

# Married Black men's opinions as to why Black women are disproportionately single: A qualitative study

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## Abstract

This study's purpose was to explore the reasons Black women are disproportionately single according to the unique viewpoint of married Black men. The sample comprises 52 married Black men who resided in northeast Georgia (mean age = 43). Qualitative interviews were conducted in 2010 as part of the Pathways to Marriage study. The authors analyzed the data in a collaborative fashion and utilized content analyses to explore the relationships in the data, which were derived from qualitative interviews with the men. Findings on the reasons for the disproportionality of singlehood among Black women reflected these four themes: gender relations, marriage education and socialization, individual development, and a preference for gay/lesbian relationships. Recommendations for future research are discussed.

Recent estimates highlight an important trend—Black women are less likely to enter into marriage or remarry than are Black

men or women from other racial and ethnic groups (American Fact Finder, 2011; Banks, 2011; Taylor, Tucker, Chatters, & Jayakody, 1997; Wanzo, 2011). Furthermore, 7 of 10 Black women are unmarried and 3 of 10 may never marry (Banks, 2011). Thus, the disproportionate number of Black women who are single has been well documented. This demographic pattern is so noticeable that it has even received considerable attention from popular media (e.g., CNN documentary titled, "Black in America"; ABC News Nightline special titled, "Why Can't a Successful Black Woman Find a Man?").

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Social scientists have found considerable heterogeneity in Black women's reasons for remaining single. Among those desiring to marry, scholars have identified barriers related to economic instabilities, challenges that undermine long-term relationship success (e.g., difficulty trusting, current relationship problems, pain from past relationships, inequities in human capital between partners, fears of divorce) and concerns about

readiness for marriage (e.g., lack of skills and preparedness for marriage; Banks, 2011; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; Edin & Reed, 2005; Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005; Hatchett, 1991; Holland, 2009; King, 1999; Marbley, 2003). Other work suggests that some women are happy to remain unmarried, given their uncertainties about the permanency of marriage or their desire to concentrate on their professional lives (e.g., education, jobs) and personal responsibilities (e.g., parenting; Banks, 2011; Collins, 2000; Holland, 2009; King, 1999). Boyd-Franklin and Franklin (1998) have counseled Black women in clinical settings on these issues. They have noted that Black women are frequently provided with conflicting messages about intimate relationships by elders in their families and communities. Boyd-Franklin and Franklin wrote:

One is a message of independence (e.g., "God bless the child who has her own."), with its implication that Black men cannot be trusted to stay with and provide for women. The other is a message that a woman's utmost goal is to find a Black man who will take care of her. (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 1998, p. 272)

These contradictory statements have created situations in which either women do not form lasting intimate relationships with men or women experience difficulties in their intimate ties (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 1998).

Though prior work has sampled Black women to learn more about reasons for remaining single, very few studies consider the perspectives of married Black men. We focused on the opinions of these men for three reasons. First, while previous research has examined union formation from the perspective of Black women, rarely is the perspective of married Black men reported in studies of marriage patterns in the Black community (Marks, Hopkins-Williams, Chaney, Nesteruk, & Sasser, 2010; Taylor, Chatters, Tucker, & Lewis, 1990). The voices and perspectives of Black men who could provide in-depth accounts are largely absent from the literature (Marks, 2005; Michael & Tuma,

1985). To respond to our inquiry, the men in this study offered opinions about relationships by reflecting on their own dating and marital histories, as well as their observations of intimate ties in their families and communities. We obtained perspectives from men who value marriage, as evidenced by their commitment to enrolling in and completing a marriage enrichment program. From this perspective, obtaining the opinions of married men is particularly important since men traditionally initiate marriage proposals. Second, as parents/caregivers and mentors, these men play an important role in teaching younger generations about relationships (Elder, 1997; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Hurt, 2012). Third, Black men's opinions could help researchers better understand the factors that continue to challenge relationships between Black men and women.

Marriage uniquely offers benefits in physical, psychological, and financial well-being (Blackman, Clayton, Glenn, Malone-Colon, & Roberts, 2005; Malone-Colon, 2007). Children raised in marriage-based households also exhibit more favorable developmental outcomes over time (Blackman et al., 2005; Malone-Colon, 2007; Marks et al., 2010). For many Black adults who do wish to marry, marriage seems an elusive goal (Allen & James, 1998; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000; Taylor et al., 1997). They are not turning away from marriage; on the contrary, members of the Black community still respect the institution of marriage and its symbolic value (Banks, 2011; Edin & Reed, 2005; Marks et al., 2008). Given that stable, satisfying marriages have been associated with positive outcomes (e.g., Blackman et al., 2005; Malone-Colon, 2007), single Black women may not be reaping the rewards that marriage offers.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore reasons that Black women are disproportionately single; we explore those reasons using the perspectives of 52 married Black men. Married Black men offer a unique perspective on this important demographic trend in the United States. Very few studies of relationships include the opinions and voices of men, particularly Black men. In

this respect, this investigation makes an important contribution to the literature. Next, we outline relevant literature concerning the influence of macro-level (e.g., education, employment, and sex ratio) and micro-level (e.g., gender relations, interpersonal trust) factors on relationships.

### *Background*

The mundane environmental stress model served as a conceptual guide to help elucidate the processes by which structural factors impact intimate relationships. The mundane environmental stress model describes how mundane stress, in addition to ongoing experiences with discrimination and racially linked events, impact psychological well-being, and relationship orientations (Carroll, 1998; Clark & Haldane, 1990; Peters & Massey, 1983). Another comparable framework—the vulnerability–stress–adaptation model—is a useful tool for understanding factors that could explain nonmarriage among Black women. The model emphasizes three components—stressful events (e.g., economic inequality, incarceration), adaptive processes (e.g., strategies for responding to relationship stress such as independent spirit and focus on completing one’s education), and enduring vulnerabilities (e.g., individual characteristics that shape the relationship like personal history and experiences; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Both models highlight how structural inequalities in education, employment, sex ratio, and incarceration may set in motion family processes that undergird men and women’s abilities to form and maintain stable unions (Ooms & Wilson, 2004; Pinderhughes, 2002; Waller, 1999). For example, observable challenges might be reflected in an individual’s inability to meet roles and responsibilities because of structural inequalities. Therefore, it is critical to consider the influence of such macro-level influences on intimate ties and understand how these influences differentially shape relationship experiences for men and women (Clark & Haldane, 1990). Next, we discuss empirical work on the impact of education, employment, sex ratio, and incarceration on relationships.

### *Education and employment*

Educational achievement and employability have been linked to Blacks’ entry into marriage and their marital satisfaction (Banks, 2011; Bowleg, 2004; Lichter, LeClere, & McLaughlin, 1991). Particularly among men, as incomes rise and jobs become more secure, the probability of marriage increases (Gibson-Davis et al., 2005; Hill, 2009; Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005). Though marriage is delayed when Black men pursue postsecondary education, the probability of marriage increases (Marbley, 2003; Marks et al., 2008; Oppenheimer, 2003).

