency by stating that she would prefer her mother not become attached to the men that she dates. Even with this explanation, it is noteworthy that within a family that appears to be as close knit as Renee's, that Renee is somewhat secretive about her dating relationships. One explanation for this may be that because Renee often feels unsure about the men that she dates and about male behavior in general (as it pertains to romantic relationships), she may be hesitant to share her relationships with her mother. In addition, she may feel that her mother shares her distrust of men and caution in relationships.

It is also noteworthy that while Renee focuses on the infidelity of the men in her family, she does not go into depth about the unfaithful behavior of the women in her family. She alludes to the fact that both her mother and father had relationships outside of the marriage and that other women in her family were unfaithful to their partners. However, she appears to place greater importance on the infidelity of the male members of her family and appears to use this behavior to generalize to other men. She does not generalize the behavior of the women in her family to other women. A possible explanation for this is that the interview focused on Renee's perception of men and her experience of romantic relationships with men. Thus she may have felt that the behavior of male members of her family was more relevant to the topic at hand.

Another aspect of the interview with Renee that warrants consideration is her emphasis on good communication within a relationship. At one point, Renee explains that she desires openness and good communication within her romantic relationships because there was a great deal of open communication within her family. She reveals her frustration with dating partners who are unable to communicate effectively and voice their opinions freely. Renee also reveals,

however, that throughout her childhood, her parents were unable to communicate effectively with one another. Renee may desire openness and place great importance on communication within her relationships because she does not want to follow the pattern of behavior that her parents exhibited. As was previously mentioned, this desire of Renee's to have good communication and her attempts at communication in her relationships thus far may provide support for the idea that children are able to learn by opposition. Alternatively, it may also lend credibility to the idea that children learn behavior from family members and significant individuals other than their parents. While Renee did not observe good communication between her parents, she feels that there was open communication within the rest of her family. Despite Renee's attempts at openness and good communication within her relationships, it is noteworthy that she feels that her partners often misunderstand her attempts at communication or are uncomfortable with the opinions that she expresses. While Renee desires a relationship that is different from that of her parents, to some extent she may be following a similar pattern of communication that tends to be ineffective at times. Furthermore, while Renee feels that she openly expresses her opinions and beliefs with partners, she indicates that emotional expression and complete openness has been difficult. As indicated previously, Renee indicates that she would like to be "let her guard down" and to allow herself to be more emotionally vulnerable or available with her dating partners. It becomes evident, then, that although children are capable of learning by opposition, establishing a different pattern of behavior in one's own life may prove difficult.

Renee had no additional interpretations of the data after reading over the interview and the researcher's interpretations. She did indicate that she fully agreed with the researcher's

interpretations and that she believed that they were “right on” [target]. A summary of Renee’s interview is presented in Table 1.

Alicia

Alicia is a twenty-one year old African American young woman from a working class family. She was raised in a large metropolitan city. Alicia spent most of her childhood in a household with several other women including her grandmother and aunts. Alicia takes great pride in the special bond that she and her mother have and in fact one of her fondest childhood memories was visiting Disney World with her mom when she was young. Alicia describes her mother as her best friend and says that she can talk to her mom about anything. Alicia has had very few male influences while growing up and she calls attention to the fact that she was raised in a household full of women. Alicia has not had much of a relationship with her biological father but the relationship that she did have was negative. Alicia does not feel that her father was a positive role model and she is unhappy with the way he chose to live his life. Alicia’s father was physically and emotionally abusive towards her mother, whom Alicia is very protective of as she cherishes her relationship with her mother. Alicia feels that her father is a resentful man who, at one point, expressed displeasure with Alicia’s continued success in academics as a result of his failures. Alicia’s mother and father dated for ten years prior to getting married when Alicia was around ten. They remained married for a year and then divorced. Alicia’s mother remarried and she currently has two small children. She did not remarry until Alicia was an adult. Alicia describes only one significant relationship with a male during her childhood years; she went on several outings with a deacon from her church. She looked forward to outings with this man and she believes that the relationship that she had with him has had some influence on her, and yet she did not feel extremely close to this man. Alicia has had some issues with self esteem in the

past and she feels that this may have had some influence on her dating relationships. Alicia is currently single with no children. She prefers relationships with men and has been involved in a relationship with a member of the other sex.

Alicia received many of her messages about African American men, romantic relationships, and marriage through observing the relationships of women in her family as well as through observation of her father's behavior. It is apparent throughout the interview that Alicia feels that her relationship with her father, or lack thereof, was influential in shaping her perceptions of African American men and her experience in romantic relationships. She also places emphasis on how the lack of a healthy model of marriage or romantic relationships within her family has shaped her perceptions and experiences. Although Alicia does not recall receiving many direct verbal messages as a child from family members regarding men or dating relationships, the indirect messages that she received were either cautionary or negative in nature. According to Alicia, the primary messages that she received from her mom were to be careful around guys in order not to be taken advantage of and to avoid living with a dating partner before marriage. In addition, she gained non-direct messages about men and dating that were negative in nature through observing the relationships of women in her family. The messages that Alicia received from her family and the behavior that she witnessed have been supported rather than contradicted in the romantic relationships that she has been involved in.

Alicia received conflicting messages about marriage while she was growing up and she continues to receive negative messages from her family members as a young adult. Alicia received the message from her mother that while marriage is an institution that is to be desired, it is also an institution that is flawed. While Alicia's mom placed emphasis on avoiding premarital cohabitation, thus stressing the importance of marriage, she also enforced the idea that marriage

is not synonymous with fidelity and that marriages do not necessarily last. Alicia reveals these conflicting messages in lines 314-320 when she says:

..... she kinda gave me the ideal that- well you don't ever know what your man, in other words like, like all men cheat, like being married doesn't keep your man there, in other words, I mean it's important to get married you know, that's kind of a contradiction, she's like it's good to be married or to be with somebody before you have a child but in the same token, you know when things would go down she's like marriage, being married is not gonna keep anybody there or you know, you're not with him twenty-four/seven...

These conflicting verbal messages that Alicia received from her mother were reinforced when Alicia witnessed the unsuccessful short-term marriage between her mother and father. Alicia emphasizes that despite their ten year dating relationship, they were unable to remain married for a year. As a result of this failed marriage and her father's unfaithfulness, the messages that Alicia's mom provided her with regarding marriage were likely supported. Alicia was also influenced by her aunt's unhappy marriage. According to Alicia, the message that she received as a result of her aunt's marriage was that a woman should marry a man in an effort to keep him there-even when he has demonstrated that he is not interested in long-term commitment. It may be assumed then, that based on the messages that Alicia received from her mother and the unhappy marriages that she witnessed, Alicia has learned that marriage is simultaneously an institution to be desired and avoided. Based on her comments in lines 337-338, it appears that Alicia is in fact simultaneously avoidant of and desirous of marriage:

I'm...I don't know but you know the more that I think about it I do want a compan- I do want to be married, but I just don't know, you know, I don't know...

Despite the fact that Alicia received messages that were generally negative in nature, she feels that she learned many things from her parents' relationship by opposition and she does not plan to establish a similar pattern of behavior within her own life. Alicia feels that she learned

not to cohabit before marriage as a result of watching her mother live with her father for several years and subsequently experience a failed marriage. She also feels that she learned as a result of her mother's pattern of behavior in romantic relationships that she cannot establish a negative cycle within her own life. She expresses this sentiment in lines 537-541:

.....I see a pattern with her relationships...it's...it's always something and she sticks around so long(emphasis) and puts up with it, I don't understand and I think it impacts me but I'm not gonna put up- like if something happens that way, you can't always control what happens...but to keep putting-putting up with it, I can't do that, I can't be that way...

Alicia learned by opposition that it is not wise to remain in a relationship that is physically or emotionally abusive. While Alicia may find it difficult to establish a distinct pattern of behavior in her own life, it is interesting that during this portion of the interview Alicia describes how she did not follow the pattern of young motherhood that her mother and grandmother modeled. She calls emphasis to the fact that both her mother and grandmother had their first children as teens and that she has made it into her twenties without becoming pregnant. Thus, it is apparent that Alicia feels that she is capable of exhibiting behavior that is different from some of the negative things she witnessed while growing up.

Alicia feels that her interactions with her family members have had an impact on her experience of romantic relationships. The unsuccessful relationships that Alicia witnessed among women in her family have made it harder for her to trust men. Alicia feels that perhaps an even stronger influence on her current expectations of male behavior in dating relationships was her father's unfaithful behavior and lack of dependability. Alicia frequently describes how her father's actions have made it difficult for her to trust men. Alicia expresses displeasure with the way in which this lack of trust influences her relationships and she reveals that she does not like the fact that infidelity is always something that is "in the back of her mind." Alicia further

explains that she expects the worst in her relationships and this has been a problem for her.

Alicia describes what she sees as a self-fulfilling prophecy in her relationships in lines 573-580 in which she is often suspicious and expecting the worst and in turn her partners often confirm her suspicions:

.....so that whole trust thing I guess it kinda supported my-the relationships I have now, I've had problems trust- with trust issues...um I tried to go into it you know with an open mind and then something will happen and I'm like see I told you, you know it kinda just confirms...what I already believe, like the self-fulfilling prophecy, it was supposed to happen and when it does happen you're like see I knew this was gonna happen you know even if you know...it just confirms... something, you're looking for something to go wrong.....

In attempting to establish a pattern of behavior that is different from the cyclical mistakes of her mother and aunts, Alicia may at times be overly cautious and unforgiving of any behavior that is undesirable. Alicia describes herself as having limited patience and in lines 334-336 she worries that she is so picky that she will be quick to divorce when she does marry:

you know so...I haven't gotten really positive messages about marriage, I mean there was a point where I said I didn't wanna be married...cause I'm too you know, picky, you leave the toothpaste off I want a divorce...

This sentiment is in line with the findings of previous researchers that children who have experienced their parents' failed relationship or divorce may hold more favorable attitudes towards divorce (Jennings, Salts & Smith, 1992; Greenberg & Nay, 1982).

Alicia stresses that her lack of a relationship with her father has impacted her in several ways. First, she has learned that it is difficult for African American men to open up and express themselves. Alicia feels that her father was unsure of how to express himself with her and to develop a bond with her and she finds that the men that she dates have similar problems with communication and the open expression of feelings. After recalling an incident in lines 663-669 where her father gave her money that he desperately needed and later came back for, she reveals

her feeling that African American men often compensate for their inability to express emotions through monetary expressions and gifts:

.....like my dad when I would see him he would try to give me money, you know I remember one occasion he came back and got the money later, you know he banged on my grandmother's door so loud for like forty dollars and I think...like I said he thinks that, you know, giving me that little money would make...things better so I think in that way they try to-they try to substitute things for you know feelings and money like, they try to make up for stuff that didn't go right or something ...

In support of the view that African American men are unable to express emotions, Alicia cannot recall a time when her father said that he loved her.

Secondly, as a result of her lack of a relationship with her father, Alicia reveals a strong desire to have a connection with a man and to be in a relationship where there is a great deal of closeness and shared activities. While Alicia initially describes this desire for closeness as the result of her close relationship with her female family members, she later attributes it, in lines 684-688, to her lack of a relationship with her father:

having the lack of relationship- the lack of relationship with him...I think in my relationships... that tends to make me... try to be closer with the guy... because I want that relationship with a man, I, you know, I kinda-I kinda need that in my life even though I'm not looking for a relationship with him to be like a daddy or anything but...just... to know that there is a man there I feel safe...

While describing the household in which she grew up, Alicia places emphasis on the fact that she was reared in a household full of women and that there were no men present:

269 like I said we were in a household full of women, you know, where are the
270 men?

It becomes apparent then that Alicia experiences tension in her romantic relationships that may be partially the result of her lack of a relationship with her father. She desires a great deal of closeness with partners because of the lack of closeness that she felt with her father while simultaneously realizing that men have a difficult time establishing closeness and openly

expressing themselves. This awareness is likely exacerbated in Alicia's life and in her relationships because not only does she resent having to push her partners to express their feelings but in doing so she may be continually reminded of her father's shortcomings.

As previously stated, the third manner in which Alicia's relationship with her father, or lack thereof, has had an impact on her perceptions of men and relationships is that she is often unable to trust men. Alicia believes that this lack of trust is a result of witnessing her father's repeated infidelity in his relationship with her mother as well as the lack of dependability that he exhibited in his relationship with his children. She expresses this sentiment in lines 351-355 as well as in lines 603-609.

351 Well yeah...going back to my dad (emphasis), he made it hard for me to
 352 trust guys...because he always promised me things but never came though...
 353 um, and I have siblings, I have... sisters, I don't even know how many all
 354 by the same woman...and they're all younger than me so you figure that out,
 355 you know, like my mom and dad were supposedly together this whole time...

603 ...and I think you know, after they...separated, before they divorced they
 604 separated...and he would, then he would try to do stuff with me and then he
 605 still would disappoint me, he's like "I'll go to the park with you or take you to
 606 the show," that's what he called the movies-the show, and I remember one
 607 morning I was sitting out on the step at my grandmother's house waiting
 608 for him and waiting and waiting so...that's the kind of stuff you see on tv but
 609 it actually happens...

Thus, Alicia's issue with trust may mean that she not only worries that her partners will be unfaithful but that she also worries that they cannot be depended upon for an extended period of time and that they may not be not be emotionally available even when they are physically present. Alicia places emphasis on this lack of trust and its impact on her relationships.

Yet another way in which Alicia's observation of her father's behavior has impacted her is that she finds that she has at times been physically abusive towards her partners-though not in great severity-just as her father was abusive towards her mother. Alicia is not sure whether she

has inherited her father's temper or whether her physical incidents with romantic partners are based on the behavior that her father modeled. It is likely that a combination of genetics and learned behavior has played a role. Several kinship studies have indicated that heritability may play an important role in the way an individual experiences their environment (Plomin, Reiss, Hetherington, & Howe, 1994; McCartney, Harris & Bernieri, 1990). The relationship that Alicia had with her father and the pattern of negative relationships that she saw her mother experience causes Alicia to want to establish a different life for herself and her children. It may be that Alicia's awareness of the negative impact that an unhappy conflicted relationship has on both partners and the children involved will push her towards finding a partner who is different from her father and with whom she is compatible.

In an attempt to gain an understanding of Alicia's current perceptions of African American men and male-female relationships prior to discussing the things that she learned in her family, Alicia was asked to describe her perceptions of African American men in the early part of the interview. Alicia responds by describing African American men as hard to understand. While this description may result, in part, from the lack of understanding that she has of her father and the very small number of close male role models that she had while growing up, Alicia reveals that this perception is also largely the result of her previous relationships with African American men. Alicia feels that the male with whom she had a significant relationship was hard to understand, particularly where it concerned his priorities. While Alicia realizes that this was just one relationship, she does feel that this attribute is typical of many African American men. It appears that while Alicia's family members have had a definite impact on the way that she views men and relationships, her own experiences have been just as influential.

Alicia feels that society views African American men as trouble makers. She also feels that they are seen as extremely disadvantaged and that they are not expected to do well in life as a result of this disadvantage. This is conveyed in lines 76-81:

.....and they just see them
as disadvantaged, just because, I mean they, you know, in essence they are but
they're seen as disadvantaged no matter where they really come from, I mean it
gives you an edge, you know, if your parents you know do this or that but...
I don't know, they're seen as being behind in the race...like already being
behind when everybody else started just because they're black men... so...

While Alicia expresses many frustrations with the men in her life, she also emphasizes that she is happy when African American men do well and when they are able to defy stereotypes.

Alicia feels that African American men view African American women primarily as sex objects and that they are often unable to rid themselves of this preoccupation. Alicia expresses a great deal of displeasure with African American men's preoccupation with sex and women's bodies. While Alicia's perception may indeed be warranted, it should also be noted that Alicia admittedly has had her own issues in the past with feeling that men view her solely as a sex object. In a later part of the interview, Alicia reveals an issue that she had as a young teenager with self-esteem; she confides that she rarely understood why boys demonstrated an interest in her and that she often felt their ulterior motives were related to sex and an admiration of her physical attributes. Thus, it may be that the instances in which men confirm Alicia's suspicions stand out in her mind and serve to further enhance this perception. Interestingly, Alicia also feels that African American men view African American women as mother figures. While Alicia feels that the media overemphasizes the sexual aspect of relationships between African American men and women, she does credit them for attempting to portray African American families in a more positive light and to portray diverse family structures.

Alicia feels that societal images of African American men and relationships do not impact her views. In lines 195-199 Alicia expresses her belief that it is her personal experiences that impact her perceptions and beliefs:

.....I don't know...it's not so much the society but things that I go through personally that impacts the way I see... men...black men...that's all I can really base it on, my own experiences...I mean I know what society, you know tends to say or how they feel but um...but I don't see too much societal impact on any thing...

While it cannot be said that the media has had no impact on Alicia's perceptions, it does appear that its influence has been minimal. Alicia appears to have been strongly influenced by the relationships that she witnessed in her family, her relationship with her father, or lack thereof, as well as her own experiences in romantic relationships. Societal influences that were not explored within this interview such as the time period in which Alicia lives may have impacted her perceptions and beliefs. Alicia was raised and currently lives in a time period where divorce is viewed more favorably than it has been viewed in the past and where marriage as an institution is called into question more frequently than it had been previously.

Overall, it appears that Alicia currently has a negative view of African American men and romantic relationships and that her opinions have been informed partly by the experiences and relationships that she had within her family. While the experiences that Alicia encountered within her family may have been partially responsible for her current perceptions and experiences, an alternative explanation for her negative experiences in relationships may be the issue that Alicia has with self-esteem. It may be that Alicia's uncertainty with her own worth and desirability causes her to undermine the worth of others, particularly individuals who demonstrate an interest in Alicia. Alicia's self esteem may also cause her to experience relationships more negatively, to have trouble trusting her partner's motives, to question the

sincerity of her partner, and to desire a degree of closeness that they are unable to provide.

While this is simply one explanation, it is worthy of consideration due to the fact that Alicia raises this issue spontaneously and feels that it has had an impact on her life. It should also be noted, however, that even if the negative experiences Alicia has in romantic relationships are the result of low self-esteem, Alicia's low self-esteem could have been partially influenced by negative relationships within her family, such as the one with her father. Thus Alicia's issue with self-esteem, her perceptions of men and experiences in romantic relationships, and her experiences within her family of origin all likely have an influence on one another.

