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Afrika Cotton
Does Internalized Racism Affect the
Mate Selection Process of African
American Men and Women?

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to determine if internalized racism, which can be seen as self-stereotyping, colorism and low self-esteem, affects the mate selection process of African Americans who are pursuing heterosexual relationships. A qualitative interview guide, that contained demographic questions and 23 open ended questions plus a set of picture questions, was administered to 15 African American men and women from the North and the South. Participants were interviewed to assess their responses about heterosexual mate selection within the African American community. The questionnaire contained culturally sensitive information to determine if internalized racism affects participants mate selection process.

The findings of the study showed areas in which internalized racism does affect the mate selection process. The possible effects of internalized racism were admittedly conscious in some ways and unconscious in others. Additionally, there was evidence that colorism is still evident in the African American community.

DOES INTERNALIZED RACISM AFFECT THE MATE SELECTION PROCESS OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN?

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2014

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This descriptive, cross-sectional, exploratory qualitative study was an attempt to determine if internalized racism affects the mate selection process of African American men and women. The purpose of the study was to highlight specific racial characteristics that may be (identifiable) to African Americans and determine if these are viewed positively or negatively by the pursuing mate. The concepts of internalized racism, stereotypes and colorism and how these may influence African Americans will be reviewed.

This study was an attempt to explore the attributes African American men and women find pleasing, attractive and/or inviting about potential mates. While this study did not fully address the multitude of factors that could possibly attribute to the mate selection process or internalized racism, it is a starting point for future discussions.

Fifteen African-American men (7) and women (8), seven from the South and eight from the North, participated in a qualitative interview about mate selection. All interviews were audio reordered for the use in transcription. The interview guide contained three sections. The first section obtained demographic information from each participant. The information was gathered prior to the beginning of the questionnaire section of the interview. The second section was a qualitative interview consisting of 23 open-ended questions regarding mate selection. The third section consisted of pictures questions used to ascertain the participants opinions of physical attractiveness. One of the

women's interviews was accidentally deleted and so her demographic information and responses to the picture questions were not used in this study.

Due to the limited amount of this kind of research, there are many people who stand to benefit from these findings including but are not limited to African Americans looking to be involved in a romantic relationship, couples counselors, social workers, and/or any one working as a clinician with the African American community. Most important, the implication for the social work profession is that clinicians may not be aware that internalized racism may be operating as part of the presenting problem when working with African American clients. Adhering to the social work practice of person-in-their environment, recognizing the part that internalized racism plays in the lives of African Americans is important. Clinicians utilizing traditional methods of therapy when working with African American clients in the areas of marriage, conflict resolution or issues around self-esteem, may naively reject internalized racism as a contributor to underlying resentments. Thus, internalized racism may be an unaddressed but critical issue in treatment. Because internalized racism can also be unconscious, it may be the core issue of many problems and because there is shame associated with talking about racism and race the core issue will go unaddressed. Internalized racism is missing from the discussion around marriage and family formation.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This qualitative study explored whether internalized racism had any effect on the African American mate selection process. The following chapter is a review of the previous literature. The first section presents the definition of key terms used in the current study. The literature regarding African American mate selection is limited. Therefore, previous studies are presented that offer some insight into mate selection and the limitations, concerns and struggles that African Americans may experience when traversing through this process. Next a general overview of the mate selection process will be offered. This will lead into a comparison and contrast of character traits between men and women. Pertinent factors that affect the mate selection process in the African American community will be assessed, such as the low sex ratio, high incarcerations of African American males, and the education gap between African American men and women. Next, areas of socialization such as media and familial influence will be assessed to provide background information about how viewpoints are formed. Finally, internalized racism will be discussed and will touch on some points of characteristically African Features, and some stereotypes of African Americans.

This study is an attempt to understand the complexities of the mate selection process and how living in a culture of overt and subvert racism can possibly affect that way members of a less dominate culture and view each other. While this study will not full address all of the factors that contribute to the mate selection process within the

African American community, the hope is that it will spark productive conversations and be a catalyst for further research.

Definition of Key Terms

In order to fully understand internalized racism, we must first define racism. The Oxford University Press dictionary (2012) defines *racism* as “the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races”. Miller and Garran (2008) note that “racism does not fit into neat exclusive categories, and that all forms of racism coexist together simultaneously.” (p. 30). They postulate that racism fluctuates and exists on a spectrum that ranges from intrapersonal to societal. *Intrapersonal racism* is how a person processes the prejudices, biases, attitudes and beliefs about him or herself from the dominant culture. This leads to internalized stereotypes of superiority and inferiority that are both conscious and unconscious (Miller & Garran, 2008).

So, what is internalized racism? *Internalized racism* is the process of adopting other peoples’ stereotypical beliefs about oneself or the community in which a person belongs. The effects of internalized racism can be seen as color prejudice (or shadism), self-hatred, low self-esteem, and a belief in stereotyping (Miller & Garran, 2008, p32). However, internalized racism is not limited to just these factors because even people with high self-esteem grapple with it, as it includes navigating daily in a system of oppression that maintains a system of power and privilege by limiting resources and advantages of the oppressed (Bivens, 2005). Speight (2006) refers to Williams and Williams-Morris’ (2000) definition of internalized racism as “the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves” (p. 129).

Stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics of a group of people based on our need to categorize and/or compartmentalize. They can be positive or negative; however, all stereotypes are toxic (Miller & Garran, 2008).

In this study the terms *colorism*, *color prejudice* and *shadism* will be used interchangeably. According to Wilder and Cain (2010) “colorism is defined as an intra-racial system of inequality based on skin color, hair texture, and facial features that bestows privilege and value on physical attributes that are closer to white” (p. 578). Esmail and Sullivan (2006) noted African Americans go through great pains to alter their physical features to look more “white”. The use of bleaching creams is utilized to lighten (or promise to lighten) darker skin. Additionally, chemical creams and straightening (hot combs) are used to straighten natural curly or kinky hair textures to mimic the straight hair textures of white people.

Mate Selection

In Jones and Ratterman’s (2009) article, *Mate Choice and Sexual Selection: What Have We Learned since Darwin*, *sexual selection* is defined (as cited in Darwin, 1871), “[Sexual selection] depends on the advantage which certain individuals have over other individuals of the same sex and species, in exclusive relation to reproduction.” (p.100001). In other words, the male species compete and the victor gets the prize, the female of the species. However, modern day mate selection has become more complex. As a society, humans have transitioned from the traditional definition of sexual selection of mating exclusively for reproductive purposes. Humans participate in the ritual of mate selection. As humans we choose mates for all sorts of reasons. Current trends show that

the desire to find a partner no longer resides solely on the need to reproduce or even to marry.

The process of mate selection involves choosing from the available single people around you, one with whom you would want to partner. When choosing a mate, most people follow the rules of *homogamy*, “choosing someone of similar attraction, background, interest and needs” (Cheney, 2009, p 3) and also *heterogamy*, choosing someone with different traits. Humans are social creatures and, as such, belong to various social groups, family, friends, communities, school, work, etc. all of which influence our values beliefs and behaviors. This process is known as *socialization* (Britannica, 2013).

The method of choosing a mate is often guided by values and beliefs that are inherent in our social groups. Other factors outside of our family and friends also influence our choice of mates like socioeconomic status, education, career, political affiliation, age and race (Ross, 1997). Schoen and Cheng (2006) noted that men and women seek “attractive partners, with reflecting social values and prevailing patterns of social stratification” (p. 2).

Historically, marriage has become the logical outcome of mate selection. However, marriage rates in the United States have dramatically decreased in the last 40 years. According to Pew Research, in the 1960’s, over 80% of people have participated in the ritual of marriage whether they were married, widowed or divorced. However, based on the same report, in 2010, barely half (51%) of the American population were married and the percentage of never married individuals increased from 15% in the 1960’s to 28% by 2010. The statistics are greater for the African American community. In 1960 61% of African Americans were married compared only 31% of African American marriages in

2010 (Cohn, et al 2011). There are some assumptions that one cause of low marriage rates in the African American community may be attributed to the lack of desire to get married. Based on the previous research (Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003 & Ross, 1997), African American's desire to marry may not be the cause of low marriages rates. The availability and quality of mates may be the problem. The low sex ratio between African American men and women leads to a limited number of available males in which to form a relationship. Additionally, due to high incarceration rates and low rates of African American males pursuing higher education, the quality of available mates may be considered subpar.

Not much research has been dedicated to African American mate selection. This sentiment is further corroborated in the few research articles dedicated to the subject (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003; & Ross, 1997). As Ross (1997) noted, little research has been done that examined successful relationships within the African American community. Marbley (2003) quoted Karenga (1982) and Aboramph (1989) stating that the state of African American relationships or the lack thereof, deserves some attention (p. 28). Based on the literature, there are several factors that heavily influence the African-American mate selection process. These factors are: 1) low sex ratio where women outnumber men, 2) social economic status, 3) parental and peer pressures, 4) unhealthy relational conflicts, 5) high incarceration of African American men and 6) the education gap within the African American community (Dixon, 2009; Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003; and Ross, 1997). Some studies have addressed the subject of racial and/or skin color conflicts within the mate selection process of African Americans (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Ross,

1997), Ross (1997) and Esmail & Sullivan (2006) looked at mate selection preferences among African American college students. They found that African American men preferred lighter skinned women whereas African American women preferred medium to darker complexioned men. However both studies were limited in their ability to tie the psychological effects of racism in how it can possibly alter the perceptions African Americans have of each other (Ross, 1997). Esmail & Sullivan's (2006) qualitative findings show a possible relationship between the skin color/complexion of the parents of the participants to their skin color preference. The findings also noted that some participants were aware of the historical implications of color issues in the African American community.

Another limitation to the research (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003; and Ross, 1997) is that the majority of the studies were done on college age students (17-25). However, King and Allen (2007) did a more expansive search and the average age of their participants was 34. Additionally, other research has shown that African Americans get married later than their White counterparts (Dixon, 2009). So limiting the research on African-American mate selection to college age students does not reflect the actual the mate selection process within the African American community.

Character Traits and Gender Differences

In a review of the literature, men and women appear to want similar traits in a mate. Both men and women are looking for someone who is well educated, financially stable, honest, monogamous, independent, and attractive (Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003; and Ross, 1997). However, in most studies (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006;

King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003) physical attractiveness was more important to men than it was to women, whereas higher levels of education and financial stability were more important to women (Marbley, 2003).

Women have been taught to “marry up”. With more and more African American women obtaining higher degrees, they want potential mates to match their success. Most researchers agree that the most important characteristics that African American women look for when choosing a mate are higher levels of education and financial stability (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Dixon 2009; Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Ross, 1997; and Wilson et al 2007). For African American women, physical attractiveness in their mates may not be as important as other characteristics. According to King and Allen (2007),

Some social scientists agree that Black women are no different from other women in Western, industrialized nations with respect to the qualities they seek in a marital partner. They want someone who is well-educated, financially stable, physically attractive, independent, monogamous, faithful and respectful. (p.574).

Studies revealed that financial instability is a weak point for Black men. Due to the fact that a significant amount of African Americans grow up with limited financial means, a long-term financial commitment to another person who may also come from a similar background is not a desirable characteristic (Marbley, 2003; South, 1993). However, as King and Allen (2007) pointed out, little research has been done on the personal characteristics that African American men and women seek in a potential marital partner. To date, no studies were found that looked at internalized racism and whether it plays a part in determining if a potential partner is “marriageable”.

Some traits mentioned throughout the literature are economics, education, past incarcerations, desirability and children (Allen & King, 2008; Chambers & Kravits, 2011;

Dixon, 2009; South, 1993). Allen and King (2008) did a quantitative study exploring the characteristics African American look for in a mate. Preferred traits in a mate were, “reliable, monogamous, affectionate, financially stable, African American, confident, religious, and spiritual” ranked high (p. 580). Allen and King (2008) also noted that skin shade and history of incarcerations were important to add to future research since it was missing from their survey. They also did not do a qualitative interview, which would have been beneficial in this study.

Low sex ratio

Ross (1997) noted that “in most cultures women outnumber men” (p. 556) and the ratio of African American men to women has garnered recent attention. In America, there are approximately 93 African American men for every 100 African American women aged 18-44 (Census 2011 ACS estimates). This ratio equals roughly 528,596 more African American women than men. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Minority Health report (2011), the largest concentration of African Americans are in the South, with over 55% of the African American population residing in that region of the United States. The CDC report further identified 11 states (Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Maryland, South Carolina, Alabama, New York, Florida, Texas, California and North Carolina) plus the District of Columbia (DC) as having a large percentage of African-American residents. Of those states, DC had the largest gender imbalance with 83 men for every 100 women. California, on the other hand, was the only state where African American men outnumbered African American women in the age range of 18-44 with approximately 97 women to every 100 men (Census 2011 ACS estimates) However, these numbers do not factor in the high death rates and/or high incarceration rates of

African Americans, specifically African American men. King and Allen (2007) found that the death rates of African American men between the ages of 15-44 are nearly twice that of African American women (p. 571). Also not factored are those African Americans 1) who identify in any way other than heterosexual (i.e. homosexual, transgender, and transsexual) or 2) who prefer to date interracial. The education imbalance between African American women and men (Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003; and Schoen & Cheng 2006) further reduces the pool of eligible partners, making the gap in the ratio larger.

Marbley (2003) postulates that because African American women outnumber African American men; men may view this shortage as an advantage for them that may lead to a lack of commitment in their present relationships. Additionally, the shortage of Black men creates a feeling of competition among African American women. Thus creating the option of African American women accepting a “piece of a man”, the part-time intimacy and support of a shared man, or none at all (Miller & Browning, 2000).