Among Black men, scholars have noted a decline in well-paying jobs and, consequentially, a rise in unemployment and underemployment (Browning, 1999; Marks et al., 2008; Staples, 1985). Ethnographic work has highlighted how compromised educational and economic opportunities, as well as perceived loss of freedom, undermine the likelihood that men will marry (Anderson, 1999). Furthermore, economic opportunities have waned for Black men and Black women with criminal records; blocked opportunities in the labor market and the continuous surveillance and follow-up often required after imprisonment hinder one’s ability to participate in the workforce (Clayton & Moore, 2003). This reduction in employment prospects for Black men has been termed the “depletion effect” (Clayton & Moore, 2003). This effect hurts family formation and promotes joblessness and loss of power in relationships (Clayton & Moore, 2003).

Recently, there has been evidence to suggest that Black women have advanced more in education and job opportunities relative to Black men (Banks, 2011; Burton & Tucker, 2009; Cazenave, 1983; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Dickson (1993) noted that women are encouraged to pursue education, secure employment, and be self-reliant in communities where there is a shortage of marriageable men, as in the Black community. Black women have traditionally worked in the labor force to help sustain their families, but over time, they have become even more independent and less likely to marry

solely for financial support (Hill, 2004; Jones, 1985; Taylor et al., 1990). As the discrepancy between education and employment prospects for Black men and Black women increases, greater challenges in their formation and maintenance of intimate relationships could follow (Burton & Tucker, 2009; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Pinderhughes, 2002).

Black women's upward social mobility may not always be celebrated by Black men, who may view themselves in competition with Black women for similar educational and employment opportunities or may have difficulty relating to women who might otherwise be viewed as intimidating (Cazenave, 1983; Collins, 2000; Marbley, 2003). Cazenave (1983) documented a sentiment among Black men that Black women helped block social mobility for Black men; they attributed these women's efforts to Black women's low regard for their male peers.

#### *Sex ratio*

There are 91 Black males per 100 Black females (American Fact Finder, 2012). Available Black females outnumber Black males as a result of mortality, morbidity, and imprisonment among Black males and increased longevity for Black females (Lane et al., 2004; Marks et al., 2008). When there are more women than men, the likelihood of marriage for women is poorer (Harknett & McLanahan, 2004). The availability of mates in the marriage market affects the likelihood of marital formation and longevity (Hopkins-Williams, 2007). In marriage markets where women are outnumbered by men, men can be more selective when choosing a mate and exert more leverage in romantic ties, using their influence to control relationship formation and duration (Dickson, 1993; Hill, 2004; Senn, Carey, Vanable, & Seward, 2009). The imbalance of males to females is further exacerbated by the increased likelihood that Black men will marry someone of another race (as compared to Black women), thereby further reducing the number of marriageable Black males available to wed Black females (Banks, 2011; Batson, Qian, & Lichter, 2006; Bowleg, 2004; Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Hill, 2004).

#### *Incarceration*

The higher proportion of incarcerated Black adults has been negatively linked to marriage (Clayton & Moore, 2003; Lane et al., 2004). Blacks, and Black males in particular, have been imprisoned at higher rates than Whites or women (Clayton & Moore, 2003). One third of Black men between the ages of 20 and 29 are in prison (Clayton & Moore, 2003). The proportion of Black men and women incarcerated has been more strongly associated with nonmarriage than with the sex ratio (Banks, 2011; Harknett & McLanahan, 2004). Other work highlights specific ways in which romantic relationships deteriorate after a male is incarcerated, such as loss of instrumental and emotional support, as well as intimacy (Roy & Dyson, 2005).

Despite considerable attention to macro-level influences that impact Black unions, only a fraction of the variations in relationship patterns can be attributed to structural factors such as employment, education, sex ratio, and incarceration (Cherlin, 1992; Wilson, 1997). Therefore, it seems critical to reflect on other reasons, such as micro-level factors, that might shape the tenor of Black relationships such as gender relations and interpersonal trust (Bennett, Bloom, & Craig, 1989; Cherlin, 1992; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). We review these two relationship dynamics next.

#### *Gender relations*

Research suggests that slavery in the United States and its consequences explain some of the challenges in relationship formation and maintenance between Black men and women today (Banks, 2011; Bowleg, 2004; Pinderhughes, 2002). Enslaved Black men were customarily removed from their families and communities, and thus, their function in family life was often more biological than social or financial (Boyd-Franklin, 1993; Franklin, 1997; Staples, 1987). Slavery conditions may have significantly undermined the formation of permanent unions and the leadership roles of Black men in their families (Pinderhughes, 2002). Given the marginal roles relegated to

Black men within their families and the history of strained gender relations that may be attributable to harsh slavery conditions, communication challenges and confusion about gender roles between Black men and women developed (Franklin, 1997; Hatchett, 1991; Pinderhughes, 2002). This confusion in the gender roles between Black men and women can be traced to fluidity in gender roles between the two genders; gender roles were flexible out of economic necessity. Pinderhughes (2002) attributed the existence of “deep scars” in relational ties between Black men and Black women to the conditions of slavery as well as to their contemporary experiences of racism and discrimination (p. 272). Relational challenges, negative orientations and attitudes, and difficult interactional styles between Black men and Black women were passed on to younger generations through socialization (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Browning, 1999; Johnson, 2007).

Gender relations between Black men and Black women have been characterized as tense (Collins, 2000; Edin & Reed, 2005). Strain in gender relations may be rooted in slavery and discrimination; as such, various manifestations may have resulted in generalized distrust, an inability to effectively communicate with one another, and navigating noncomplementary gender roles (Cazenave, 1983; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Dickson, 1993; Edin & Reed, 2005). Franklin (1984) offers an illustration of how conflicting sex roles may operate: “A Black woman may feel that her Black man is supposed to assume a dominant role, but she also may be inclined to exhibit behaviors that are opposed to his dominance and her subordination” (p. 143).

In addition, the spirit of independence and a sense of personal rights among Black women, which developed out of the necessity for coping with persistent inequality, may strain couple relationships between Black men and Black women (Hill, 2004; Johnson, 2007). Moreover, these relational dispositions may challenge a Black woman’s ability to establish a long-term, interdependent, committed relationship with a Black man. In addition to gender relations, another micro-level

factor to consider relates to interpersonal trust, which we address next.

