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The Qualities That Black Men and Women Most Appreciate about One Another: A Qualitative Examination

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THE QUALITIES THAT BLACK MEN AND WOMEN MOST APPRECIATE ABOUT ONE
ANOTHER: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Masters of Science

in

The School of Social Work

by
LaKeshia Marie Carhee
B.S., University of Louisiana, 2012
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Abstract

Given increased media interest in the relationships that exist between African American men and women, few studies to date have examined the characteristics that Black men and women most appreciate in one another. Since emerging adulthood is the time in life when many individuals are contemplating marriage and date with the goal of finding a suitable marriage partner, this study will examine the qualities that Black men and women highly value in one another, which may lead them to eventually marry. Through the use of Value Theory, this study will examine the qualitative responses of 24 (17 females; 7 males) Black men and women, aged 18-29 to the question: “What characteristics do you most appreciate about African Americans of the opposite sex?” Qualitative analysis resulted in the following three themes: (1) *Value of Strength and Candor*; (2) *Value of Mutual Understanding and Sensitivity*; and (3) *Value of Leadership and Protection*. Supporting qualitative data are presented in connection with each of the aforementioned themes.

Introduction

Currently, there are more single individuals in America than in any other time in history. According to the U. S. Census Bureau, there were 102 million unmarried people in America 18 years of age and older in 2011, and this group comprised 44.1 percent of all U. S. residents 18 and older (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Interestingly, the high number of singles in America has prompted television shows that feature the dating experiences of this unique demographic. For example, popular American reality television dating game shows such as *The Bachelor* (2002-2014) and *The Bachelorette* (2003-2014) are evidence of society's interest in the romantic lives of singles. The aforementioned reality television dating game shows have primarily featured Caucasian couples, however, the romantic relationships of Black men and women have received an increasing amount of attention, as well. Case in point: Several years ago, the Black American actor, comedian, entertainer, and television/radio personality Steve Harvey wrote the best-selling book *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man: What Men Really Think About Love, Relationships, Intimacy, and Commitment* (2009). This book spent 28 weeks on the New York Times Best Sellers list (New York Times Best Sellers List, 2009) and resulted in two films (*Act Like A Lady, Think Like A Man*) Released on April 20, 2012; *Act Like A Man Too*, Released on June 20, 2014), which to date have grossed \$91,547,205 million and \$69.3 million in the United States and Canada, respectively. Although these television shows and films have become of notable interest in relation to singles, it seems that producers may have lost sight of interest in family television. In the mid 1980's the *Cosby Show* (1984-1992) was one of the most popular sitcoms in which the show focuses on the upper-class African American, Huxtable family. Also, popular in the late 1980's was *A Different World* (1987-1993) that focused on the lives of college students, as well as the romantic relationship of two Black college students.

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively examine the qualities that Black¹ men and women value in one another, and there are at least three reasons why this topic is important. First, although society has seen an increase in the number of single individuals, African Americans are less likely than members of other racial groups to marry, more likely to marry later in life, spend less time married, and are more likely to get divorced and become single parents (Dixon, 2009). Studies show that while 35% of Americans between age 24 and 34 have never been married, that percentage increases to 54% for African Americans in the same age group. Furthermore, married couples head 76% of our American families, yet African American married couples head only 47.9% of American American families (African American Healthy Marriage Initiative, 2014). Since Blacks are less likely than Whites, Hispanics, and Asians to marry, and more likely to become single parents, understanding the factors that may encourage Black men and women to enter romantic relationships with one another is worthy of scholarly attention. Second, given Blacks interest in marriage (Chaney, 2009; 2011;2012;2014a;2014b; Chaney & Fairfax, 2013a; 2013b; Chaney & Francis, 2013; Chaney & Marsh, 2009; Chaney & Monroe, 2011) as well as the increased federal interest in encouraging marriage among African Americans (Chaney, 2012), this work can further the goals of policy by highlighting the qualities that are especially valuable to Black men and women. Since emerging adulthood is the time in life when individuals generally develop romantic attachments to others (Ahmed & Brumbaugh, 2014; Arnett, 2007), federal initiatives such as the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI) can use this information to highlight the qualities that Blacks in this stage in life value and are associated with marital commitment and stability (Phillips, Wilmoth, & Marks, 2012). Finally, this study will provide a strong counter-narrative to the myth that Black men and women are not interested in romantic commitment by highlighting the qualities that African American

¹ The terms “Black” and “African-American” will be used interchangeably in this thesis.

men and women most value in one another (Hill, 2005). Given the current void that exists in the scholarly literature related to the qualities that Black men and women value in one another, this study will be led by the following question: What characteristics do Black men and women most value in one another?

Review of Literature

A growing body of scholarly research has explored various aspects of Black male-female relationships. For example, scholars have explored the relationship between Afrocentricity, individual, and couple outcomes (Kelly, 1998), correlates of relationship satisfaction, marriage expectations, and relationship longevity among unmarried African American and Black Caribbean (Caribbean Black) adults in a romantic relationship (Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2008), as well as the salience of emotional support from extended family among nationally representative samples of African American and Black Caribbean adults (Taylor, Brown, Chatters, & Lincoln, 2012). In particular, data from the National Survey of American Life investigated relationship satisfaction and their relation to extended family relations (i.e., emotional support and negative interaction) among two groups of unmarried persons—those who are cohabiting and persons who are unmarried/non-cohabiting—in addition to married persons. This study revealed that emotional support from extended family is positively associated with relationship satisfaction for married and cohabiting African Americans and Black Caribbeans who are romantically involved. On the other hand, negative interaction from extended family was associated with lower relationship satisfaction for married, cohabiting, and romantically involved African Americans and for married Black Caribbeans (Taylor et al., 2012).