Incarceration

“While people of color make up about 30 percent of the United States’ population, they account for 60 percent of those imprisoned” (Kerby, 2012). The United States has the highest incarceration rates in the world; with African American rates of incarceration being the highest in the nation (Miller & Browning, 2000). According to the National Institute of Justice based on data from the Pew Center on the United States (2008), 1 in 9 Black men between the ages of 20-34 were behind bars and 1 in 15 are incarcerated if one accounts for Black men 18 years and older. This number is much higher when compared to their White counterparts. The incarceration rate for white men 18 and older

is 1 in 106. The rates of incarceration for African-American women are also higher compared to other races/ethnicities (Solomon, 2012). Kerby (2012) also noted “according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1 in 3 Black men can expect to go to prison in their lifetime”. This situation has repercussions that can be attributed to racial profiling, institutional and structural racism. Kerby (2012) notes that African American students face harsher punishments in schools and have higher numbers of youth in the juvenile justice system. Additionally, political policies unfairly target certain crimes that affect people of color leading to longer jail/prison sentences. Once released from jail, African Americans face difficulties obtaining jobs due to their criminal record or if employed, face wage disparities in their earnings growth that is 21% slower than their White counterparts (Kerby, 2012; Solomon, 2012)

Findings from several studies (Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003 & Ross, 1997) confirm that the high rate of incarceration of African American men affect the mate selection patterns of African Americans. The stigma of past incarcerations further tarnishes the social status of an underrated minority (African-American males) resulting in damaging effects on interpersonal skills, the family unit, economic resources and the African American community as a whole (King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003). On the other hand, King and Allen (2007) discovered some evidence showing that men with previous incarcerations are still considered dateable, even marriageable. King and Allen made reference to Miller and Browning’s (2000) research conducted with 286 African American women in the Cincinnati, Ohio area. Miller and Browning (2000) discovered that due to a woman’s social status and her perceived perception of the lack of available men led to a decision to pursue relationships with men that have had previous

incarceration(s). Given that 1 in 15 Black men ages 18 years and older were incarcerated in 2008, it is understandable why Black women would consider pursuing a relationship with a man with a previous incarceration.

Education gap

The low sex ratio is exacerbated by the education gap between African American men and women. According to the 2012 Census figures, African American women are pursuing and obtaining advanced degrees in higher numbers than African American men (Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003; and Schoen & Cheng 2006). The notion that African American women are obtaining degrees in high numbers may be due to the fact there are more African American women than there are men. Nevertheless, studies (Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003; and Schoen & Cheng 2006) show that African American women who pursue higher education are looking for mates with the same or higher education level. King and Allen (2007) surveyed 344 (212 women and 132 men) African Americans in the Ohio and Pennsylvania area. King and Allen's (2007) survey contained 15 questions (12 Likert and 3 open ended statements) based on a literature review on African American's mate seeking preferences. The purpose of their exploratory study was to develop a better understanding of the qualities African Americans seek in their marriage partners. The findings showed that the African-American women in the study responded that economic stability and completion of formal education were important characteristics when looking for their mates. In addition, Holland's (2009) qualitative study of African American single mothers enrolled in college found that the participants would rather stay single than to be involved with a mate that did not match their educational achievements.

Schoen and Cheng (2006) note the empirical evidence that supports the historical notion that African-American women are taught to “marry up” which may be difficult given the gender and educational imbalance that currently exists. The 2012 Census data for educational attainment for African Americans shows that for every 100 Black women with a Bachelors degree or higher, there are only 66 Black men. When considering the numbers by degree level, at the bachelors level there are 70 men for every 100 women, at the Masters level there are 50 men for every 100 women and for professional degrees (i.e. Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.), Doctor of Medicine (M.D.), Master of Divinity (M.Div.) etc.) there are 81 men for every 100 women. Only at the doctoral degree level do you see a reverse in which men outnumber women with 85 women for every 100 men.

“Many African American men suffer from two handicaps of their minority status: race and class” (Marbley, 2003, p. 17). To increase his status, an African American man may pursue a woman of perceived higher status - a White women (Schoen and Cheng, 2006) There is a belief within the African American community that professional, highly educated and/or more affluent African American men tend to date and marry interracially. Given the increasing number of single African American women who are pursuing advanced degrees, interracial marriage may add to lack of available professional Black men (Marbley, 2003). Marbley’s study addressed this topic directly. Marbley’s (2003) qualitative study was done with 6 professional African American men who had earned an advanced degree between 21 and 41 years of age. Six participants is a very small sample, this limiting generalizability. The purpose of the study was to obtain African Americans men’s perspective on how an advance degree affected their mate selection. The men in Marbley’s (2003) study reported that they preferred African

American women; but they also agreed that Black men choose White women as a status symbol. Schoen and Cheng (2006) cite this finding as evidence of an increase in interracial marriages stating that, “White women marry up substantially more with respect to education when marrying a Black man than when marrying a White man” (p 2). These responses do provide some initial insight into the perceptions of African American men, especially in an area that lacks research. Marbley (2013) also asked about the small number of African Americans compared to White pursuing advanced degrees on college campuses. Although some of Marbley’s (2013) participants did admit to feeling intimidated by Black women, they stated that as they progressed further in their schooling and or career the field of African Americans they encountered on that level greatly thinned out. These men were often placed in situations where they were the only Black person in their class. Due to the rigorous course load associated with advanced degrees, the men stated that they needed to remain focused, which limited their chance to socialize with other Black women at their level. The men said dating anyone is difficult when you are pursuing a degree at that level, so you tend to gravitate to those who are closer to you. Due to the limited amount of African Americans at higher levels of education, the sporadic nature in which they are assigned to classes, and the limited number of African Americans in the career fields that are produced by the higher levels of education, one may deduce that African Americans men in higher status positions may tend to date/marry outside of their race. This hypothesis could be supported by a finding in the Schoen and Cheng (2006) article that observed that when analyzing interracial marriages, white women who married black men either shared similar backgrounds or “married up”.

The choice to date and marry interracially may seem to be an option for African American men; but this is not necessarily so for African American women. In Porter and Bronzaft's (1995) study, African American women stated that their preference of a mate was an African American man. Porter and Bronzaft (1995) surveyed 70 African American college women between the ages of 17-21. The purpose of the study was to examine the future mating plans of African American women. Of the future plans of the respondents, 87% of the women wanted to marry an African American man and 7% stated that they would marry interracially due to the shortage of African American men. However of that 7, only 1% responded that they would marry a White man, the majority preferring to marry a person of color. Notably, 67% of the women responded that it is not acceptable for an African American woman to marry a White man due to the shortage of available Black men. Porter and Bronzaft's (1995) research conveyed the same sentiment in Holland's (2009) study that African American women would choose to be alone than be with someone who did not suit their preference.

Socialization Family and Community: Afrocentric vs. Eurocentric Values

So where do contemporary African Americans develop their notions about male/female relationships? As humans we are socialized. Spera and Matto (2007) defined *socialization* as "the transmission of skills, attitudes, values, customs, motives, roles, and rules from a diverse array of socialization agents (e.g., parents, teacher, peers, siblings, extended family members, and community leaders) to a target child" (p 551). According to the research, the media, institutions of higher learning and family units are key socialization agents in how we view others.

Media

The media has become a large part of socialization. Within societies, most often, the dominant group determines the messages that are incorporated into society. The dominant group within a society determines which norms, values and ideas that are considered “normal” within a society. Other cultural values that differ from the dominant group’s values are considered inferior (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Through media outlets (television, internet, magazines) the dominant group controls the predominant message that is disseminated to overall society. The media outlets can manipulate images and create language that reinforces the dominant group’s values and misrepresent subgroup culture (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Cultural media can influence knowledge because electronic information systems (smart phones, televisions, computers, etc) have become so ingrained into the everyday lives of the American people, the messages are easily transmitted and internalized by the general public. Russell et al. (1992) noted, “socialization and especially the media reinforces both ideal models for beauty and status” (Ross, 1997, p 566). Cultural media has the power to influence attitudes, perceptions and intentions that can lead to stereotypes and unrealistic expectations with little regard to “racial/ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic and geographical differences” (Rouse-Arnett, Dilworth, 2006). In America, African Americans have historically been presented negatively within the media. There have been few positive media messages, but these have been outweighed by the negative messages. Gender roles and sexual roles are presented in the media. The promotion of women as sex objects, particularly African American women is often portrayed as objects of sexual desire and objects of promiscuity (Rouse-Arnett & Dilworth, 2006). The absence of positive minority role

models within the media creates internalizing stereotypes that may taint the actual reality of the dynamics of the African American relationships (Holland, 2009). Euro-centric capitalism popularized through music and music videos promotes the belief that men with a lot of money can get a lot of women. And displays of wealth must be shown in material affluence such as designer/name brand clothes, jewelry and cars (Ross, 199). Materialism is then equated with a higher status level, which can lead to overcompensation within poorer communities to present as having more than they can afford. The spending beyond ones means traps the low-income community into a never-ending cycle of debt. Predatory lending companies and cash advance companies that are numerous within many African American communities easily prey many upon (Bianchi, 2012).

Family

Within in the African American community, family is an essential part of socialization (Wilder & Cain, 2010). Beliefs and values about the outside world as well as the dynamics within a family are shaped at home. Historically and presently, the extended family is instrumental to the functioning of the African American family. Wilder and Cain, (2010) and Dixon (2008) point to the extended family as being an instrumental part of African American families. Dixon (2008) noted that the extended family can be traced back to West Africa in which family bloodlines were valued more the conjugal ties. The prevalence of “other mothers and grandmothers have been essential in providing, economic and emotional support and often support in raising children (Wilder & Cain, 2010 and Dixon, 2008).

African American families are also more female centered. Wilder and Cain (2010) noted, “Black motherhood has traditionally been symbolic of community, strength and

power” (p 579). Historically African American women in the United States have always had to work to help to maintain their families. McCollum (1997) noted that the matriarchal image of the black woman grew from necessity. In slavery, all enslaved Africans, men, women and children alike, were made to work. In post slavery America, African American women still had to work to help to maintain their families due to social and political structures that often kept African American men out of the work force. This dynamic led to a shift in gender role expectations in African American families (Burgess & Horton 1993).

Presently, single women in the African American community account for more than 40% of the households (Wilder & Cain, 2010). With a high rate of single mothers within the African American community, extended families have become vital. With over 40% of households with children being led by single mothers, positive male/female relationships are very difficult to model. In Ross’ (1997) study there were many interesting findings. His research showed that more affluent families teach their children to marry based on characteristics that they could provide and sustain a relationship. Additionally he discovered that lower income African-Americans have been socialized to marry for love. However, Ross (1997) also noted that the higher the SES, the greater the family influence over mate selection. They are taught to “marry up” or choose someone of equal social status and not for love.

African American values and beliefs about relationships are developed and formed within the family unit. It begins through child rearing. There is this old adage within the African American community that mothers “raise their daughters and nurture (baby) their sons” (Sharp & Ispa, 2008). This way of raising children has potentially led to African

American women more focused and driven than men. Also the dynamics of a relationship is taught within a family. Traditionally in White America, men are taught to be masculine, independent, to control, protect and provide and for the family and display very little emotion. Whereas White women are taught to be feminine, display more docile characteristics and encourage nurturing, domestic tendencies (Sharp & Ispa, 2008). However, within the African American community, cultural values center on “interdependence, cooperation, unity, mutual responsibility and reconciliation” (Bell, Bouie & Baldwin, 1990, p.170). Eurocentric gender roles are difficult to maintain for African-Americans and thus cause conflicts within the relationship. Among African Americans who live in low-income areas, maintaining traditional White gender roles are nearly impossible. In contemporary American society men are supposed to be the providers for the family. The American dream is that if you apply yourself and work hard, then you can be something. This American dream does not account for institutionalized racism that places barriers in the way and makes financial and academic achievement difficult for African Americans, especially males. Diemer (2010), in his research about provider identity among African American men, discovered that African American men equate being a man to being able to provide for one’s family. This notion doesn’t strictly apply to only African American men, as this is a major part of the socialization process of males within contemporary United States. However, achievement of the provider role cannot be generalized across race and class. Discrimination and institutional/structural racism create hurdles that may prevent African American men from adequately attaining and maintaining the role of “provider”. Diemer (2010) noted that the frustration experienced due to an inability to successfully achieve this provider

status may lead to displays of hyper-masculinity that is characterized by “promiscuity, thrill seeking and violence” (p 32). When African American men fail to achieve provider status (that is easier to attain by their white counterparts), they are viewed negatively by society as a whole making them less desirable as a potential mate. Additionally, when African American women are the breadwinners, that negatively impacts the gender role dynamic within the African American households, leading to tensions within relationships (Marbley, Porter & Bronzaft, 1995).

Internalized Racism

Due to victimization during and post-slavery, most African Americans experience internalized racism of different degrees. Speight (2006) refers to Williams & Williams-Morris’ (2000) definition of internalized racism as “the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves” (p. 129).

A component of internalized racism is the rewards that African Americans may get for furthering the White institution of power and privilege (Bivens, 2005). The effects of internalized racism include color prejudice, stereotyping, self-hatred and low self-esteem. People with high self-esteem also grapple with the effects of internalized racism, as African-Americans navigate daily in a system of oppression that maintains power and privilege by limiting resources and advantages of the oppressed (Bivens, 2005). Nuru-Jeter et al., (2008) did a qualitative study with 40 pregnant African American women in the mid-California area. The study took place from May 2004 to April 2005. The women were separated into groups based on their use of public programs. The researchers felt that the women would be more open with their responses if they were more comfortable

with the similarities within their group. Using semi structured interview questions, the researchers aimed to see if racism had any effects on African American pregnant women since this group has such high rates of low birth weight and preterm delivery. The study was exploratory because there was limited research connecting the effects of stress from racism to African American women giving birth to healthy babies. During the interview the women shared a number of experiences with different forms of racism. One participant in particular reported on her struggles with internalized racism, she revealed, “I’m looking [at my son] going, ‘What have I done?’ My child is going to have to go through this life being Black” (Nuru-Jeter et al., 2008, p. 34) One participant shared that she wrestled with the idea of whether to put her child in a White school or a Black one because of the perceived superiority of the White school and the inferiority of the Black one. The women in this study dealt with a range of emotions when trying to process their encounters with racism, from outward bursts of anger to inward feelings of hopelessness. Most women tried to figure out how to navigate racial incidents without being labeled “the angry Black woman”.