### *Interpersonal trust*

Interpersonal trust, defined as one’s expectation of the predictability and dependability of another’s actions, words, or written statements, is a critical aspect of forming and maintaining intimate ties. Scholars underscore the salience of interpersonal trust in studies of Black relationships (Burton, Cherlin, Winn, Estacion, & Holder-Taylor, 2009; Edin, 2000; Wilson, 1997). For example, women’s distrust of men was linked to their relationship histories; firsthand experiences with infidelity, financial irresponsibility, and desertion led women to be wary of men (Edin, 2000; Edin & Kefalas, 2011; Gibson-Davis et al., 2005). Wilson (1997) documented Black women’s distrust of men and their doubts of men’s commitment to family life and ability to maintain stable employment. Women’s distrust of men contributed to their pessimism about having a satisfying marriage (Wilson, 1997). In summary, though many women desire to marry, relational concerns about whether men can be trusted create anxieties about entering long-term unions like marriage (Edin & Kefalas, 2011; Gibson-Davis et al., 2005; Wilson, 1997). Having considered macro-level and micro-level factors that impact Black relationships, we now turn our attention to the rationale for this study.

### *Study purpose*

Few investigations of relationships have adopted a within-group analysis approach and focused exclusively on Black men. There are gaps in the literature on Black men, particularly with regard to type of samples and kind of methodologies employed. Much of the research in this area has employed quantitative methodology with larger samples and has focused on the influential role of education, employment, intermarriage, and nonmarital childbearing on marital behavior. Several qualitative studies have been conducted but have primarily used samples of women or couples (e.g., Banks,

2011; Edin, 2000; Gibson-Davis et al., 2005; Holland, 2009; Johnson, 2007; Lane et al., 2004). No study of which we are aware has sought the perspective of married Black men to better understand why a disproportionate number of Black women are single. Although Black women may offer the best insight on these experiences, we interviewed Black men to capture their unique perspectives on the issues. Therefore, we believe that the results of this study add to the literature. We used qualitative methodology to deeply explore Black men's opinions about the disproportionality in singlehood among Black women. We felt that a qualitative inquiry could provide a richer understanding of these issues elucidated by Black men than had been obtained using survey measurements in quantitative studies.

## Method

Qualitative data were gathered from 52 married Black men who participated in the Program for Strong African American Marriages (ProSAAM), a 5-year randomized study of 393 couples begun in 2006. The purpose of ProSAAM was to examine the role of prayer and skill-based intervention in strengthening African American marital relationships. The sample was recruited from metropolitan Atlanta and northeast Georgia through referrals and advertisements at churches, community centers, radio shows, print media, and local businesses frequented by Black couples and families (for more details, visit <http://www.uga.edu/prosaam>).

Of the 393 couples who participated in ProSAAM, 109 husbands had completed their 3-year follow-up assessment by December 1, 2009, marking their completion of the larger ProSAAM study and were thus eligible for participation in this study called Pathways to Marriage. Recruitment brochures describing the project's focus, eligibility criteria, risks and benefits, interview procedures, and study contact information were mailed to these 109 men. Fifty-two men consented to participate. The men were enrolled on a first-come, first-served basis. Participating husbands were

compensated \$75 for completing one interview of approximately 2 hr in duration.

## Sample

A brief survey was administered to the participants to collect demographic information. The mean age for the study participants was 43 (range 27–62). All men reported their race as Black; one man identified himself as a Cuban American while all the others self-identified as African American. (Black was used to describe the race of the sample in order to include ethnicities such as Cuban American and African American.) All of the men were married. Relative to schooling, 8% reported less than a high school education, 21% had finished high school, 27% had completed some college or technical school education, 19% had earned a college degree, 10% had received some graduate education, and 15% had achieved a graduate or advanced degree. The mean *individual* annual income among the men was \$30,000–\$39,999; individual incomes ranged widely, however, with a few earning less than \$5,000 per year while others earned more than \$80,000 per year. The mean *household* annual income was \$50,000–\$59,999. About 68% attended a Christian church while 22% went to nondenominational Christian centers. One man (2%) reported no religion and four men (8%) offered no response to the religious affiliation question. Most men fathered two biological children (range 0–7). One man (2%) did not respond when asked if he had children. Most men reported living in a home with two children (range 0–3).

This sample of Black men recalled being romantically involved (including dating and marriage) with their wives for 16 years on average (range = 3–41 years; one participant gave no response). Seventy-three percent of the men had not been married previously. One fifth (21%) of the men were married for a second time, two men (4%) were in their third marriage, and one man (2%) was in his fourth. The average length of their current marriage was 14 years (range = 2–35).

### *Procedures*

The 52 men were interviewed in their homes or another setting of their choice (e.g., a private room at a coffee shop or church office). The interviews were semistructured and were the primary method of data collection. Each interviewee was assured anonymity and strict confidentiality of the data collected.

Two married Black male interviewers conducted the interviews between January and April 2010. To help facilitate rapport during the interviews, and given the sensitive nature of the questions that were asked of the husbands about their marriages, the interviewers and participants were matched by race and gender (see Cooney, Small, & O'Connor, 2007; McCurdy & Daro, 2001). The men were asked about the meaning of marriage, marital socialization, their motivations for marrying and staying married, factors that helped to encourage and sustain marriage, barriers to or challenges in staying married, commitment attitudes, and their participation in ProSAAM (Hurt, 2012). For these analyses, we examined the advice men provided regarding the disproportionate number of Black women who are single. After explaining that Black women represent the greatest number of women not married in this country and that approximately 42% of Black women were not married, we asked them to share their perspectives and the reasons for this trend. The two interviewers digitally recorded each interview, and the recordings were electronically submitted to a transcriber. Undergraduate research interns listened to the digital recordings and read the transcripts simultaneously to verify complete transcription since the transcriber was not a member of the research team (Carlson, 2010). The interview transcripts were used for the data analyses.

The two interviewers underwent extensive training with the first author, learning interviewing techniques and the ethical collection and handling of interview data. The interviewers also listened to eligibility requirements for the men's participation. The men must have been (a) married, (b) self-identified their ethnicity as African American or been married to an African American spouse, (c) took

part in ProSAAM, and (d) completed their 3-year follow-up interview. The first author also reviewed study goals, the interview protocol, and the background for each question with the interviewers.

The interviewers were trained to ask the questions in the interview protocol and then follow up as needed to obtain a fuller understanding of the participant's viewpoints. When the interviewers sensed that the men could say more about their experiences and offer a more detailed account of their perspectives or experiences during the interviews, they frequently encouraged the interviewee to talk more specifically about the issue. In such instances, the interviewer often relied on nonverbal cues and other observations of the manner in which the respondent answered the question. The interviewers were trained to ask questions in an open-ended way so that the participants would share their opinions and experiences more fully. The interviewers followed a consistent line of questioning and only probed where necessary. This style of interviewing permitted a more holistic understanding of what the participants thought and felt about the issue under study. Nonetheless, in light of the more individualized nature of qualitative inquiry and the semistructured method of interviewing, the interviewers adapted their line of questioning with the men, rearticulating questions or phrasing them differently to ensure the participants understood what was being asked.