Other studies have identified typologies by which Black men and women relate to one another. For example, Dixon's (2014) qualitative study explored the perspectives of Black men in a fatherhood program regarding the joys and struggles of their intimate relationships with Black women. Using purposeful sampling, participants were fathers who were currently in or had been in relationships with a Black woman, identified as Black themselves, and were members of an urban fatherhood program. The behavioral types included dominating, rejecting,

trying (but defeated), and committing. Inductive analysis of the data resulted in four major themes: ambivalence, issues of control, negative media messages, and pride in fatherhood. Essentially, these Black men exhibited positivity and a desire to develop and maintain healthy relationships with Black women. In addition, they also displayed pride and optimism regarding fatherhood. Based on the findings in this study recommendations for practice are offered, as are recommendations for further research (Watson, 2012). African American Relationships and Marriage Strengthening (AARMS), a curriculum that consists of 10 core areas, was developed to be used for relationships, premarital, and marriage education courses and programs. This scholarly work provided an overview of the rationale for each component of the AARMS curriculum, with the specific goal of providing a framework and strategies for developing an African American relationships course that can be taught at the university or college level or for relationship, premarital, or marriage education for community and faith-based organizations (Dixon, 2014).

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood has been proposed by scholars as a new conception of development from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on ages 18–29 (Ahmed & Brumbaugh, 2014; Aquilino, 2006; Arnett, 2000; Chassin, Pitts, & Probst, 2002; Côté, 2006; Hendry & Kloep, 2010; Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). In addition, emerging adulthood exists demographically, subjectively, and in terms of identity explorations because young people reside in a culture that grants them a prolonged period of independence (Arnett, 2004). In general, emerging adulthood exists due to the introduction of the birth control pill and less stringent standards for sexual morality, an increase in the number of years devoted to higher education, and perhaps more important, due to the “profound change in how young people view

the meaning and value of becoming an adult and entering the adult roles of spouse and parent” (Arnett, 2004, p. 6). All in all, these factors extend the time that individuals in emerging adulthood actually transition into adulthood through job stability, marriage and parenthood.

According to Arnett (2004), emerging adulthood encompasses the following five features:

(1) It is the age of *identity explorations* (of trying out various possibilities, especially in regard to love and work); (2) It is the age of *instability*; (3) It is the most *self-focused* age in life; (4) It is the age of *feeling in between*, in transition, neither adolescent or adult; and (5) It is the time of *possibilities*, when hopes flourish, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives. (Arnett, 2004, p. 8)

Basically, emerging adulthood is the time in life when an individual comes to a greater awareness of self by exploring relationships and opportunities in life.

The growing scholarship related to emerging adulthood has focused on the psychological, emotional, behavioral, and social changes experienced during this stage in life. DeZutter, Waterman, Schwartz, Luyckx, Beyers, Meca, and Caraway (2014) investigated naturally occurring profiles based on two dimensions of meaning in life: Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning. In this study, 8,492 American emerging adults (72.5% women) from 30 colleges and universities completed measures on meaning in life, and positive and negative psychosocial functioning. These scholars found that individuals in this stage of life showed specific patterns in relation to positive and negative psychosocial functioning. Specifically, respondents with profiles high on Presence of Meaning showed the most adaptive psychosocial functioning, whereas respondents with profiles where meaning was largely absent showed maladaptive psychosocial functioning. In other words, this study found that emerging adults whose lives had more meaning functioned mentally and socially better than emerging adults whose lives had little meaning. Essentially, this study provided evidence for the salience of Presence of Meaning and Search for

Meaning, and their relation with psychosocial functioning among emerging adults (Dezutter et al, 2014).

Another study focused on the relationship between emerging adulthood and self-esteem. Chung, Robins, Trzesniewski, Nofie, Roberts, and Widaman (2014) examined the development of self-esteem in a sample of emerging adults ($N = 295$) followed longitudinally over 4 years of college. Participants also rated, at the end of their 4th year, the degree to which they thought their self-esteem had changed during college. On average, self-esteem levels dropped substantially during the 1st semester ($d = .68$), rebounded by the end of the 1st year ($d = .73$), and then gradually increased over the next 3 years, producing a small ($d = .16$) but significant mean-level increase in self-esteem from the beginning to the end of college. Furthermore, individuals who received good grades in college tended to show larger increases in self-esteem. On the other hand, individuals who entered college with unrealistically high expectations about their academic achievement tended to show smaller increases in self-esteem, despite beginning college with relatively high self-esteem. With regard to perceived change, 67% reported that their self-esteem increased during college, whereas 12% reported that it declined; these perceptions tended to correspond with actual increases and decreases in their self-esteem scale scores ($r = .56$). Overall, the findings support the perspective that self-esteem, like other personality characteristics, can change in systematic ways while exhibiting continuity over time among individuals in the emerging adulthood phase of life (Chung, Robins, Trzesniewski, Nofie, Roberts, & Widaman, 2014).