According to Miller and Garran (2008), internalized racism exists on a spectrum ranging from intrapersonal (person) to state sanctioned (government). The intrapersonal level is “our internal process” (p. 31). It includes messages that we receive from birth to death. It’s the shows we watch, the music we listen to, the policies enacted, the lessons in school, etc. (Miller & Garran, 2008). These messages lead to stereotypes, conscious and unconscious, that we have about ourselves and other groups of people (Miller & Garran, 2008). Clinicians should be prepared for negative effects associated with internalized

racism and make connections, whether it's a part of the presenting problem or not (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1994).

Does internalized racism play a role in mate selection of African Americans? Allen and King (2008) in their study on personal characteristics of African Americans noted 1) a lack of research done on African American mate-selection preference and 2) a limitation in their study is in regards to skin, shades were not included.

Esmail and Sullivan (2006) conducted semi structured interviews with 100 African American 18 and 19-year-old college students at a midwestern university in which skin tone was a factor. The sample included 50 men and women. The purpose of the study was to assess the role skin shade played in the mating process. The interviews lasted about 20 minutes and they were asked about their preference in mate selection for dating and marriage. Similar to the Williams and Davidson (2009) study the participants were presented with pictures of African Americans. This study used photos from magazines and the pictures were placed in three categories light complexion, medium complexion and dark complexion. The participants were asked to select who they thought was most attractive. The men in Esmail and Sullivan's (2006) study navigated more toward the medium and lighter complexion pictures whereas the women navigated more toward the medium and darker complexion pictures, respectively. The men stated that they were simply more attracted to "light and medium skinned women" they also felt that these women "acted better". The women however, stated that in terms of physical attraction skin complexion was not most important characteristics. A smile, nice attire, hair, lips, height and his approach were things they found more important. Although, this study provided a glimpse of the African American mate selection process including skin tone,

Afrocentric features

Afrocentric features are physical features that are associated with stereotypical traits that directly distinguish African Americans from other groups (Blair, Judd, Sadler & Jenkins, 2002). Blair et al (2002) quoted “Although skin tone may be especially salient, there are other features that [are associated] with it, such as nose width, hair texture, and the fullness of one’s lips” (see Secord et al., 1956, p. 7). According to Thompson and Keith (2001), “skin color is highly correlated with other phenotypic features” (p. 337). Identifiable Afrocentric features, particularly skin color, have historically been discriminated against (Blair et al. 2002; Thompson & Keith, 2001; and Wilder & Cain, 2010). Lighter skin and or more European like features tend to be prized within the African American community and have been associated with attractiveness, high levels of social status and economic success (Blair et al. 2002; Thompson & Keith, 2001; and Wilder & Cain, 2010).

General stereotypes of African Americans

Stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics of a group of people based on our need to categorize and/or compartmentalize. They can be positive or negative; however, all stereotypes are toxic (Miller & Garran, 2008).

In an effort to create a reliable racism measure, Czopp and Monteith (2006) went through a six-study process with 4,404 University of Kentucky students. The students were enrolled in an introductory psychology class and were a part of a pool of subjects. The students received some form of class credit for participating in the research. The majority of the participants were White for each study, with a few minority students represented. The researchers did not exclude the responses of the African American

students because they found the results to be the same whether they left them in or removed them. The goal was to measure complimentary stereotypes (CS) against negative prejudice (NP). In study one the researchers' goal was to create a valid and reliable instrument that would do just that. Complimentary stereotypes were taken from the Princeton Trilogy (1995) study. These traits are that African Americans are musically and rhythmically inclined and they are athletic. Czopp & Monteith pulled several other CS from other studies to create additional list of traits; socially and sexually competent, possess coolness, are fashionable, hip, funny. The researchers then matched those traits with common negatively held beliefs Whites have about Blacks, (i.e. lazy, unintelligent and criminal). They added race-related policy issues and close interracial contact.

The instrument for the first study consisted of a 78-item questionnaire that asked participants which item they agreed with based on a 7-point scale. Six items received the strongest response. First was that African Americans are athletic. The second strongest point was the negative attitudes about interracial contact. Next were negative attitudes about race-related government policies and that Black people are inferior. The final two were positive attitudes around African Americas' coolness/sexuality and their rhythmic ability.

In the second study the Czopp & Monteith (2006) prompted participants to list subgroups, positive or negative about a given social group. All of the participants were given African Americans. From the variety of responses, the results were coded by two separate coders and put into the following groups. The positive groups were African Americans were athletic, musical/rhythmic (with rappers being the top reference), and cool/sexual. An extra category of "other positive" was created to put the additional

responses that did not fit into the other three positive categories. The negative groups were underclass (with ghetto being the top reference), deviant and annoying (with racists being the top reference in that category). An extra category of “other negative” was created to place additional negative responses that didn’t fit into the other three negative categories. An additional miscellaneous category was created to include responses that couldn’t be coded as either negative or positive. Out of the 67 White students who participated in this study 67% responded that they thought of African Americans as athletes, 46% as gangsters, 37% as rappers, 29% as smart/educated, 28% as good dancers, and 25% as racists. Although four of these top six responses are categorized as positive, Miller and Garran (2008) state all stereotypes are toxic. Czopp & Monteith also warn that, “People who are likely to praise Blacks for their supposed athletic and music ability are also likely to denigrate Blacks for their laziness and criminality” (p. 245).

Williams and Davidson (2009) discovered the unconscious internalization of stereotypes in African American children as young as 7 when doing a quantitative study with 38 first graders and 38 third graders in Chicago. Eighty were originally selected but four were excluded for not being African American so the “final sample of 7-year-olds consisted of 18 boys and 20 girls, and the final sample of 9-year-olds included 19 boys and 19 girls” (p. 368). The study focused on five areas; interracial stereotypes, intra-racial stereotypes, memory consistent and inconsistent traits, stereotype attribution task and skin tone assessment. In the area of interracial stereotypes the children were given six positive words (wonderful, happy, healthy, friendly, right helpful) and six negative words (cruel, sad, sick, unfriendly, wrong, selfish). The children were offered pictures of all African American children, Euro-American children and a mixed group of Black and

White children. The study found that the child participants more readily equated all positive words to the pictures of Euro-American (EA) only children and the negative words with the pictures of the African American (AA) and the mixed group of children pictures. When assessing Intra-racial stereotypes the children were given the same group of words. In this test the pictures consisted of light-complexioned children, dark-complexion children and a group with both light and dark complexion children. The positive traits were overwhelmingly assigned to the lighter complexion children. Unlike the first group in which the African American children and the group with both AA and EA children got the negative traits, in the assessment the darker complexioned children received all negative traits. The researchers performed an additional assessment to determine if the participants inter and intra racial stereotypes were correlated. The children were given another set of words, 6 positive (clean, smart, kind, good, pretty, nice) and six negative (bad, mean, ugly, naughty, stupid, dirty) and asked to assign them to the pictures of African American children who were light complexioned, dark-complexioned and a group with a mixture of both. The results showed that “children who held negative views of African-Americans and positive views of European-Americans on the interracial measure were more likely to hold negative views of dark-skinned African-Americans and positive views of light-skinned African-American” (p. 371). Interestingly enough, although the authors did not point this out, the children overwhelmingly thought that darker skin meant ugly (Williams & Davidson, 2009).

These stereotypes are so intrinsic and embedded that they can last throughout our lives. Nuru-Jeter et.al (2008) noted that issues of childhood racism had a long-term effect.

Can these experiences affect the thought process of mate selection among African Americans?

Summary

This literature review has examined mate selection, pertinent factors that affect the mate selection process in the African American community, areas of socialization and internalized racism. Social workers working in the areas of individual, family and couples therapy should have a basic understanding of how these factors affect African Americans

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative and exploratory study was to examine the mate selection process of African Americans between the ages of 18 and 44 to see if internalized racism – conscious or unconscious - is related to mate selection. This descriptive cross-sectional exploratory study attempted to highlight specific racial characteristics that may be (identifiable) to African Americans. Additionally, the study tried to determine if gender and geographical location makes a difference in selecting a mate.

The major research questions are: 1) Does internalized racism affect the mate selection process of African American men and women? 2) Were participants' reported undesirable or desirable characteristics of possible mates match the common stereotypes of African Americans portrayed in American society? 3) Was shadism practiced in the mate selection process amongst African American? 4) "Were there differences in the data among participants of different genders or geographic locations?"

Research Design

This was a qualitative study. I chose a qualitative design due to the exploratory nature of the research. The in-depth, narrative responses will allowed for a deeper understanding of the information being presented and allowed the participants more flexibility in their responses. Findings from this master's thesis may be used in a presentation to the Smith social work community and potentially in future presentations and publications.

Sample

This was a non-probability convenience sample recruited from the population of African Americans. The sample participants were taken from the larger African American population who were between the ages of 18 and 44. The participants in this study were comprised of 7 men and 8 women who identify themselves as African Americans. Three men and four women were from the regional South of the United States and three men and four women will be from the regional North of the United States. The participants had at least a 3 generational lineage of family born within the United State and all stated that English is their first language. The participants identified as heterosexual. Screening of potential participants was done via email to confirm selection criteria. Potential participants who did not meet these qualifications were sent a response email thanking them for their interest and informing them that they did not qualify for the research study.

Mixed ethnicity was an exclusion factor. Black people, who do not self-identify as African American, were excluded (i.e. Cuban American, Haitian American or Americans from Africa). Also excluded were Black people who claimed more than one ethnicity (Hispanic and African American or Caucasian and African American). An immigrant's experience, which may carry different values, was also excluded. Those who self-identified as homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender, queer or anything other than heterosexual were excluded. Children and teens not of legal marrying age and/or of legal age to consent to the survey were excluded. African Americans over the age of 54 were also being excluded. Although African Americas are still getting married past that age,

the desire to marry diminishes as the age increases. Economic status, religion, marital status and number of off spring were not exclusionary factors.

The sample size desired was at least 12 participants from various geographical areas and socioeconomic status for this qualitative study. However due to the exploratory nature of the study, the sample population was considerably smaller and thus the results will not be generalizable to the larger population.

Recruitment

The participants comprised a non-probability convenience sample from the population of African Americans. The recruitment process for this study began with a solicitation of assistance from 4 sources: my church, social media, a previous professor, and a community organizer. First a recruitment letter (Appendix A) was sent to the Administrator of the Shrine of the Black Madonna. This church has regions in Atlanta, GA, Houston, TX, Detroit, MI and South Carolina. This letter requested that an announcement to be made at the church service and a notice be placed in the church's bulletin directing people to contact me via email if they are interested in participating in the study. The church administrator agreed to help with the project. Second, a notice of participation was posted on my friends Facebook walls (Appendix B) soliciting help with a link to a description of the study and my email address. In addition, a request was made to all viewers of the notice to post the link on their Facebook page in order to garner more responses from potential participants. Very few reposts and minor interest feedback was obtained through this process. Thirdly, I sent the recruitment letter (Appendix A) to Ade Oguntoye, a community organizer in Atlanta, Georgia, to see if he could direct participants to the survey. The participants that he directed to the survey were not eligible

to participate. A similar recruitment letter was sent to Michael Funk, a local professor in the Massachusetts area. All potential participants were asked to forward the link through social media (email, Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr). A final recruitment letter was sent to Dr. Anthony Hill of Springfield College who agreed to help recruit but no participants surfaced from that contact.

Potential participants were asked to email me directly if they are interested in participating in the study. Once they contacted me, a return email was sent to the participant with a list of “Yes/No” screening questions (Appendix C). The screening questions ensured that the participants met the eligibility requirements for the study. If the participant did not meet the eligibility requirements, they received an email thanking them for their interest and informing them that they are not eligible. An informed consent form (Appendix D) was mailed out for the participants who met the eligibility requirements. However, this was only done for participants who did not live within driving distance for an in-person interview. Once the informed consent was signed and returned, an interview time was scheduled for the participant. For participants who were available for in in-person interview, the interview time was scheduled first and the informed consent was signed in-person before the start of the interview. A duplicate copy of the informed consent was given to the participant for record keeping.

All interviews were digitally recorded. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. Demographic information was also obtained from each participant before the start of the structured interview. All interview participants were asked at the end of the interview to forward the information to anyone that they knew.

Ethics and Safeguards, Risks and Benefits

There was an anticipated minimal risk of distress to the participants of the study from the nature of the questions being asked. One benefit for individuals participating in the survey is participants might think more critically about their mate selection process. The participants were allowed to answer the questions in an environment of their choice, which may have added to their comfort and sense of security when completing the interview. Some participants were able to participate from their own home via Skype. A list of websites advertising psychotherapy resources (Appendix E) was listed on the informed consent form that the participant may refer to should he/she experience psychological distress as a result of participation in this study.

Precautions Taken to Safeguard Confidentiality and Identifiable Information

Participation in this study was confidential. No identifiable information was used in the research. A pseudonym was assigned to each participant, and the informed consent forms were kept separate from data. The demographic information that was obtained from the participants is presented in summary form for the findings chapter. All data was kept confidential, with the exception of my research advisor, the research analyst and myself.

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by myself. All transcriptions and data files will be kept in a password-protected file for three years as required by Federal regulations, after which the data will be destroyed or kept secure as long as they are needed.

Data Collection

Data collection began after receiving the approval letter from the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (Appendix F). All participants were presented with the informed consent and were asked to read and sign it prior to participating in the study. The participants were instructed to keep a copy of the Informed Consent for their records. Once I received the signed Informed Consent, a date and time for an in-person interview or a Skype interview was set-up. The interviews lasted approximately between 30 minutes to an hour. Demographic information was collected from the participants at the onset of the interview.

The participants then participated in a semi-structured interview. The participants were given no compensation for their participation in the survey. I read directly from an interview guide to ensure that all questions were asked. Some probing questions varied between each participant depending on the nature of their need for clarification for a specific question.