Communication between the first author and the interviewers was maintained throughout the 4-month data collection process. The interviewers met semimonthly in person with the research team and communicated weekly with the first author about their progress in the field. Through in-person meetings, e-mails, phone conversations, and documented reflections on the digital recorders, the interviewers reported important themes and impressions from their field observations. The research team regularly checked the interview recordings to make certain that the interviewers were following the interview protocol in their lines of inquiry and were practicing effective interviewing techniques.

### *Data analyses*

In the spirit of transparency and reflexivity, we present information pertaining to the authors' backgrounds (Carlson, 2010). During the analysis phase, the authors shared the following demographic characteristics: All were women, native-born American citizens, heterosexual, highly educated, and engaged in long-term relationships of different commitment levels (two were dating, two were engaged, and one was married). This group included four Black women and one White woman.

The team of authors analyzed the interview data in a collaborative way. Over a period of 18 months, the authors met for data retreats every 2–3 months in person. The authors analyzed interview data that had been collected, transcribed, and archived. The husbands' responses to the question of interest were identified first, and then arranged by individual case and laid out in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Each row included the respondent's identification number, the interviewer's reflections, the duration of the man's marriage, a description of the husband's path to marriage, and the respondent's response to the interview question on the disproportionate number of single Black women. We conducted data reduction; that is, after reviewing the full data set, we selected only those data that were pertinent to the current analyses (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Content analysis was employed in order to better understand the men's perspectives. In doing so, the authors closely examined the data to understand the participants' responses (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005).

Next, data selection and condensation were carried out. Each author independently evaluated, compared, and contrasted data across the 52 respondents and developed a list of data summaries, coding, themes, and clusters that emerged from her review of the data (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Specifically, the authors looked at each case alone to examine the background characteristics relative to demographic, the participant's length of marriage, age, and family upbringing; the goal was to

look for any factors or processes that could explain the men's responses to the question of interest. The authors also reviewed the interview transcripts to better understand the men's life experiences (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Each author recorded her own self-reflections and interpretations in exploring the data for themes. The authors created independent audit trails to establish credibility; each audit trail included reflections about the transcripts, notes on themes in the data, data interpretations, and analytic memos to record the process (Carlson, 2010; Huberman & Miles, 1994). It was important for each author to record her work to minimize the challenges associated with different scholars analyzing the data in dissimilar ways (Saldaña, 2013).

At the data retreats, the authors compared findings from their independent analyses, discussed emergent themes observed in the data, engaged in collaborative descriptive coding by sharing codes that reflected the basic topic of each man's response to the interview question, and selected notable themes in the data (Saldaña, 2013). The authors grouped men who shared similar sentiments regarding why Black women were disproportionately single (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The authors reconciled any differences in coding to create a consensus; there were no unresolved analytic differences (Saldaña, 2013). The themes emerged from the authors' discussions about the data over time. Overall, this analytic process established dependability in data coding, which is analogous to reliability in the quantitative paradigm (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Moreover, the analytical procedures involved iterative sequences of reviewing, categorizing, verifying, and drawing conclusions from the data (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

In the spirit of member checking, the two interviewers who gathered the data were asked to validate themes the authors identified in the data. The interviewers were contacted via e-mail and asked to review a manuscript draft in which the results were detailed. Previous work has highlighted that member checking is best conducted when a finished product can be reviewed and interpretations are offered for themes and patterns (Carlson, 2010). The interviewers reflected on the

meetings they had with the husbands and agreed with the themes. They believed that the authors had accurately reflected the men's perspectives (see Creswell, 2007). Next, we outline the study's results.

## Results

The 52 Black men cited various factors for the disproportionate occurrence of unmarried Black women; these factors were grouped into four themes: gender relations, marriage education and socialization, individual development, and preferences for gay/lesbian relationships. We present these four themes, without consideration to the men's demographic characteristics, marital experiences, or life histories; the authors could not identify any differences in the men's backgrounds to explain why they thought more Black women were single than other groups. All participants quoted below have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. In addition, we organize the categories in hierarchical fashion, presenting the percentages of men who are assigned to each theme (Saldaña, 2013). Within each theme, the number of men who offered responses is detailed. In some cases, participants provided more than one reason for the disproportionality in singlehood among Black women. As such, the number of responses may not necessarily equal the number of men (expressed as percentage or sample size) within each theme.

Lastly, most perspectives shared by the men are included in the results; we only omitted two responses. Two respondents described the role of drug use in hindering a male's ability to marry. Collectively, the authors regarded these two responses as outliers, and not reflective of primary themes in the data.

### *Gender relations*

Over three fourths of the men (79%) discussed gender conflict between men and women in the Black community. The husbands noted that many women are misguided in their approaches to attracting and keeping a mate. The men also discussed the negative effects of incarceration on relationships. Further, the respondents underscored how the

strong independent nature among some Black women challenges relationship formation and maintenance. Other respondents cited Black men's failures to meet their responsibilities and pursue education and training as well as how lack of trust challenges relationship formation and maintenance. The men also described how a decline in labor market opportunities impacts relationships. These factors are discussed in detail next.

### *Women's approach to men is misguided*

Seventy-three percent of the respondents in the gender relations category indicated that the Black woman's approach to men is misguided, as it relates to patterns of pursuing a man for a relationship and not exhibiting lady-like behavior (e.g., cursing, wearing revealing clothing;  $n = 2$ ), setting standards too high and placing more value on men who can offer material possessions and status ( $n = 12$ ), engaging in controlling behavior ( $n = 2$ ), lowering their standards to attract a man's affection ( $n = 4$ ), and not being approachable (e.g., not friendly, bad attitude;  $n = 10$ ). Regarding Black women pursuing men for relationships, Carter, 45 years old and married for 9 years, said, "If you get down to the bottom line, actually a woman don't suppose to look for a man no way." This reflected his sentiment that it is a man's responsibility to pursue a relationship, and that women who are seen as too aggressive in this context may be hurting their chances of a long-term, stable relationship. Forty-three-year-old Steve, who had been a husband for 18 years, recalled his observations of women's behavior at church, saying,

"I laugh [when] I see some of them trying too hard to get married; [it] makes them look desperate. . . . You notice when they dress differently, when they start doing things that are normally out of their character when a new guy shows up at church or something like that. They're trying to catch his attention or trying to get him; they're throwing themselves at him."

On the subject of setting standards too high or being a high-maintenance woman, Steve also noted,

From what I've noticed, there are some women who are too anxious . . . their standards [are] set too high, I don't mean you should go for the gutter variety of guy, but a lot of them are looking for a man with the BMW, the large brick house, the two-hundred-thousand-dollar-a-year job, you know. I mean when I got married I didn't have any of that but, you know, my wife was perfectly happy to marry me.