It is also important to note that Alicia appears to have experienced a recent relationship dissolution with a romantic partner who meant a great deal to her. Alicia's current views of African American men and her recollection of the messages that she received within her family may be influenced by her current situation and the recent experience that she had. While it certainly cannot be said that Alicia did not receive the negative messages that she recalled or that she did not witness several failed relationships and unsuccessful marriages, it may be that the negative experience that Alicia had recently caused her to focus more on the negative messages that she received from her family and less on any messages or romantic relationships that were positive in nature.

Alicia expressed concern with the transcription of her interview; she was unaware of the relaxed manner of her speech during the interview and did not recall saying "um" and "like" as often as was recorded. As a result of Alicia's concerns the tapes were checked with the transcription a second time and few errors were found. Alicia had no concerns with the content of what was recorded. She had no additional insight as it related to the researcher's interpretations of her interview. A summary of Alicia's interview appears in Table 2.

Tricia

Tricia is an eighteen year old African American young woman from a working class family. Tricia grew up in two different parts of the United States and she calls attention to the fact that the move was a major point of upheaval in her life as it came at a time when she was experiencing other major life changes such as the start of high school and the break-up of her parents. While Tricia does not feel that her family is extremely close-knit, she appears to have a close relationship with her father that is one of unspoken understanding. In fact, one of Tricia's fondest childhood memories involves a time when her father was there for her when she broke her wrist as a very small child. Tricia feels that her father was an excellent role model and it is evident that she looks up to him as a symbol of strength and protection. Tricia also appears to have a very special relationship with her younger sister who is eight years younger than she is. While Tricia did not have the best relationship with her mom while growing up, particularly during her teenage years, Tricia feels that this relationship has improved since she has become an adult. Tricia feels that the tension that existed in her relationship with her mom was a result of their very similar personalities and her mother's controlling nature. While Tricia does not have close relationships with many extended family members she feels that several of her early dating partners as well as an older cousin have been important influences in her life. Much to Tricia's dismay, her parents divorced when she was fourteen years of age after several years of conflict. Recently Tricia has been having difficulties within her romantic relationships but she attributes this to the age of the men that she dates. In the early part of the interview, Tricia expressed her need to grow and experience more of life in order to gain a more complete understanding of herself and others. Tricia is currently single with no children and she has been involved in a romantic relationship with a member of the other sex.

Tricia's primary messages about men were non-verbal and resulted from her observation of her father. Tricia's father has been an important influence in her life and she feels that she received positive messages about African American men based on the behavior of her father who was a dependable family man. Interestingly, in Tricia's household her father was the one who did much of the cooking for the family. This is unique in that in many households the mother is expected to assume responsibility for household duties such as cooking and other chores. As a result of his behavior, Tricia's father provided her with high expectations of males and she admits that she has often been disappointed in the dating partners that she has had thus far because they have not lived up to the model her father provided. Despite the relationship dissolution of her parents when Tricia was a young teenager, Tricia remained close to her father and he has remained involved in her life. In addition, Tricia reveals in lines 187-190 that her mother continued to provide her with positive messages about her father following the divorce:

..... but, I mean my mom
 she'd never say like anything bad about my dad, like..... even
 to this day...she's always "your father's a good man," you know "don't ever
 think I'd say anything bad about him, we just weren't meant to be together" so...

Thus, as a result of Tricia's continued involvement with her father, and the positive messages that her mother provided, Tricia did not develop a negative view of African American men. To the contrary, she expects them to be respectful and dependable. Tricia had two significant early dating relationships as well as a relationship with an older cousin while she was growing up which further enhanced her expectations that African American men could be respectful and treat her appropriately. Tricia's views and expectations support the idea that fathers and other significant male role models provide girls and young women with expectations of male behavior.

The messages that Tricia received about romantic relationships and marriage were also non-verbal messages that she gained from observing the actions of family members. The messages that she received were mixed. Through observing her parents' marriage, Tricia learned that marriage often involves conflict and that arguing is a part of married life. She expresses this sentiment in lines 196-199:

Well...all I really saw...well I saw my parents and sometimes they seemed,
you know...happy and stuff but...a lot of times there was a lot of arguing...so
kinda- I guess I was kinda was used to it, I just figured it was part of married
life, you know the arguing...

Through Tricia's observation of her aunt and uncle's marriage, however, she also learned that married couples can have a loving relationship that lasts. While Tricia feels that she did not receive any unhealthy messages about romantic relationships or marriage while growing up, it appears that based on the primacy and frequency of Tricia's referrals to her parents' conflict, she tends to place more emphasis on conflict in marriages than the loving and caring aspects. Tricia also received the message that couples should work at making a marriage last by trying to resolve problems that exist rather than simply dissolving the relationship. Thus, it appears that while the persistent conflict that Tricia witnessed between her parents may have been unhealthy, other messages that she received about marriage and relationships between men and women were primarily positive. It appears that Tricia's family, particularly her father, placed an emphasis on the importance of marriage and on attempting to make marriage last.

Tricia feels that her parents' relationship has impacted the way that she perceives and experiences relationships, despite her attempts to avoid bringing baggage into her dating relationships. She reveals in lines 254-258 that her parents' divorce left her with less faith in love and she feels that as a result she is more cautious in her relationships and does not try as hard to make them work:

I think...kinda...in-in a sense...I think...um, my parents split up kind of left me a little disheartened...you know...and I have a little less faith in...love, I guess you could say, you know...cause it's like um...and so that kinda makes me not want to try as hard..... cause it's like is it really worth it cause nothing lasts forever...that type of thing...

Thus, while the verbal message that Tricia received from her father and the non-verbal message that she gained through observing her aunt and uncle pointed to the importance and possibility of making marriage last, the actions of her parents and their decision to divorce was likely the strongest influence on Tricia's feelings and behavior. The uncertainty that Tricia now has about love and marriage supports the findings of previous researchers who indicate that children of divorce have less faith in marriage as an institution (Jennings, Salts & Smith, 1992). It should be noted that Tricia feels that her caution and lack of faith in love is a result of the actual dissolution of her parents' relationship and is not primarily a result of the consistent conflict that she witnessed between her mom and dad. Previous researchers have found that conflict is often more damaging to children than divorce as it relates to their perceptions of marriage (Jennings, Salts & Smith, 1992). Tricia feels, however, that the divorce had a greater impact on her current feelings and behavior than the conflict she witnessed.

Tricia has witnessed her mother in relationships with men besides her father and she feels that witnessing these relationships has impacted her to some degree. She places emphasis on the fact that she does not want to have relationships that are similar to her mother's dating relationships. Interestingly, however, she feels that she sometimes dates men who are similar to the ones that her mother dates. Tricia's sentiments lend credit to the idea that children are capable of learning by opposition but that they may find it difficult to establish a unique pattern of behavior in their own lives.

In an attempt to gain understanding of Tricia's perceptions of African American men and romantic relationships prior to discussing familial influences, Tricia was asked to describe her perceptions of African American men in the early part of the interview. The first thing that Tricia indicates is that it is difficult to find one word for all or most African American men. This statement points to Tricia's emphasis on each individual's uniqueness and the complexity of experience that shapes different types of African American men. On the other hand, Tricia also generalizes and feels that all men share many similar qualities irrespective of race. The one difference that Tricia emphasizes between African American men and white men in lines 34-41 is that African American men often feel that they should be less loving and emotional in relationships because of media images that depict them as hard-edged and tough:

I think black men have a lot more pride than white men do...in-in the sense that like it's-I think it's mostly because of... I-I wanna say the music industry and the media...and things like that because...this image is portrayed of these thug men who you know are supposed to be all extra hard core and you know, I don't-we don't love them-them hoes and you know money over b-and you know, and it's like, so.....it's gotten African American men now they're like-they're hesitant to enter into relationships and care and show affection and things like that and I think that's the difference between black and white men...right now...

Tricia feels that African American men may be fearful of commitment to an even greater degree than white men- though this characteristic is also present in white men. She further emphasizes in lines 232-239 that African American men may be afraid of developing feelings for a romantic partner:

.....I just-some of them are just scared...and it might just be I just have bad taste in men, I don't know (laughs)...I mean it could be so many different reasons...but I think...most of it is probably that they're scared, like... just...analyzing cause I'm a psychology major so...one thing I like try to do is try to understand people's point of views, you know, why they do things and... just from different conversations and just-you know looking at different actions, the most I can see is that they're scared...of committing or...having real feelings for somebody...because they don't know what it would do to them...

Based on her experience, Tricia feels that African American men can be dependable as friends but that they become unreliable when they enter romantic relationships and she attributes this in part to the fear that they have of becoming attached. Tricia feels that this fear may stem from societal expectations of African American men. Interestingly, while the first word that Tricia uses to describe African American men is beautiful, she also states shortly thereafter that she does not like African American men a great deal right now as a result of a recent breakup. This apparent contradiction may be based upon the fact that Tricia's early experiences with males, particularly her father, were positive in nature in comparison with her recent negative experiences. Thus, the foundation that Tricia was provided may enable her to continually see positive attributes in men despite their present shortcomings.

Tricia feels that African American men view African American women primarily as beautiful women in whom they can place pride and yet she emphasizes the belief that African American men do not really appreciate the women they say that they love. She conveys this sentiment in lines 78-86:

(sighs) Um...I guess it just depends on which ones you ask but...I would say the majority of men view black women as beautiful women however....I don't... like most African American guys I've talked to they're like "oh yeah I wouldn't date white girls," you know da-da-da "I'm all about African American girls," but then when it comes right down to it the African American women they date they don't really appreciate them.... a lot of, I mean this is not just from personal experience, just like from talking to different-cause I'm friends with a lot of, you know, males...and a lot of them I see they don't really appreciate the African American women that they claim that they love so much and...kinda hurts a little bit...

Tricia believes that the image of African American women as intimidating and strong willed is both a stereotype and a reality. She feels that while it may be an exaggeration that oversimplifies the array of personalities that exist among African American women, it may also

be partially realistic as a result of the things that African American women have dealt with and overcome both historically and at present.

Tricia feels that loving, committed relationships between African American men and women are rarely portrayed in the media and she feels that music videos are particularly damaging as they portray African American women as sex objects and African American men as emotionless and overly interested in sex. When prompted, Tricia is able to think of positive models of marriage and relationships on television sitcoms. However, it appears that she feels that music videos are perhaps more influential or salient in her life.

When asked how society perceives African American men Tricia stated that it was important to differentiate between African American society and white society. Tricia feels that white society views African American men as violent and as pimps. She feels that this depiction of African American men is one reason that they feel the need to be less emotionally expressive and to behave in line with the stereotypes of themselves. In regards to African Americans, Tricia points to the importance of class differences. She feels that lower class African Americans view middle and upper class African American men as snobbish and that middle and upper class African Americans view lower class African American men and women as lazy and as partially responsible for their shortcomings. Tricia expresses displeasure with this tension between lower and middle to upper class African Americans. If Tricia's perceptions of the way in which society views African American men are correct, then it can be assumed that African American men have a difficult time creating identities for themselves which may in turn lead to difficulties in romantic relationships and other areas of their lives.

Tricia concedes that she does not allow majority views to impact her because she realizes that everyone is unique. She expresses this belief in lines 122-126:

Um I don't really go by like majority views because I feel like everybody's different...like everybody has a... social face and then who they really are...and so I don't really let what is on the tv and what everybody thinks-I don't, I try not to let that affect me because I know everybody is different-you really have to get to know people to know...them...and understand...

Based on what Tricia has indicated previously, this social face may be particularly apparent in the lives of African American men. It should be noted that while Tricia does not feel that the views of the majority have a strong influence on her understanding of the world, she is influenced, to some degree, by the historical time period in which she lives and the environment that surrounds her. At one point during the interview, Tricia mentions the high divorce rates in U.S. society and how knowledge of the divorce rate along with the impact of her parents' divorce have been influential in forming her views about relationships and her ideas about love.

There are a few ideas that Tricia raises during her interview that should be further elaborated upon. First, and based upon Tricia's own acknowledgement, Tricia's age and the age of the men that she dates likely has an impact on her current experience of romantic relationships. While Tricia reveals that she is often disappointed that African American men are unable to love up to the model that her father provided, she does appear to realize that young men may be more likely to be unreliable and irresponsible than older men. Thus, it may be that at the current point in her life she will continue to be disappointed in men but if the model that her father provided allows her to maintain a positive mindset as she matures, she may be able to find a partner who possesses the qualities that she admires in her father.

It is also important to point out the role that Tricia's mother played in shaping her perceptions of her father and possibly of men in general. Tricia recalls that her mother's messages about her father were continually positive both prior to and following the divorce.

Mothers and other family members may play a critical role in shaping or distorting their children's images of their fathers following a divorce or relationship dissolution.

Tricia had no concerns with the interview transcription and no additional insight into the researcher's interpretation of her interview. A summary of Tricia's interview appears in Table 3.

Sherri

Sherri is a nineteen year old African American young woman from a working class family. Sherri's family has struggled financially and by Sherri's own description her family's living environment was less than optimal while she was growing up. She further explains, however, that during her childhood she was unaware of her family's financial lack and thus Sherri felt as if she had everything that she needed. Although Sherri's parents were born and raised in another country, Sherri and three of her four siblings have spent most of their lives living in the United States. Sherri was born in the U.S. and has always resided here. Sherri's parents separated when she was thirteen years of age; however, their divorce became final one year ago. Sherri has good relationships with most of her family members and she is very close to her mother. Sherri takes great pride in her relationship with her mother and she describes herself as her mother's favorite child. Sherri also has good relationships with her younger sister and brother. Interestingly, Sherri feels as if her older sister, who is three years her senior, is dependent upon Sherri when it comes to every day obstacles and decision making. In fact, Sherri appears to take responsibility for the well-being of several of her family members and by her own description she has carried more of a burden than anyone in her household. Sherri does not have much of a relationship with her oldest sister but it appears to result from the physical distance that existed for years between her oldest sister and the rest of the family as opposed to

any tension or hostility. Sherri's oldest sister was raised in another country and has only recently immigrated to the United States.

Sherri has a very strained relationship with her father and she appears to hold a great deal of anger and resentment towards him as a result of his physical and emotional abuse towards her mother, his lack of financial contributions, and his persistent infidelity. Sherri was very fearful of her father while growing up and although she says that she has overcome this fear, it appears that the abuse that she witnessed as a young child continues to have an impact on her. In fact, Sherri recently had a dream about the first incident of physical violence that her father demonstrated towards her mother. In lines 221-224 and lines 249-254, Sherri shares the fear that she had of her father:

.....and the earliest memories I have of my childhood is of my d-of like fearing my dad...I like fear him...because he didn't have to like hit me, he could just like look at me and start yelling and I would just cry...

and then I think there was like two or three instances where he was abusive to my mom, like physically abusive, and um...I think the first time it happened, I think we came from church and it was over something really stupid...and I don't remember how it happened, but I remember I had like nightmares for like a couple months about it...and I actually like had a nightmare about it like a year ago... which was really weird...

It is clear then, that a great deal of anger and unresolved feelings still remain and that perhaps some of the fear that Sherri had of her father while growing up still lingers. At the current point in time, Sherri admits that her father is trying to develop a relationship with her and her younger siblings but she dismisses his efforts and feels that he has an ulterior motive for showing kindness. While Sherri initially proclaims that she had one of the best childhoods, she also emphasizes that her family had problems in lines 153-156 and that the friction between she and her father has always been an issue:

Well I have um three sisters and a brother so...I loved growing up in my household minus...problems...certain problems we used to have, but like I like had the best childhood I could honestly say even though I had a lot of family problems, I had like one of the best childhoods...

In her recollection of a fond childhood memory that involved a road trip to pick up her oldest sister, Sherri focuses on the fact that while there was usually conflict between her family members and anger between her and her father, this road trip contained no such anger or conflict. However, she also points to the fact that this road trip was brief and the absence of conflict short-lived.

Sherri reveals during the interview that her family members describe her as “mean” and she feels that several of her family members are intimidated by her. During the interview, however, Sherri’s body language and behavior indicated that she may be shy and emotionally withdrawn. It appears that she is simultaneously unrestricted in her expression of her opinions. Sherri does feel that she can be closed off towards others at times. Sherri is single with no children and she has had one significant relationship with a member of the other sex.

The messages that Sherri received about African American men within her family came primarily from her mother, aunts, and the behavior of her father. Sherri feels that her mother gave her no negative messages about African American men, however, she warned Sherri not to date or marry anyone from the African country that Sherri’s family is from because of the infidelity that these men exhibit. In lines 330-334 Sherri expresses her agreement with her mother’s belief:

.....my mom told me not to marry a man [from the country that she’s from], that’s all she told me, she told me don’t marry a man [from that country] because they’re all the same, from what I’ve seen they are all the same, pretty much all cheat and...they’re worse than American men in my opinion...

Sherri also feels that while her family has no problems with interracial dating or marriage, she is unhappy with the fact that they think she will marry outside of her race. It may be that Sherri received mixed messages about interracial relationships, although the specific content of these messages is unclear. While Sherri makes few direct links between the feelings that she has for her father and her current perceptions of African American men, these links become apparent when she discusses her relationship with her father and the way that she currently perceives African American men.

The messages that Sherri received about romantic relationships came primarily from extended family members. Sherri feels that her aunts emphasized that she should not take anything from any man. Interestingly, although they provided Sherri with this message verbally, their behavior demonstrated that it was acceptable to remain in unsatisfying relationships. Sherri also received mixed messages about dating from her uncles and other family members. While several of Sherri's family members-primarily her uncles- feel that she should focus on her schooling as opposed to dating, other family members question Sherri about her current lack of a dating relationship. Sherri's uncles felt that dating was acceptable while she was in high school but that she should refrain from becoming involved with anyone at the present time. The beliefs or expectations that some of Sherri's family members have may contribute to Sherri's seemingly contradicting statement that while she would prefer to be in a romantic relationship right now; she does not need or desire a relationship:

870 I don't have time to devote to anybody, so I
 871 guess I occupy my life as to where it doesn't matter...I can do with or without,
 872 I would prefer if I did have like a boyfriend, but I don't care, I really don't...