The interview was comprised of three sections (Appendix G). The first section is the demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire asked for background information about the participants such as age, gender, location, employment, and current salary range, religion, number of children, highest level of education and previous marriages. The second section of the interview asked the participants a number of questions about what they like or dislike in a potential mate. The answers were coded for shadism, stereotypes and racialized self-hatred. The third section asked about qualities or characteristics that the participant felt were the most important or least important when looking for a mate. In the third section the participants were presented pictures of the

faces of African American men/women and were asked questions about their attraction to the photos (Appendix H and I).

The participants were instructed to respond to each question by saying the first thing that came to mind. They were told that there are no wrong answers but to try to be as honest and as thorough as possible in their responses. The participants were also given the choice to opt out of the interview at any time while the interview is being given. The participants were also informed that the interview was being recorded for transcription purposes.

Instrument

The interview guide was created after reviewing the literature available regarding African American mate selection. It was also modeled after the questions presented in the Internalized Racial Oppression Scale for Black individuals (Bailey, Chung, Williams, Singh, & Terrell, 2011). The questions were reviewed and edited by an expert in the field, Ann Marie Garran, Ph.D., co-author of *Racism in the United States* (2008). Two different people who were not in the sample piloted the interview guide. . The interview was slightly altered after the first pilot to adjust for time.

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The average interview time was 47 minutes. The interview guide was comprised of 23 open and closed ended questions. However, the participants were asked to elaborate on the closed ended questions. Probes were used to elicit additional information. Some additional probes were added based on the participants need for clarification. The interview also was comprised of picture questions, which assessed for perceived attractiveness. The

participants were asked to elaborate on what qualities they found attractive in the picture they selected.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the demographic information were analyzed and is presented in the Findings chapter. The responses obtained from the men and women from the open-ended questions in the interview were compared. The answers were also assessed for differences that could occur based on geographical location. The responses were looked at for two reasons, to gain information for what men and women look for in potential mates. The responses were analyzed for themes and keywords that reflected the definition of internalized racism. The interview also contained questions based on a set of pictures. The pictures were coded for shadism (light complexion, medium complexion and dark complexion). Consideration was also given to the facial features of the models in the pictures. The responses obtained from the questions were assessed based on skin complexion and then based on the facial features of the models determining if they mainly consisted of African or European features.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews conducted with fourteen African American men and women. The participants involved in this research were currently involved and/or seeking heterosexual relationships.

The interview questions were designed to illicit information regarding the participants' perceptions on their mate selection process. The goal was to analyze their responses on mate selection to determine if they contained themes of internalized racism. *Internalized racism* is the process of adopting/internalizing other cultures' stereotypical beliefs about oneself, community, and/or culture in which one belongs. This led to a sequence of open-ended questions pertaining to specific topics relating to mate selection and internalized racism. Demographic information was also obtained from the participants at the before the start of the interview. The final section consisted of a series of questions regarding pictures presented to them during the interview. The pictures were used to gauge the participants' instinctual reactions to visual attractiveness. The responses were appraised for components of internalized racism. Finally the participants were asked to contribute topics or questions that they felt were relevant to the discussion and not covered in the interview.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

This study was comprised of 15 participants: 7 men and 8 women. One woman was excluded from the study due to the accidental deletion of her recorded interview. Geographic locations were comprised of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Georgia, and Washington DC. For the purposes of this study the states have been divided into

Northern and Southern states with Massachusetts and Pennsylvania considered as Northern states and Washington DC and Georgia considered as Southern states. Participants' ages ranged from 22 and 37 years, with the average age of men 30.3 and the women average age being 29.6 years. The participants were asked how they self identified. They were given several options that could be used as an ethnic identifier. The participants were given the choice of selecting more than one option. While the majority of the respondents identified as Black (n=10), other selections included, Black American, African American, Afro-American and American.

The following section offers information pertaining to the participants as prospective mates. The majority of the participants reported that they were working (n=12), with all of the men (n=7) and the majority of the women (n=5) reporting current employment. Many of the interviewees rented their homes (n=9), three reported that they own their homes and 2 stated that they neither owned nor rented their place of residence. There was a range in the participants' educational level from vocational/technical experience (n=1), some college (n=3), Associates degree (n=1), Bachelor's degree (n=4), Master's degree (n=4) and a Juris Doctor degree (n=1). Half of the participants self-reported as single (n=7), one participant was in a domestic partnership, four were married, and two were in long-term relationships but not living with their partners. Most of the participants' reported that they did not have children (n=9) with the remaining participants reporting having children (n=5). Of the 5 participants who had children, four were married and one was in a long-term relationship.

Attractiveness

This section addresses the participants' idea of attractiveness through their responses to questions regarding physical characteristics. The purpose was to determine if the participants identified physical characteristics that could be identified as a Eurocentric ideal of beauty or praise for Afrocentric features. The data will be presented in the following sub-sections: top physical characteristics, importance of skin shade and hair.

Physical characteristics

The participants were asked two questions pertaining to physical characteristics. First they were asked to identify the top five physical characteristics that they look for in a mate. Second they were asked to expound on those characteristics.

Males: The men in the study identified these characteristics: an attractive face, nice legs, buttocks, nice build, nice back, smile, full lips, feet, breast, eyes, hair and height. The top three characteristics that the majority of the men identified were buttocks (n=6), smile (n=5) and breast and feet tying for third (n=4). When asked to expound on these features the participants this is how the participants responded about buttocks:

All right in terms of the donkey, basically it's umm... like, I think I got that from just growing up in the projects and you see the old heads just looking like "DAMN" and you're like ok.

I think I always like sisters and sisters always pretty much have a rump...so I like that---I don't know, that's more just animalistic, makes me wanna, you know.

When describing the importance of smile most of the males reported that they that they look for a smile that is "sincere", "genuine" and "inviting". The respondents also reported that a great smile is indicative of good oral hygiene. Of the participants who identified breast and feet as attractive features, the respondents reported that large round breast were considered attractive and nice feet were indicative of good hygiene.

Females: The women involved in this study identified these physical characteristics as attractive: buttocks, eyes, height, weight, body type, smile/teeth, face, complexion and hair. The top three characteristics are as follows: body type/weight (n=6), height (n=5) and eyes and smile tying for third (n=4). The participants were asked to elaborate on these characteristics. When responding to height, the participants responded as follows:

Oh nice body. It doesn't mean you have to be in---Well I said in shape—so you could still be a big guy but be in shape, that's fine. Like stuff can't be just sloppy, like... if you're skinny, be nice and have things toned or whatever, if you're a little bit heavier, it doesn't need to be jelly everywhere, it needs to be nice and firm and fit.

Not morbidly obese just because I don't really want you to be dying on me.

Nice husky build I like that protector physique factor like an NFL player. Can I look at you and get the sense that you have the ability to protect me Cause for me smaller guys especially with me being a chunkier woman they don't give me that feel

And when responding to height:

Well, height, taller than me cause I'm short um but not too tall not like monster somewhere around the average like what 5'8 -6'3 or something like that

I don't want to look down on the guys, cuz I'm 5'5" and I want, yea so they should be taller than 5'5" and preferably taller than that because I want to be able to wear heels and look eye to eye with them, it's just so unattractive to have to bend over to kiss a guy.

In terms of eyes and smile, the women's responses were similar to the men. They reported that these characteristics are points of connectedness to the other person. The women were looking for "nice" eyes that "connect to the soul" and a "friendly" and inviting" smile. The smile was also said to represent "good hygiene".

The men and women responses did not vary much geographically. However, the woman that responded that complexion was an important physical characteristic was from the south. The participant responded, "I think red men are hot".

Complexion

This section asked a question about shade preferences to assess the participants' level of shadism. This section contained one question with a follow up probe, to be asked if needed, for further clarification.

Males: When asked the question about skin complexion/ shade preference, most of the male participants replied that they had little to no preference about skin complexion. They boasted that they have dated the full color spectrum and all shades were beautiful.

I like all skin complexions I mean preferably of color umm but outside of that you know a beautiful woman is a beautiful...

Skin complexion to me doesn't really resonate as a red flag, you know, it just is what it is, I don't look, I don't see complexion. I kind of see race, but with black women I don't see, she's dark skin or light skin or whatever and it's weird, I thought about that earlier, I've kind of dated the whole spectrum.

However, many of the male respondents added that they were referencing women of color.

I really like all sisters, she can be high yellow, dark skin, dark as I, I'm cool.

Are we talking about black folks? I don't put a heavy importance on that, not when it comes to sisters at all, I feel black is black.

I prefer black women, you know and Hispanic, but complexion is not really important.

In assessing their responses, I've noticed that color shade can be viewed as different.

One male respondent replied that he liked women who were of medium to darker complexion and prefer not to date anyone lighter than himself. The participant proceeded to identify two African American actresses, Nia Long and Essence Atkins, which were examples of the skin shade that he was referencing. When I thought about these women and the television shows and movies in which they performed, medium to dark skinned is not how I would have identified them. It was in this interview that I realized that the perceptions of skin shade could vary widely within the African American community.

A few of the gentlemen responses made specific references to the issues of shadism and how it has influenced their perceptions on potential mates:

I feel that like a lot of African Americans I do have some color complexes that I deal with um I've dated you know kind of across the color spectrum um but fully understanding you know how skin color really works.

I've never been color struck, I really like all sisters, she can be high yellow, dark skin, dark as I, I'm cool. I've never really had a "I like light skin sisters or dark skinned sisters or brown sisters."

If I can remember or in dreams I've had or fantasies, well it would be, uh like a dark brown, you know, it always fluctuated between a dark brown and a golden brown, never dark, dark skin and never light skin, so somewhere in between that.

Although the majority of the men responded that skin shade had no importance to them, their responses did show a preference to women of medium to darker hue. In the male responses, there were no variations based on geographical locations.

Females: Similar to the male responses, the majority of the women also responded that they had no preference when it came to skin complexion/shade. However there were two women who explicitly expressed a preference for men of lighter shade. Also similar to the men, the majority of the women showed a preference to a medium to darker hue.

There were also levels of shadism within the women's' answers:

I've never dated anyone dark, dark, dark, like black, black but other than that I've pretty much dated black guys, with uh, medium complexion.

Like the men, there were no variations based on geographical locations.

Hair

African American hair when worn naturally has a kinky texture. In society, African American hair is not seen as beautiful, clean, or professional. Many negative stereotypes are associated with African American hair.

Males: All of the male participants responded that they prefer women with natural hair.

Many responded that they prefer the natural texture versus permed (chemically straightened) hair.

I like natural. Dreds, kinky afro I like it all I prefer natural over processed

The natural, like Angela Davis and also I've seen some with the India Arie like chop it off and just... dirty tennis ball look. I dig it.

I think natural hair, I like natural hair, I mean uh, it's the way it grows out your head, it's, I don't know, you're putting chemicals on your head, your skull, it's next to your brain.

I love natural hair. My wife has locks, my daughter has locks, my baby girl, her hair is cut short until she can get locks. The reason being, first of all, it's healthier for the hair, I think it's a healthy life style and it's a certain level of embracing their culture, not demeaning their natural beauty. I love it.

But the majority of the men said it is the women's choice as to how she would want to present herself.

It's a matter of finding what is good with you, and again the confidence that goes with it, if you want to shave your head completely bald, then that's awesome, go for it.

I think I do like the natural look versus the weave, but I also, I have some friends, women, they have weave and I mean I respect them all the same.

I mean to each his own I mean I don't really try to put judgment on someone that's all up to there I mean that's on them so you know that's fine.

Some men showed an aversion to additional hair (i.e. weaves or extensions):

As long as it's hers, I like the natural look and the permed look. If it's hers, it's cool. I just don't like weave. I don't like someone else's hair on your head. If you want to put chemical in your hair, you know, and it's all you doing, do what you want to do if you want to twist it, you want to braid it, or you wanna wear an afro, do you. I'm just saying don't go buying an Indian's hair or a Malaysian's hair and putting glue on your head or however they're doing it these days---as long as it's natural.

The drawbacks are all men kind of like running their fingers through hair and touching bobby pins is not sexy, it's not at all. And it's a lot of money, this young lady put a lot of money into her hair and it restricted a lot of what we did dating wise. She couldn't

ride a roller coaster, she couldn't get her hair wet, she needed like two weeks notice if she was going to be at a swimming pool.

Some men pointed out how societal influence can shape a woman's decision

Although I respect the idea that maintenance type things are issues and what have you a woman's choice can kinda be influenced by a lot of other um situations and scenarios as far as that kind of stuff so I don't like have a very very strong preference but um getting rid of self-hatred as much as possible is always good.

I think it says a lot about a woman when she is willing to go natural. Their mommas and their grand mommas, they like, "need to perm their hair" and that's the generation they come from so I don't blame them, but I think it says a lot.

Regionalism did not play a huge difference in the men's answers. Some said they liked long hair, some didn't care. Although all preferred natural hair, processed hair was not a huge deterrent for many. Maintenance, flexibility and confidence were major factors in their answers. Many participants noted that a women being comfortable and confident with who she is - is attractive.

Females: When assessing the female participants' preference for men's hair, most are looking for guys that look "clean". Maintenance was a consistent theme in the women's responses. While most of the women deemed afros and dreds as acceptable, all of the women showed a complete aversion to men who wore braids. Evidence of societal stereotypes can be found in their answers:

Umm braids... at this point in life I would have to say I would pass. I really don't know where you can work at with my level of education just professionalism with braids.

Men that wear braids often come off to me as thugs.

Um, if you are wearing braids at our age [*early thirties*], I can't date you, you are way too old for that. Um locks and afros are fine, you cannot have braids, there is no way you have a real job.

Afros and dread locks I can get with, I can't get with a man wearing braids though.

Geographical location was noticeable in the women's responses to the questions.

Although some women made reference to men maintaining a "clean" appearance in regards to their hair, two of the women from the South made specific mention about the texture of the men's hair:

[I seek someone with] a good grade of hair.

Interviewer: And can you describe a little more about that?