Ahmed and Brumbaugh (2014) examined how best friend attachment representations influenced perceptions of new relationship partners in emerging adulthood. These scholars discovered that close friendships influenced anxiety (both attachment and avoidance)

experienced specifically with friend-like others, while parental relationships affected feelings of anxiety toward a variety of people. Furthermore, several relationship factors, such as the importance of the friend relationship, moderated the transference process. Our findings suggest that emerging adults' current relationships have an impact on their reactions toward novel individuals, and emerging adults' feelings about their existing relationship partners color their future social experiences (Ahmed & Brumbaugh, 2014). While emerging adulthood has been associated with developmental changes and serious problems for some, this stage of life is generally positive because it gives individuals the opportunity to find meaning in life, set personal goals, and establish what is valuable in relationships (Arnett, 2007).

Value Theory

Essentially, values influence what is important to individuals. While each person has their own set of values, the importance of these values may vary among individuals. However, it is important to recognize that a value that may be important to one person may be less important to another. Examples of values for which individuals may have different views are financial security, independence, altruism, wisdom, success, and relationships (Ferssizidis, Adams, Kashdan, Plummer, Mishra, & Ciarrochi, 2010; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Furthermore, when prioritizing values, it is important to know the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic values (commonly referred to as instrumental values).

An intrinsic value is something that is good “in and of itself,” i.e., not merely as a means to acquire something else. An example of an intrinsic value is happiness, because being happy is good because it's good to be happy, not because being happy leads to anything else. Something is considered an extrinsic or instrumental value if it provides the means for acquiring something else of value. For example, being wealthy or working a financially rewarding job is only good to

the extent that it provides the means for an individual to acquire something else (e.g., material possessions, recognition from others, financial security). Distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic (instrumental) values can be traced back to in Plato's dialogue, *Republic*. In the *Republic*, Socrates stated that there can be no "communion" between "extravagant" pleasure and virtue (Plato & Jowett, 1941). This was also discussed in the *Philebus*, where Philebus argued that pleasure is the highest good, Socrates argued against this, claiming that pleasure is better when accompanied by intelligence (Plato & Jowett, 1941).

Several noteworthy empirical studies have examined the salience of intrinsic and extrinsic values. Twenge, et al (2010) examined the work values of a nationally representative sample of U.S. high school seniors in 1976, 1991, and 2006 ($N = 16,507$) representing Baby Boomers, Generation X (GenX), and Generation Me (GenMe, also known as GenY, or Millennials). These scholars revealed leisure values increased steadily over the generations (d comparing Boomers and GenMe = .57), and work centrality declined. Extrinsic values (e.g., status, money) peaked with GenX but were still higher among GenMe than among Boomers ($d = .26$). Interestingly, and contrary to popular press reports, GenMe did not favor altruistic work values (e.g., helping, societal worth) more than previous generations. Social values (e.g., making friends) and intrinsic values (e.g., an interesting, results-oriented job) were rated lower by GenMe than by Boomers (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010).

In their examination of how motives and commitment to social values influence well-being in men and women of different ages, Ferssizidis et al. (2010) had college students and older adults report on their motivational orientation (intrinsic vs. extrinsic), behavioral commitment to idiographic social values, and their current well-being (satisfaction with life, positive and negative affect). Consistent with self-determination theory, these scholars found that

behavioral commitment to intrinsically motivating social values was related to greater life satisfaction and positive affect, whereas being committed to extrinsically motivating values was related to greater negative affect. While age and gender did not moderate these relationships, meaningful age and gender differences emerged across value-based motivations, commitment, and indices of well-being (Ferssizidis et al. 2010). Therefore, from a sociological standpoint, value theory encompasses the beliefs held by (within) the community and how those values might change under particular circumstances. In regards to African American male and female relationships, the qualities that these individuals value in each other could largely determine the entrée and maintenance of their romantic partnerships, which may ultimately lead to marriage.

Methodology

Research Design

To identify the themes that were presented within this paper, all narrative responses were content analyzed using grounded theory and an open-coding process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Holsti, 1969; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), and themes were identified in the narratives. In order to clearly extract themes from the written responses, words and phrases were the units of analysis. Specifically, coding involved examining all responses, keeping track of emerging themes, assigning words and symbols to each coding category, and examining how the themes presented were related to the values of the men and women in this study. To assess the reliability of the coding system, a list of all codes and their definitions along with the written responses was given to an outsider who then coded the transcripts based on this pre-determined list of codes. The outside coder was selected due to their experience with coding and analyzing narrative data. After a 98% coding reliability rate was established between the researcher and the outside coder, it was determined that a working coding system had been established. In order to sufficiently control for reliability, a second outside coder was selected to code and analyze the narrative data after the initial coding reliability had been established. The reliability established between the second author, and the two outside coders was 97%.

Participants

Twenty-four (24) individuals participated in the study, and of this number, There were seventeen (17) females and seven (7) males. The participants ranged from 18-29 years; the mean age was 20.5 years; and the average amount of education was 15.3 years. Twelve (12) participants were juniors (67%), three participants were sophomores (17%), two participants were seniors (11%), three participants were graduate students and three participants were

working professionals. Fifteen participants (62.5%) were single/never married; eight participants (33%) were in romantic relationships; one participant (2.25%) was married; and one participant (2.25%) was married, but separated. The average length of relationships was 24 months. Twenty-three participants (96%) did not have children while one participant (4%) had a child (six years old). Seven (29%) participants were Baptist; six participants were Christian (25%); five participants were Catholic (21%); three participants were Non-Denominational (12.5%); one participant was Non-Denominational Christian (6.25%), and one participant did not claim a religious affiliation (6.25%).