Sherri has also received mixed messages about marriage. The non-verbal messages that Sherri received were primarily negative in nature. Sherri expresses in lines 411-418 an

uncertainty about marriage due to the failed marriages of several of her aunts and the unfaithful behavior of their spouses and boyfriends:

marrriages around me are like crumbling...so my thing like...I guess I got a negative um image about marriage because I don't wanna get married for a really long time and I guess it's because of the marriages I've seen...all my aunts(emphasis) and uncles either they're divorced...or they should be divorced...or they're on their second, third marriage or...like my mom is, I guess it's a new thing this year, that her and like all her friends and a couple of my aunts' little circle, they all have boyfriends now and the boyfriends are all cheating...and I don't know, like they put up with a lot of crap from men...

Despite the negative non-verbal messages that Sherri has received, many of Sherri's family members consistently question her mom about when her daughters will get married:

408a lot of people talk about me
409 and my sister's wedding, and um all my family members are always asking
410 my mom when her daughters are gonna get married [despite the fact that] all the
411 marriages around me are like crumbling...

Thus, it appears that her family members, who have failed in their own relationships and marriages, place a high value on marriage. The value they place upon marriage becomes particularly evident when one considers the ages of Sherri and her siblings who are still young and in pursuit of higher education. In addition to a high value placed on marriage, however, Sherri's family members could simply feel that it is best for a woman to be married. The mixed messages that Sherri received about marriage are evident in her own ideas and desires. In lines 419-424 Sherri mentions her uncertainty about marriage as frequently as she mentions her desire or need to be married:

and it's like...marriage...like I don't really look at like marriage as...being a part of my life...my mom keeps telling me that it's gonna happen and I know it's probably gonna happen...um someday cause I can't really help the way I feel but...I don't wanna get married...but I know I have to get married cause I wanna have kids and my mom (inaudible words) what she calls bastard children so...I'm gonna get married...

Thus, while Sherri may be unhappy about marriage as an institution because of its instability, she may also realize that societal and familial norms dictate that marriage is a necessity for those who desire children. Sherri further reveals that her concerns about marriage are based on her personality in addition to the marriages that she has witnessed. She explains in lines 440-444 that while she desires a lasting marriage, she loses interest in people and romantic partners rather quickly:

Because...I can like you and stop liking you so quick...I don't know why...
I wouldn't want to be in a marriage and be like well I'm not really in love
with him or...you know, he does something stupid and I wanna break up the
marriage, you know...I want it to last so...that's possibly another reason
why I don't really care too much for marriage...

Sherri reveals that the messages that she received about African American men, dating relationships, and marriages in combination with her current experiences have left her confused about African American men. Sherri reveals that while her first impression of men came from the negative things she learned in her family and her interactions with male friends who lie excessively, she is currently meeting men in college who are different from the ones she has known previously. Sherri feels that her current opinion is unstable because of the new information that she is receiving. Sherri's current instability suggests several things. First, it suggests that young women may be equally influenced by the messages they learn about men and relationships in childhood and their current experiences with men and relationships. While Sherri's responses to many of the questions in the interview suggest that she is strongly influenced by experiences within her family, her response to this question attests to the influence of male friends and the evolving nature of perceptions and beliefs. However, it should be noted that Sherri has not changed her beliefs to match the new information she is receiving about men—she simply acknowledges that this new information has an impact on her. Sherri's perception of

men as expressed throughout the interview appears to remain overwhelmingly negative; however, it is uncertain whether or not time and relationships that potentially contradict the things that she learned in her family will alter Sherri's perceptions.

Secondly, Sherri's current instability may suggest that young women of college age are at a stage in life where they are particularly susceptible to new information and experiences. Sherri may be more likely to alter her perceptions at the present time in her life than when she is older. Thirdly, Sherri's instability may suggest that young women on college campuses or in other settings that drastically contrast with the settings in which they were raised may be particularly susceptible to new information and experiences.

Sherri feels that the way in which she interacted with her family has impacted the way that she interacts with others, including her dating partners. Sherri reveals in lines 542-545 that as a result of the experiences within her family and the lack of a relationship with a male that she could trust, she has difficulty trusting males in relationships:

.....I don't know why people say I block them out, dudes say that too...but that's also because I haven't been close to any male, like really, really close to where I would just open up, I think it's a trust thing, I have a problem with trust...so...maybe if I trusted males more...I don't know...

Sherri also reveals that while growing up she did not feel that she could share her feelings or frustrations with family members. Sherri felt that showing emotional upset or stress was a sign of weakness and that it would simply place additional strain upon her mother:

519I don't-I don't know...um, I think that um...it's the...I used to
520 think it was a sign of weakness to like...you know, oh my God I'm just so
521 frustrated, this happened and that happened and I don't know what to do and I'm
522 just stressed out...cause I was always stressed out but I don't like to like...
523 put my burdens on other people so I kinda keep it to myself...and that's how
524 I always was like in my household because like...I always felt like the most
525 stress even though it might not have been true...

Subsequently, Sherri holds personal information about herself inside in her friendships and dating relationships. Although Sherri revealed a great deal about her personal life in the interview, her body language during the interview indicated that while she wanted to share her experiences and perceptions, she at times felt somewhat uncomfortable about doing so. Sherri avoided eye contact during the interview, particularly when discussing her father, and she would occasionally look in the opposite direction. The behaviors that Sherri exhibited during the interview are in line with Sherri's description of herself. It is interesting that despite Sherri's reservations about revealing personal information and feelings other than happiness or anger, Sherri reveals that she recently gave her sister all of her personal journals so that her sister could learn more about Sherri. It may be that while Sherri would like to reveal more of herself and is willing to do so at times, these instances are rare because of the heightened sense of vulnerability and weakness that Sherri feels at such times.

Another potential explanation for Sherri's emotional withdrawal or avoidance of revealing personal information in friendships and relationships could be that Sherri learned to be avoidant based upon her father's avoidant behavior. Sherri reveals that her father often avoided having conversations with her mother and that he went as far as altering his work schedule in order to avoid interaction with Sherri's mom. Sherri's reservations about opening up to friends and dating partners could be a result of social learning as well as genetic influence.

Sherri feels that her parents' relationship has impacted the way in which she views relationships, her expectations of men, and her personal desires for her own life. Sherri's father was not only persistently unfaithful towards her mother, but he was also physically and emotionally abusive. In addition, the men that Sherri's mother dated following her separation from Sherri's father were often unfaithful and dishonest. According to Sherri she was often

pessimistic about her friends' relationships in high school and she frequently assumed that their boyfriends were lying:

525 Um...actually yeah...that's probably where my, um...trust issue comes
 526 from because I notice like...like in high school I was being kinda negative
 527 towards my friends' relationships...like they ask me like what do you think
 528 about him, so and so, and I'd be like he's probably lying to you...I'd always
 529 be like the pessimistic one...

Thus the infidelity of Sherri's father and her mother's dating partners led Sherri to generalize about the behavior of males and to expect them to behave in line with her generalizations. The one significant romantic relationship that Sherri has been involved in has served to further confirm her expectations of men.

Sherri also feels that observing her parents' relationship caused her to desire a husband or partner who was unlike her father. She hopes to further distinguish herself from her parents by not holding on to a failing relationship. Sherri learned by opposition that it is best to leave a relationship that is not working rather than attempting to make it work for the sake of the children or for some other reason. She expresses this belief in lines 646-650:

so I mean I learned that if something is bad just let it go...like please just...
 that like made it worse on the kids, she thought it was helping us, that made it
 ten times worse on us, if she were divorced a long time ago we would've been
 just fine...so...that together for the kids thing only makes you miserable and
 the kids miserable...there's no point in that...

While this view may be beneficial in assisting Sherri to avoid an abusive or otherwise damaging relationship, it may also contribute to her loss of interest in partners- a behavior that she does not know how to explain. Sherri may quickly lose interest in partners and decide to terminate relationships for fear that remaining in a relationship for an extended period of time will cause her to become so attached that she is unable to leave the relationship.

Sherri's relationship with her father appears to have had a profound impact on her life. Sherri discusses her relationship with her father at length and she focuses more on her relationship with her father-prior to being questioned specifically about this relationship-than her relationships with any of her other family members. Sherri appears to blame her father for many of the negative things that have occurred in her family and to be angry at other family members when they do not have the same resentment for her father. While Sherri is understandably upset with her father for his physical abuse of her mother, she appears to want to hold on to the anger that she feels for her father as she minimizes his attempts to become closer to herself and her siblings. In lines 790-798 she admits trying to hurt her father's feelings-possibly in response to his hurting her family while she was growing up:

.....and like-like right now-when they first got divorced like I used to talk to my dad any kind of way I wanted to...like right now I get-I get little attitudes with him right now cause my dad like...it's like he knows I'm getting smart with him but he doesn't even like stop me when I'm talking, he'll just be like I'm your dad so you gotta respect me, but he'll just like, he doesn't say anything to me...so I don't like really...say anything negative anymore...cause it's just the fact that he doesn't let it bother him kinda takes away from it....

According to Sherri, her father had five children with another woman while she was young, one of which he chose to introduce to Sherri by bringing her to the house while Sherri was sleeping. Sherri recalls the event in lines 233-237:

when I was like uh...say around...late elementary school...um I found out I had a little sister cause I-I woke up one morning and there was a little girl standing beside my bed, my dad was like that's your sister, I never knew that he had another child, my mom was like yeah, actually he had like four or five mistresses during their marriage I didn't know about....

In addition to his unfaithful behavior, Sherri says that he did not contribute financially to the family. She also places emphasis on the fact that he disappointed her by missing her high school graduation. As a result of these behaviors, Sherri frequently says that she does not hate her

father but that she currently looks down upon him. While Sherri appears adamant about not allowing her father to evoke weakness within her, she reveals that she still has nightmares about the abuse that occurred within her household. Thus, while she prefers to show no outward sign of weakness to others, it appears that she is hurting within.

Sherri's relationship with her father has not only raised issues with trust and resentment within her, it has also influenced her selection of partners. According to Sherri, she is turned off by men who are aggressive because of her father's aggressive nature. While Sherri does not directly state such, Sherri may bring fear into her dating relationships. Alternatively, she may avoid dating someone altogether if they show any signs of anger or hostility.

Although Sherri acknowledges the impact that her father has had in her life, she does not make many explicit links between her current perception of African American men and her relationship with and observation of her father. It appears, however, that there are similarities between her current perceptions of African American men and her perceptions of her father. Sherri describes African American men as "dogs" who are unfaithful and who are not trying to do anything with their lives. Sherri's perception of African American men as unfaithful may be based, in part, on her father's infidelity. Her description of her father as someone who did not do anything for the family is very similar to her description of African American men as individuals who are not attempting to do anything with their lives. Sherri also feels that African American men do not respect women's views and ideas. Although this link is less obvious, it may be possible that part of the reason Sherri feels that African American men lack respect is because her father lacked respect for her mother.

While it is apparent that Sherri's father has influenced her perception of African American males, Sherri has likely been influenced by men other than her father such as the male

friends that she has. Their dishonesty may play just as much of a role in Sherri's current perceptions as the early model that she had. While Sherri feels that many of the negative characteristics that she attributes to African American men are not unique to African American men, her primary response to the question about African American men is that they are low in numbers. Thus, Sherri may feel that while women of all races deal with issues in dating relationships, she may feel that the pool of eligible men is significantly reduced for African American women and thus the likelihood of finding a partner who does not possess such negative attributes is lower for African American women.

Sherri feels that society perceives African American men as worthless and as individuals who are not doing anything with their lives. This perception may indicate that Sherri is influenced by societal perceptions; alternatively it may indicate that Sherri's own perceptions influence her beliefs about what she assumes society thinks about African American men. Despite Sherri's negative view of African American men, she does acknowledge that African American men have a difficult time in life. She feels that African American men have it worse than African American women because they are looked down upon by whites as well as African Americans. Although Sherri acknowledges that African American men have a difficult time, she feels that they often behave in line with stereotypes thus making things difficult for themselves.

Interestingly, although Sherri feels that African American men are looked down upon by whites and other African Americans and that they have a difficult time in life, she also feels that they assume that they are special and that they can be with any woman that they wish to be with. One would assume that a group of people who are stereotyped and looked down upon would not exhibit the pride and self confidence that Sherri describes and yet she feels that African American men do simultaneously experience hostility from the world and overconfidence in

themselves. Sherri feels that African American men know that African American women are their backbones and that they will always be there and thus they feel that they can mistreat African American women while saying that they love them.

Sherri feels that the media portrays African American relationships as violent and that they depict African American men as uninvolved fathers with several different baby mothers. Sherri acknowledges that the media often takes the worst in every story but she feels that they do this to a greater degree with African Americans.

Sherri feels that societal views do not impact her own views to any great extent because she is primarily influenced by her personal experiences and the experiences of her friends and family members. While societal beliefs may not have as great of an impact on Sherri as her personal experiences and the things that she observes within her friendships and family relationships, she may to be influenced by societal beliefs to some extent as some of her perceptions of African American men are similar to society's perceptions of African American men. Sherri appears to be influenced by the environment in which she lives in other ways. First, Sherri demonstrates an awareness of or a belief in the fact that certain factors reduce the pool of eligible African American men in her statement that African American men are low in numbers. Secondly, Sherri demonstrates an awareness of rising divorce statistics. She feels that her uncertainty about marriage is mutually influenced by the failed and unhappy marriages of family members as well as high divorce statistics.

Although Sherri initially states that there was no male that she could trust when she was young, when asked, she reveals that she did have a significant relationship with a male family member other than her father. Sherri reveals that there is one uncle that she is close with and who treats her well but she also states that she is not sure why he treats her this way. In the

interview Sherri supplies a reason for her uncle's kindness by stating that she believes this uncle encouraged her mother to have an abortion when she was pregnant with Sherri and thus he feels guilty. This explanation, coupled with her explanation of her father's current attempts at reconciliation, suggest that Sherri feels that men must have motives behind their kindness. It appears that Sherri feels that men, and perhaps women as well, are unable to be kind without reason. Sherri does feel, however, that this uncle provided her with a positive male image as well as a positive model of marriage based on the lasting marriage that he has with his wife of twenty years. Although Sherri acknowledges in her recollection of her uncle that there are some good men out there, she emphasizes that such men are rare.

There are several issues that Sherri raises within her interview that are worthy of further consideration. First, there may be more than one reason why Sherri is at times emotionally unexpressive or restrained in her expression of personal feelings within friendships and romantic relationships. While Sherri feels that she keeps personal feelings to herself as a result of not being able to express personal feelings within her family, it may be that Sherri closes down within romantic relationships for fear of being hurt as she and her mother were hurt by her father. Alternatively, Sherri may have trouble opening up within romantic relationships because she has learned that it is adaptive to refrain from expressing emotions. Sherri may have developed such a coping mechanism while attempting to keep her father from hurting her. Sherri's insistence on revealing no outward sign of weakness in her dealings with her father is evident in lines 230-232:

and I wouldn't care, like he'd spank me and I wouldn't cry and he'd always
get mad at me...he'd say I was hard headed..... he'd always
say I was hardheaded cause I never cry when he spanked me...

Yet another explanation for Sherri's behavior and the underlying belief that she has that displaying emotions are a sign of weakness is that within Sherri's culture emotional displays may

be seen as a sign of weakness. Sherri was likely influenced by the cultural beliefs of both the African country that her family is from as well as African American culture. Thus the belief that emotional expression or the expression of personal frustrations is a sign of weakness may not be limited to Sherri's household but may be a broader cultural belief.

Another issue that is worthy of further elaboration concerns the generalizations that Sherri may or may not have been able to make based upon her father's nationality. While Sherri appears to have generalized the behavior of her father to African American men or to African American men in the U.S., it should be noted that Sherri's father is of a different nationality. Thus, as the messages that Sherri's mother espoused may indicate, Sherri's father may have been unfaithful and may have had other negative qualities because of his nationality and thus it cannot be assumed that African American men will behave in ways that are similar to Sherri's father. However, as Sherri indicates in her statement that her first impression of a guy came from what she learned in her family, her father's behavior did have an impact on the way that she sees men, inclusive of African American men. In addition, although Sherri does not make explicit links, Sherri's description of African American men is in some ways similar to her description of her father. Thus, Sherri may have generalized her father's behavior to that of African American males, despite her father's distinct nationality. It could also be that she generalized his behavior to that of all males, rather than limiting her expectations of male behavior to African American men.

Sherri had no concerns with the transcription of her interview. While she had no additional insight into the researcher's interpretations, she revealed that she learned a great deal about herself during the interview and while reading over the transcript and interpretation. A summary of Sherri's interview appears in Table 4.

Shannon

Shannon is an eighteen year old African American young woman from a working class family. Shannon was raised on a farm in a household with her grandparents, her mother, and several members of her extended family. Shannon is very proud of the environment in which she was raised and the values that her family instilled within her. Shannon has a very special relationship with her grandfather who was a significant male influence in her life. While Shannon's mother and biological father never married and while Shannon was unable to establish a relationship with her biological father, the example that Shannon's grandfather provided left her with a lasting image of a positive male role model. Shannon describes her grandfather as a very nurturing and caring family man who made it a point to spend quality time with all of his grandchildren and who served as a father figure to Shannon. In fact, Shannon's fondest childhood memories involve spending time with her grandfather and assisting him with farming chores. Shannon also had several uncles who served as positive male influences, although they did so from a distance once they became adults and moved away from her grandparents' home. Shannon feels that she has a good relationship with her mother. As a young child, Shannon was very close with her mother but as she has gotten older there is some tension in their relationship as Shannon attempts to become independent and her mother continues to view Shannon as a child. Shannon's household also included several aunts and a male cousin. Shannon describes one of her aunts as a second mother with whom she could discuss issues that she could not share with her mother and she describes her youngest aunt as someone who was similar to a sister in her life. Shannon describes her male cousin as someone who was like a brother with whom she could play with at times and avoid when needed. Shannon did not develop a relationship with her biological father and she has had very limited

contact with him. She has received primarily phone calls and letters from him and has only met him on two occasions as a small child. Shannon expresses pride in the fact that her father's absence has had no impact upon her and that her family provided her with enough love and care to replace anyone or anything that was unavailable. Shannon has always felt that her family form was natural and that it was sufficient to fulfill her needs and desires. Shannon recalls only one of her mother's dating relationships and she explains that her mother chose not to introduce Shannon to dating partners in order to avoid having Shannon become attached to several different men. Shannon is currently single with no children and she has had relationships with members of the other sex.