Not nappy.

Very interesting you should bring that up, I don't necessarily need someone who is good with their hair, but I don't want their hair to look all peasey either.

Interviewer: Peasey? What does peasey mean?

Um, like those little knots on your head...unless that is the intended style---I don't want my kids to have hair they can't do anything with.

Values

There are many components that factor into what a person finds attractive. In this section, the goal was to go beyond that physical in order to determine the qualities within a person that their potential partners may find attractive. The participants were asked two questions in this section. First, they were instructed to identify those values they look for in a potential mate. Many participants appeared more comfortable answering this question than identifying the physical attributes that they found attractive. Secondly, they were asked if African American males or females possessed the traits that they identified. Religion, views on incarceration and substance use were included in the value section as subheading.

Males: The men in this study offered a wide variety of answers, with very few repeating the same trait. However, some qualities were similar enough that they were combined; trustworthy and honest (n=3), integrity, morality, good foundation and principles (n=4), compassionate, caring, nurturing and kind (n=5). These values ranked the highest. Two participants specifically thought that intelligence was an attractive trait.

There were some slight geographical differences in the males' answers. The men from the north predominately favored intelligence (n=2) while the men from the south favored kind, nurturing woman.

When asked if they thought that African American women possessed these traits, all of the men agreed that they did. The differences in the responses again lay in their geographical region. The men from the north vehemently and concisely answered yes. The answers given by the men from the south showed signs of hesitancy:

I think all women can. I think African American women sometimes suppress a lot of these traits. They have this stigma that they have an uphill battle against the world, and so they don't want to show the world their smile, they don't want to show the world they are having fun, because everyone is out to get them. I think that is not a thing that can be confined within race. I think that is any woman, so. I don't know if that's as valid a question because I think every woman can and every woman can't.

I do. I think they do, possess them, I think individually you know, a lot of our, first of all, take people individually. So, all African Americans don't have those traits. But I think a lot of times we go through trauma, like a lot of African Americans have commonalities in the trauma we face, so we get out of balance, but I think African American women that I meet, that I choose, that I date, have these qualities.

Yes. I mean I think everyone possesses these traits, I'm going to start off with that and then I am going to say that not all of us display them.

Females: Similar to the men, the women also gave a variety of answers with very few overlapping. However, the majority of women replied that honesty (n=4) and a sense of humor (n=4) was what they valued most in a partner. There were also traits were similar in nature that could be combined, goal-oriented, determined, motivated and hard working (n=4).

The women were also asked if they thought African American men possessed the identified traits. Their answers were not as favorable as the men. Two participants replied with a hearty "yes", whereas the rest of the participants were not so sure. The participants

were willing to concede that only “some” African American men possessed the traits. There were no geographical differences in the women’s answers.

Religion

The participants were assessed for their perceptions on their mates’ religion and whether or not it was a factor in their mate selection process. There were two questions about religion in the interview, both pertaining to the potentials mate religious preferences.

Males: Although the men in this study were open to their mate freely practicing her religious beliefs, most of them (n=5) reported that it was important that their potential mate did not try to change, influence, or alter their current religious (or lack thereof) affiliations. Two of the men self-identified as Christian and wanted a mate who shared the same values. One participant felt that religion should be a topic of conversation with a potential mate. He reported that it should be a part of the process of a maturing relationship:

That would be some... we’d have to have a discussion and especially if we are trying to have a family and things like that. Say “hey hold on, wait, we like each other a lot, we want to go further, let’s discuss this now instead of letting this be the last thing we talk about and then sever the relationship.” So you really need to have that understanding earlier.

The idea of having a “super religious” mate was a turn-off for three of these men. However, the majority (n=6) of the men preferred mates who entertained a belief in a spiritual entity.

Females: Religion was an important topic to the women in this study. The majority (n=6) reported religion is a deciding factor when choosing a mate. One participant identified as Muslim and reported that identifying a mate who is also Muslim is a top criterion above all else. The participant responded that all other characteristics were not as important as his commitment to his religion. Conversely another participant reported that could not see “eye

to eye” on the tenants of some religions and this would disqualify a potential mate. Many of the women reported wanting to share their spiritual life with their mate, so having a similar religious belief was important.

Incarceration

This section was included due to the high level of incarceration rates of people of color specifically within the African American community. The participants were asked a single question as to whether they would date someone who had been incarcerated before. The question did not specify between felony or misdemeanor incarcerations. The participants were encouraged to address the question how they saw fit.

Males: Previous incarcerations do not seem to be a huge deterrent for the men in this study. The terms of the incarceration however, may be what determine whether or not they pursue a relationship. Crimes of a more serious nature may prevent the respondents from moving forward. Still, the majority of (n=6) the men reported that they are willing to permit former missteps if the woman has been reformed.

If they're still involved in that risky behavior whatever that into probably not but if they just have a history of being in jail like maybe not but it might be difficult because you can get a job.

If they went to jail for killing their ex, that might be a little weird, if they went to jail for stealing, I have a big thing against women who steal. You know, shoplifting women, that's a big trend these days. Depends on what you went to jail for, but it would be hard for me to get over it, very.

Well I've been locked up before. Not for no a stint, but, county jail, something like that. So I wouldn't mind. You know obviously you don't want a murder or nothing.

One participant spoke to the nature of incarceration in the community of people of color. Although his response was similar to the rest of the men, he reported on the probability of dating a woman who has been incarcerated.

It's not a deal breaker for me um, I think that on the flip side if situations were a little bit different African American women regardless of what they say are willing to date people that went to jail because that's the nature of incarceration within our community its kinda you know rough um but African American females tend to not be incarcerated at the same kind of rates and African American men tend to not be educated at the same kinda rates and African American females tend to want African American men who are educated and so the numbers game kinda works out in my favor.

His response speaks to the high level of incarceration within the African American community. The response also addressed the high rates at which African American women are attending college and/or pursuing higher levels of education.

Was the lack of distain felt by the men in relation to a mate with a criminal record associated with the perceived culture of incarceration within the African American community? Most men in this study were not bothered by it.

Females: Murder and/or other serious crimes were a point of contention for the women in this study. The length of the sentence was also a concern for two of the participants. Yet, the majority (n=6) reported that they would pursue a relationship with someone who has had a previous incarceration.

Only one respondent replied that she would not pursue a relationship with a guy with a previous incarceration record. She replied that engaging in a partnership with someone with previous imprisonments might negatively affect her future aspirations. Although she reported that ideally she might be willing to consider the charges in a potential mate, she is initially disinterested in someone with a previous incarceration.

Substance use

The participants were asked whether or not recreational use of legal or illegal drugs or the consumption of alcohol would be possible deterrents from pursuing a relationship with a potential mate. Additionally, they were asked if they have partaken in drugs or alcohol,

currently or in the past. These questions proved to be uncomfortable for most of the respondents to answer.

Males: The usage of marijuana and the consumption of alcohol were considered permissible for most of the men (n=6) as long as it was consumed in moderation. All the men in this study rejected the recreational use of prescription medication; one related the activity to something “white girls” do. One participant reported that any substance use by a mate at this stage in his life would be a deal breaker. All of the men admitted to have used marijuana and consumed alcohol within the lifetime. A few reported still presently engaging in the activity but only as a source of relaxation.

Females: Alcohol was the only intoxicant that the women would approve of their mate engaging in and only if it was done socially. The majority of the women immediately considered marijuana usage; cigarette usage or consuming pills deal breakers. One participant reported that it depended on the nature of the relationship. She explained:

I have dated guys where they have smoked or used drugs like, ecstasy or whatever on a regular basis. But it wasn't such a serious relationship where I would consider them my mate, it was just like, dating, if that was the case, I wouldn't be seeking anything with them. It was just momentary and temporary stuff.

All of the women admitted to have consuming alcohol at some point within their lifetime with a few confessing to have tried marijuana. Marijuana experimentation appears to be something that happened as a result of peer pressure when the women were younger. Presently, alcohol is the only substance that some of the women admit to engaging in and only socially.

Socio-economic Status (SES)

This section takes a look at education, career and financial stability. When looking for a mate, these were the 3 important areas that the literature review showed that were most

important factors in identifying potential mates. The participants were asked questions pertaining to the socio-economic status of a potential mate. The first question was to ascertain their feeling about identifiable status markers such as clothes and cars and if they were essential to identifying a prospective mate. Additionally the participants were asked if the annual income of a potential mate was a factor and their thoughts on the spending habits of a future mate.

Males: The questions covered four specific areas, materialism, annual income, unemployment, and spending habits. Annual income: Four out of seven men reported that they are not concerned with their mate's annual income, with one of those participants reporting that his mate does not have to work at all. However, the other three men reported that although they are not concerned with the amount their partner makes, she must be actively engaged. This engagement ranged from being enrolled in school, to looking for work, starting her own business or being a stay at home mom. Two out of the seven men were unsure of the salary they wanted their potential mate to make and offered up a suggestion between 0-\$40,000 a year. They also responded that they would like to see their partner working or in school or a being a stay at home mom. In response to his future partner's salary, one participant responded "the higher, the better" and if she is not currently employed, she must be pursuing her goals and/or passions.

Additionally the men were asked about the spending habits of a potential mate and identifiable status markers such as clothes and cars and if these were important. Financial stability seemed to be a priority for the majority of the men, as four of them refused to engage in a relationship with a woman who spent beyond her means. Of the men who would take a chance on a woman who spent beyond her means, two had the hopes that she could

“change her ways” and become fiscally responsible. Only one participant embraced the thought of having a relationship with a woman with irresponsible spending habits. All of the men responded that the only aspect of materialism that affected them is the way a woman presents in the clothes she wears:

You want your lady to look nice, you know, but no, that’s not going to be where it is if I’m going to be with her, because if I’m going to be her man and I want her to look nice and she can’t afford it at the time, that’s where I’m supposed to step up, go ahead and get that, you know what I mean.

They have to have themselves together like I mean I guess is what's the word objective? Subjective? One of those. Objective! But me personally I kind of my date I can't date like a hippie or anything like that or none of them nutty, crunchy people.

It goes back to the hair, you know, as long as you keep everything up. If you have a 1985 Nissan Sentra and you keep it clean and keep it nice and you keep it up, that’s fine. I don’t care about that, I would actually be more attracted to someone who would thrift store dive or go to consignment shops, that shows a little bit of confidence.

One participant did equate materialism attainment to a higher level of socioeconomic status and made not that “materialism can reflect you know educational achievement and professional success”.

Females: The women in this study were looking for a lower-middle to middle class man. Four of the woman reported that they would prefer a man to earn at least \$50,000 a year before they would consider a long-term relationship. One participant reported \$30 and another reported \$40 [thousand per year]. However, one woman did report that it did not matter how much her partner earned because she “makes enough money”. The majority of the women were willing to enter a relationship with someone who was unemployed only if the potential mate was actively looking for employment. One woman reported that the guy would have to be in school or employed, “You can’t be not in school and not working. You have to do one of the two or both”. The women were also strong in their desire for a partner

with financial responsibility with six of them responding that they would not engage in a relationship with someone who spent beyond their financial means. The women equated this type of characteristic to showing a “lack of discipline” and “irresponsible”. There was one participant who that she would consider a relationship with a guy possessing this particular character trait. She replied

It’s not that they are bad; it’s not that they necessarily know that they're broke in doing it just because they want to I mean it’s sometimes you gotta do it.

The women were split in this response. Three women reported that materialistic attributes were not important to them. They also did not elaborate on their responses. Four of the women replied similar to the men, which materialistic attainments only matter in how a man presents himself to the world. According to the women in this study, the clothes did not have to be name brand, just well put together.

Education

Education rates are disproportionate within the African American community with African American women pursuing higher education at greater rates than African American men. This section is dedicated to determining what level of education is important when looking for a mate. There were two questions asked in this section.

Males: One participant specifically reported that he is looking for a mate with a Master’s degree or higher because of what the degree means. According to him, the type of education you have is interchangeable with your career path. Additionally the respondent felt that having a partner with a similar degree level would allow them to be more compatible and relate to each other. However the majority of the men wanted a woman who is “seeking new knowledge”. A formal degree was not as important to them. Two of the men reported that their mate could be a high school dropout, as long as she was self-motivated in pursuing new

knowledge. The interviewees reported that they were looking for smart women who were consistently seeking to broaden her intellectual capacity, whether by means of an institution of higher learning or self-motivated learning.

Females: For the majority of the women in the study (n=5), a college degree is the prerequisite for beginning a relationship. Two of the participants reported that a high school diploma was the bare minimum level of education that they sought. One woman reported that she is looking for her mate's degree to be similar to her own. One participant responded, "Because with education I feel...you can have more life, with education."

Career

Based on the stereotypical information that states the African American women are "gold diggers" and African American men want to be athletes or rappers, the question of potential mates' career path was posed to the interviewers. They were asked five questions regarding career preference of their future partner. The goal was to identify if the participants were drawn to career paths that were supposed to be stereotypically black. This is how the participants responded.

Males: Geographical location became a factor in how the males answered this question. The men from the north all responded that they would want their potential mate to have a career that made her happy. The men from the south answers centered on money/ motivation.

I would prefer someone who is a self-starter, someone who did not have to take direction from somebody. Someone who is not 100% comfortable staying with where they are at forever, I always think that people should be looking bigger, constantly.

White collar. Yeah, a white collar job. Usually white collar makes more money.

...as she getting paid, it's cool. I don't want nobody that is always away—you know flying and stuff like that. I don't want to get in front of her hustle, you know, but you in town once every three months, that's gonna be hard.

Only one responded that his focus is not on a career.

No specific career path. She can be a housekeeper or a security guard, those things, it's... relationships are hard enough to care about.

The men were then asked about specific career industry (i.e. entertainment, blue collar and white collar. The men did not show any discriminatory bias for any particular career path but most (n=5) responded that if they had the ideal option, they would choose a woman whose career path led her to a white-collar job. The other two participants replied "I really don't have a preference" and "I would prefer my mate to pursue some kind of business or to do something on their own, because I think that is the best way to be, financial independence."