The participants represented various disciplines. Three participants (17%) were psychology majors, two (11%) were biology majors, two (11%) were business majors with one pursuing their MBA, and two (11%) were nursing majors. In addition, there was also a child and family studies major (.05%), a chemistry major (.05%), an engineering major (.05%), an accounting major (.05%), an ISDS major (.05%), a Spanish major (.05%), a kinesiology major (.05%), a visual and performing arts major (.05%), a criminology major (.05%), and a mass communications major (.05%). Fifteen participants (62.5%) were raised in two-parent homes, while nine (37.5%) participants were raised in single-parent homes. Participants had annual incomes in the \$10,000 - \$40,000 range. The identity of all participants was protected through pseudonyms.

Presentation of the Findings

Grounded theory analysis of the data revealed three emergent themes: (a) *Value of Strength and Candor*; (b) *Value of Mutual Understanding and Sensitivity*; and (c) *Value of Leadership and Protection*. The “*Value of Strength and Candor*” theme included words and/or phrases related to an appreciation of the mental strength and determination of Black men and women as well as the ability of these individuals to speak openly and honestly about what is on their minds. The “*Value of Mutual Understanding and Sensitivity*” theme included words and/or phrases related to an appreciation for the ability of Black men and women to understand the unique experiences associated with being African American and sympathetically support one another during these experiences. The “*Value of Leadership and Protection*” theme included words and/or phrases related to an appreciation for the ability of Black men and women to successfully manage their homes and to protect the individuals within that home.

Value of Strength and Candor. Thirteen individuals (7 males; 6 females; or 54% of participants) used words and/or phrases related to an appreciation of the mental strength and determination of Black men and women as well as the ability of these individuals to speak openly and honestly about what is on their minds.

Three participants (2 females and 1 male) appreciated the openness of Black men and women. Sydney a 21 year-old, senior (majoring in Spanish, reared in a two-parent home, and who identified as Christian) shared: “I appreciate that many African-American males are outspoken, and not afraid to express what they are feeling, but when outspokenness converts to arrogance or ignorance it defeats the purpose.” Jaclyn a 20 year-old, undergraduate student (majoring in Kinesiology, reared in a single-parent home and who identified as Baptist): “I appreciate most of their bluntness. Most men tell it like it is, in most situations. Women have a

tendency to beat around the bush, but men say what they need to say and get it over with. They also do not hold onto things as much as women do.” Christopher, a 20 year-old student, (studying Biology, reared in a two-parent home, who did not identify with any particular religion) definitively shared: “The candor that they express their interests with.” Also sharing an appreciation of expression was Destiny, a 20-year old undergraduate student (studying Business Management from a two-parent home who identified as a Non-denominational Christian): “I appreciate a man who loves God and is not afraid to express his love and live for God.”

Four participants (1 female and 3 males) shared their appreciation of strength in a Black man or woman. One female participant, Glenda (26 years old, graduate student in Juvenile Forensic Psychology, reared in a two-parent home, and identified as Baptist) said: “I love their strength, dedication to provide, and their will to endure.” Trayvon (29 years old, graduate student, management, single-parent, Catholic, has been in a relationship for 5 years) stated: “I really appreciate the strong will of Black women.” Terrence (19 years old, sophomore, mass communications, with a focus in Public Relations, two-parent, Catholic): “Their support and the way that they can handle everything and stay strong.” To extend the three aforementioned statements in regards to strength, one man appreciated the independence of Black women. Daniel, a 20-year old undergraduate student (studying Chemistry from a two-parent home who identified as a Baptist) had this to say: “I love the sense of independence that I see in AA women. It is easily one of the most attractive qualities ever. It’s like the fact that you don’t need me for anything makes me want to do more for you.”

Two participants went in-depth regarding their appreciation for the racial identity of Black men and women. The Black woman was appreciated in her totality by Zion a 20 year-old undergraduate student (studying Child and Family Studies, from a two-parent home, who

identified as Christian). He provided this view, “In my opinion, there isn’t a stronger individual than the African American woman in America. No one is disrespected, dismissed, or disregarded more than this woman, yet they have always risen above the circumstances of their existence and done the best with what life has given them, when other women would have crumbled under the weight of life’s troubles.” An appreciation for the many dimensions of the Black man was provided by Tiana, a 20-year old undergraduate student, (studying Psychology, from a two-parent home, identified as Baptist) who said:

I appreciate the strength of the African American male. This includes his ability to succeed in the midst of all of the negative forces around him. My definition of strength does not include the lack of emotion, but the ability to not act on every emotion. It takes a strong Black man to succeed in this White patriarchal society and I applaud every one that does.

Two participants shared the same appreciation of having goals and ambition. Jeremiah, a 20-year-old, undergraduate student (studying Psychology/Sociology, has been in a romantic relationship for 3 years, reared in a single-parent home and who identified as Christian) stated: “I love the ambition, confidence and thinking of Black women.” Tiffany (29 years old, working professional, single-parent, identified as non-denominational Christian) who said: “I most appreciate a man with short and long term goals who is articulate and passionate about life and his plans and who gives back to the community.”

One man appreciated the self-awareness of a Black woman. Oscar (29 years old, graduate student working on Master’s in Business Administration, currently separated, two-parent home, identified as Baptist) shared: “For those who do possess a sense of self awareness, I think the strength they possess is admirable.”