The messages that Shannon received about African American men were primarily non-verbal and positive in nature. Shannon learned about male behavior through observing the behavior of her grandfather, uncles, and the men that her aunts dated. The behavior that Shannon's grandfather and uncles exhibited taught her that African American males could be responsible, dependable family men who nurtured and cared for their loved ones. Shannon describes her grandfather in lines 279-284:

...and then-he's just, he's very giving...um...and supportive...emotionally, financially... specifically financially and as far as materials like if you needed anything...he's very willing to get it for you or help you get it for yourself...um ...and he-he's definitely willing to get something that you needed for you before he'll get it for himself so he's very much of the caring father role even for his grandchildren...

Shannon feels that the men that her aunts dated were also positive influences, although likely less significant ones. Shannon explained that her aunts would only bring men home that they felt were suitable enough to meet Shannon's grandparents and thus these men were always positive, respectable influences. While Shannon demonstrates an awareness of her mother's somewhat

negative image of males that resulted from the bitterness that she felt toward Shannon's father, Shannon reveals that her mother made an effort to refrain from providing Shannon with any negative messages regarding her father. Instead, Shannon reveals in lines 508-514 that she was able to form her own opinions about her father:

...um the rest of my family tried to make up for that absence by showing me the positive side instead of emphasizing the negative side of him not being there...um...h-his actual absence was never an issue, it wasn't like we're giving you this extra love because your dad's not here...but at the same time they weren't blaming him all the time...so I kind've...they let me have a very neutral image of him until I was old enough to form my own image and so I think that's why that didn't... negatively affect my relationships with men...

The neutral image that Shannon's family members had of her father, coupled with the positive examples that her grandfather and uncles provided, has allowed her to form positive expectations of African American men. Shannon demonstrates an awareness of how the overwhelmingly positive African American male role models and messages about African American men that she received while growing up may set her apart from other young African American women.

Shannon reveals in lines 286-291 that her grandfather's presence enabled her to believe in a positive image of African American men that some people are unable to believe exists:

..... I think that really allowed me to believe that-to believe in a positive image... because I know a lot of people that even though there is positive-even though there are positive images...of black men now, I know a lot of people who still don't believe in those images, they-they don't believe that...those black man exist...and I had an opportunity to know one and live with one...and so I think that that largely impacts my ability to believe in that...

The messages that Shannon received about romantic relationships were also positive. Shannon received the verbal message that love does not involve abuse and that one should be respected and cared for within a relationship. The non-verbal behaviors of Shannon's grandfather and uncles supported this message. Shannon also feels that both verbally and non-

verbally she received the message that premarital sex was unacceptable and that it often led to unintended pregnancy. Shannon feels that throughout her childhood she received the non-verbal message that premarital sexual activity was unacceptable partially as a result of witnessing the unintended pregnancy of her aunt and the subsequent lack of involvement of this child's father. As Shannon grew older, Shannon's mother verbally reinforced this message by encouraging her to refrain from sexual behavior until marriage. Although not directly stated, it appears that Shannon received dual messages about premarital sex, unintended pregnancy, and single motherhood. It appears that while Shannon's family felt that premarital sex was unacceptable and that ideally pregnancy and childrearing should occur in the context of marriage, they simultaneously held the belief that the absence of a child's biological father was not the most detrimental event that could occur in a child's life and that other significant familial influences could replace any void that was created by the absence of a biological father.

The message that Shannon received about marriage is that it is a very important decision that one should be prepared for. Shannon feels that her aunts placed emphasis on not getting married too young. Shannon's family also stressed the significance of marriage because of its impact on not only the individuals in the marriage but on the family members of those two individuals. While Shannon does not feel that the messages that she received about marriage or romantic relationships were specifically in regards to the marriages or relationships of African American men and women, she feels that it was assumed that she would marry within her race.

Shannon feels that her interactions with her family members have influenced the way that she behaves in romantic relationships in several ways. Shannon feels that the verbal and non-verbal warnings that her family members provided her about premarital sex have allowed her to hold on to her morals and values within relationships. Thus far, she does not feel that she has

compromised these morals for any of her romantic partners. Shannon also feels that her family member's encouragement to think for oneself has allowed her to remain independent while dating and to do what she feels is best for her. She feels that she has simultaneously experienced independence and intimacy within relationships as a result of her family's messages and example. According to Shannon, her dating partners have confirmed her beliefs and stated that she is in fact, an independent thinker who remains true to her values. Shannon further feels that her interactions with her grandfather have shaped her interactions with dating partners. She feels that as a result of her grandfather's affectionate nature-in his relationship with his grandchildren- she has become a very affectionate person who appreciates small expressions of love.

While Shannon did not witness the parental relationship of her mother and biological father, she does feel that observing the relationship of her grandparents taught her several important lessons about marriage. She feels that her grandparents' marriage taught her by opposition the importance of good communication. Shannon feels that there was poor communication in her grandparent's relationship based upon her grandmother's temper and frequent anger. Shannon does not feel that her grandmother expressed herself properly and thus she has learned that it is essential to communicate in a way that will cause listeners to be receptive as opposed to avoidant towards the speaker. As a result of her grandmother's unkind behavior and hostile attempts at communication, Shannon also learned that it was important to be positive and kind within relationships and that it was acceptable to be happy. In addition to these lessons, Shannon feels that she has become aware of how her actions affect her partner. Shannon reveals that her grandmother's closed mindedness often kept her grandfather from trying new things and traveling to new places. As a result of the lessons that she learned from observing the strained relationship of her grandparents, Shannon feels that she is able to remain positive in her

relationships and to demonstrate kindness towards partners unless she has sufficient cause to display anger or frustration. Shannon discusses the lessons that she has taken from her grandparents' relationship in lines 464-473:

...I learned that it's really important to hear what someone is saying to you ...cause I think that listening to someone and hearing them...is different...and in my grandparents relationship they weren't always hearing each other...and so... that has influenced me to make sure that I'm actually hearing people...and I'm not just listening...and I learned that...it's a lot easier to be positive than negative and it has a lot better outcomes in the long run...um...and so I always try to be ...positive...whenever possible, of course if I'm angry, I'm angry, or if I'm upset or disappointed and those types of things...but I learned that it's ok to be happy...and that people like you when your happy...you're easier to get along with...so you don't have to be upset all the time...

To the contrary, Shannon reveals that she has not always been an effective communicator in her relationships and otherwise as a result of her family's protectiveness when she was young. Shannon explains that when she was young her family frequently communicated for her or did not require her to express herself and thus her communication skills suffered until recently when her schooling allowed her to become a more effective communicator. Thus, it becomes apparent that while Shannon was able to learn certain things by opposition, other skills that Shannon was unable to obtain within her family had to be demonstrated and learned elsewhere in order for Shannon to reverse the pattern of ineffective communication that she learned within her family. Shannon feels that her experiences in relationships have supported the importance of good communication skills.

Shannon does not feel that her father's absence had a significant impact on the way that she views men or the way that she experiences romantic relationships. Shannon appears to be very proud of the fact that her family did not place emphasis on her father's absence and that

they refrained from labeling him in ways that were negative. She expresses this sentiment in lines 256-265:

.....so my dad not being-my
 dad not having a relationship with me was never an issue in my family, it was
 never talked about like outside of the context of it being explained to me and...
 um...I mean I was always allowed to ask questions about it and different things
 like that but other than that it wasn't an issue, it wasn't like you know, you don't
 have a dad, that's so terrible so we all have to support you to make sure that
 you're ok or anything like that...it was just-it was always like it was natural, I
 mean I knew that other kids had moms and dads and those things, but it wasn't
 like a foreign thing in my family, it wasn't like...you know, the worse thing
 in the world that I didn't have a dad.....

Shannon feels that she was able to develop her own perceptions of her father and that her mother and grandmother, who may have held some resentment towards her father, did not express views that were negative. Shannon's experience lends support to the idea that family members have the potential to shape a child's perception of their father and other men, particularly when the child's parents were never married and the child has been unable to develop a relationship with their biological father. It should be noted, however, that during the interview Shannon was hesitant about discussing her father and adamant about his lack of influence in her life. At one point she reveals that she recently discovered letters that he sent to her as a young child that she did not recall receiving. It may be that Shannon's family has minimized the importance of her father or portrayed him as someone who was insignificant and thus Shannon has repressed any negative feelings she has concerning her father. Based on Shannon's portrayal, however, it does not appear that any negative feelings that Shannon may or may not possess have influenced her perceptions of men and her experience of romantic relationships. Shannon's emphasis on her relationship with her grandfather and other positive male role models suggests that these men were able to counter any negative messages or feelings that Shannon may have received or felt during her childhood. In fact, in lines 519-525, Shannon explains that her relationship with her

grandfather makes it difficult for her to accept negative images when she does see them because of the positive model of male behavior that her grandfather provided:

..... because I saw so much positive it-I was...that once I did see the negative like in real life, like the images on tv and those types of things it was a little harder to accept and cope with because I'd always been around this positive, I had the positive um male role model...and I'd seen a African American man do good things for so much of my life and so...um I guess it was a little hard for me to actually realize that this did exist...which is kind of opposite of most people I guess...

Shannon describes African American men as interesting and unique. This positive description that Shannon provides is in line with the positive images that she witnessed within her family. When asked to describe African American men Shannon points out that there are differences within the race that make it difficult to classify African American men in one way or another. Shannon explains that while some African American men work to defy stereotypes, others behave in ways that are in line with stereotypes. In lines 32-34 Shannon demonstrates resistance towards acceptance of stereotypes and she appears to make a conscious effort to refrain from labeling African American men:

They're very unique...um they come from a broad range of backgrounds... same race, same gender...but a lot of different backgrounds influence them... you don't brand the race...

On the other hand, Shannon feels that society perceives African American men as naturally athletic, aggressive and violent. She feels that African American men are rarely portrayed as nurturing, caring father figures. It is clear that Shannon feels that societal views of African American men are quite different from her own and yet she demonstrates awareness that societal views and media images do have an influence on people when they are repeatedly expressed.

Shannon expresses in lines 160-165 that although it is difficult, people must strive to find a balance between stereotypes and reality:

Um, well like I said seeing the same thing and hearing the same thing over and over again definitely impacts point of view or perception...but at the same time you have to take into consideration that each individual is an individual... and that stereotypes aren't always true...they...it's really just finding a balance between what you assume from...what is commonly, generally accepted as truth...and what is actual...

It is likely that Shannon had less difficulty in finding this balance than other young women (and young men) with less positive familial influences.

Shannon feels that African American men perceive African American women in ways that are both positive and negative and yet it should be noted that with primacy as an indicator of significance, the image of the African American woman as someone who is overly aggressive and difficult to get along with is particularly salient. Another negative character trait that Shannon feels that African American men attach to African American women is that of an individual who is solely interested in partnership based on financial gain and the monetary rewards that she may receive from the relationship. To the contrary, Shannon feels that African American women are also viewed by African American men as strong women and as the caregivers for their families. Thus it is apparent that Shannon believes, or at least hopes, that while African American men may hold negative views of African American women, they may also be aware that African American women are different from one another and capable of possessing positive qualities.

Shannon feels that relationships between African American men and women are conveyed by the media as being driven by sexual desire rather than emotional attachment. Once again, however, Shannon feels that the images and messages are mixed. In Shannon's perception, images of African American family life as conveyed by the media range from

positive African American mothers and fathers to overly abusive and aggressive husbands and wives.

Based upon the interview, Shannon appears to have had a wonderful childhood where she was loved and supported by members of her immediate and extended family. Shannon received positive images of African American males and dating relationships and is thus able to perceive African American men in a manner that is both positive and realistic; while Shannon is aware of negative media images and societal views, she also realizes that African American men are unique individuals with the capacity to love and care for others.

While it cannot be said that Shannon did not have positive experiences within her family or that she did not have a wonderful relationship with her grandfather, it should be noted that Shannon appeared to desire to portray her family in a positive light and to portray her own behavior as ideal. To some extent, Shannon may have attempted to reveal experiences, perceptions, and beliefs that were socially desirable. While it is unlikely that any portion of Shannon's recollections are false, she may have neglected to reveal experiences or beliefs that were less than ideal because of her strong belief that her family sufficiently provided for her needs despite any lack that existed within the household. During the interview, Shannon demonstrates an awareness of societal expectations that children reared in households without their fathers will be negatively impacted and she appears to desire to work to contradict this belief. This awareness does not render Shannon's recollections or expression of beliefs invalid in any way; instead it may serve to inform future researchers of participants' desires to avoid stigmatization.

Shannon had no concerns with the transcription or interpretation of her interview. A summary table of Shannon's interview appears in Table 5.

Table 1: Summary of Interview with Renee

| Family Structure and Relationships | Messages about African American men received in family of origin | Messages about romantic relationships received in family of origin | Messages about marriage received in family of origin | The impact of familial messages on perceptions of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of parents' relationship on perceptions and experiences in relationships | Father's impact on perception of the other sex | The impact of societal messages on perception of the other sex |
|---|--|---|---|--|--|--|--|
| The only girl of four children; middle class family; raised in small southern town; parents separated and reunited frequently; their first separation occurred when Renee was seven; parents currently separated; | Primarily influenced by non-verbal messages; Influenced by behavior of father, brothers, and uncles; Both male and female family members have been unfaithful to one another but Renee focuses on the men; Brothers continually unfaithful in their relationships; | Messages both verbal and non-verbal but primarily non-verbal; Couples should have time apart; Don't be the fool in the relationship; "Go into it with one eye open" | Messages primarily non-verbal; Renee received these messages based on observing the failed marriages in her family; | Renee compares potential partners to family members; She is cautious when entering relationships and she "keeps an eye out" for any signs of deception or unfaithful behavior; tries to decipher what a man's motives are before entering a relationship; Keeps a guard up; brothers unfaithful men; Family helped her realize and identify deception; | Renee learned what not to do from observing parents; She learned that it is not good to separate and reunite multiple times; Learned the importance of effective communication (by opposition); Was not aware of mother's relationships with other men (during separations) until recently | Admires father for always being there for her and her brothers; desires a partner who is similar to her father- someone responsible and goal oriented; learned that men can be responsible | Feels that African American men are both strong and vulnerable/ deceitful; Black men are different from one another; society portrays them as dangerous; tension between black men and the world |

Table 1(cont.): Summary of Interview with Renee

| Family Structure and Relationships | Messages about African American men received in family of origin | Messages about romantic relationships received in family of origin | Messages about marriage received in family of origin | The impact of familial messages on perceptions of the other sex | The impact of parents' relationship on perceptions and experiences in relationships | Father's impact on perception of the other sex | The impact of societal messages on perception of the other sex |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| Closer with the men in family; closest with father and oldest brother who is ten years older than Renee; very close knit family; not as close with mom as with other family members; does not tell mom about relationships | Non-verbal messages were that "all men are the same" and that "you can't put all your trust in somebody" | | Messages were that long lasting marriages were rare and that marriage is not a commitment to be taken lightly; Can only think of one stable relationship out of 150 family members | Renee has a difficult time communicating and being completely open emotionally with partners | | Is able to separate father's unfaithful behavior from his total person; negative perceptions of men relate to their behavior in romantic relationships; brothers have a large influence on her expectations of male behavior | Black women seen as intimidating/bossy; Black relationships portrayed as violent; societal views of black men different from her own views; societal views upset her; doesn't want African Americans to live up to stereotypes |

Table 2: Summary of Interview with Alicia

| Family Structure and Relationships | Messages about African American men received in family of origin | Messages about romantic relationships received in family of origin | Messages about marriage received in family of origin | The impact of familial messages on perceptions of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of parents' relationship on perceptions and experiences in relationships | Father's impact on perception of the other sex and experience of relationships | The impact of societal messages on perception of the other sex |
|--|--|--|--|---|--|---|---|
| Only child until eighteen years of age; now has two small siblings from mother's remarriage; working class family; raised in large southern city; raised in a household full of women; very close relationship with mom; | Messages both verbal and non-verbal; primarily received verbal messages from mom; messages were to be careful around guys because they can take advantage of you and to avoid premarital cohabitation; | Messages non-verbal; observed the lack of successful relationships within her family; feels that she has not seen a good relationship between a African American man and woman | Didn't receive the best picture of marriage; Marriage is not synonymous with fidelity- "all men cheat"; Being married is not going to keep anybody there but it's the right thing to do; | Influenced by father's behavior and observing the relationships of family members; they made it hard for me to trust men; infidelity is always in the back of her mind and she does not like this; expects the worst in her relationships | There was a lot of physical and emotional abuse in parents' relationship; learned not to "shack up" or cohabitate before marriage by opposition; caused her to have limited patience in relationships; | Father continually disappointing; father resentful of her achievements; father emotionally inexpressive; taught her that African American men have trouble opening up; substitute material things for emotional expression; | Feels that African American men are hard to understand and emotionally inexpressive; society perceives them as disadvantaged trouble makers; African American women seen maternally and as sex objects; |

Table 2 (cont.): Summary of Interview with Alicia

| Family Structure and Relationships | Messages about African American men received in family of origin | Messages about romantic relationships received in family of origin | Messages about marriage received in family of origin | The impact of familial messages on perceptions of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of parents' relationship on perceptions and experiences in relationships | Father's impact on perception of the other sex and experience of relationships | The impact of societal messages on perception of the other sex |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| Strained relationship with father; parents dated for ten years and then married when Alicia was ten; remained married for a year and then divorced; mom recently remarried; no close relationships with men in family; issues with self-esteem | Emphasizes lack of frequent contact with her father and living in a household full of women-this may indicate that her understanding of African American men is limited | | Aunt gave her the message that you should marry a man to try to keep him there; Mom waited ten years to get married the first time and did not stay married for a year | Her own relationship has reinforced the idea that she cannot trust men | Parent's relationship and mom's relationship with other men taught her by opposition that she should not continue to stick around if the situation is bad; encouraged her not to continue in a cycle of negative relationships | Made it hard for her to trust men; desires closeness to romantic partner because she did not have it with father; believes that her temper/physical incidents with partners are a result of witnessing her father abuse her mother; desires high level of communication with partners | Media overemphasizes sexual aspects of black relationships; media beginning to convey positive family structures; personal experiences have a stronger impact on her views than societal influences; appears that father shaped current perceptions |