Females: The women were far more decisive when considering a career path for a potential mate. Four women were able to provide a career path that they had considered, educator, engineer, entrepreneur, and business. One participant responded that she would prefer something stable. The last two participants reported that they had no preference about a potential mate's career path. The women were also asked about specific career industry (i.e. entertainment, blue collar and white collar) and their answers varied from the men. Four out of the seven ladies reported that they would not pursue a relationship with a guy who wanted a career as a singer, rapper or athlete. This is one participant's response:

I don't think entertaining is that important; there are so many more important factors in life than wanting to entertain others.

However three out of the seven women reported that they would pursue a relationship with someone in the entertainment industry. One participant responded:

I could, everybody has their dream. Um, just, takes people a little bit longer, well some people a bit longer than others that some dreams are just not, meant to happen, so but if I feel like I care about that person enough then um, I could just be there when they realize it if it doesn't work out.

Two participants responded that they were not interested in pursuing a relationship with someone with a blue color job. Their reasoning for this was based of previous experience.

I would want to say no but for selfish reasons; but that sounds so bad because for me, it would be no for all of the wrong and right reasons because he put in so many hours at the barbershop. You have to think; a barbershop is open every day except for Sunday. There was no time for anything else. There was no attention for anything else.

I don't know. The reason they didn't make it very far, the people I've dated in those fields - their intellectual capacity is not to the level that I wanted it to be.

The majority of the women responded that they would pursue a relationship with a guy with a white-collar job. One participant, however, did not agree:

I've dated those too. They were chauvinistic and annoying and the ratio to black men and black women, it was just unbearable.

When asked their preference of an ideal career path, the majority of the women chose white collar, however two participants reported they would like for their mate to be an educator.

Family

Familial influence played a huge part in mate selection. Family also played a part in how people are socialized, what values they internalized and how they see the world. In this section we took a look at whether or not the participants' viewed their family as a huge part of their mate selection experience. Four questions were asked in this section. The aim was to look familial influence, whether or not the participants felt as if their viewpoints differed from their family's and whether or not their parents were good role models in providing a good example of how to find a mate.

Males: The men in the study felt for the most part that their family had some influence in their mate selection process (n=5). Two participants reported that their family had no

influence at all. Of the men who felt a strong family influence, they were surprised by the amount of influence that their families had in the mate selection process.

They joke that they play a larger part than I think they do. But you know, results matter and so I remember back in college you know I had a girlfriend I was dating and my mom came to visit me for my birthday again and you know didn't like her thought she was, not didn't like her intensely but thought she was inappropriate or whatever umm and three weeks later I broke up with her and so I don't think it was because of her. I don't think my momma had anything to do with it at all but the reality is the 2 things happened close to each other.

I was about to say slim to none but I think my family instilled the values that I have. so I was say I guess in theory a great deal because the way that I look to a certain degree that I conceptualize who they is, is partially due to my family and my upbringing and I guess the other part is like society standards but I haven't really thought about that too tough but I would say believe they have influence I can't put how much but I say they have a pretty good influence.

I guess a boy's gonna always subconsciously look for someone who has some traits that his mama has, you know what I mean?

The male participants were asked what sort of women their family would pick for them.

Some responded that their families would be satisfied with whoever made them happy. A few responded specifically that their families want to see them with an African American woman. When asked if it differed from whom they would select, most responded that their picks would not differ from their families. One participant reported that he is more spontaneous with his choice in women than his family would want him to be. Another participant reported that he would intentionally do the opposite of what his family would want.

R - What kind of a mate would your family want you to select?

P - Um, some woman from Mississippi that lives down the street, I guess. Some farmer girl I don't know. A teacher probably, a Sunday school teacher, yea a Sunday school teacher from Mississippi that is a friend of the family.

R - How is that different from what you would pick?

P - From that extreme, I would purposely go out and get a current or ex-porn star.

Most of the men (n=4) reported that they felt that their parents provided them with a good example of how to find a mate. Two reported that their parents' methods were not methods that they would adopt in trying to find a mate. One participant was unsure, reporting that his life is different than his parents so their methods may not be applicable to his life.

Females: The women in this study mirrored the men's responses. Most (n=4) said their families had some form of influence on their mate choice. The others reported that their family is not involved at all. Of the women who reported feeling influenced from their families, the level of influence varied with each participant.

Important. I'm all about my family. If my family doesn't like you then pretty much I'm not gonna want you.

My family is crazy. So I would say being from a family primarily dominated by females [is] probably like an eight because I want a mate who can gel with my family

Other than like, the ridicule that comes from dating somebody out of the race, no, oh and he can't be lame because they would ridicule him too.

They have an opinion, but they don't have a say. That's really all I can say about that.

When asked what kind of man would their families want them to select, the women in this study reported that their choice in men differs from their family's choices. Many of the women's answers reflected the socialization of wanting a woman to "marry up". One participant reported on the scarcity of her family's ideals.

R - What kind of a mate would your family want you to select?

P - An African American man, with, a white collar job, who is, as we like to say, concise, about the, the black struggle, that would probably be the man they would want me to be with.

R - How is that different from what you would pick?

P - It's not different from who I would pick, it's just, um, hard to come by.

Single parents

In this section the questions were formulated to determine if single parents were considered viable mates. Two questions were asked in this section. The first question asked if a person would consider a relationship with a single parent. The second question inquired whether a parent who had children by more than one person was considered desirable.

Males: Most men (n=7) in the study would not mind dating a single parent. One participant responded that he is attracted to single mothers. He reported that being married with children is a lot of work, so he has a lot of respect for a single mother who is managing it successfully. Two of the men wanted clarification on the term “date”. These two men reported that when it came to single mothers, “dating” or short-term relationships would be more favorable than a long-term commitment. The only participant who reported that he would not date a single parent supported this sentiment. He stated that he would rather begin a relationship with a woman and then progress into beginning a family adding that there is too much pressure of being a “good enough” father. One participant reported that he had never dated a single parent but would not be opposed to the idea. The men’s answers shifted when they were asked to consider a single parent whose children had multiple fathers. They were less likely to even consider it as a possibility. Only one participant reported that he would still consider dating a woman who had children by multiple men. The remainder of the men saw this as “too much”. One participant responded:

It gets to a level where it gets a bit much, you know four kids, four baby daddies, there are some questions I need to ask. But with any women with kids, the situation with the father and kids is paramount. Find out what is going on there first, if he’s in jail, you handle it one way, if he’s living around the corner, then that’s another way. If he’s cool and they’re in each other’s life and he’s sleeping on the couch sometimes, then that’s a whole other situation, and I’ve seen all of them, so it just depends. But too many baby daddies? No.

Females: The women were less likely to consider a relationship with a single parent. Three out of the seven women involved in the study reported that they would prefer not to engage in a relationship with a man with children. However, one of these women reported that as she is getting older, she might have to re-evaluate her viewpoint on this matter. She reported that if she was entering the relationship without any children, she felt that he should do the same. Two of the participants reported that “Baby mommas” were a deterrent for considering men with children. One participant had this to say about the subject:

I don't think so, just because, unless his ex-wife was like dead or something, because like the baby mama's has the trump card they can always come back in and try build their family back together. I don't need that drama, because I have dated some single fathers and that is pretty much consistently what happened and I'm like, yeah, I'll pass.

The other women (n=4) reported that they would date a single parent and also reported that they loved children. Similar to the men, all but one of the participants viewed a man whose children had more than one mother as off-putting and undesirable. The character qualities of these men were called into question. These men were thought to have poor judgment, were inconsiderate, inconsistent, and not practicing safe sex.

Race and Dating

This section addressed racial issues the participants have encountered while dating. The goal was to assess from the participant's responses if their dating experiences contained incidences of colorism and stereotyping. There was also an effort to ascertain if the participants were opened to the experience of interracial dating.

Interracial dating

Males: The majority of the men (n=6) have dated outside of their race. However when asked this question the men wanted clarification on what “dating” meant and what “race” meant. A few men (n=4) reported to have been involved with a person they considered

outside of their race, however they responded that it was not a serious relationship. One participant reported that it was just sex. When asked about their insights on their experiences two of the men reported feeling uncomfortable with the experience and mention of feeling pressure of the black community weighing on their decision to date interracially.

I didn't feel bad about it until we went out in public, it was just weird. I always felt the most pressure from older black women. You know what I'm saying, you know, young black women would be like "I didn't want him anyway" and young black men would be like "hey, you go" but older black women would always be like "ummm!" I always felt people looking at me and it happened at an age when I wasn't as secure as when I am now, so you know I was always worried about what people were thinking. And then I also felt like a science project, I felt like a thesis, she was always like "so your hair, it— oh wow" It was just weird, so like, yea.

During this interview, no stipulations were placed on race. Some men considered Hispanic or Latina women to be a part of the "African Diaspora" and did not consider dating them as dating outside of their race. One participant responded that he only thought of "white" to be considered interracial dating. Other men did consider it dating interracially if they were involved with women who are considered Hispanic, Latina, and/or Mexican. While overall (n=5) the men reported that it was a positive experience, some raised the concern that cultural difference played a role in their relationship. Two of the participants reported that their interracial experience was with someone who was from a family of a higher income bracket. They reported that this also played a role in their relationship. One participant reported on some stereotypes of white women that were identified in the literature.

[It was a] positive, experience, in a sense like I said I was younger, she had more money than me and it seemed as though she did not mind giving me that money and when you're twenty two you're like, "fuck yea, let's go" and then, [I'll be a little PC about this], she didn't have a lot of inhibitions when it came to physicalness, and so that upheld the stereotypes in my head that there were different parameters for white women and black women when it comes to sex.

In areas of attractiveness, the men reported that they are more attracted to African American women than women outside of their race. However, they reported that they find themselves being attracted to women of all races for many different reasons.

Um, I wouldn't say more attracted, I may be attracted because they have a physical characteristic I would find attractive, but not more. I don't have a problem with interracial dating, but also I make a political statement, to love black women, not that I hate any other women, I love all women, I can't help it I 'm going to be attracted, but you know, political statement and it ain't just a political statement, I love black women and genuinely find black women attractive.

I would not say that. I'm exposed to more sisters than anything, but I'm not craving anything else. Not that I don't think that other women of other women aren't beautiful, I think they're all gorgeous, I like women, period, I just happen to you know, particularly find sisters attractive.

That's a 50-50, sometimes, I think I'm physically attracted to black women just because I love their, the texture of their skin, they're me, you know, so I'm comfortable with it, I relate to it and also we have a common story, you know. Cause when I was on the date with the white chick, some things didn't translate you know, even though the conversation we had was great, you know I kept thinking "I wish you were black." Attraction, no I don't break my neck looking at white chicks or Asian chicks. But yea, it's a 50-50 some things I am open to or am attracted to, by their, level of freedom, they are allotted a certain life style or privilege, so I think, good example. I was on a date and I wanted to go into this pool but this sister wasn't getting in the pool because she didn't want to mess up her hair and I wanted to be on some spontaneous, let's skinny dip shit, you know, so, but I couldn't because, of her hair, she wanted to make sure her hair didn't get wet. Which I understand, but we couldn't go, it's a certain point I could go with you. So that's what I mean about the openness and freedom of life. Sometimes it's a blockade and sometimes it's a turn off.

All of the men reported that they could see themselves marrying someone outside of their race, only if they loved them and things "worked out". Most of the men attributed this to being older, more mature, and confident enough to stand by their decisions.

Females: The majority of the women (n=5) in the study had experienced interracial dating. Although their answers were brief, the women did not report any negative experiences with their interracial dating experience. They reported that interracial dating felt similar to intra-racial dating. They stated that "it felt normal" and that they were "fine with

it” and “thoroughly enjoyed it”. However, one participant attributed a lack of connection to why the experience wasn’t completely positive.

Additionally, the women were also asked about whom they find attractive, the majority of the women reported that they found themselves being more attracted to black men. The women reported that black men are very attractive. One participant stated:

There is something about a brother... I mean there just is. There is no other way to say it, it’s something in the way that he carries himself that is more appealing, I should say that is just different than any other race.

Another participant said this about her level of attraction to guys of different races “You’d have to be really, really attractive for me to even register your existence.” However, one participant reported that she was more attracted to men outside of her race. She stated, “For some reason I usually shy away from African-Americans”. However, when the possibility of interracial marriage was presented to the women, all agreed that they could see this as an option.

Intra-racial dating:

Little research is dedicated to analyzing the experience of dating intra-racially and/or whether internalized negative stereotypes may affect the quality of the experience. With challenges African Americans face, are their relationships affected by these challenges. In this section a review of intra-racial dating will be assessed and analyzed for cues of internalized racism.

Males: Overall, the men expressed that their ideal mate is African American. Two made note that their ideal mate would be a woman of color. But conclusively, the men in this study ideally would prefer an intra-racial relationship. The gentlemen reported that their

experiences with intra-racial relationships have been a positive experience, although it has been a learning experience as well.

I've had any type of relationship with a black woman that you can think of. It just varies from woman to woman; for the most part it's been awesome though

It's been alright; like I know often times a lot of it is just comfort. We stick to the stereotypical like "yeah she wild" but in general like people are people and emotions run the way they do; um so overall it just been easier to relate to a black woman who kinda... is willing to talk about the issues pertinent to your skin color as illogical as reasonable as that may be.