Value of Mutual Understanding and Sensitivity. Five individuals (all female, or 21% of participants) used words and/or phrases related to an appreciation for the ability of Black men

and women to understand the unique experiences associated with being African American and sympathetically support one another during these experiences. One woman appreciated the warmth of Black men yet desired that these men demonstrate strength and be more focused in their lives. Tayla (25 years old, single-parent, identified as Christian) shared: “They are kind, loving, sweet, helpful, when they want to be. I just would like to see more of them become men instead of run away from problems and actually do something with their lives.” The sensitive, caring nature of Black men was appreciated by Hailey, a 22-year old undergraduate student (studying Visual/Performing Arts from a two-parent home who identified as a Non-denominational Christian) who said: “Gentleness, I like feeling safe knowing that a man won't hurt me but will be there for me and that I won't be abandoned.”

While Tayla and Hailey focused on the caring nature of Black men, three women particularly appreciated the mutual understanding between Black men and Black women. Makayla, a 20-year old undergraduate student (studying Child & Family Studies from a one-parent home who identified as Non-denominational) said: “The mutual understanding of what's wanted/needed in a relationship or most appreciated.” In an extension of Makayla's assessment, another female valued the ability of Black men to understand her culture. Assyria, a 20-year old undergraduate student (studying Accounting from a two-parent home who identified as Baptist) expressed herself in this way: “They tend to understand my culture (food, holidays, and slang) better than others.” The ability of Black men to personally relate to her was supported by another female. Cicely (29 years old, faculty member, married for 4 years, reared by a single-parent, and identified as a Unitarian Universalist) provided this comment: “What I appreciate most is that the African American male can relate to me in a way that men of other nationalities simply cannot.

If only we (African Americans) could all be fully emotionally healthy. What a wonderful world it would be!”

Value of Leadership and Protection. Six individuals (25% of participants) used words and/or phrases related to an appreciation for the ability of Black men and women to successfully manage their homes and protect the individuals within that home. Specifically, two women prized the leadership that Black men provide while four women esteemed the “protective” nature of Black men. In regards to leadership, or the ability of Black men to effectively manage their households, Ciara (20 years old, Biology/Pre-Med, who was reared in a single-parent home, and Catholic) said: “Leadership, when a man properly assumes his position as head of house.” For Jayla, a 20-year old undergraduate student (studying Nursing from a two-parent home who identified as Catholic): leadership involved demonstrating a work ethic that is based on personal improvement and passion. She expressed herself in this way: “I love an African American’s work ethic. If there is something they love to do, then they usually work to perfect it and put all their heart into it.”

While Ciara and Jayla stressed the salience of Black male leadership, other women placed greater emphasis on the ability of Black men to defend their families. Chloe, a 20-year old undergraduate student (studying Psychology from a two-parent home who identified as Baptist) said: “African American men seem to have a protective instinct.” Lucinda, a 20-year old junior (studying Criminology, who was reared in a single-parent home and identified as Christian) shared: “I love that black men are strong, and are very protective of their women.” Like Chloe and Lucinda, Michelle, a 22-year old senior (studying Child and Family Studies from a two-parent home and identified as Catholic) valued the protective nature of Black men. She shared the following: “I appreciate that when he is passionate about something it shows. I also

appreciate that he will take up for his and be a protector.” Like Chloe, Lucinda, and Michelle, Laila, a 20-year old undergraduate student (studying Criminology, from a two-parent home who identified as a Non-Denominational Christian) respected the protective nature of Black men. She expressed herself in this way: “The characteristic that I appreciate the most would be that African American males are very protective over their significant others and would defend them during a time of need.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine the qualities that Black men and women value in one another. At the beginning of this thesis, I placed this topic within the context of three broad sociological realities. The first reality was related to the exceptionally high number of African-American men and women, as well as their decreased likelihood to marry and remain married (Dixon, 2009). The second reality was related to the increase in federal initiatives that encourage marriage, but most of all, marital stability (African American Healthy Marriage Initiative, 2014). The last reality was related to the assumption that because they represent such a large unmarried group that Black men and women do not value one another (Hill, 2005). This study builds on the literature related to the romantic relationships of African-Americans by focusing on the factors that may motivate them to initiate, develop, and maintain monogamous relationships over time. In the paragraphs that follow, I will discuss the implications of the three previously-mentioned themes for young Black men and women in emerging adulthood, namely *Value of Strength and Candor*, *Value of Mutual Understanding and Sensitivity*, and *Value of Leadership and Protection*.

Theme 1: Value of Strength and Candor

Based on the comments, provided by a substantial number of men and women in this study (13 individuals, 7 males and 6 females), strength and candor are important qualities to seek in a potential romantic partner. Since the majority of the men and women in this study (15 out of 24, or 62.5% of the participants), were reared in two-parent homes, they may perceive the strength and candor demonstrated by both parents to be instrumental in keeping these families together. On the other hand, even among the nine (37.5%) participants raised in single-parent homes, these young people may have been advised by their parents to seek a strong romantic

partner or they may have witnessed the strength that their parent demonstrated during financial and emotional hardships. Therefore, the strength that was verbally encouraged by their parent as well as their appreciation for the inherent hardships (i.e., financial, emotional,) associated with this form of parenting may motivate these emerging adults to establish and rear children in a stable, two-parent household. Interestingly, although one of the Black females in the study was reared in a single-parent (e.g., mother-headed) household, she did not hold an inherent preference for how women generally behave. For example, Jaclyn stated: “I appreciate most of their bluntness. Most men tell it like it is, in most situations...” This response not only demonstrates Jaclyn’s appreciation of the candor of Black men but perhaps hints to her desire that Black women be more outspoken in their dealings with others.