Table 3: Summary of Interview with Tricia

| Family Structure and Relationships | Messages about African American men received in family of origin | Messages about romantic relationships received in family of origin | Messages about marriage received in family of origin | The impact of familial messages on perceptions of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of parents' relationship on perceptions and experiences in relationships | Father's impact on perception of the other sex | The impact of societal messages on perception of the other sex |
|--|---|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| One of three children- a sister who is eight years younger and a brother who is an infant; grew up in two different parts of the U.S.; working class family; parents divorced when she was fourteen after several years of conflict; | Messages were received non-verbally through observing father's behavior; father's behavior taught her that African American men were dependable; mother gave positive messages about father following divorce | Messages about romantic relationships related to marital relationships | Messages were non-verbal and based on observing the marriages of family members; parents argued a lot; parents' relationship taught her that conflict was a part of married life; | They've left her disappointed that the African American men she meets are not able to live up to the model that her father provided | Parents' divorce left her with less faith in love; parent's divorce caused her to feel more cautious and on guard in relationships; she feels that she doesn't try as hard in her relationships as a result of parents' divorce; feels that the divorce impacted her more than the arguing; | Tricia and father do not talk a lot but she feels they have an unspoken bond; admires father; sees father as symbol of strength and protection; father cooked meals for family; father old fashioned but always there for her; | Feels that it is hard to categorize African American men; men share qualities irrespective of race; Black men are beautiful, unreliable and afraid of revealing emotions; don't appreciate their women |

Table 3 (cont.): Summary of Interview with Tricia

| Family Structure and Relationships | Messages about African American men received in family of origin | Messages about romantic relationships received in family of origin | Messages about marriage received in family of origin | The impact of familial messages on perceptions of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of parents' relationship on perceptions and experiences in relationships | Father's impact on perception of the other sex | The impact of societal messages on perception of the other sex |
|---|--|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| Family is not close knit/few shared activities; close relationship with little sister; strained relationship with mom during her adolescent years but the relationship has improved; unspoken understanding with father | | | Aunt and uncle's loving marriage taught her that happiness was a part of married life; father verbally conveyed the message that one should work at resolving problems in a marriage | | Father's behavior in the marriage taught her that respect and compromise are important; mother's relationships following the divorce cause her to desire relationships that are different from her mother's; feels that she dates men who are similar to those her mother dates | Father's behavior caused her to have high expectations of men; older cousin and high school boyfriends provided a model similar to that of her father and further raised her expectations; currently disappointed in men | White society portrays them as violent pimps; Black women seen as beautiful and intimidating; Black loving relationships not shown by media; feels societal impact is minimal- she realizes everyone is unique; mentions high divorce rates |

Table 4: Summary of Interview with Sherri

| Family Structure and Relationships | Messages about African American men received in family of origin | Messages about romantic relationships received in family of origin | Messages about marriage received in family of origin | The impact of familial messages on perceptions of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of parents' relationship on perceptions and experiences in relationships | Father's impact on perception of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of societal messages on perception of the other sex |
|---|--|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| One of five children; parents of African heritage; Sherri born and raised in the U.S.; lower working class family; very close relationship with mom; protective of mom; close to sister who is ten years younger; | Advised not to marry a man from the African country that she is from because these men are trouble; told that American African American men were acceptable; | Messages primarily verbal; aunts encouraged her not to accept anything from a man; uncles gave mixed messages that she should date in high school though not in college | Messages verbal and non-verbal; negative view of marriage from observing aunts and uncles; family members ask mom when daughter will get married | Current feelings about marriage are ambiguous; desires and avoids marriage; wants her marriage to last but tires of people easily; withholds personal information in relationships because she withheld it in family; | Avoids men like her father; parents' relationship caused her to be pessimistic about friends' relationships and assume their boyfriends were lying; taught her that if a marriage or relationship is bad that it should be let go and not kept together for children; | Poor relationship with father; fearful of father as a result of his abuse towards mother; looks down on father and feels he doesn't do anything; feels that father has good intentions but also has problems; feels that dad has ulterior motives for showing kindness now; dad was continually unfaithful and disappointing; | Feels that African American men are dogs, headaches, and disrespectful men who do nothing with their lives and have multiple women; feels they are low in numbers; feels society perceives them as worthless and inactive; |

Table 4 (cont): Summary of Interview with Sherri

| Family Structure and Relationships | Messages about African American men received in family of origin | Messages about romantic relationships received in family of origin | Messages about marriage received in family of origin | The impact of familial messages on perceptions of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of parents' relationship on perceptions and experiences in relationships | Father's impact on perception of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of societal messages on perception of the other sex |
|---|--|--|--|---|---|--|--|
| Feels burdened by family; older sister is dependent upon her; very strained relationship with father; fearful of and angry with father; father abusive towards mother; parents separated when she was thirteen; divorce now final | Family assumes she will marry outside her race and she is unhappy with this; behavior of family members and friends indicate that males lie frequently | | | Indicates that although first impression of males came in her family, her current perception of males is unstable because she is meeting new types of men; problems with trust in friendships and relationships | Sees a pattern in mom's current relationships; mom's current dating partners reinforce the idea that men lie and cheat; Sherri's own relationship also reinforces this idea | Does not display emotion in dealings with father; he made it hard for her to trust men; she avoids aggressive dating partners because of father's abuse; one uncle has provided a positive male model but she feels he has an motive behind his kindness | Emphasizes that it is hard on black men; they feel they are a gift to the women they mistreat; African American relationships portrayed as violent and men depicted as uninvolved fathers; feels she is impacted by personal experiences rather than societal views; mentions high divorce rates |

Table 5: Summary of Interview with Shannon

| Family Structure and Relationships | Messages about African American men received in family of origin | Messages about romantic relationships received in family of origin | Messages about marriage received in family of origin | The impact of familial messages on perceptions of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of parents' relationship on perceptions and experiences in relationships | Father's impact on perception of the other sex | The impact of societal messages on perception of the other sex |
|--|--|--|--|---|---|---|---|
| Only child; raised in grandparents' household with mom and extended family; raised on farm; working class family; mom and biological father never married; sees grandfather as father figure; very close with grandfather; | Messages mostly non-verbal from observing grandfather and other males; grandfather, uncles, and men aunts dated were all positive models; grandfather demonstrated that men could be very caring and nurturing | Verbally and non-verbally she received the messages that premarital sex was unacceptable; received the message that love does not involve abuse; one should be respected and cared for | To make sure that you are ready for marriage; that marriage is a very important decision | Grandfather's presence allowed her to believe in a positive image of African American men which she believes that some people are unable to believe in; messages allowed her to hold on to her morals and values; caused her to be independent; | Did not witness a relationship between mother and biological father; Did not witness mother's relationships with men besides biological father; grandparents' marriage taught her what not to do in a marriage; | Little to no relationship with biological father; is proud that this lack of a relationship has not impacted her; feels that family never emphasized his absence; they gave her everything she needed; grandfather was father figure; | Feels African American men are unique from one another/ interesting; society perceives them as athletic, aggressive, and violent as opposed to nurturing father figures; African American women are seen maternally and as aggressive "gold diggers"; |

Table 5 (cont): Summary of Interview with Shannon

| Family Structure and Relationships | Messages about African American men received in family of origin | Messages about romantic relationships received in family of origin | Messages about marriage received in family of origin | The impact of familial messages on perceptions of the other sex and experiences in relationships | The impact of parents' relationship on perceptions and experiences in relationships | Father's impact on perception of the other sex | The impact of societal messages on perception of the other sex |
|---|--|--|--|--|---|---|--|
| Good relationship with mom although currently a little strained; aunt second mother; another aunt seen as cousin; protective uncles; no relationship with biological father; grandmother has bad temper | While Shannon has an awareness that mom had a somewhat negative view because of father, she indicates that her mother and other family members never said anything negative about her father | | | Feels grandfather's affectionate nature caused her to be affectionate in relationships | Grandparents' marriage taught her the importance of communication (by opposition); saw the importance of kindness and how her actions can affect her partner; causes her to listen to partners and try to be positive in relationships (in opposition to grandmother) | Indicates that it was hard for her to accept negative images when she did see them because grandfather provided such a positive model | African American relationships are portrayed in ways ranging from positive images to overly sexual images and overly aggressive/abusive husbands and wives; believes that societal influence and media images impact her to some extent but that she strives to find a balance between reality and stereotypes |

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Several common themes emerged during the analysis of individual interviews. These common threads will be discussed and elaborated upon in this section. Additionally, ideas expressed by participants that were in contrast to the common themes found across interviews will be reviewed. Possible explanations for unique or contrasting views will be explored where case study data is present to support such explanations. A summary of common themes and divergent views is presented in Table 6.

The findings presented here are divided into six sections based upon the research questions that were explored. The first section describes sample participants as it relates to family structure and relationships. The second section focuses on the messages that young women received in their families of origin concerning men and relationships and how these messages have influenced their current expectations of male behavior. The third section describes the manner in which familial interaction has influenced young women's behavior in their current relationships. This topic, although not based on an original research question, arose during the interviews and appears to be an important aspect of participant experience. The fourth section focuses on the influence that the parental relationship has had on participants' perceptions and expectations in relationships. The fifth section focuses specifically on the influence of father figures in shaping their perceptions of men and experiences in relationships. The sixth section focuses on environmental and societal influence on young women's beliefs and

perceptions of African American men. Finally, results will be summarized and discussed as it relates to theory and previous research.

Question: Who were the women who participated in the study?

The African American women who participated were primarily from working class families and most spent at least a portion of their childhood living in large cities in the southeast. While all of the women had experienced at least one romantic relationship, the women ranged in ages from eighteen to twenty-three and as a few participants pointed out, their perceptions and beliefs were still forming and continually evolving. Despite the evolving nature of perceptions and beliefs, the information that these young women shared provides researchers with valuable insight into familial and environmental impact on young African American women's perceptions of African American men and their experience of romantic relationships.

Most of the women in the study were close to their families and felt that their families were influential in shaping their lives and behavior. Of the five women that participated in the study, two were from large families with three or more siblings and a great deal of extended family involvement. By contrast, two of the women spent their childhood- the years prior to turning eighteen- as only children. Both of these women raised as only children felt that their extended families were highly involved in their lives and in fact, some extended family resided within both of their households. One of the five women was raised in a medium sized immediate family with little extended family involvement. Four of the five women felt that they had good relationships with female family members including their mothers and aunts and three of the five women felt they had good relationships with their biological fathers or a father figure. Two of the women had poor relationships with their fathers which included resentment, disappointment, anger and fear. Of the five women, three had parents who were currently divorced, one had

parents who were currently separated and one young woman's parents had never been married. All of the women describe their parents' relationship with one another as primarily negative although a few of the women concede that these relationships have improved following separation or divorce. Three of the five women witnessed the infidelity of male family members such as their fathers, brothers, and uncles. Two of the women had fathers who were physically and emotionally abusive to their mothers. There was only one participant who felt that she had no relationship with her biological father and this young woman felt that her grandfather, with whom she resided while growing up, had always assumed the role of a father figure within her life. Demographically, the women who participated in the study were similar to one another; however, their family structures and relationships with parents and family members served to distinguish each young woman from the other participants in the study although there were several commonalities between participants.

Question: How do the messages that young African American women receive in their families of origin concerning the other sex and romantic relationships impact their current perceptions of African American men?

The section of the interview that dealt with the manner in which familial messages influence young African American women was divided into three areas: messages about African American men, messages about romantic relationships, and messages about marriage. The discussion that follows focuses on common themes and divergent views found as it relates to these three areas.

The primary source of information about the behavior of African American males for most of the women was the behavior of male family members such as the women's fathers, brothers, and uncles. An additional source of information about male behavior for two of the

women was the behavior of family members' male dating partners. Thus, it appears that messages about African American men were primarily non-verbal and based upon behaviors rather than shared verbal messages constructed within families. It may be that while the women were exposed to verbal messages about men while growing up, men's actual behavior was a stronger and more lasting influence than spoken messages. Symbolic interaction theorists propose that while verbal interaction between primary group members such as families is highly influential in shaping an individual's beliefs, shared symbols or understandings of the world may also be constructed based upon the roles that family members play and the behavior they exhibit (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

While a few of the women felt that they received negative messages about men or negative examples of male behavior within their families of origin, two of the women received the message based on the behavior of male family members that African American men were dependable family men. Tricia expresses this sentiment in the following way:

171 Well... my-I mean if-if seeing my father counts and the male figures within
 172 like the...um extended family...um my dad, he always cooked dinner (laughs)
 173 and he was always the one who...took me places I needed to go...so I guess...
 174 um for a long time I always knew black men would be dependable...and you
 175 know, it was like my dad-I can always count on my dad so you know...that's
 176 the type of image I had of black men...

While one of the women who expressed this positive belief also reported receiving negative messages about male behavior, it is noteworthy that the only commonality found across interviews as it related to messages about African American men was positive in nature and portrayed African American men as dependable family men. This message is noteworthy in light of the findings of previous research (Carter, 2001; Moynihan, 1965) and media images that depict African American fathers as uninvolved in their families. Other messages that the women reported receiving about African American men were that all African American men were the

same, that it is not wise to put all your trust in somebody, and that one should be careful around guys. While these three specific messages were not found across interviews as it related to the messages women received about African American men in their families of origin, it appears that these three messages share a cautionary tone.

Several of the women reported receiving mixed messages about romantic relationships within their families. Two of the young women place emphasis on the fact that they have not witnessed a positive relationship between a man and a woman. Renee revealed:

191I don't think it's been
192 like a stable relationship.. you know, that I can say like oh, I wanna be like them
193 in my family...I just always known them to be players... and you know, do little
194 things...

Another negative or cautionary message that was received by Renee is that one should avoid being made a fool of at all costs:

216there's always the possibility of...
217 someone straying away...and you never wanna be the fool...in a relationship
218 ...that's, that's the way I've always been, you know...don't (emphasis) be the
219 fool...spot it before it happens and... nip it in the bud, you know...I guess it's all
220 about saving face in the, in the long run...not being the one who got played for a
221 fool...

The women also reported receiving positive or non-detrimental messages about romantic relationships. One young woman reports that she received both verbal and non-verbal messages that premarital sex was not condoned and that this message has subsequently had a positive impact on her behavior. Other positive messages were that couples should have time apart from one another and that love involves care and respect as opposed to abuse. Thus, it appears that young African American women receive both cautionary and positive messages about romantic relationships. The one commonality found as it relates to messages about romantic relationships

suggests that young African American women similar to those who participated in this study often feel that they have very few models of healthy romantic relationships.

While there were few common themes among the women in regards to messages about non-marital romantic relationships, there were several commonalities that emerged pertaining to messages about marriage. Several of the women felt that they received the message that long lasting marriages were rare based on the failed marriages of their parents and other members of their family. Despite the non-verbal message women received that long lasting marriages were rare, the majority of the women demonstrated an awareness that their family members placed a high value on marriage and some of the women also received the message that marriage is a commitment that should not be taken lightly. Sherri discusses her family member's emphasis on the marriages of her and her sisters despite their own failed or failing marriages:

408a lot of people talk about me
409 and my sister's wedding, and um all my family members are always asking
410 my mom when her daughters are gonna get married... [even though] all the
411 marriages around me are like crumbling...

These messages may create tension in the lives of women who have experienced a failed parental marriage or women who have witnessed several failed marriages within their families of origin.

It is possible that the conflicting messages that these women receive create ambivalence concerning the institution of marriage as it appears to be something that is both highly valued and difficult to maintain. Two of the women did appear to be simultaneously avoidant of and desirous of marriage and two of the women worried that they would divorce soon after marriage.

Sherri conveyed her ambivalence about marriage in the following way:

411.....I guess I got
412 a negative um image about marriage because I don't wanna get married for
413 a really long time and I guess it's because of the marriages I've seen.....

419 like I don't really look at like marriage as...being a

420 part of my life...my mom keeps telling me that it's gonna happen and I
421 know it's probably gonna happen...um someday cause I can't really help the
422 way I feel but...I don't wanna get married...but I know I have to get married
423 cause I wanna have kids

This finding is in line with the results of previous research that finds that children of divorce hold more favorable attitudes towards divorce than children whose parents remain married but that they are not necessarily less desirous of marriage (Jennings, Salts & Smith, 1992; Greenberg & Nay, 1982). In other words, although children of divorce would like to get married or expect to get married in the future, they also possess a heightened awareness of the solubility of marriage. The findings of this study also suggest that children of divorce or failed relationships may lack confidence in their ability to be successful marital partners irrespective of their attitudes towards marriage and divorce. It should also be noted that within this sample of African American women the majority of participants felt that their families placed a high value on marriage. This finding is in line with previous researchers who assert that African Americans are not less desirous of marriage than other groups but that they may experience certain barriers that make marriage difficult to attain or maintain. (Thompson & Lawson, 1999; Davis, Emerson, & Williams, 1997; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan 1995).

There were several messages about marriage that certain women received that were not found across interviews that are noteworthy as they serve to further highlight the conflicting messages about marriage that young women receive in their families of origin. One of the young women, whose mother emphasized the sacredness of marriage by stressing that she marry rather than simply live with a dating partner, also received the verbal message that marriage is not synonymous with fidelity and that ultimately all men will be unfaithful to their partners whether they are married to them or not. This young woman also reported receiving the non-verbal message based upon her aunts' behavior that a woman should marry to "keep a man" or to

preserve a failing relationship. As was previously stated messages such as these may be problematic for young women because they stress the importance of becoming and remaining married and yet they simultaneously convey the difficulty in maintaining a satisfying marriage. Undoubtedly, these conflicting messages are confusing for this young woman as she attempts to form and maintain her own romantic relationships and as she contemplates whether or not she will marry.

The messages that these young women received about African American men, romantic relationships, and marriage within their families of origin appear to have influenced their current expectations of African American men in several ways. There were four common themes that were found across interviews as it related to the women's current perceptions of African American men based upon what they learned while growing up. A few of the women felt the non-verbal messages they gained by witnessing the relationships of family members made it difficult for them to trust men. Alicia reveals that her own relationship and those of family members cause her to question men's trustworthiness:

368now that I went through what I
 369 did with my boyfriend- my ex, and my mom went through what she did, and
 370 I saw my aunt go through the same thing, it makes it even harder to trust, it's
 371 like I'm thinking about their specific situation and thinking about mine and
 372 even though it's like three guys, you know outta the whole population, it still
 373 makes me feel like...I well, I always think about you say you're gonna with your
 374 friends, you know, where are you really going? It's always in the back of my
 375 mind.....

In line with this distrust, a few of the women reported caution in entering relationships based upon the verbal and non-verbal messages they received from family members. Renee reveals:

408 like I feel... extremely(emphasis) and probably overly cautious about getting
 409 into a relationship...until it, I feel like that person...has...not so much passed the
 410 test but...proved themselves to not(emphasis) be like...my family...you know
 411...the negative side anyway...