Victor, a 32-year-old who had been married for 5 years, agreed: "There's not really a shortage of men out there. It's that some of the women are raising their standards so high that they are missing out on that person for them." Paul, 32 years of age and married for 5 years, concurred: "[Women] look [at] what's on the outside and not what's on the inside. They [are] not looking at [men's] character; they [do not] care about looking at what they [are] made of [on] the inside." Elvin, a 44-year-old who had been married for 8 years, shared,

"It might be the way we dress, the way we walk, the way we talk, our life experiences. . . . Cause [women] hold that stuff against you and I just think that they should just break it down a notch, just lower it a little bit. . . . I do think they deserve the best, but you know it takes two."

Forty-eight-year-old Xavier, married for 24 years, summed up his thoughts with, "You've got women who are not married; there's two ends to that pull. You've got [those with] high standards and [who look] down at all the guys, then you've got the other end, where, you know, anybody will do." Jerry, 46 years of age and married for 23 years, emphasized the importance of focusing on a man's future, asserting,

"I just think that our young women have to start being able to assess potential in their mates and not [think] that they got to have everything already when you go into a relationship. How can you truly appreciate and work to sustain it if you didn't get it together?"

Much of the discussion in this area reflected the men's opinions of and firsthand experiences with women engaging in what they described as controlling and nagging behavior with partners. Marcus, married for 7 years and 38 years old, said,

"You know, no man wants somebody in his ear and fussing at him all the time, see, and Negro women tend to like to fuss in certain instances, based on where they're from. You can't [treat] me nice to get me, and then treat me bad and think I'm going to stay."

Agreeing, 46-year-old Ronald, married for 13 years, stated,

A lot of Black women, they run their mates off nagging. Stop nagging and listen some-time and you don't have to worry about [not being married]. You got a lot of single women—no fathers and kids. The reason they got no mates is cause they probably ran them off, yakking and wanting this and wanting that. Stop all that complaining and fussing and fighting and arguing. 'Cause one day, you're going to really [want to] settle down as [you] get older. Right now, they're young and still feeling themselves and when they get older they going to see it. [It'll take] time to change.

Other men observed controlling behavior among women. For instance, Isaac, 40 years of age and married for 11 years, said,

"When I was single, and a lot of my single guys talk about [this], a lot of women that I chose not to marry, it dealt a lot with controlling us. . . . You need to do this, this, this, this, that. . . . They wanted to control you and shape you to be what they wanted you to be."

Finally, 49-year-old Danny who had been married for 25 years remarked,

I can't say for sure but I think the way the Black woman handles and approaches Black men sometimes has a lot to do with it. I've been a firm believer that a Black

woman can get a man and get the right man, but the way they go about doing it is the reason why they don't get a man. . . . I believe if you approach it right and you handle it right you're supposed to make the man say, "I want this," and bring him into a situation where he says, "This is the best thing that ever happened to me."

Other husbands pointed to the need for Black women to raise their standards, demand more from the relationships in which they find themselves, recognize potential in a man, and be patient for the relationship to develop ( $n = 6$ ). For example, Kelvin, married for 22 years and 44 years of age, recommended this:

[Women] should treat themselves as queens, [and] look at themselves as jewels, as prizes. . . . [Sometimes,] the guy can do whatever he wants to and [the women are] left to take care of the [responsibilities], and the [women] don't put any installments on the [men]. . . . [The women should] say, "Well, you know, if you want to get with me, you want to be with me, there's things that I have [to have]. If we're going to have [anything], there's a plan that we should have. . . ." [Women should] put that back in place and then you'll have guys falling in line.

In summary, from these husbands' perspectives, women's missteps in how they approach men may be one reason for the disproportionate amount of single among Black women. A second factor cited in the gender relations category is the impact of incarceration on relationship maintenance and formation. We present the data on this next.

#### *Incarceration*

Forty-nine percent of the participants cited the effects of male incarceration on the availability of marriageable Black males. Some noted how incarceration negatively impacts a man's ability to provide the kind of support a woman may seek in a partner ( $n = 14$ ). They also commented how incarceration reduces

the pool of available men in communities who can meet, date, and potentially marry Black women (assuming within-race coupling;  $n = 4$ ). A couple of respondents also felt that imprisonment could affect the men psychologically, and that rehabilitation is critical to reducing rates of recidivism and ensuring that men can be productive members in their communities and providers for their families upon their release ( $n = 2$ ). Nolan, a 47-year-old preacher who had been married for 24 years, drew on his experiences in prison ministry:

Most of the prisons are full of young Black males and older Black males. . . . That's a devastation and blow to the females. Everybody that's in prison don't deserve to be in prison. I can personally tell you that 'cause I've been around them. Drugs, stealing, most Black men trying to make a quick dollar to provide for their family and they just make mistakes doing that. It's a lot of good men—young men and older men—are in prison and if they don't come up with a plan to help rehabilitate them, they won't be no good when they get out.

Incarceration of men was viewed as a reason for the higher proportion of singlehood among Black women. We now address a third factor cited in the gender relations category concerning the strong, independent stance that diminishes the likelihood of Black women partnering with a man.

#### *Strong, independent women*

In 37% of the men's views, some independent women believe that they do not need a man ( $n = 15$ ). Quinn, married for 7 years and 35 years of age, said, "They got [it] in their mind [from] this independence song [referring to song titled, *Independent* by Webbie, Lil Phat, and Lil Boosie] that they can do it by their self. Can't nobody do it by themselves." Ricky, 34 years of age and married for 5 years, agreed: "The role of 'I don't need anything but myself' has been contributing to the fact that a lot of women are looking past the benefits of marriage."

The men also described a lack of knowledge among Black women about how to share the responsibility for managing a household with a mate, having spent years without a partner or a model. Lionel, 34 years old and married for 13 years, said,

If you're Christian, you have to believe in the woman submitting, and that's a curse word to an African American woman. "Me? Submitting? Submissive?" But they have to understand the context of what the word means. . . . Let's say you marry a 30-year-old Black woman; she's been single all her life; she's took care of herself; she's self-sustaining. She got her own car, got her own crib, you know, that I-N-D-E, the independent sister, and then you marry her, and then you come in trying to be a man and say, "Well, I'm the man of the house. I'm going to take care of the house." She'll say, "No, I've been doing it on my own." So you got to break that. It's tough. It's really tough. They are some really peculiar creatures. They're the epitome of being from Venus and Mars [an allusion to the book *Men Are From Mars Women Are From Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships*] and all of that.

Fifty-six-year-old Thomas who had been married for 35 years pointed to economic progress among women that set the stage for such a pattern among *all* families, not only in the Black community, saying, "Now [marriage has] been discouraged. You got women today, not only Black and women of color, but all women who are able to take care of, not only themselves, but a man and children."