Interestingly, two participants (1 male; 1 female) who were both reared by single parents described strength in relation to ambition. For example, Jeremiah and Tiffany’s description “...I most appreciate a man with short and long term goals who is articulate and passionate about life...” or “I love the ambition, confidence and thinking of Black women,” may be associated with them personally witnessing the strength and determination that was necessary to help them successfully achieve their goals.

Theme 2: Value of Mutual Understanding and Sensitivity

Interestingly the criteria for a potential mate for five females (Tayla, Hailey, MaKayla, Assyria, and Cicely, or 21% of participants) involved mutual understanding and sensitivity. Specifically, Assyria, and Cicely both described their interest in a potential mate who understood their culture. In particular, comments related to appreciating the ability of Black men to ‘understand their culture (food, holidays, slang) better than others’ or an awareness that Black men can ‘relate to them in ways that men of other nationalities simply cannot’ suggests the

intrinsic need for Black women to have a Black mate who can relate to and support their racial/ethnic identity. However, something these statements may be related to something greater. Since Blacks are substantially more likely to experience racism than other racial group (Black, Johnson, & VanHoose, 2014; Feagin, 2014), Black women may especially value being in a romantic relationship with a Black because they perceive that he will help them more easily cope with their realities as Black women. In regards to sensitivity, Hailey preferred a Black man who can provide a stronghold of safety and assurance. Recall that she said, “Gentleness, I like feeling safe knowing that a man won't hurt me but will be there for me and that I won't be abandoned.” Hailey’s comment suggests that for young Black women in emerging adulthood may find that the type of relationship they established with their father may directly (or indirectly) motivate them to seek out a mate that will make them feel physically and emotionally safe.

While the majority of narratives were focused on the positive aspects of Black men, one female provided commendation that was tempered with criticism. Recall that Tayla appreciated the “kind, loving, sweet, helpful” spirit of Black men yet expressed the desire “to see more of them become men instead of run away from problems and actually do something with their lives.” This comment reveals that while Black women greatly value the sensitivity of Black men, they may perceive a divide between what Black men and women ultimately want from their lives and relationships. Stated another way, although Black women may value the ability of Black men to demonstrate their vulnerability, they may be unwilling to forfeit being in a relationship if their prospective romantic partner has no solid life plan. This further suggests that young, Black women in emerging adulthood are aware that a strong relationship should be built on more than romance, but rather extrinsic characteristics that will facilitate relationship stability. Thus, it

seems that securing a man that understands them provides Black women with the emotional, social, and cultural capital that they need to initiate and sustain a romantic relationship over time.

Theme 3: Value of Leadership and Protection

In support of the findings revealed by Chaney and Francis (2013), several women used leadership and protection to describe the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics they found most valuable in Black men. Four women (Chloe, Lucinda, Michelle, and Laila, which made up 25% of the participants) all agreed that having a Black man who protects them is an attractable trait in their potential mate. For example, “African American men seem to have a protective instinct” or “I love that black men are strong, and are very protective of their women,” as provided by Chloe and Lucinda speak to an intrinsic value that Black men are supposed to protect their mates, families and homes. While Laila respected the protective nature of Black men and their ability to lead and protect stating, “The characteristic that I appreciate the most would be that African American males are very protective over their significant others and would defend them during a time of need” which suggest that some young, Black women were raised that a man is supposed to protect you during opposition.

Notably, only one participant (Jayla), responded with her interest in work as a means of leadership. “I love an African American’s work ethic. If there is something they love to do, then they usually work to perfect it and put all their heart into it,” suggest that a man’s role as a leader should consist of working as a mean of protecting the family and/or his mate financially.

Limitations of the Current Study

This study had several limitations. For one, the small sample size and inequities in the number of men and women who participated makes it difficult to generalize the findings of this study to African American men and women in the general population. Also, as the overwhelming

majority of participants had annual incomes less than \$40,000 dollars, the findings in this study cannot be generalized to African Americans who enjoy higher annual incomes. In addition, as only one of the participants had a child, one must also be cautious when extending the findings of this study to college-educated Black men and women who do not have children. Furthermore, as the majority of the participants professed some form of Christianity (e.g., Baptist, Christian, Catholic), the findings in this study cannot be generalized to African Americans within these religious faiths, other Christian faiths, or those that are non-Christian. Moreover, as the majority of the participants were secured from a Primarily White Institution (PWI) in the south, it is possible that African American college students from other PWI's in the south or other regions of the country may have provided different perspectives. Lastly, as the overwhelming majority of the young men and women in this study were reared in two-parent homes, the perspectives provided by these individuals cannot be transferred to African Americans reared in single-parent homes. However, in spite of these limitations, this study extends existing scholarship related to strength, mutual understanding, and leadership, among college-educated African Americans by highlighting the qualities they most value in one another and would make relationship entry worthwhile.