Thirdly, two of the five women reported dissatisfaction with the fact that infidelity is something that is always “in the back of [their] minds.” Fourth, a few of the women felt that their family members influence their selection of partners in that they compare romantic partners or potential partners to male family members prior to becoming involved and during their relationships. Renee explains “when entering a potential relationship...I always rate that person...by how closely they relate to my family.” This finding is in line with previous research that suggests that father figures serve as important points of comparison for young women as they select dating partners (Genuchi, 1997; Sharpe, 1994). However, the finding of this study serves to highlight the influence of male family members in addition to the young woman’s father. These four commonalities suggest that women who witness several failed or dissatisfying relationships while growing up are not only likely to be distrustful of men and to have low expectations of dating partners, but that they are also likely to be extremely cautious about entering relationships. Equally as important is the common theme which suggests that women would like to be more trusting and less suspicious of men as it relates to concerns of infidelity.

There are several points that should be addressed in relation to these four common themes regarding the impact of familial messages and behavior on the perceptions that young African American women develop of African American men. First, it cannot be said that these perceptions are unique to African American men. Instead, as will be elaborated upon in a later section, young women may apply the verbal and non-verbal messages they receive within their families to all men irrespective of race. Secondly, it should be noted that several of the women emphasize the fact that witnessing *several* failed relationships impacts their perceptions. Thus, it is not simply the failed or unsatisfying relationships of their parents that cause them to make generalizations about male behavior or romantic relationships. Thirdly, it is important to

remember that several of the women in the study witnessed the infidelity of their fathers or other male family members and this likely had an influence on their perceptions. Thus, their distrust of men and caution in relationships did not appear to result solely from witnessing a failed relationship but from witnessing relationships that failed partly based on infidelity. Women whose parents and other family members experience relational difficulties that are not based upon unfaithful behavior may not be impacted in the same ways as the women in this study were. A fourth point that should be raised is that the women in this study appeared to have received and to place greater importance on non-verbal messages (behavior of males and observation of relationships) than verbal messages received within families.

A common theme that two of the women expressed that was a point of distinction from the other four themes was that two of the women currently experienced heightened or positive expectations of African American men based upon the behavior of their father figures and the messages they received within their families. Tricia states:

403 I have...higher expectations...and-and they might be higher than they should
404 for men the ages I, you know, I date...but I just, you know I expect to be treated
405 with a certain level of respect [based on my father's behavior]

Thus, it is evident that despite witnessing failed and unsatisfying relationships both of these women were able to form somewhat positive expectations of African American men based upon the positive models that their father figures provided. The influential role of father figures in these women's lives will be elaborated upon in a later section.

There were several unique points that were brought up in individual interviews that warrant consideration as they serve to further enlighten researchers concerning the ways in which familial messages impact young women's perceptions. First, as one young woman's emphasis on the behavior of male friends reveals, young women's peers and early dating

partners may play a critical role in shaping expectations of male behavior. This young woman emphasizes the dishonesty of both male family members and the young men that she knew in high school as influential in shaping her beliefs. Secondly, one participant points out that her current perceptions of African American men and males in general is unstable because she is still young and is currently receiving new information. This serves to highlight the idea that while early learning and experience may be influential, individuals are continually influenced by new information and perceptions of the other sex are evolving as opposed to concrete. While symbolic interactionists emphasize the importance of early familial influence, these theorists also acknowledge the constant interaction between the individual and society (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

Question: How do family interaction styles and the messages that young African American women receive in their families of origin impact their current behavior in relationships?

In addition to shaping young women's *perceptions* of men and expectations of male behavior, it appears that families may also influence the manner in which a young woman *behaves* within romantic relationships. Four of the five women felt that the messages that they received from family members while growing up *and* the way in which they interacted with family members was influential in shaping their current behavior in relationships. The one commonality found across interviews as it relates to familial influence on women's *behavior* in relationships was that two of the women felt that they had difficulty being emotionally expressive within relationships. One of these women revealed that she withholds personal information in both her friendships and romantic relationships because she learned to withhold personal information and emotions within her family of origin. She further revealed that she felt that displaying emotions was a sign of weakness and that she felt that within her family it was

her duty to listen to the problems and concerns of others. A second participant also indicated that she has difficulty being open and emotionally vulnerable within her relationships:

583 so I wanna be able to open up...I mean I open up..... I want
 584 to be able to accept someone...maybe... more readily than I have before...
 585 because I, like I say keep ...kinda keep a guard up, let it down so you can
 586 peep over the fence but don't let it all the way down, so they can, you know
 587 barge in...and hurt your feelings...

This difficulty in emotional expression may result from familial interaction styles or familial messages such as warnings about being cautious in relationships. Alternatively, cultural views about disclosing personal information and expressing emotions may have influenced these young women. While the commonality between the participants in this study is by no means indicative of a cultural phenomenon, the issue may be worthy of further consideration as other research has found that young African American women have difficulty with emotional expression and intimacy within relationships (Rouse, 2001). Another potential explanation that applies particularly to the first participant is that this young woman's personality traits may have caused her to take on the role of caregiver as opposed to the recipient of care within her relationships- both those in her family of origin and those she currently has with friends and dating partners.

In contrast to the lack of emotional expression among two participants in the study, one participant feels that the affection expressed between she and her family members, particularly her grandfather, has allowed her to be an affectionate partner in dating relationships. This participant also felt that based upon interaction within her family of origin she has become independent and moral as it pertains to her behavior in romantic relationships. The verbal and non-verbal messages that this young woman received about premarital sex and maintaining one's independence while establishing intimacy have shaped her behavior in relationships. Thus it appears that verbal and non-verbal messages and interaction within families may be influential in

shaping young women's behavior in relationships as well as their perceptions of men and expectations of dating partners.

Question: Do young African American women from single mother homes feel that the relationship dissolution of their parents has an impact on their own experience in romantic relationships?

In addition to exploring the ways in which verbal and non-verbal messages that young women receive in their families of origin shape their perceptions and behavior in romantic relationships, the present study also sought to examine the influence of the parental relationship on women's beliefs and experiences. While shared understandings of the world are likely developed within the familial network extending beyond one's parents and the parental relationship, particularly within those African American families where there is a high level of extended family involvement, the parental relationship has been found to be influential in shaping children's perceptions and beliefs about marriage and relationships (Biller, 1993). There were several common themes found across interviews in relation to the manner in which the parental relationship impacted young women's expectations and desires for their own relationships. Three of the five young women felt that their parents' relationship served as an example of what should not be done in a marriage or romantic relationship. Two young women felt that they learned the importance of effective communication by opposition. In addition, three young women learned from observing their parents' that if a relationship is bad that it should be dissolved rather than held on to for the sake of children or for other reasons. Sherri expresses this sentiment in the following way:

646 so I mean I learned that if something is bad just let it go...like please just...
647 that like made it worse on the kids, she thought it was helping us, that made it
648 ten times worse on us, if she were divorced a long time ago we would've been

649 just fine...so...that together for the kids thing only makes you miserable and
650 the kids miserable...there's no point in that...

This finding is significant in light of previous research that has linked parental divorce and single parenthood with several negative outcomes among children (Wenk et. al., 1994; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993; Gabel, 1992; Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981). Although this finding does not necessarily mean that there are no negative outcomes associated with parental divorce, it does imply that in some instances children may prefer divorce to continued unhappy home environments. While one of the young women in the study sees her parents' divorce as a major point of disruption and change within her life, other participants feel that their parents' divorce or relationship dissolution was beneficial for the entire family. Thus, it may be that highly negative or abusive relationships between one's parents may bring about more detrimental outcomes, including pessimistic views of marriage, than relationship dissolution or divorce. Two of three women in the study who favored marital dissolution over holding on to a negative relationship experienced parental relationships that were abusive. It is uncertain whether or not a similar theme would be found among a sample of women who had not witnessed abusive relationships between their parents.

Another common theme that was found was that a few of the women felt that their parents' relationship has caused them to be pessimistic and to expect the worst in their relationships. Alicia discusses the impact that her parents' relationship and other relationships she observed within her family impacted her:

574I've had problems trust- with trust
575 issues...um I tried to go into it you know with an open mind and then something
576 will happen and I'm like see I told you, you know it kinda just confirms...what
577 I already believe, like the self-fulfilling prophecy, it was supposed to happen
578 and when it does happen your like see I knew this was gonna happen you know
579 even if you know...it just confirms... something, you're looking for something
580 to go wrong...and that's kinda, I think in that way you know because of all

581 the relationships I've seen with men or people in my family and things go wrong
582 and I kinda expect the worst in my relationships...

Similarly, one young woman felt that her parents' divorce left her with less faith in love. She reports that she does not try as hard in her own relationships because of her parents' divorce.

254I think...um, my parents split up kind of left
255 me a little disheartened...you know...and I have a little less faith in...love, I
256 guess you could say, you know...cause it's like um...and so that kinda makes
257 me not want to try as hard...like you're (inaudible words) cause it's like is it
258 really worth it cause nothing lasts forever...that type of thing...

This finding is important because it further emphasizes the idea that children who experience parental divorce and perhaps other failed relationships within their families of origin are less optimistic about the longevity of their relationships and subsequently they may be less likely to behave in ways that lead to lasting romantic relationships and marriages. It should be noted that several of the women also mentioned high divorce statistics when discussing the impact of the parental relationship on their beliefs and expectations. This finding is in line with ecological theorists' emphasis on societal influence and the time period in which a young woman lives on her perceptions and ideas (Klein & White, 1996).

In addition to exploring the impact of the parental relationship on young women's expectations, the influence that the mother's dating relationships had on these young women was explored based on the fact that all of these women had parents who separated or divorced at some point. Some common themes were identified. First, a few of the women indicated that they did not witness their mother's relationships with men besides their fathers. While these women were aware that their mothers dated, they felt that their mothers did not do so openly. Second, some of the participants reported seeing a pattern in their mother's relationships and of these women; one reported that it causes her not to continue in a cycle in her own relationships and to have limited patience. A few participants also indicated that their mother's dating

relationships cause them to desire relationships that are different from hers. This finding indicates that women do in fact observe their mother's relationships and that perhaps when these relationships are negative they are able to establish a distinct pattern of behavior in their own lives. As a few participants indicate, however, establishing such a distinct pattern may prove difficult. In addition, in attempting to establish a different pattern of behavior and to avoid the mistakes that their mothers made women may terminate relationships quickly (i.e. have limited patience) as opposed to attempting to solve problems that arise.

Many of the women felt that the things that they learned from observing their parents' relationship and their mother's dating relationships were supported more often than they were contradicted by their own experiences in romantic relationships. Several of the women felt that their own dating relationships supported their beliefs that men were unfaithful- a belief that many of the women previously indicated developed partly as a result of the behavior of male family members and other early male influences. A few of the women indicated that their own relationships reinforced their caution in relationships and their issues with trust. Perhaps more positively, one of the women felt that her relationships have supported the importance of good communication. Although she did not witness good communication between her grandparents with whom she was raised and who provided the most consistent model of marriage in her life, thus far she has seen the importance of good communication continually reinforced in her own relationships. As a point of distinction, one woman indicates that the behavior of her dating partners has contradicted one of the things she learned through observation of her parents. While she feels that her father's interactions with her mother taught her the importance of sacrifice, thus far she has not dated men who have demonstrated the same degree of sacrifice.

Based upon the views expressed by participants it appears that the parental relationship is influential in shaping young women's expectations of marriage and their desires for their own lives. Mothers' dating relationships appear to be somewhat influential although less obvious and openly displayed. Societal influences and the time period in which a young woman lives also appear to have an impact on her expectations given the fact that societal norms and historical trends often dictate acceptable marital behavior. While several participants feel that their parents' negative experiences in love and marriage have lowered their expectations, several women also feel that they will be able to establish a distinct pattern of behavior in their own relationships.

Question: In what ways, if at all, do young African American women from single mother homes feel that their relationships with their fathers have an impact on their perception of the other sex?

Women's relationships with their fathers and father figures appear to have had important influences on their perceptions of men and expectations of dating partners. As indicated previously, the messages that participants recalled receiving about men within their families were primarily non-verbal and based on the behavior of their fathers and other male family members. As previously mentioned, several women indicate that their fathers serve as standards of comparison when they are choosing dating partners. Furthermore, among the women who witnessed several failed or unhealthy relationships within their families of origin, those with good relationships with their fathers continued to hold somewhat positive expectations of African American men. Three of the young women in the study had good relationships with their biological fathers or a consistent father figure with whom they resided while two of the women had poor relationships with their fathers whom they considered to be disappointments.

A few common themes were found concerning the impact of father figures on women's perceptions of men. Two of the women felt that the models that their fathers provided made it difficult for them to trust men. Both of these women had fathers who were not only unfaithful to their mothers but who were also consistently disappointing and unable to keep promises.

Alicia describes how her father continually disappointed her:

351 Well yeah...going back to my dad (emphasis), he made it hard for me to
352 trust guys...because he always promised me things but never came though...

603after they...separated, before they divorced they
604 separated...and he would, then he would try to do stuff with me and then he
605 still would disappoint me, he's like "I'll go to the park with you or take you to
606 the show," that's what he called the movies-the show, and I remember one
607 morning I was sitting out on the step at my grandmother's house waiting
608 for him and waiting and waiting so...that's the kind of stuff you see on tv but
609 it actually happens...

As a result, these women had concerns with males' ability to be faithful and dependable in relationships. This finding is in line with those of other researchers who find that women's relationships with their fathers, particularly as it relates to their father's acceptance and consistency in their lives has an impact on their ability to trust in heterosexual relationships (Secunda, 1992; Southworth & Schwarz 1987). Similarly, Cangelosi (1988) found that perception of a father's dependability and consistency in his daughter's life was related to her ability to achieve emotional intimacy with heterosexual partners. It should be noted, however, that while a few of the women in this study felt that their father's behavior had an impact on their distrust of men, these two women along with other participants indicated that their family member's behavior (the behavior of fathers and other males) as well as the observation of several failed relationships within their families was the source of their distrust in men. Thus, it is likely that while the behavior of fathers was influential, other factors likely contributed to participants' distrust of men.

Another common theme among women who had poor relationships with their fathers was that both expressed the belief that men often have ulterior motives and both appeared to be simultaneously avoidant of and desirous of a relationship. Alicia discusses questioning men's motives:

813so that again
 814 that plays a part in my relationships with men like...I have to be cautious and I
 815 have to try to find out is there an ulterior motive, you know, is he really what he's
 816 saying does he really mean it, is he sincere about it? Or is something else...

It is likely that their distrust of men and the negative models that their fathers provided have left these women with concerns about whether men can be sincere and honest in their dealings.

Subsequently, they appear to have developed ambivalent attitudes about romantic relationships.

Interestingly, both of the women who had poor relationships with their fathers disclosed issues with self-esteem or exhibited behavior during the interview that indicated self-esteem issues.

Alicia describes her issues with self esteem in the following way:

777I had a problem being pre-teen and as a
 778 teenager...with a self esteem issue and that was you know...

785 and so when guys did start paying me attention it was hard for
 786 me to think they wanted anything else but-you know they liked my butt or like,
 787 you know it went back to the sex object thing...when they first start showing
 788 interest... you know I was happy but then it made me think why are they
 789 showing interest.....

810and just you know that influences me , so when a
 811 guy does show interest, even now I'm like is it because you really wanna get to
 812 know me? Is it something about me you like? Or is it something physical, you
 813 just saw my butt so you're thinking oh I wonder...

Although the primary focus of the study centered on the impact of women's families of origin on their perceptions of men and experiences in romantic relationships and no questions were asked relating to self-esteem, a woman's self-esteem is likely to play a critical role in her experience of romantic relationships. Scheffler and Naus (1999) found that the more affirmed women felt by

their fathers, the higher their self-esteem and the less affirmation they felt, the more fear they had of intimacy. While it cannot be said that the women's poor relationships with their fathers *caused* them to have lowered self-esteem, it may be that a woman's self-esteem is associated in some way with her relationship with her father. Symbolic interactionists assert that the "looking glass self" or an individual's self-perception is developed, to a large extent, within primary groups such as families and that an individual develops an understanding of the manner in which others will react towards them based upon the reactions and behavior of primary group members (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

In contrast to the women who had poor relationships with their fathers, two of the women felt that their father's behavior taught them that men can be responsible father figures. Shannon describes her father figure, her residential grandfather, in the following way:

479 ...and then-he's just, he's very giving...um...and supportive...emotionally,
480 financially... specifically financially and as far as materials like if you needed
481 anything...he's very willing to get it for you or help you get it for yourself...um
482 ...and he-he's definitely willing to get something that you needed for you before
483 he'll get it for himself so he's very much of the caring father role even for his
484 grandchildren...

These women had father figures who were consistently involved in their lives. Although one of these women considered her residential grandfather to be her father figure, the other had a father who remained involved in her life despite the divorce of her parents. This finding highlights the importance of continued father involvement in young women's lives despite his absence from her residence. Previous researchers have emphasized the role that non-residential fathers play in their daughters' development and have pointed out that negative perceptions of men are formed only when father involvement is entirely absent or the father-daughter relationship is poor (Way & Stauber, 1996).

Another common theme found among two of the women with non-residential biological fathers was that the lack of negative messages about their fathers within their families enabled them to form or maintain somewhat positive perceptions of African American men. One of these women expresses the belief that she did not develop negative perceptions of men as a result of her father's absence because her mother and other family members refrained from depicting her father in a negative manner. She feels that they allowed her to form her own perceptions of her father once she was old enough to do so. Another young woman felt that her mother refrained from depicting her father in a negative manner following her parents' divorce. Several researchers have stressed the role that mothers and other family members play in shaping a child's perception of their father and other men particularly in families where fathers are absent and uninvolved from birth onward (Secunda, 1992; Adams et. al., 1984). It should be noted, however, that while the absence of negative messages within these women's families concerning their biological fathers may have assisted them in developing positive attitudes towards men, it is also likely that the consistently positive male image that their father figures provided further enhanced their positive perceptions of men. One of these women had a residential grandfather who assumed the role of father within her life and the other had a father who remained involved in her life despite the divorce of her parents. It may be that the absence of negative familial messages concerning an absent or non-residential father is more beneficial where there is another father figure or consistently positive male role model available than when such a model is not present.