The men believed that this strong sense of independence is especially acute among some women who are economically self-sufficient. Victor shared,

"It's getting to a point where women are making more than a man and more are going to college, that sort of thing. 'Cause as of late, there's lots of things going on

in the media with, you know, independent women. And they don't need a man for anything. I would say otherwise."

Zachary, 54 years of age and a newlywed, agreed, citing more progress among Black women than men as a factor in these women's choice to remain single:

There was [a time when] the men [knew] how to be the man. They would come home, set the food on the table and say "now handle it." She raised the children. And she took care of what needed to be taken care of, you know, and everything was fine, but when you find yourself as a Black man out of place, out of position, and you feel weak to society, you can't deal with that thing in a Black woman, and she still being in the house, she still raising the children by herself, and now she telling you "I don't need you." She'll tell you, and she's more outspoken with it now. Back then, my grandmother would not have dared told my granddad "I don't need you." It [would have been], "Ok, well let me see you [the wife] make it without me."

Allen, married for 5 years and 52 years of age, believes that the pattern of women not depending on men in the Black community was set in motion during the time of slavery:

Now personally, I think that [it] started years ago when back in the day, you know . . . when the woman was the head of the household . . . she did all the work because the men were taken away or whatever. I'm going back to slavery. It's just gotten more modernized where the Black man has lost his focus on what he actually should be doing, instead of being the head and stepping up in the household and being the man, he's kind of set back and let the woman take that lead. I think that most Black women, they'll tell you right now, "What do I need a man for? I can work and I can do this and I can do that and I take care of myself." I think all that started [back then], and what we're getting, that's

a ripple effect from [that time]. And the Black women are more advanced, so much that why would I depend on a man who wants to live this kind of lifestyle when I can get out and be something myself?

The strong independent stance of some Black women was regarded as a consideration. A fourth factor in the discussion on gender relations concerns the study participants' viewpoints on how a Black man's inability to meet his responsibilities has contributed to the higher proportion of Black women not marrying.

#### *Lack of men meeting responsibilities*

In the gender relations category, 34% of the men maintained that the women are not at fault, but pointed to men not fulfilling their responsibilities to themselves (e.g., engaging in criminal activity, failing to pursue higher education;  $n = 12$ ) and to their female partners/spouses (e.g., failing to actively parent their biological children, not committing to a relationship;  $n = 2$ ). Thirty-seven-year-old Orlando who had been married for 14 years asserted, "There are a few men [out there in the world] and a lot of grown boys." Darrin, 35 years of age and married for 7 years, stated,

"It is more so, I think, [men's] responsibility, and not necessarily on the women. In that case, it's more so the men have to be trained by a stronger Black man to understand the true meaning of marriage and true meaning of manhood . . . but I believe a lot of it has to do with more so for men who do not know how to treat women right."

Dennis, 33-year-old and married for 12 years, responded in kind:

I can say that it's our fault as men. Black men; it's our fault. The reason I say it's our fault because, sometimes, we have seen our fathers go out there, get with a woman and they have a baby, and then they [are] no longer in their life or what not. And for the women, we are not treating them like the queens that they are. We're not taking care of them. We're leaving them to themselves

. . . and then we're not teaching our men how to grow up to be men because they are left with the women. . . . Some of our men, not all of our men, some of our men don't want to work. They're going to stand on the street corner; they want to hustle, they don't know how to provide for a family, a stable home, and so for our young men, they see that, and like I say, the cycle keeps going and keeps going.

Forty-three-year-old James, married for 15 years, agreed that many young Black men are missing male role models:

I think part of the thing that we're dealing with in our culture is the impact of the lack of a father in the home, and so then we have boys growing up that have been raised by mom and not really being taught how to act towards women, or what they've learned from a video, or whether it's grandpa or you know, and like I said earlier, I think our media in our society, we don't promote marriage and that. We promote doing things but not really coming together for the long haul. I think [for me] personally, it's almost impossible for a woman to teach a man how to be a man, and I know that that may be challenging to some people and don't get me wrong, I believe women are doing the best that they can.

The husbands pointed to the influence of men not meeting their responsibilities to their families and their communities as a reason for the higher number of Black women not being married. The respondents also identified interpersonal trust—as well as the lack of trust—between Black men and women; we discuss this fifth factor next.

#### *Interpersonal trust*

Within the gender relations category, 24% of the sample reflected on various factors that may have prompted women to take a self-reliant stance, including an unwillingness to commit to a partner or trust a mate because of personal experiences with difficult relationships in their pasts and observations of

other women (e.g., mothers, sisters) coping with relationship troubles with men ( $n = 10$ ). Harold, a 54-year-old married for 30 years, said,

I mean they're so tired of being hurt, you know. I know some of those women that are not married and I'd like to say *fine* women. I've never seen them with anybody or I've seen that person get hurt before, you know. . . . I mean she is extremely bitter which may affect her and her kid for the rest of their lives, you know, 'cause of boo-boos.

Isaiah, 53 years old and married for 19 years, described learning about relationships from others as well and internalizing difficult experiences as well. He elaborated,

Living in a single-parent household that they've seen their mother [living in] and [they're] mimicking that, you know? She may be with that man, but she don't even trust men, you know? [Quoting a woman] "Cause I've seen what they did to my mother, and I'm looking at what they did to my sister, and I don't want to go through that." So even if they probably meet the right guy, it has that big barrier there. Some of them say, "Well, you know, I'm going to try it" and some of them shy away from it. Maybe sometime, [as women], maybe they have seen things in their childhood, maybe they've seen their parents and stuff fighting, see their father stepping out [cheating, committing adultery, etc.] and what not. And maybe they don't want to be married . . . they don't want to go through the hurt or the trauma, or maybe they have been scarred by a man and they choose to separate from that. And to move on and say I can do this by myself. Because maybe they seen their mother do it. . . . I don't need a man.

While interpersonal trust issues are a concern, so is the decline in labor market opportunities and the availability of marriageable men to partner with Black women.

### *Decline in labor market opportunities*

Another factor cited that negatively affects men's attractiveness as marriage partners is the decline in labor market opportunities (22%). Five men described the employment challenges that Black men face. Thomas offered,

The economic situation's changed. It used to be that a man went out and made the bread and brought it home. She cooked it. He went out, he killed a hog or a deer or what not, brought it home. That fundamental thing has changed in our society and it's continuing to evolve. I mean you bring it down specifically to the African American; it's been a breakdown in our family structure, not with just us, but the whole country and you can attribute it to a lot of things, but I mainly attribute it to economics. See, money make the world go round, and right now if you're a female and you got a little bit, you can go out here, you can make some money. You ain't gonna worry about no dude. You don't want no dude trying to tell you he's a man 'cause he feeling emasculated and trying to deal with society out here.

Two other men agreed that Black women have outpaced Black men in the workforce. Darrin said,

“. . . this culture was so oppressive back in the day. Now that we have moved past the women's movement, you have more acceptance of Black women being accepted in higher levels of business, higher levels of corporations than you would Black men.”