Directions for Future Research

There are five ways that future studies can expound upon the findings that have been presented here. First, future research should seek the perspectives of a more diverse group of Black men and women. Through exploring the views of Blacks who represent different ages, marital and parental statuses, geographic regions, educations, religions, and socioeconomic levels, future research may reveal more varied themes than the ones presented in this study. Second, future studies should utilize longitudinal designs to determine whether the intrinsic and

extrinsic values established by Black men and women change or remain stable over the life course. Future work in this area may reveal that depending on the most salient need of their life at that time, intrinsic and extrinsic romantic values that may be largely linked to financial, psychological, emotional, religious, or psychosocial needs. Third, since the overwhelming majority of the men and women in this study were single/never married, this begs future scholars to examine whether the intrinsic and extrinsic values of Black men and women are linked to perceptions of their current marriage, perceptions regarding marital decline, or perceptions regarding their prospective marriage, if and when they decide to marry. Fourth, while the current study focused on the subjective values that Black men and women perceive in one another, future studies should examine the characteristics these individuals least value in one another. Last, future studies should more closely examine the relationship between what Black men and women value in one another and the degree to which their parent and/or parental figure exemplified these qualities during their formative years. Invariably, the dating and mate selection choices of African Americans may be linked to these parental qualities, and may ultimately determine whether the costs and benefits of Black romance and/or Black marriage are truly worth the effort.

Conclusion

The young Black men and women in this study are on the brink of entering committed relationships, symbolizing this commitment via marriage, and rearing children of their own. As they transition into the roles as partners, spouses, and parents, it is important that scholars understand the characteristics that Black men and women most value in one another. Regardless of whether these values are intrinsic or extrinsic in nature, they influence the timing of romance, and ultimately marriage. While some may believe that Black men and women are not interested in romantic commitment, and thus see little value in one another (Hill, 2005), the findings in this study provide strong evidence that Black men and women truly value their ability to be strong and honest with one another, to be sensitive toward and mutually understand one another, as well as lead and protect one another.

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Appendix

Informed Consent

To Participants in the “**Living Single in the African American Community**” Study

This form is to invite you to participate in the “**Living Single in the African American Community**” study and to explain its procedures. The purpose of this study is to better understand the romantic decisions made by single, unmarried African Americans. As a participant, you will be asked to respond to a series of questions regarding Black romance and marriage.

You are being asked to complete a survey that will last approximately thirty (30) minutes. You will be asked 18 questions and your responses to the questions will be confidential. There will be minimal risks from participating in this study. Participating in this study will give you an opportunity to share your views regarding relationships. There will be approximately 100 individuals participating in the study.

All information collected from you will be kept confidential. All forms will be given an identification number with names omitted to secure confidentiality. Only the principal investigator will have access to the name and corresponding code. Those analyzing the data will not have access to the names. There will be no reference to individual identity any time when the information is reported.

The study is intended to learn about how you feel about relationships. It is **not** an evaluation and there are no expected or correct answers. You are free to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequence. The results of the study will lead to a clearer understanding of how unmarried African Americans feel about romance and marriage. These results will guide the design of the next phase of this research.

Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records. If you have questions about the study at any time, you can contact me, Cassandra Chaney, at Louisiana State University at 225-578-1729 (cchaney@agctr.lsu.edu). You may also contact the Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board (at 225-578-8692 or <http://www.lsu.edu>) if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

I sincerely thank you for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Cassandra Chaney

Cassandra Chaney, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Assistant Professor
School of Human Ecology
Family, Child and Consumer Sciences
Louisiana State University

Monday, March 19, 2012

Date

By signing below I agree to participate.

Signature of Participant

Date

Demographic Questionnaire

Date_____

ID#_____

Instructions: *Please answer the questions below as accurately and completely as possible as this information is important to my understanding of African American relationships. All answers will be kept strictly confidential and your name will not be attached to this form.*

1. Gender: [Place an X by the appropriate response].
 - a. _____ Female
 - b. _____ Male

2. Age_____

3. Classification (Freshman; Sophomore; Junior; Senior; Graduate Student; Law Student)_____

4. University_____

5. Major_____

6. Are you a first generation undergraduate or graduate student? (Yes/No)_____

7. What is **your** highest level of education?
 - a. _____ Less than high school
 - b. _____ High school graduate/GED
 - c. _____ Some College
 - d. _____ College graduate
 - e. _____ Advanced degree
 - f. _____ Other [Please Specify _____]

8. What was the highest level of education of **your parents**?
 - a. _____ Less than high school
 - b. _____ High school graduate/GED
 - c. _____ Some College
 - d. _____ College graduate
 - e. _____ Advanced degree
 - f. _____ Other [Please Specify _____]

9. Were your parents married? (Yes/No)_____

10. Have you ever been married before? (Yes/No)_____

11. Are you currently in a romantic relationship? (Yes/No)_____

12. If yes, how long have you been in this relationship
(Months/Years)_____
13. How many children do you have?_____
14. The type of home in which you were reared (single-parent; two-parent, reared by
relatives)_____
15. Religion_____
16. Occupation_____
17. **(Optional)** What was your total income before taxes last year? [Place an X by the
appropriate response].
- | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|---|-------------------|----|--------------------|
| 1 | under \$10,000 | 5 | \$40,000-\$49,999 | 9 | \$80,000-\$89,999 |
| 2 | \$10,000-\$19,999 | 6 | \$50,000-\$59,999 | 10 | \$90,000-\$99,999 |
| 3 | \$20,000-\$29,999 | 7 | \$60,000-\$69,999 | 11 | \$100,000 or above |
| 4 | \$30,000-\$39,999 | 8 | \$70,000-\$79,999 | | |

“Living Single in the African American Community” Study

The purpose of this survey is for you to share your views regarding African American relationships. This information can help researchers, scholars, and policymakers better understand the relationship choices of single African Americans. **Please provide as much information as possible.** In advance, I thank you.