In his response to this question, one participant spoke to the reason why this study was developed:

Um, it has been a learning process. Um, and even, just even like, dating within my race in terms of African descent, I've dated women from the Islands and you know, everyone is different, women are different everywhere. But the experience with that, it's been a struggle. I mean I've been doing research and I've been reading and trying to understand that struggle just because of our history in this country of slavery and how, you know, just the family is just disintegrated and basically it's no model of what should be or what is and a lot of times as black men we have an idea of what black men should be and black women have the same idea or a different one, and a lot of time those clash. You know, time changes, I grew up, the only example I had was my grandmother and grandfather. Their generation you know, the woman was bare footed and pregnant and the man was the breadwinner, and you know, you have this break where my parents didn't stay together and it was no example so, I'm fighting against the only successful in household thing I've seen and you're looking at us millennials and you're not telling no sister you aren't washing dishes you know, I'm not washing them dishes, you know, looking for this crib, you know, the girl was "I'm better have a dishwasher" and that was before we, you know what I'm saying, I guess a preference and I might have my preference too, I'm still expected to take out the trash, you know, work on the cards, do the yard, these definitions of what we have in our head of what a black family should look like, when there are so few, I guess it's a statistical thing, you know, all the stats say it's such a few, but we never get to see the good ones. I mean, I've never seen one and because I haven't seen one I believe those statistics, you know what I mean.

Females: Although the majority (n=5) of the women stated that their ideal mate would be an African American man, unlike the men, a good portion (n=4) of the women reported that their intra-racial dating experiences have been negative.

[It's been] negative. It's been really difficult. Maybe that's why umm I am more willing or malleable to dating outside my race because dating inside my race has been very difficult

[It's been] Not so good. [There has been a] lack of loyalty, lack of communication, lack of trust.

Um, trouble and heartache. The good stuff, but the bad mostly outweighs the good.

There were two participants who reported having positive experiences gave semi-positive responses, "fun on one hand but lots of lessons learned". The last participant reported that the experience was neither positive nor negative, but reported on the difficulties involved with trying to find mate.

Additionally the participants were asked if they thought their skin color was a factor in how potential mates saw them.

Males: Overall (n=5) the men reported that their skin complexion was not an issue when it came to intra-racial dating. And although the majority of the men felt that their skin shade has not been a benefit or a detriment to their relationships, a few men reported to have noticed some incidents in which skin color preference has played a part in their interaction with African American women.

There were two men who reported that their skin complexion was an issue. Their comments reflected the color preference in the literature review that African American women prefer men who have a medium to darker complexion and that men who are lighter complexion are not viewed as attractive.

I think I have had a little prejudice, you know what I mean, but it was never said outright, you know what I mean, it was just more or less I wasn't dark skinned enough. I've gotten darker since coming out in the sun, maybe a little shade darker, but I've never been real light, like high yellow light or midnight black, and over the years, there were the brothers who were in if you were real light skinned or real dark skinned, so, I always, kind of was in and out of season, every season, you know what I mean. Sister like 'em brown...

Of course. I get made fun of all the time by pretty much every woman that I've dated, except for the girl who was not black in which case her family felt better that I was light skinned ... You know they were a Latino family and they were more comfortable with me being somewhat Latino looking and so I made them more at ease. There was one woman I dated that didn't really feel comfortable dating a light skinned person. She said, you know what, you really aren't all that attractive. You know it is what it is. But she was ok with dating me because of my personality and or vibe. That's happened a couple of times. I've had some women who've liked me because I was light skinned, I guess. That happens every so often. But mostly its kinda like, I'll date you in spite of, a little bit. Not all the time but enough times to mention, to notice. And whether they are just saying that or they actually mean that, I don't know.

Conversely, there were some responses from other participants that speak to the other side of the color issue. Two participants reported that he has gotten dates as a result of his complexion.

Oh yeah, they say light skin is in, but I don't know. But maybe not anymore. They talking bout black skin, dark skin and whatever, a bunch of bullsh*t. But I think it's my personality. But nah, I think that I've heard that, but I can't say that, you know. I don't think it's something that I personally have felt it has, you know, gotten me a lot of dates or for people to be interested in me. Or maybe that was the reason behind it or maybe that was their preference but have I felt I'm light skin or you know like whatever but I think this... but I think that's like a talked about conception, but I don't think that I don't believe that that's what it's about

Hell yeah! Cause I look like a ball player. They like owww this nigga got... yeah yeah. Why? umm just on the strength of the curiosity factor I think, also because... I don't know. I'm a fool so like I'm just... I think part of it is curiosity but part of it or hope that there was some personality factor that came in.

Females: None of the females reported to feeling as though they benefitted from or were hindered because of the color of their skin. One participant reported that any issues that she thought might have been there were in her own head. Another participant reported being unsure whether a change in her geographical location has resulted in limitations in her personal life.

Within my own race... I am thinking just being here in MA now no guys really try to talk to me and I'm not sure if it's my race or it could be but I'm not sure because

usually when I'm out when I scan the room I am usually the only black or African American woman in the room.

One participant spoke out on her disapproval for any man who would choose to pursue her because of her lighter skin.

If I thought I was getting a date because of my skin complexion I probably wouldn't go out on a date with that person, cause that's kind of shallow and stupid.

African Americans are often plagued in this society by negative stereotypes. To assess the level of internalization of those stereotypes, the participants were asked if they felt as though they were stereotyped intra-racially.

Males: All but one of the men admitted to feeling as though they had been stereotyped intra-racially. A few of the issues that were raised were pertaining to the stereotypes received based on skin complexion.

All the time. I feel that people will assume that I'm either soft or people will assume that I'm you know an Uncle Tom or that I'm nerdy or whatever. I am nerdy so I can't really frown on that assumption that much. People think that I am entitled. People think that I don't view myself in solidarity with the rest of the community. I think there are a lot of stereotypes associated with being lighter complected. These are both positive and negative. They have been ascribed to me. I don't view them as being a big hindrance on my life. Truthfully, I think I have done ok. I will continue to do ok.

Um, I think that the biggest being you're light skinned, you're like a pretty boy, you have light eyes so I think I think it's hate really, haters I mean I don't know I don't know I think it's just like trends and media and especially like being born in the 80s and raised in the 90s. I think the 90s was like this "light skin" is in type of fad that was going on you know; that's what the media was kind of portraying which is like the racism sh*t that was going on and then you know but people internalize that and light skin is better. I think there's been a paradigm shift after the 90s into the 20th century that that maybe that's changing maybe it's not so yeah I think people have these conceptions of who you are or what you are based on the color of your skin, the color of your eyes, the texture of your hair so...

I'm like oblivious, like, the only reason I know I'm light is because people tell me. People tell me I'm light skinned, I don't think I'm light skin, I think I'm brown skinned, that's the only thing, that they be like "you're light skinned." Usually darker people tell me that, I don't feel no way about it. But also, I will say this, I typically like brown skin

or dark skin [women], my wife is light skinned, I have friends from the past who say they are surprised I married someone light skinned.

However the stereotypes were not limited to color shade alone. Some of the stereotypes were attributed to personality traits or physical features that were considered stereotypically black or not black enough. The theme of masculinity and what it meant to be a black man was evident in their responses.

Well the... [I'm] always joking, never serious, like that whole nigga's ignorant stereotype or you can't take niggas seriously, that one cause I just laugh and joke all the time but... so more of that stereotypical point of view of if you really don't sit and talk with me and take me on face value you wouldn't know all the things that I am...

I feel that I have been and it's more so not for race, it's more so size, because I'm skinnier than most, I don't get the "you're a big black guy and I'm afraid of you thing" I get the more so thing---other races---this is within the race? Some reason people are attracted to my personality because I seem more unassuming, where, one of my friends who is bigger would get a different reaction. So yea, I think I'm a smaller black man and I get treated differently than a bigger black man.

Oh yes, every, almost, I mean it's consistent, I've been asked so many times, "I know you have kids", well told that, or asked, well asked first and I say no and then I'm told I'm lying and that I have three or four kids somewhere, so I've had to fight that and this is within my own race. I know you have a girlfriend, when I'm single, or, um, what else, I mean, what are the other stereotypes, I've even, yea, I've even got the stereotype of being gay, because of, I don't uh, I wasn't promiscuous at that time, so. Um, else they, being a Bama, ever since coming up here to DC they love throwing that word around, being a Bama. Though I grew up in the army and I've lived everywhere, but my roots are in Mississippi, or my other stereotypes, being not black enough, not a thug or not hard enough, or whatever, not being manly enough just because I'd rather think before I speak, I'd rather kind of give people enough rope to hang themselves, I have had women shout at me "Yo, you need to check dude, he's looking at you" and I'm like, I can't stop people from looking, so I've been stereotyped on my masculinity, within dating, especially dating black women, within how hard are you or how masculine are you, in a specific situation.

Females: Similarly to the men, all but one of the female participants felt as though they had been intra-racially stereotyped. The participant, who replied "No" also reported having a limited amount of African American friends. The other participants reported that feeling

stereotyped based not only on the hue of their skin but on other physical presentations as well.

Yes. Because of the fact I wore weave, makeup, lashes. [People felt] that I wasn't being myself.

Well, kind of. I think cause, I'm lighter skin and my hair—well, it's not long, long, but it's longer and people have these kind of perceptions of who you are...that's really not me. Can't do it.

Other areas of discrimination was felt based on their level of advanced education, confidence, how the women presented themselves to the world and their levels of femininity.

Yes, oh that's unfortunate. Why? Because I love education; there has been instances where I am sitting around all black people, family or just friends and if I say a word they say "Oh here you go with these \$20 words again" and then I do get singled out even amongst my quote unquote people because I articulate different or my inflection is different or I express myself in a different way so unfortunately yes and it is a horrible feeling to think "Ok am I really getting singled out because I am a little bit more educated." That has always kinda played on me. Especially in dating, one of the guys that I really, really liked; he always singled me out because of my accomplishments and that was awkward because I was like aren't we both striving for the same thing. It was weird.

Probably yes. I mean I would say cause I am straightforward or direct confident I have been described as having a dominant personality. Um I think someone has said that I am not submissive so within a way yes and I think someone just said that the other day like you don't wanna cook those traditional things but in my mind you are not my boyfriend, you are not my husband. No.

Yes, people say I talk white, I don't see that at all. Or like, the Oreo, the black girl who thinks she is too smart kind of thing or whatever. It's because I don't listen to a whole bunch of rap music, I don't know, I like what I like and some people don't understand that so.

Racial Awareness

This section gauged participants' awareness of how they present and the level of consciousness as an African American. This section assessed for internalized racism and the stereotypes. The participants were asked their opinion what it meant to be black/African American

Males: The men who held positive sentiments about being black reporting feeling a sense of pride associated with being African American. Discontent was also expressed when some of the participants reflected on the history of Africans and the place African Americans hold in society now.

Honestly what it means to be black is to equate yourself to a color in general it's a fluid term but at the same time given all the social structures of society that deem I... no umm I think its... it's a blessed burden I think and I always hearken back to the historical side of umm what brings me here is through every... every society has conquered or been conquered or every race every ethnicity what have you and even the ones that we don't know the history on I'm sure... cause the history books can only go so far back so whose ever writing them knowing the history of black American, African American, the African Diaspora is yes we've come from greatness and we have fallen but I think in a certain aspect we are getting back to that greatness on a more on a more all embodying level where it's like damn all this time it's been this race and that race but all the time we find that we are all the same and the hue of your skin doesn't qualify you to be more human than the next person but being black is just... knowing... just... we as people play... put so much emphasis on history and that aspect so being black means you know what like we have to see that somewhere along the lines we... I don't know it's all about always being and able to fight and overcome and I don't know sometimes...

To be black, um it means you were born with melanin, and to be black, I have a sense of pride, you know, the past, present, future of black people. I have a sense of - I don't have a huge sense of being angry at white people. I think that we've come a long way and I think now is a time for black people to move further within themselves so I think pride, confidence, I can walk into any room as a black man and feel I have just as much of a shot as anyone and that's not because I'm black but because I am just me. Basically the one word is pride.

One participant response spoke to the nature of African American having a specific definition. The participant responded that the definition of being black varies based on each African American's definition of it.

My opinion to be black, to be African American, ok I'm going to answer for myself. To be black for me, is just being me, because, like you just gave all the names for people that were born from African Descent, black American, Afro-American. So many labels, so, if I'm Afro-American that definitely means I'm natural, or you say I'm black, so it's like, I'm Tupac. I've seen boys in the hood, so it's like, say you meet someone, you haven't seen juice, you haven't seen boys in the hood, oh you're not black. Does that really mean you aren't black? Because if we're going through the same struggle

because this white person on the bus just called you nigger is that the same experience, or even, even that, because, you know a white person, whatever white person decides that, you know what I'm saying, that whole thing, that whole mind control of what black is and what we should glorify and what we should be proud of. Is it being proud to wear Afro being black, or having the same experience of living in the ghetto. I think if I'm born black, I am black and whatever I want to define it as, that is what it is. So whether I want to talk with a white accent or British accent, or I like Walker Texas Ranger or I like, The Wire, you know, it, so it's one of those things like, what is love. Shit. You know what I mean? It's relevant to what you think it is. It's relevant to you.

Females: The women responded that being Black/African American came with a sense of pride. All of the women reported being proud to be black. The women defined being black as being “beautiful, strength, pride, and being born immutable characteristics that comes with years of history behind it.” However one participant could not give a response to the question. When asked what did being black mean to her, the participant simply replied, “I don't know.

In this study, the participants were solicited about their thoughts of positive and negatives message that they associate with being African American. The purpose is to gauge the types of messages that one may internalize about their own race and how it may affect their identity and how they view others who may share a similar identity.

Males: Some of the negative themes that the men reported were the high rates of incarceration of black men, the low rates of higher education of black men and the negative view that society has about African Americans. Some of the participants reported that the media plays a large part in portraying African American males in a negative light. One participant reported wanting to try to change the course of racism but conceded that he could not solve the problem on his own. One participant reported that he has reached a point in his life where the negative looks no longer bother him. The gentleman reported that if someone

views him negatively, then the fault and onus lies with that person and not with him. Two of the participants had this to say about the topic:

I don't feel as though I was taught a lot of the things that a lot of my peers that are white were taught - mainly financial things and things of that sort. So I feel as though I started in a negative because I didn't know a lot of things that they know. I hate that some of the quote un-quote black areas of town don't have some of the things white areas have. We want Starbucks. Why does Walmart have to have outdated orange juice? I hate the old stereotypes that come about. I hate the fact that I don't even like being in the same room as someone's purse, she goes in her purse and something is missing, I'm instantly a suspect.