Unique views expressed by participants that warrant consideration concern the manner in which the women felt that their relationships with and observation of their fathers have impacted their *behavior* in relationships with men. One young woman, Alicia, feels that the lack of a

positive relationship with her father causes her to desire a relationship with a man and to try to become extremely close with dating partners:

683but at the same
 684 time having the lack of relationship- the lack of relationship with him...I think
 685 in my relationships... that tends to make me... try to be closer with the guy...
 686 because I want that relationship with a man, I, you know, I kinda-I kinda need
 687 that in my life even though I'm not looking for a relationship with him to be like
 688 a daddy or anything but...just... to know that there is a man there I feel safe...

While this belief was not expressed by the other participant who described her relationship with her father as poor, it is in line with the findings of several researchers who assert that daughters of divorce often anxiously seek attention from men and desire relationships with men who can assume the role of father figures within their lives (Genuchi, 1997; Secunda, 1992). Another young woman felt that her relationship with her father and observation of his behavior has caused her to have a temper and to react physically when angered just as her father did. While this young woman's temperament may be partially influenced by genetics, it is likely that social learning has been influential as well.

Several of the women in the study felt that they had male role models while growing up in addition to or in place of their biological fathers. While only one woman felt that another man was able to assume the role of a father figure within her life, others indicated that male family members were influential to some degree. Three of the five women felt that their uncles were significant male influences. Two of the five women- those who had poor relationships with their biological fathers- felt that the significant male influences that they had taught them that "there were good men out there." While neither of these women felt extremely close to these male figures they did indicate that these men had been important influences. Other male influences that were not found across interviews were older brothers, grandfathers, clergy, and high school

boyfriends. These findings suggest that extended family members and other male influences are influential in shaping perceptions of males for some African American women. For the young woman whose grandfather assumed the role of a father figure within her life, her father's absence appears to have minimal influence. However, based upon the responses of those women who had poor paternal bonds, positive male images provided by *non-residential* male extended family members may not be strong enough to fully replace the negative male image that one's father has provided.

Question: In what ways, if at all, are African American women from single mother homes impacted by societal messages regarding African American men?

While much of the interview focused on the manner in which family relationships and familial messages impacted the women's perception of men and behavior in relationships, the early part of the interview focused on the manner in which societal views impacted young women's beliefs about African American men. Questions about participants' current perceptions of African American men and their beliefs about societal views of African American men were asked prior to questions about familial influence.

Participants' current perceptions of African American men were both positive and negative. Interestingly, three of the women described African American men as unique and different from one another while two of the women described African American men as beautiful. These two descriptions are important because they highlight the insistence of some African American women to avoid stereotypical labeling of African American men. One young woman, Shannon, insists that "you don't brand the race." Another woman, Tricia states that she resists assuming majority views:

122 I don't really go by like majority views because I feel like everybody's
123 different...like everybody has a... social face and then who they really are...and

124 so I don't really let what is on the tv and what everybody thinks-I don't, I try not
125 to let that affect me because I know everybody is different-you really have to get
126 to know people to know...them...and understand...

This finding stands in stark contrast to the finding of Cazenave & Smith (1990) who found that many African American women believed in the stereotypes about African American men. Perhaps more negatively, two of the women felt that African American men were emotionally inexpressive and three women felt that they often have ulterior motives. While these descriptions are negative, they are not necessarily in line with the beliefs that the women felt that society upheld. Interestingly, two women indicated that all men share similar qualities irrespective of race. Thus it is possible that some women generalize the behavior of their fathers and other male figures to the behavior of all males rather than limiting generalizations to males who share a similar ethnic or racial background. On the other hand, the findings also suggest that some women strive to avoid labeling men.

One of the participants who described her relationship with her father as poor described African American men in a manner similar to the way in which she described her father. Her description of African American men was also in line with the way in which she believed that society views African American men. This young woman described African American men as unfaithful men who were not trying to do anything with their lives. She further refers to African American men as "dogs." While this young woman's description is in line with the findings of Cazenave and Smith (1990), it was not found across interviews within this study and may be the result of this woman's intense anger towards her father and other male figures within her life. Other unique views that warrant mention are descriptions of African American men as vulnerable and low in numbers. One woman's description of African American men as vulnerable is in line with the common perception expressed by some participants that African

American men are seen as disadvantaged. The description of African American men as low in numbers, although only expressed by one participant, is in line with the emphasis of previous researchers that contextual factors may limit unions between African American men and women (Loury, 2004; Lawson & Thompson, 1999; Kiecolt & Fossett, 1997; Dawsey, 1996; Braithwaite, 1981).

Several commonalities were found across interviews regarding the manner in which the women felt society viewed African American men. A few women felt that society perceives African American men as disadvantaged. As previously mentioned, this was in line with one young woman's description of African American men as vulnerable. Two women felt that society viewed African American men as lazy and as individuals who are not doing anything with their lives. This is in line with one young woman's personal perception of African American men. This finding is also in line with the assertions of previous researchers who argue that cultural myths portray the African American man as unreliable, lazy, and irresponsible (Bethea, 1998; Lang, 1996). Two women felt that society viewed African American men as violent and two women noted that there was tension between African American men and the rest of the world. Interestingly, only one of the women differentiates between white society and African American society.

As an important aspect of the manner in which the African American women in the study were influenced by the environment, participants were also asked how they felt African American relationships were portrayed by the media and how they felt African American men perceived African American women. When discussing media portrayals of African American relationships, a few of the women felt that the media images they were most consistently exposed to were those of popular music and music videos. Several others discussed portrayals in

television shows such as “The Cosby Show” and “My Wife and Kids” or movie portrayals such as those in “Poetic Justice.” One young woman mentioned talk shows and reality television shows that have recently become popular as a source of exposure.

Several of the women felt that African American relationships were portrayed as abusive and violent and that the media overemphasized the sexual aspect of African American relationships. Tricia discusses the lack of loving relationships between African Americans in the following way:

104 and so in that sense they don't really show relationships but then you've got
105 your little love songs and you show-you see the African American love and you see the
106 dedicated, committed relationships but...media wise those are far...few and far
107 between...

A few women also felt that African American men were portrayed as uninvolved in their families as opposed to being portrayed as nurturing caregivers. One participant emphasized the fact that many African American sitcoms in which husband-wife relationships are depicted are written by white writers rather than African Americans themselves. On the other hand, a few of the women felt that positive depictions of African American relationships and family relationships were improving.

Several of the women felt that African American men view African American women as bossy and aggressive and a few also felt that African American men saw African American women as intimidating. This finding is in line with other research that has indicated that African American women are aware of stereotypical views of themselves (Cazenave & Smith, 1990) and that African American women are seen as matriarchal and controlling (Bethea, 1998; Lang, 1996). African American men and women who agree with stereotypical beliefs about themselves may be more likely to perceive their relationships negatively (Cazenave & Smith, 1990). A few of the women felt that African American men mistreat the women they claim they

love. Perhaps more positively, a few of the women shared the belief that African American men see African American women as caregivers. While it is plausible that African American women's beliefs about how African American men perceived them was partially influenced by their actual experiences with African American men, it may also be that societal beliefs or media portrayals of the African American woman have influenced the beliefs of the women in the study. Davis (1993) argues that when African American men and women attempt to establish healthy relationships they must do so while fighting negative media portrayals of themselves. Furthermore, Aldridge (1991) asserts that stereotypical beliefs, when internalized, can influence African Americans as they develop identities and define situations.

Several of the women indicated that they tried not to let societal views about African American men and African American male-female relationships impact their own views. Instead, they felt that they were more strongly impacted by their own experiences and by observing the experiences of friends and family members. It should be noted that they expressed this belief prior to being asked about familial influence. Two of the women also emphasized the idea that individuals are unique. There was only one young woman who indicated that seeing the same things repeatedly had an impact on her. While this finding appears to contradict ecological theory's emphasis on the influence of the environment on individual's perceptions and beliefs, it does lend some support to the assumption of ecological theory that individuals are impacted to a greater extent by influences that are more proximal to them. While the women felt that societal views had a minimal impact on their own views, several women emphasized the impact of their peers. Furthermore, while an examination of Table 6 reveals that the women's own perceptions of African American men are somewhat disparate from the views they believe society upholds, it still remains evident that societal influence, particularly the time period in

which the women live, have an impact on their perceptions of men and relationships. The women may have responded differently to the question about societal beliefs had each participant been asked to differentiate between white and African American society.

Summary

This study focused on familial and contextual influence on African American women's expectations of men and their behavior in relationships. The overall focus of the study was divided into four areas based on the original research questions posed: the impact of familial messages on women's perceptions and behavior, the impact of women's fathers on their perceptions and behavior, the impact of the parental relationship on women's expectations and behavior in relationships, and the impact of societal messages on women's expectations of African American men and romantic relationships. The findings as they relate to these four areas will be summarized here.

The Impact of Familial Messages

The messages that the women received about men, relationships, and marriage within their families of origin were primarily non-verbal. Several participants indicated that the messages that they received were a result of observing the behavior of their fathers and other male family members in addition to the observation of family members' relationships and marriages. The women reported receiving a greater number of verbal messages about marriage and romantic relationships within their families than about African American men. As stated in a previous section, this does not necessarily mean that families do not construct understandings of the world based partly on verbal messages; instead, this finding may indicate that the roles that family members play and the behavior they exhibit have a more lasting influence on young women once they reach adulthood.

Another important finding was that most of the women's families placed a high value on marriage but they also provided the women with mixed messages about marriage and romantic relationships. Based on the messages that several women reported receiving, it appears that many families conveyed the message that marriage is an institution that is both highly valued and difficult to maintain. As evidenced by a few of the participants' expectations for their own lives, the ambiguity of familial messages may create ambivalence about marital unions. Several women indicate a desire to get married while simultaneously expressing concern about the durability of marriage.

As it relates to familial messages one other finding should be highlighted as it serves to support the assertions of previous researchers. A few of the women expressed the belief that the lack of negative messages about their father allowed them to form or maintain perceptions of African American men that were not negative in nature. This finding is in line with previous research (Secunda, 1992; Adams et. al., 1984) that stresses the role that family members play in shaping the perception of a non-residential father.

Fathers' Impact on Perceptions and Behavior

Several findings warrant emphasis as it relates to the influence that fathers had on the women's expectations of men and their behavior in relationships. First, findings indicate that a father's absence from his daughter's residence was not necessarily detrimental; instead it appears that a father's lack of involvement in his daughter's life may create more resentment and feelings of uncertainty about male behavior. Several of the women's fathers (three) who did not reside within their households continued to have relationships with their daughters.

Secondly, findings indicate that a poor relationship with one's father may be more detrimental than no relationship. The women in the study whose relationships with their fathers

were poor held more negative perceptions of men and relationships (and of themselves) than the woman whose biological father was entirely absent. However, this finding should be substantiated by further research based on the fact that the young woman with no relationship with her biological father felt that she developed a bond with a consistent paternal figure despite the absence of her biological father.

Thirdly, findings suggest that poor relationships with father figures may be connected with women's self-perception as well as their perception of the other sex. Both participants with poor relationships with their fathers indicated that they had issues with self-esteem or behaved in a manner during the interview that suggested low self-esteem. This finding is in line with that of Scheffler and Naus (1999) who linked paternal bonds to both self-esteem and ability to achieve intimacy within relationships. Additionally women who were really angry with or disappointed in their fathers currently held more negative expectations of men. Both of the women whose fathers had been unfaithful and non-dependable had difficulty trusting men. Several women's description of African American men as having ulterior motives is in line with their descriptions of their fathers or uncles. One woman's description of her father as emotionally inexpressive is in line with her current description of African American men as inexpressive. Finally, one young woman's description of African American men as unfaithful "dogs" is very similar to her description of her father and other early male influences in her life. Thus, it appears that women with poor relationships with their fathers may be impacted in several ways once they reach adulthood and that to some extent women's current perceptions of men are influenced by their perceptions of their fathers.

A fourth point of emphasis is that several women used their fathers and other male family members as points of comparison within their dating relationships or prior to entering

relationships. Several women desired partners who were very similar to or very different from their fathers and male family members. Thus, it appears that fathers and other male family members are important influences for young women. Interestingly, many of the women's fond memories of childhood involved their fathers or father figures.

A fifth and final point of emphasis concerning the impact of fathers is that the women indicated many male influences besides their biological fathers. These influences were most often other male family members. This finding suggests that ties to extended kin remain strong in some African American families and as a result African American women with poor paternal bonds may be able to form relationships with other adult males and subsequently form more positive perceptions of males. Findings also suggest, however, that these male influences must be proximal to counteract a negative relationship with the young woman's father.

The Impact of the Parental Relationship

The first important point concerning the influence of the parental relationship on young women's expectations and beliefs is that the parental relationship is only one of several relationships that young women observe and which subsequently impact their perceptions. While the women reported receiving important lessons from the parents' relationship (i.e. the importance of communication and leaving a relationship that is negative), they also reported receiving messages from the relationships of other family members.

Secondly, several of the women indicated that witnessing several failed relationships caused concern over whether their relationships would last. Witnessing relationships that failed partly based on infidelity also contributed to the women's feelings of distrust towards men.

The Impact of Societal Messages

While several participants indicated that they tried not to let societal beliefs impact them, it does appear that societal beliefs and trends have influenced the women to some extent. While most of the women's descriptions of African American men differ from the beliefs that they feel society upholds, there was one similarity, as evidenced by Table 6, between societal perceptions and one woman's personal perceptions. Several participants indicated that society perceives African American men as lazy and this description was in line with one young woman's personal perception of African American men. While "society" was not defined by the researcher in the study, it can be assumed that many of the women felt that society referred to the views of the majority within the United States. While one woman attempted to differentiate between African American and white society, future researchers interested in exploring the impact of societal beliefs on individual's own beliefs and behaviors might benefit from asking participants to differentiate between majority views and views unique to their own microculture or ethnic group.

Another finding that should be further elaborated upon as it relates to the impact of stereotypical views has to do with African American women's views of African American men as opposed to the manner in which they believe African American men view them. The women in the study perceived themselves more stereotypically than they perceived African American men. While they recognized and emphasized that African American men were unique individuals they readily described stereotypical images of themselves with less emphasis on individuality. It should be noted, however, that they were also aware of the positive perceptions that African American men and women have of one another. The women described African American men as having both positive and negative characteristics. These findings as well as those previously discussed suggest that while African American women may in fact have a

growing distrust of African American men, there is not necessarily a growing hatred between African American men and women as the finding of Cazenave and Smith (1990) suggests.

A final point concerning societal impact on young women's expectations and beliefs is that several of the women appeared to be impacted, to some degree, by rising divorce statistics. Many of the women indicated that any negative impact that their parents' relationship dissolution and the failed relationships of family members had on them was further increased by an awareness of rising divorce statistics. Thus, the time period in which these women were raised and currently live may have influenced their beliefs and expectations for their own lives.

Table 6: Common Themes and Divergent Views

| | African American men are... | Society perceives African American men as... | African American men perceive African American women as... | African American relationships are portrayed in the media as... | How societal views impact your own views |
|------------|---|---|--|--|---|
| Frequency | Beautiful (2) Unique and different from one another (3) Emotionally unexpressive (2); They often have ulterior motives (3); All men share several similar qualities irrespective of race (2) | Disadvantaged (2); Lazy/they do not do anything (2); Violent (2); Tension between African American men and others (2) | Bossy/aggressive (3); Intimidating (2); Caregivers (2); They mistreat the women they claim they love (2) | Abusive and violent (3); They overemphasize the sexual aspect of the relationship (3); There are some positive images of black families (2); Black men portrayed as uninvolved rather than nurturing (2) | I try not to let them impact my views, but rather I am impacted by personal experiences and observing the experiences of friends and family (3); I realize individuals are unique (2) |
| Emphasis | Black men are not trying to do anything with their lives (Se); They think it is ok to date you and your friend (Se); Some African American men work to defy stereotypes (Sh) | | Sex objects (A) | A large number of black sitcoms are written by white writers (R); You don't see many loving relationships between blacks (T) | People have to try to consciously find a balance between stereotypes and reality and this can be difficult (Sh) |
| Uniqueness | Vulnerable (R) Hard to understand (A) Low in numbers (Se) Dogs (Se) | Differentiates between white and black society (T); I'm happy when black men do well (A) | Beautiful women (T); Gold diggers (Sh) | | They upset me- I don't want them to live up to stereotypes (R); People have a social face different from who they really are (T); Seeing the same things repeatedly impacts me (Sh) |

Table 6 (cont): Common Themes and Divergent Views

| | Relationships with family members... | Messages about African American men.... | Messages about romantic relationships... | Messages about marriage... | How have these messages about men, relationships, and marriage impacted your perceptions of African American men... | How the interactions you had with family members influences the way you behave in relationships... |
|-----------|---|---|--|--|---|--|
| Frequency | Close relationships with female family members (4); Good relationship with father figure (3); Parents divorced (3); Parents separated (1); Parents never married (1); Relationship between parents negative (5); Witnessed infidelity of male family members (3); Witnessed fathers abuse their mothers (2) | Messages came primarily through observations of male family members (3); Messages came primarily through observations of the relationships of female family members (2); They are dependable family men (2) | Mixed messages (2) | Long lasting marriages rare (3); Marriage is a commitment not to be taken lightly (2); Place high value on marriage (4); Received negative view of marriage (2); Mixed messages (3); Simultaneously avoidant of and desirous of marriage (2); Worries that she will quickly divorce after marriage (2) | Seeing my family member's relationships made it hard for me to trust men (2); I don't like that infidelity is always in the back of my mind (2); I'm cautious about entering relationships (2); They influence my selection of partners (2) | Emotionally unexpressive or withdrawn (2) |

Table 6 (cont): Common Themes and Divergent Views

| | Relationships with family members... | Messages about African American men.... | Messages about romantic relationships... | Messages about marriage... | How have these messages about men, relationships, and marriage impacted your perceptions of African American men... | How the interactions you had with family members influences the way you behave in relationships... |
|------------|--|--|---|---|---|--|
| Emphasis | | | Can only think of one stable relationship out of 150 family members (R); Don't be the fool in the relationship(R); Has not seen a positive relationship (A) | Marriage is not synonymous with fidelity-"all men cheat" (A); Partners should work at making a marriage last by trying to resolve problems (T) | My experiences with male friends teach me that they lie a lot (Se); My opinion is unstable (Se) | |
| Uniqueness | No relationship with biological father (1; Sh) | All men are the same (R); Don't put all your trust in somebody (R); Be careful around guys (A); My father's absence from my life was never an issue for me(Sh) | Couples should have time apart (R); Premarital sex was not condoned (Sh); Love involves care and respect as opposed to abuse (Sh) | That arguing was a part of married life but that there was also happiness (T); My aunt demonstrated that one should marry a man to keep him (A) | I'm disappointed that black men don't live up to my father's model (T); Grand- father's presence allowed me to believe in a positive image of black men that some are unable to believe in (Sh) | They allowed me to be affectionate, independent, and moral (Sh) |