Two other men corroborated these points, noting Black women's greater economic progress relative to Black men's, and how they might factor into relationships and marriage ( $n = 2$ ). Thirty-one-year-old Eddie who had been married for 4 years said,

“I want them to get married, but who are they going to get married to? Roscoe from down the street who don't have a plan

for his life, you know, there are not as many successful Black guys as there are successful Black girls.”

Isaiah praised Black women, saying,

“I applaud the women out there whose been that far herself and educated and all, and she is looking for her a mate to say, “Hey, you know, I feel comfortable with you.” She is looking for someone who is compatible with her.”

In sum, poorer labor market opportunities among Black men could be one reason that Black women are disproportionately single. In addition to a decline in labor market opportunities, the men discussed the role of marriage education and socialization.

#### *Marriage education and socialization*

More than one third of the men interviewed claimed that marriage as an institution is not being valued for its benefits, including the chance to journey through life with a partner and have someone to grow old with. Moreover, as 57-year-old Gene, who had been married for 19 years, pointed out, marriage training in families is not always positive:

Marriage . . . [there] is not a good class to teach you how to be a good husband or wife. The most you get you either going to get it from a friend, or a mother or father. Most of them do not know how to be one [a good husband or wife]. They go through trial and error and hope that the other spouse can handle that bump when you hit it and hope you don't bounce off it . . . and that's not, I don't think that's good for everybody.

A common theme expressed were the changes in marriage socialization in contemporary society, in which the relationship development of both men and women has been deeply affected. Most men discussed concern about the lack of marriage socialization among women. They held the view that some women lack information and models on

how to work together with a man in a marriage ( $n = 5$ ). The women's upbringing in a single-parent household with only a mother was regarded as the main source of this problem ( $n = 8$ ).

For other men, they focused on how the rise in the number of women raising children without the consistent support of a male partner in the household challenges the models and messages that Black male children receive or observe about marriage and relationships ( $n = 11$ ). For example, the men reported feeling ill prepared for relationships; they spoke about receiving inadequate relationship training from their mothers. Instead, their training entailed observing male–female relationships on the streets. Based on this experience, the men emphasized the importance of Black male role models for teaching and mentoring other males about relationship formation and maintenance ( $n = 3$ ). As 55-year-old Justin, married for 25 years, said,

It's just a matter of teaching and training. . . . Say, “You can be a man with position and authority but you don't have to be abusive. You don't have to belittle, you don't have to look down and you don't have to be in competition with the Black woman. Y'all are supposed to complement each other. . . .” But it's all about teaching.

In summary, responses from the men highlight variations in marriage education and socialization between Black men and Black women. Indeed, marriage education and socialization for men and women is a critical factor and may figure into the disproportionate number of Black women remaining single. In addition to marriage education and socialization, the men reflected on the significance of individual development.

#### *Individual development*

Twenty-three percent of the men focused on issues concerning the development of men and women and the influence of an individual's development on their readiness for a committed relationship such as marriage. Concerning males, the respondents stated that

some are simply not ready for a long-term commitment such as marriage ( $n = 5$ ). They are focused on having a good time and enjoying the company of different women. According to these husbands, many Black men do desire marriage, but at the right time.

Some of the men offered a word of encouragement for Black women who wish to marry but have not found the right mate ( $n = 3$ ). Again, they recommended that women remain patient, assuring them that many men will choose to marry, in their own time. While waiting to partner with a mate, the men advised Black women to focus on their own development and spiritual growth. Darrin proposed that women consider their desired qualities in a mate. "Whatever they want that is important to them, they have to be able to portray the same thing." Gene underscored the importance of self-love in his comment,

"[Be] content with yourself, meaning, you know, loving yourself and liking what you're doing with yourself for yourself. If you like it, somebody else will like it, but if you don't like yourself right now for whatever reason . . . other people not going to like you either."

In addition to growing as an individual, several men advocated that women trust in the Lord to bless them with a mate ( $n = 6$ ). The men recommended that women remain in prayer on the matter. Sixty-one-year-old Owen drew on his own personal experience and 22 years of marriage, recommending that dating couples attend religious services and activities together:

". . . if she take him to church then that will help her get married. Yeah, you know, because you be in the presence of God, you know, do what God want us to do . . . The way my wife did me."

In summary, the study participants believed that developmental readiness for marriage is an important consideration. Next, we present the data included in the preference for gay/lesbian relationships category.

### *Preference for gay/lesbian relationships*

Eight men (15%) made brief comments relative to how male homosexuality ( $n = 4$ ) or the practice of heterosexual men engaging in homosexual acts (i.e., the down-low phenomenon;  $n = 2$ ) may play a role in explaining the disproportionate amount of singlehood among Black women. Other men spoke of some women's desire to engage with a same-sex partner, turning away from men for relationships but not from romantic involvements ( $n = 2$ ). For example, Carter shared, "So when they said they don't need a man, 90% of them talking to another woman. So that's one of the things . . . They turn to another woman. They are gay lesbians."

Next, we discuss the current study's findings in the context of previous research.

### **Discussion**

Drawing on qualitative data from interviews of 52 married Black men, this study explored why Black women are disproportionately single. Black women are less likely to marry or remarry than Black men or their female peers from other racial groups (American Fact Finder, 2011; Banks, 2011; Taylor et al., 1997). The men, rather passionately, shared their opinions about the subject, reflecting on their personal experiences and observations of relationships in their families and communities. The tone of some comments was emotionally charged as has been noted in prior work (Marbley, 2003). The men's in-depth responses obtained through qualitative inquiry offered context and meaning to these relational experiences. Study findings are notable and contribute to the literature on Black relationships in significant ways.

Results call attention to the challenging tenor in gender relations between Black men and women, with 79% of the sample raising this as a central consideration in the disproportionate number Black women who are single. Gender role strain between Black men and women has been highlighted in previous work and is well supported in the literature (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Collins, 2000; Edin & Reed, 2005). Drawing on insights

from the data, a contributing factor to relational challenges between Black adults concerns the manner in which some Black women pursue men for relationships (Collins, 2000; Franklin, 1997; Hatchett, 1991; Hill, 2004; Pinderhughes, 2002). This may, in part, reflect a change in gender roles where it is more acceptable for women to pursue relationships. It could also reflect the women's awareness that there is intense competition for mates in a tighter marriage market (Aborampah, 1989; Marbley, 2003).

Other results point to how, from the perspective of these Black men, some strong, independent, self-reliant attitudes and behaviors may unintentionally undermine the formation and maintenance of long-term committed relationships such as marriage. Some women recognize the benefits of marriage but describe themselves as being happily single and sharply focused on investing in oneself, motherhood, and careers (Collins, 2000). Other women may have developed such a disposition because they can support themselves financially or perhaps out of necessity to cope with persistent economic inequalities, difficult relationship experiences, and insecurities about being ready for marital commitment (Clark & Haldane, 1990; Collins, 2000; Hill, 2004; Pinderhughes, 2002).