1. Do you believe that **most** single African Americans want to get married? Please provide a rationale for your response.
2. Would you like to get married one day? If yes or no, please provide a rationale for your response.
3. Do you expect to get married one day? If yes or no, please provide a rationale for your response.
4. What are the **greatest benefits** of marriage?
5. What are the **greatest drawbacks** (negatives) of marriage?
6. What would motivate you to get married?
7. What qualities must a potential marriage mate possess? Please share why these qualities are important to you.
8. Do you think **African American women value marriage more than African American men**? Please provide a rationale for your response.
9. Do you think **African American men value marriage more than African American women**? Please provide a rationale for your response.
10. Do you think **single people are happier than married people**? Please provide a rationale for your response.
11. Do you think **married people are happier than single people**? Please provide a rationale for your response.
12. Do you think African Americans generally value marriage **more, less, or equal to** racial-others (e.g., Caucasians, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans). Please provide a rationale for your response.
13. What are the **greatest challenges** of African American male-female romantic relationships? Please provide a rationale for your response.

14. What do you **most enjoy** about being single? Please provide a rationale for your response.
15. What do you **least enjoy** about being single? Please provide a rationale for your response.
16. What characteristics do you find **most frustrating** about African Americans of the opposite sex? Please provide a rationale for your response.
17. What characteristics do you **most appreciate** about African Americans of the opposite sex? Please provide a rationale for your response.
18. Do you think it is best for African American men and women to be in romantic relationships and/or married to one another? Please provide a rationale for your response.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

IRB Approval

Project Report and Continuation Application
(Complete and return to IRB, 130 David Boyd Hall.
Direct questions to IRB Chairman Robert Mathews 578-8692.)



Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8592
F: 225.578.5583
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

IRB#: 2989 Your Current Approval Expires On: 10/23/2013

Date Sent: 9/3/2013

Review type: Expedited Risk Factor: Minimal

PI: Cassandria Cheney Dept: Human Ecology Phone: 578-1729

Student/Co-Investigator:

Project Title: Living Single: The Romantic Choices and Marital Attitudes of Unmarried African Americans

Number of Subjects Authorized: 40

Please read the entire application. Missing information will delay approval

I. PROJECT FUNDED BY:

Non-Applicable, LSU proposal # N/A

II. PROJECT STATUS: Check the appropriate blank(s), and complete the following:

- 1. Active, subject enrollment continuing; # subjects enrolled: 30
- 2. Active, subject enrollment complete; # subjects enrolled: _____
- 3. Active, subject enrollment complete; work with subjects continues.
- 4. Active, work with subjects complete; data analysis in progress.
- 5. Project start postponed
- 6. Project complete; end date: ___/___/___
- 7. Project cancelled; no human subjects used.

III. PROTOCOL: (Check one)

- Protocol continues as previously approved
- Changes are requested*
 - * List (on separate sheet) any changes to approved protocol.

IV. UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS: Did anything occur that increases risks to participants?

- > State number of events since study inception: 0 since last report: 0 (N/A)
- > If such events occurred, describe them and how they affect risks in your study.
- > Have there been any previously unreported events? Y/N? No
- (if YES, attach report describing event and any corrective action).

V. CONSENT FORM AND RISK/BENEFIT RATIO:

Do new knowledge or adverse events change the risk/benefit ratio? Y/N: N
Is a corresponding change in the consent form needed? Y/N: N

VI. ATTACH A BRIEF, FACTUAL SUMMARY of project progress/results to show continued participation of subjects is justified, or to provide a final report on project findings.

VII. ATTACH CURRENT CONSENT FORM (only if subject enrollment is continuing); and check the appropriate blank:

- 1. Form is unchanged since last approved
- 2. Approval of revision requested here (in); (identify changes)

Signature of Principal Investigator:

Cassandria Cheney Date: 9/6/2013

IRB Action:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuation approved	Approval Expires:	7/12/17
	<input type="checkbox"/> Disapproved		
	<input type="checkbox"/> File closed		
Signed:	<i>Robert Mathews</i>	Date:	9/15/13

Vita

LaKeshia Carhee was born in Springfield, Illinois. She is the daughter of late Jeanetta Carhee and Roderick Williams and Jenell Carhee-Simpson and Eddie Simpson. Louisiana and the sibling of DaNielle Carhee, JaMarcus Bryant, JaCorey Williams, JaKieldrick Williams, and the late Jarvis Howard. LaKeshia attended Pleasant Hill Elementary and Jefferson Middle School both in Springfield, Illinois, and Mansfield High School in Mansfield, Louisiana. She received her Bachelor of Social Work from University of Louisiana at Monroe in Monroe, Louisiana. From there, she went on to pursue her Master of Social Work from Louisiana State University. She performed her field work at Woman's Hospital (Social Services). LaKeshia resides in Shreveport, Louisiana with her family and friends. She is now employed as a Multi-Systemic Therapist for Family Services Unlimited in Shreveport, Louisiana. She is an active mentor in the Mansfield community where she hopes to continue to empower and encourage students to further their careers by the way of higher education.