Table 6 (cont): Common Themes and Divergent Views

| | The way parents' relationship has impacted the way you see relationships... | What observing parents interact taught me about relationships or marriage.... | How mother's interaction with men besides your father impacted you... | How your own experiences have supported or contradicted the things you learned from observing your parents... |
|------------|--|---|---|---|
| Frequency | I learned what not to do (3); I learned that if something is bad, one should let it go (3); Mentions high divorce rates (2); I'm pessimistic/expecting the worst (2) | The importance of effective communication (2) | I did not witness her relationships with other men (2); I see a pattern in the men my mother chooses (2); It makes me desire relationships that are different from hers (2) | The relationships that I've had have supported my belief that men are unfaithful (3); Extremely cautious in current relationships/issues with trust (2) |
| Emphasis | My parents' divorce left me with less faith in love (T); I don't try as hard in my relationships because of my parents' divorce (T) | It taught me the importance of a positive attitude and how my behavior affects my partner (Sh) | It taught me not to continue in a cycle (A); It caused me to have limited patience (A); That men are liars and cheaters (Se) | They have supported the importance of communication (Sh) |
| Uniqueness | | Dad's actions taught me value of respect and compromise (T); That I never wanted a partner like my father (Se); Grandparents' relationship was the model of marriage (Sh) | | The men that I date do not realize that sacrifice is important as my father did (T) |

Table 6 (cont): Common Themes and Divergent Views

| | Relationship with father... | How father/father figure has impacted perceptions of men... | How father has impacted relationships with men... | Significant relationships with men besides father... | Anything else you want to say about family or romantic relationships.... | Fondest childhood memory... |
|-----------|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| Frequency | Good relationship with father/father figure (3); Poor relationship with father (2); Father is a disappointment (2); My family refrained from providing negative messages about my father (2) | It has made it difficult for me to trust men (2); It taught me that men can be responsible father figures (2) | | Close with uncle(s) (3); significant males taught me that there are good men out there (2) | I often think men have ulterior motives (2); Both desirous and avoidant of a relationship (2); Self esteem issue disclosed/revealed in behavior during interview (2) | Memory involves father/father figure (3); Memory involves family relationships (5) |
| Emphasis | Lack of relationship w/father has not impacted me and I am proud of that (Sh) | It was hard for me to accept negative images because my grandfather was such a positive model (Sh); I don't like aggressive men because of my father's aggressiveness (Se) | The lack of a relationship with my father causes me to desire a relationship with a man/to try to be really close with my partner (A) | Close with oldest brother (R); Close with grandfather (Sh) | I want to be more open and expressive in relationships (R); I appreciate the fact that my family helped me to identify deception (R) | |

Table 6 (cont.): Common Themes and Divergent Views

| | Relationship with father... | How father/father figure has impacted perceptions of men... | How father has impacted relationships with men... | Significant relationships with men besides father... | Anything else you want to say about family or romantic relationships.... | Fondest childhood memory... |
|------------|---|--|---|--|--|-----------------------------|
| Uniqueness | No relationship with biological father (Sh); Father resentful of me (A) Fearful of and intensely angry with father (Se) | I want a partner who is similar to my father (R); It taught me that it is hard for African American men to open up and be expressive (A) | I have a temper just as my father had a temper and sometimes I react physically as he did (A) | Close with deacon from church (A); High school boyfriends were influential (T) | I was attracted to “bad boys” for a brief period after being exposed to good men for so long because bad boys were mysterious (Sh) | Memory involves mother (A) |

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This study had several limitations. First, the small sample that was utilized does not allow researchers to make generalizations from the beliefs and behavior of the women in this study to those of other African American women or women in general. However, as indicated in chapter three the purpose of this study was to go into depth about a particular issue (African American women's expectations of African American men and romantic relationships) by utilizing a small purposive sample. The findings of the study were not necessarily meant to be generalized to other women; instead they were intended to provide insight into an understudied issue and to inform future qualitative and quantitative researchers.

A second limitation as it relates to the sample utilized is that the women interviewed were all college students attending the same institution. The beliefs and behavior of college women may be non-representative of the broader community of African American women. Furthermore, the ages of the women in the study may have served as a limitation due to their limited experience in romantic relationships.

A third limitation is that this study provides a limited perspective; only the participant's own recollections of family experience and views are taken into account. The beliefs of family members and the messages that they recall providing to the young women are absent from the study. While multiple perspectives may have enriched the findings of the study, the participants own perceptions of familial interactions, behavior, and messages are arguably the most important

because ultimately the young woman's personal construction of messages received within her family will shape her behavior (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

Based on these limitations, several recommendations can be made for future research in this area. First, future research should include other family members when possible to compare the messages that women report receiving from family members to the messages that family members recall providing. While symbolic interactionists assert that personal construction of meaning based on primary group interaction is what ultimately influences individual behavior, exploration of the similarity between family members' beliefs could provide further understanding of family process as well as substantial contribution to symbolic interaction theory. Multiple perspectives can substantially enhance research findings (Inman-Amos & Hendrick, 1994).

A second recommendation for future research in this area is that older women should be included. While older women have spent a greater number of years away from their families of origin (outside of the family household) they may possess a better understanding of themselves and the motivations behind their behavior and can thus provide more reflective answers to interview questions. In addition, based on number of years lived, older women may have more experience in romantic relationships and marriage and thus they may be more able than young women to reflect on the manner in which familial interactions have influenced their behavior in dating and marital relationships.

A third recommendation for further research would serve to support one of the findings of this study. A future study could compare women with poor relationships with their fathers to those with no relationship with a consistent father figure as it relates to their perceptions of men and behavior in relationships. While this study found that women with poor relationships with

their fathers were more likely to have negative perceptions of men and low expectations of dating partners than women with good relationships with their fathers, there was little exploration concerning the manner in which the absence of a father figure impacts a woman's perception. The participant in the study with no relationship with her biological father was able to form a relationship with a father figure who was a consistently positive male model.

Future research should also explore the impact that fathers have on women's self-perception and self-esteem. The findings of this study suggest that there may be a link between a father's acceptance of his daughter and his consistency in her life to her self-perception and the manner in which she believes she is perceived by males.

As it relates to societal impact on African American women's perceptions of men and behavior in relationships, future research could benefit from probing participants concerning the differences between the views of the majority and the views of their own microculture. There were few similarities found in this study between women's own perceptions of African American men and the beliefs they felt that society upheld. However, "society" was not defined by the researcher and in four of five cases it was not defined by participants. African American women's views may show more similarity to the views of their own microculture.

Another suggestion for researchers interested in the impact of societal messages on African American women's beliefs and behavior in relationships is that more attention should be given to the impact of media images. This study did not focus exclusively on this topic and thus the findings as it pertained to the impact of popular movies, music, and television sitcoms were limited.

While the findings of this study provided some support for the propositions of symbolic interaction and ecological theories, future researchers may benefit from utilizing both life course

theory and social learning theory as guides. A life course approach to the research questions in this study may have been useful because women's relationships with their fathers and other members of their families of origin continually influence their perceptions of men and experience in romantic relationships. While symbolic interaction theory takes reciprocal influences into account as they evolve over time, a life course approach may place greater emphasis on development across the lifespan. Social learning theory is suggested as a guide based on the indication of this study that the behavior of family members appeared to be more influential than verbal messages constructed within the family. While verbal messages are believed to be important, the behavior of significant others may provide a stronger influence on a young woman as she forms perceptions of men and expectations for romantic relationships and marital unions.

The findings of this study, although limited in their generalizability, suggest several implications for practice. First, the findings imply that marriage and family therapists and other clinicians working with couples in marital or premarital counseling might benefit from working through unresolved issues that resulted from women's relationships with their fathers or negative messages they received within their families of origin about male behavior and romantic relationships. Women who have unresolved feelings of anger, fear, disappointment, or resentment towards their fathers or other male figures and those who have witnessed several failed relationships in their families may have low expectations of their partners, ambiguity about marriage, and uncertainty about their ability to be successful marital partners.

Secondly, clinicians working with families who are experiencing or have experienced a recent divorce should encourage mothers and other family members with whom children reside to refrain from depicting their fathers in a negative light. The findings of this study suggest that

following a divorce or relationship dissolution, the manner in which a young woman's family portrays her father may subsequently impact her perceptions of men. The young women in this study whose families refrained from depicting their fathers in a negative manner were able to develop mostly positive expectations of male behavior.

Thirdly, therapists working with African American families or individual clients should consider the context in which families live. An awareness of this context means that children born to single mothers or those who have experienced parental divorce are not necessarily reared in homes with their mothers alone and no significant male influence. Four of the five women in this study felt that they had close relationships with their extended families including male family members and they indicated that these family members did influence their beliefs and perceptions albeit to varying degrees based on their proximity to the young women. Therapists may be more effective when working with African American families if they are aware of the resources and influence that extended family members may provide.

Fourth, the findings of this study suggest that fatherhood programs and other fatherhood initiatives that encourage fathers to remain in their children's lives throughout the life course should be continued. Young women who retained positive relationships with their fathers despite the separation or divorce of their parents were found to have more balanced expectations of male behavior than those women who had poor relationships with their fathers. Those women whose fathers were inconsistently involved in their lives not only held negative perceptions of men, they also appeared to hold somewhat negative perceptions of themselves. While these recommendations may be useful to practitioners, they should be taken with caution as the findings of this study must be substantiated by further research.

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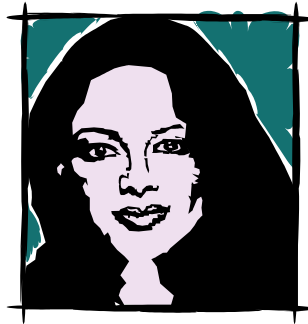
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT FLYER



****African American Women Needed****

To Participate in a Research Study
about their Experience of Romantic Relationships

Participants Must:

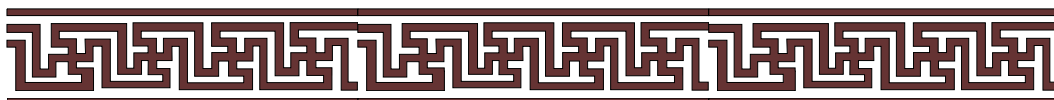
- * Be single (non-married)
- * Prefer relationships with men
 - * Have no children
- * Have spent at least one year in a single mother home

All eligible participants will participate in a one to two hour interview
and receive \$10 as well as refreshments as compensation for their
time

If interested contact Danielle:

706-338-3230

Canise98@uga.edu



APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant,

First, I would like to thank you for your interest and willingness to participate in this study. I hope that you will find the experience to be enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how African American women perceive and experience relationships. A second aim of the study is to explore the ways in which the experience that women have in their families of origin impact their perceptions of men and romantic relationships. Please read and fill out the form below inserting your name where necessary.

I _____ agree to take part in a research study entitled “An exploration of family of origin and contextual influences on African American women’s perception of men and their experience of romantic relationships,” which is being conducted by Danielle Larkins, Department of Child and Family Development at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Thomas Coleman, Department of Child and Family Development at the University of Georgia. I understand that Danielle Larkins, the principal investigator can be reached at 706-338-3230 and Dr. Thomas Coleman, her advisor, can be reached at 706-542-4899. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may stop participating at any time without giving any reason and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

There are several benefits that I may expect from participating in this study. Upon completion of one interview and two follow-ups (or upon my withdrawal from the study) I can expect to receive ten dollars as a token of appreciation for my willingness to participate. As a result of participating in the study, I will have an opportunity to share my experiences and beliefs and I may also gain increased self-awareness.

I understand that if I volunteer to take part in this study I will be asked to do the following things. First I will complete a demographic sheet that will ask questions about my family background, marital status, income, and sexual orientation. Next I will set up a time to complete one two-hour interview with the researcher and I will participate in this interview, during the time that I request, at The McPhaul Center Family Clinic. I understand that this interview will be tape recorded. Thirdly, within a couple of weeks, I will be sent a copy of the transcripts, which will present in written format the content of my interview. I will look over the transcripts and return them with any corrections I have regarding what I recall saying to the researcher. If I choose, I can meet with the researcher to review the transcripts as opposed to having them mailed or emailed to me. Lastly, within another couple of weeks, I will be sent a copy of the analysis that has been done and I will be asked to make any comments that I have regarding the researcher’s interpretations of my interview. The disagreements that I have with the researcher’s interpretations will be noted in the final report. My participation in this study should last no longer than two months and I understand that each meeting or follow-up should take approximately two hours of my time.

The discomforts or stresses that may be faced during this research are that I may experience some discomfort in recalling negative events or experiences that occurred in my

family of origin or in my current or previous romantic relationships. I understand that this discomfort should be minimal and that I may not experience any discomfort. I understand that while my participation may entail psychological risks associated with self-exploration and the exploration of current and previous relationships, this risk will be kept to a minimum by the researcher. I will be provided with a listing of clinics in the area that I may visit if I feel distressed following my interview.

Another potential risk involves the disclosure of the current abuse of a minor or my plan to commit suicide. If I reveal either of these, I understand that the researcher is required to provide this information to local authorities. Otherwise, the results of my participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form unless otherwise required by law.

I understand that the results of the study will be included in the primary researcher's Masters Thesis. However, no names or identifying information will be used in the write-up. Pseudonyms will be substituted for actual names. My tape recorded interview as well as the transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the primary researcher's advisor. The only individuals with access to my interview will be the researcher and three committee members serving on her thesis committee. The write-up will be provided to the graduate school upon completion of the study. I understand that the audiotapes of my interview will be erased on December 31, 2004.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 706-338-3230.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

| | | |
|--------------------|-----------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of Researcher | Signature | Date |
| Telephone_____ | | |
| Email_____ | | |

| | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of Participant | Signature | Date |

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Demographic Sheet

Please fill this sheet out as accurately and honestly as possible. While it would be helpful to the researcher if you would provide as much information as you are comfortable with, please remember that you can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Age _____

Gender _____

Ethnicity _____

Please indicate the yearly income bracket that your family (your household) belongs to:

Less than \$10,000 per year _____

\$10,000- 19,999 per year _____

\$20,000-29,999 per year _____

\$30,000-39,999 per year _____

\$40,000-49,999 per year _____

\$50,000-59,999 per year _____

\$60,000-79,999 per year _____

\$80,000 or above per year _____

Marital status: (Please check the one that describes *your* current marital status)

Single, unmarried _____

Married _____

Divorced/separated _____

Widowed _____

Do you have children? Yes _____ No _____

What is the current marital status of your biological parents?

Married _____

Divorced/separated _____

Never married _____

One parent deceased _____

Both parents deceased _____

Are your biological parents currently involved in a romantic relationship with one another?

Yes _____ No _____

If your biological parents are no longer together, how old were you when they separated? Please give approximate age: _____

Why did they
separate? _____

Have you ever been involved in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex?

Yes _____ No _____

Do you prefer relationships with.... (Please check one)

Men _____

Women _____

Both _____

Neither _____

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

Instructions: Tonight we are going to discuss several issues pertaining to romantic relationships between African American men and women. We are also going to discuss your family relationships and how these relationships have influenced your life. Please feel comfortable to respond to each question in as much depth or detail as you would like. Feel free to elaborate on questions if you feel that you have more to say. Feel free to ask for clarification on questions that are unclear to you. I really would like to learn about your views and experiences that you have had.

Topic I: Societal Views of African American Men

Icebreaker: What is love?

- 1.1 Fill in the blank to the following incomplete statement “African American men are...”
 - 1.2 How does society perceive African American men?
 - 1.3 How do African American men perceive African American women?
 - 1.4 In what ways are relationships between African American men and women conveyed by the media?
 - 1.5 How do societal views about African American men impact your own views, if at all?
-

Topic II: Familial Messages

- 2.1 Please describe the relationships you had with the people who lived in your household while growing up.
- 2.2 What messages did your family members provide you with regarding African American men?
- 2.3 What messages did your family members provide you with regarding romantic relationships?
- 2.4 What messages did you receive about marriage between African American men and women?
- 2.5 How have these messages influenced your current perceptions of African American men?
- 2.6 In what ways, if at all, have the interactions you had with your family members influenced your current or previous romantic relationships?

Topic III: Thinking Back to Parental Relationships

- 3.1 Did your parents' relationship affect the way you see relationships? (this question is close ended but highly important)
 - 3.2 What did observing your parents interact teach you about relationships or marriage?
 - 3.3 If you observed your mother in relationships with men besides your father how did these interactions affect the way you see relationships?
 - 3.4 In what ways have the experiences in your own relationships supported or contradicted the things you learned from observing your parents?
-

Topic I: Fathers as Models

- 1.1 Please describe your relationship with your biological father.
- 1.2 How has your relationship with your father impacted your *perceptions* of men?
- 1.3 How has your relationship with your father impacted your *relationships* with men?
- 1.4 Do you feel that you had significant relationships with men besides your biological father while growing up?
- 1.5 If so, how did these relationships impact your perceptions of men?
- 1.6 Is there anything else that you would like to say about your family relationships or romantic relationships you have been involved in?

Ethical question (to promote happiness): What is your fondest childhood memory?

- Is there an email address or telephone number at which you can be reached within a couple of weeks?

APPENDIX E
REFERRAL LIST

MCPAUL MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY CLINIC
Provides individual, couples, and family therapy.
706-542-4486

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PSYCHOLOGY CLINIC
706-542-1173

NORTHEAST GEORGIA MENTAL HEALTH CENTER
250 North Avenue
Athens, GA
706-542-8810

SAMARITAN COUNSELING CENTER
Provides individual, couples, and family therapy.
1690 South Milledge Avenue
Athens, GA
706-369-7911

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY:
ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL
1230 Baxter Street
Athens, GA
Emergency Center: 706-354-3100
St. Mary's Ambulance: 706-546-0911