Still other women may simply withdraw from relationships or remain distrustful of men and wary of relationship formation (Carroll, 1998; Cazenave, 1983; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Collins, 2000; Dickson, 1993; Edin & Reed, 2005; Peters & Massey, 1983). Considering core tenets of the mundane environment stress and vulnerability–stress–adaptation models, one might expect Black women to alter their relationship orientations and behaviors in response to structural inequalities in employment, education, and the marriage market (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Peters & Massey, 1983).

Moreover, these results concerning women's independence reflect broader societal trends. Indeed, the rise of the feminist movement has validated work as a source of a woman's self-fulfillment and a means to achieve independence from men (Edin, 2000). The evidence is mixed, however, on whether

increased participation of women in the labor force explains a decline in marriage (e.g., Edin & Reed, 2005; Fossett & Kiecolt, 1993; Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, & Landry, 1992; Lichter et al., 1991). Though Black women have traditionally worked in the labor force to help sustain their families, over time women have become more self-reliant and less likely to marry solely for financial support (Jones, 1985; White, 1985).

Other findings related to gender relations draw attention to troubling conditions among Black men that challenge the probability of marriage. As corroborated in previous work, the men discussed the detrimental effects of male incarceration on relationship formation and maintenance (Clayton & Moore, 2003; Harknett & McLanahan, 2004). Poorer labor market opportunities for men were also cited as a factor; scholars have documented a decline in well-paying jobs, as well as an increase in unemployment and underemployment among Black men (Browning, 1999; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Marks et al., 2008). Many of the men in this study also noted how Black women, on average, have experienced greater social mobility than Black men as evidenced by higher educational levels and employment status, which is supported by other work (Banks, 2011; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Burton & Tucker, 2009). Other respondents expressed their concern with some Black men not meeting their responsibilities relative to work, family, and education; these issues have been outlined in previous work as well (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Burton & Tucker, 2009; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Hill, 2004; Marks et al., 2008). Regardless of the social inequalities they face, Collins (2000) asserted that Black men still must be held accountable for how they treat women, children, and each other.

A number of the Black men interviewed for this study focused on the role of individual factors. More than one third of the men reported the need for marriage education and socialization, and how its absence may contribute to an increased proportion of Black women not marrying (e.g., Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Moreover, according to social exchange theory, adults will only marry to the

extent that they value marriage as offering more rewards than costs (Hopkins-Williams, 2007). Existing work in the marital literature addresses how trends in family formation may negatively influence an individual's readiness for marriage (Dickson, 1993). Broken and fractured relational bonds are a critical factor to consider, especially in communities where there is a prevalence of single-parent households as in the Black community. The lack of exposure to long-term relationships may challenge some Black adults' ability to form such relationships (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011).

Another 23% of the study participants noted the importance of being developmentally ready for marriage (Hill, 2004). According to Holman and Li (1997), marriage readiness is socially constructed and, in part, dependent on whether an individual has achieved specific developmental milestones such as educational achievement and job security. They also discussed other work citing the significance of positive childhood experiences in preparing adults for marriage, including quality parent-child and family relationships. Indeed, as corroborated by the participants in the current study, the basis for trusting intimate partners later in life is set early in a person's development (Ables & Brandsma, 1977). Developmental perspectives emphasize the critical role of parents and caregivers in the socialization of children in this regard (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1995; Bowlby, 1979; Bryant & Conger, 2002; Erikson, 1950).

Relative to gay/lesbian relationships, a small sample of men (15%) discussed the preference for engaging in homosexual intimate ties and the "down-low" phenomenon. Banks (2011) has also written about the negative impact of the "down-low" phenomenon on long-term unions. The consequences of same-sex partnering on declining numbers of mates available to partner in the marriage market has also been highlighted in earlier work (Staples, 1985). This consideration in mate selection may increase the imbalanced sex ratio in the Black community.

There were a few limitations to this study. First, the results may not reflect the opinions of Black men residing in different regions of the United States, Black men from different

ethnic groups, Black men with different relationship preferences, or Black men of different religious backgrounds. Second, the sample was nonrandom. Third, the sample represents a group of highly committed married men whose attitudes and values may be considered promarriage. Although the data were collected in northeast Georgia and metropolitan Atlanta, a part of the Bible Belt, we cannot assume that all research participants were highly religious. Level of religiosity was not a basis for recruitment (Beach et al., 2011; Hurt, 2012). In the final section, we outline several conclusions and future directions for study.

### *Conclusions and Future Directions*

This qualitative study explored 52 Black men's opinions as to why there is a disproportionate number of single Black women. Indeed, concerns about this imbalance have received considerable attention in the popular media. Moreover, although there has been significant attention to Black relationships in the research literature, no known empirical study has investigated this issue directly with a sample of married Black men. This study's results confirmed and extended previous findings relative to the strain in gender relations between Black men and Black women (e.g., Browning, 1999; Pinderhughes, 2002; Staples, 1987). The men also mentioned, to a lesser extent, other factors that may exacerbate the conflict between Black men and Black women, including lack of marriage education and socialization, individual development, and a preference for gay/lesbian relationships.

These results validate key considerations that challenge relationship formation and maintenance between Black men and women, which have been identified in prior work. This study extends the findings of previous research by presenting the results of qualitative interviews of 52 married Black men about these issues. By drawing on the men's own voices, we were able to illustrate not only the main themes that emerged from the data, but also the tone of the Black men's responses. Their reactions showed compassion and deep concern about the complexity of the issues

facing Black women and men when forming long-term intimate relationships. Reflections on their personal experiences on relationships and the social conditions needed for developing long-term relationships with Black women have provided a richer understanding of the issues under study. The men's discussions have also offered insight into how the relational dynamics between Black men and women may unfold in certain circumstances.

Future studies could test these qualitative findings quantitatively using a more representative sample to determine the generalizability of the results. Other inquires might employ samples of single Black women or men who might be amenable to marriage to comment on the issues under study (South, 1993). This would help to advance the field in important ways. Future research projects exploring the singlehood of Black women could include samples of couples in order to explore the viewpoints of both partners in the dyad. Future projects might include an intervention program to test the effectiveness of marriage education, marriage enrichment, and relationship development for Black women and men as well as Black youth (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Such programs could help build relationship skills among adolescents and adults, encourage conversations between Black men and Black women in mixed group settings about gender roles, and foster healing among persons who recall different experiences in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood that impede relationship formation (Aborampah, 1989; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Equally important, scholars could work with policy makers and legislators to address structural social inequities (e.g., unemployment and underemployment, incarceration) that often challenge enduring relationship formation and maintenance in the Black community (Aborampah, 1989; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011).

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