The negative things are the basic statistics and the greater American society statistics, like high rates of incarceration and high rates of out of wedlock but I don't think that is the totality of who we are, I think a lot of that comes from trauma in our communities and so on. So I think that is where a lot of those negative things—I don't think we are predisposed to that, I think those are just products of our condition in this country and a lot of things that have been left un-dealt with.

Identifying positive African American attributes were harder to come by for the men in this study. Of the positive that were identified, the men reported the black people have “swag”, they are artistic, creative and athletic, black men have are thought to have big penis’, and black people are resilient. One participant had this to say about the subject:

The positive thing about being black is - that I am black. Um, my skin kisses the sun. Everybody seems like they want to be black, but they don't actually want the pigment. So they get the booty, they get the injections, they get the lip injections, they go tan. That's the weird thing about it. We are so discriminated against for our skin tone and who we are, but everybody wants to be that or adopt that or take all the great attributes. It's like everything, in terms of the lips, the butt, they want that, but they don't want the negative that all the other races have put on being black. That's even within the Indian culture where you have dark skinned, black Indians. It's really weird, I really don't understand it.

Females: The negative characteristics that the majority of women identified were the effects of racism. One participant reported that there weren't any negatives associated with being Black/ African American. However the other women responded in this way:

Yes I would say racism, oppression, marginalization, stigmatization, not having equal opportunities, not having access to resources, how African Americans are negatively

portrayed in the media looking at the fact how you have to sometimes minimize or reduce your knowledge or expertise so you do not come across as if you are more knowledgeable than someone else which may then be interpreted as “you are better than me”. So I would especially as an African American, an African American woman, its a lot of censoring that has to take place. So you can kinda, stay in your lane and grow without offending others.

Yes there is not enough time on our interview process to get into that. It’s unfortunate but it is so true. There are people who would rather say that we should know our place and our place would be in an arena where we are not part of the affluent... there are... goodness that’s such a convoluted question because there are... there is a prognosis that was given to us after slavery that was so grim that generations removed from it you can still see mental, a mental slavery or a mental shackling and it is a very rampant thing that has run through the African American community. We are not physically in chains anymore but mentally what we go after is interesting, it’s sad. These are prominent issues.

Females: The females were able to ascertain more positive traits associated with African Americans than their male counter parts. The women reported that the positive thing about being Black /African American is “a strong cultural pride” also being aggressive in a way that overcomes adversities and obstacles that are placed by society’s marginalization.

One participant spoke about the beauty of being black:

Have good hair, extremely good hair. It can shrink and it can be really long, just by adding heat to it. I think it’s absolutely amazing; it’s so thick and luscious. And people always want to touch it, especially white people, whether you have an afro or locks, I love having this black hair, the physique, the African or the black shape of the body is really nice, lots of curves going on everywhere. Um the skin, black don’t crack. It’s nice because we have natural oils in our skin and it keeps us looking really nice and young when you’re old. I mean I’m 22. I get mistaken for being in high school still.

One participant reported a perceived negative as a positive attribute of being Black.

Uh, it horrible to say but uh one of the things I always find that’s helpful for me you know they tell you not to walk on the street at night by yourself but nobody messes with me especially when I have that mean look on my face like leave me alone so when I want to be left alone, people leave me alone because there probably scared that I’m gonna do something.

The participants were asked who they thought strongly influenced their views and/or perceptions about other African Americans.

Males: reported that their family and the media that is controlled by the dominant society played a large part in shaping their views about other African Americans.

I hate to say it but I think the biggest one is the media and even though I am aware of the media and how it spins things and how it teaches us, how we internalize it. A lot it is just like unconscious and I know that just by reading and literature behind it and even just some of my own feelings and things that I may not believe but I react to it a certain way and when I do it sometimes I'm upset with myself. I mean there's a fine line between you and I'm from Philadelphia so if I go down the street and there's a group of kids on the corner or something and they look shady like yeah I'ma get ready but at the same time how much of that is what the media portrays and how much of that is me trying to be smart and trying not to get my ass beat or hurt or killed or so I think it's hard to it's not easy to discern and then the other thing I mean like my family so I will say that to me you know my peoples just really instilling that in teaching me how to be a strong black man in the world where you're not necessarily favorite it or not going to be given things you have to earn it so those are my two top.

Two participants also noted the role that black media played in shaping these messages.

People like Oprah, people like Jay-Z. These are people that I look at as kind of the symbol of black success, what I strive for. They are the good side. I look at Medea and that's the negative side of black imagery, so my view of black people is somewhere between Oprah and Medea—boom -right in the middle.

It's a mixture of medium, cinema, photography, videos, and movies. We don't really know the effects of a lot of the things that we produce. You know, I think when people did movies like *Boyz in the Hood*, they were trying to do like the Vietnam War, because they had all those videos and footage, that's why they stopped, but with us it's like they perpetuated it. It prescribed it. But it didn't stop, you know so, you got people in the suburbs who didn't know anything about gangsta rap or about gang violence and now it's like "oh let me do that" and so I think that has had a major effect. Just the lack of knowledge about myself, like in the public school system, they hide everything about being African American except for Martin Luther King Jr. or Rosa Parks. Seeing that and then seeing the people around me who just don't give a fuck about themselves or about their history. Then going to find out about myself and my history and these are people in my own family, it's almost like you are speaking another language. It breaks down the community of African Americans, Afro Americans, Black, it's almost like a tribal instinct, ok, I'm Afro American, you're black, I'm Caribbean American, I'm Haitian American, I'm Jamaican American, so you know it's just, we just, um, it becomes so complicated.

Although most messages can be perceived as negative, the men felt that this exposure was overall positive in the sense that they felt empowered to become better people and work

to improve the plight of African American people. The lack of information being offered, in schools and other settings, led them to search for the information themselves. Family was also huge in providing relevant and positive information that they did not receive in everyday societal interactions. Two participants noted that the church was also influence in shaping their views.

Where I come from, you know the Bay Area is known for their black power. I think church reflected that at the time.

Females: Similar to the males, the females responded that their family played a huge role in influencing how they view other African Americans. Life experience was also a huge factor in influencing their viewpoints. Church was also touted to be an influential factor. The females reported that these factors have been positive.

Positive, always positive. Both of them always taught me we are the first people and we should hold ourselves to a higher standard, and make other people, other black people aware and hold them to a higher standard. About recognizing your own and building up the rest.

The participants were asked if they felt if these influences were a factor in choosing a mate.

Males: The men affirmed that they were influenced by their internalized perceptions of African American people. Most of the men responded that these influences led them to want to choose an African American woman as their mate. One participant responded that early influences have played a large part in what he finds attractive about a woman.

Yes umm because um yeah like you sure you want to write all of this... so yeah because alright basically the images that I've gotten were growing up in the inner city and you kind of see what your hood chicks are like. That's kinda what you are around so you adapted to you know that way of functioning in a relationship on that type level and also from your mom's or my mom's and knowing that she laid down the law or whatever have you and so understanding that those characteristics you know I've learned to adapt to those but in growing mentally and seeing a variety of things and kind of what works in relationships and what doesn't you still want a taste of what you know but you also want or I also want something different in regards to things that I have seen as ideal so in choosing a mate it was who can still carry what I've known and

what's comforting in regards to you know what I grew up with and what was nurturing to me in a sense and balance that out with what I see as something functional if that's a word for me and how I see a relationship being sustainable I need a I guess I need a ghetto as bogie broad (laughs) sorry .

It has, I think, because when you get a Michelle Obama type of woman, you kind of like, like when Barack Obama first came into prominence, you saw Michelle, every black man was like "That is what I want right there" and I think that has definitely influenced, I see a lot of the traits of Michelle Obama in my wife, so yea.

Females: Reported that these influences have affected their choice in mate.

Well, I mean, an intellectual mate, who is cognizant of the perception, or well, the persona he portrays to the public, so yea, kind of.

Picture Questions

In this section the participants were shown a set of pictures (Appendix H and I) and asked to identify whom they thought were attractive. The pictures were arranged in sets (5 sets for the men and 4 sets for the women) with three pictures to a set. Each picture set included a person that could be considered to have a light complexion, medium complexion and a dark complexion. In each set the order varied as to not have the participants predict the order of hue placement. The pictures were selected from a Google image search of Black/African American models. The pictures were then ranked in attractiveness by a separate group of people. To control for "attractiveness", only the pictures that ranked the highest were used in the actual interviews. The pictures were only headshots. This allowed the participants to focus on the complexion, facial features (broad nose, thick lips,) and hair of the models. The participants were shown the pictures for a short period of time (the time varied on whether the interview was in person or via Skype). The participants were then asked to choose who they thought was the most attractive. The short time period given to view the pictures was a method to get the interviewees to with their gut reaction. Finally the participants were presented with a group picture that contained 9 individual headshots. The

group contained 3 pictures each of models that could be identified to be lighter complexion, medium complexion and dark complexion. When selecting the pictures, attention was also paid to the hair and the facial features of each model so that a variety of features were present. The participants were asked three questions for the group picture. 1) To select the picture of the person that is closest to whom they normally date, 2) Who is most attractive and why 3) who is least attractive and why.

Males: The male participants when going with their gut reaction on the timed picture sets mostly chose the picture of the woman considered medium complexion. Their responses closely mirrored their responses to the earlier question about skin complexion, the majority of the men responded that skin complexion did not matter and they have dated women of various hues. When presented with the group question a vast difference in the men's preference in complexion emerged.

The participants were asked to select the picture of the woman closest to which they normally date. The men overwhelmingly chose a woman of lighter complexion (n=6) with the majority of them (n=5) choosing the same woman. This woman could be described as a light complexioned African American woman with shoulder length dreadlocks, a petite African nose and full lips. The selection of this picture also supports the men's earlier responses reflecting their preference for women with natural hair.

In regards to the second question about who they thought was most attractive, the men answers varied again with 3 participants choosing the same light complexion woman from the first question, 3 participants selected a medium complexioned woman and one participant selected a dark complexioned women. When assessing the responses for differences in geographical locales, the men from the north preferences reflected a light to medium choice

whereas the men from the south preference ranged from light to dark with the majority (n=2) choosing a medium complexion woman as most attractive.

When asked who they thought was least attractive three participants selected a light complexion woman, 3 selected a medium complexioned woman and one selected a dark complexioned woman. What was interesting is that the three participants who selected the light complexion woman as least attractive also selected a light complexion woman as who they would normally date. The women shared similar features; they are both light complexioned with dreadlocks. However the woman that they selected as least attractive had more European features with her nose and lips. When asked what qualities made her least attractive, this is how they responded:

Her smile is kind of awkward, um she's got like, I don't know, she's just, her head to smile ratio is a little bit off.

P- I have to say for my tastes, I probably would not date H.

R- What are the qualities that make them unattractive?

P- It doesn't make her ugly or anything like that, that type of sister just never been into me. That type of sister is going to have her dude, dark skinned cat, cat got roots you know, the whole nine. That was never really my style.

P- Her face

R- Can you tell me a little bit more?

P- Her facial structure is just not attractive

R- And what about her facial structure that is not attractive? If you could pinpoint it.

P- I couldn't

Three men chose a medium complexioned woman as unattractive. Two chose the same woman with the other selecting a different person. The men who chose the same woman had this to say as to why they found her unattractive:

Her nose is a little to big and just the angle that she is facing is not as flattering so... that would be it. It just really sticks out.

Her nose.

The gentleman who selected the other medium complexioned woman had this to say about why he found her unattractive:

P- Umm [She has] the look, it's kind of "nigga I'm gone fuck you over"! Naw, the look, it seems mischievous. It seems like, I'm looking at you to entice you cause something on a materialistic level. I'm saying all this but I'm just looking at them and...

R- That's normally how we make our judgments

P- This is true but can you bring them in here so I can talk to them?

The final gentleman who chose the dark complexioned woman as least attractive reported "Her hair is kinda... umm... I don't know what is going on". The woman in the picture, who he was referencing, hair, is straighten/permed. It is also styled in a way that appears disheveled. This response could be interpreted in two ways to support earlier statements made by the men. The first is the men's preference for women with natural hair. The second is for a woman whose appearance is well maintained. Skin complexion may not be the sole deciding factor that contributed to her being considered least attractive.

Females: The female participants varied greatly in the choices of men from the picture set. The women were shown four picture sets on which to make an immediate response to. On picture set 1, two women chose the lighter complexion male, two chose the medium complexion male and three chose the darker complexioned male. On set 2 the women were split between the medium (n=3) and the darker (n=3) male, with only one participant choosing the lighter complexioned male. In set 3, the women overwhelmingly chose the darker complexion male (n=6) with only one female choosing the lighter complexion male. The fourth and final set the women overwhelmingly chose the lighter complexion male (n=6) with only one choosing the medium complexioned male. In these sets, there were very little geographical differences in responses.

However, the group picture question is when a difference in the women's preference in complexion emerged. The participants were asked to select the picture of the man closest to which they normally date. The women were split down the middle with the women from the South showing a preference for the lighter skinned males and the women from the North showing a preference for the medium complexion males.

In regards to the second question about who they thought was most attractive, the women's answers flipped with the women from the South showing a preference to the darker skinned males. The women from the North showed a preference for the lighter skinned males.

When asked who they thought was least attractive three participants selected a darker complexion man and 4 selected a lighter complexioned man. The lighter complexion male, although he presents as "clean-cut", is wearing braids. Assessing the women's earlier responses, this may be the reason why he was chosen as least attractive. This is how the women responded to this question:

He looks like a player.

Ooooh **E** with those braids. He's cute but just the braids. I can't even see past the braids. So I have already judged him probably.

I don't know, he just is. Maybe because he looks like he has braids and he's too old for that.

The women who chose the darker complexion man as least attractive were women who expressed a strong preference for interracial dating or made the specification of only dating light skinned men. This is how they responded when asked what qualities made him least attractive.

He looks like he is about to get mad or something. I don't know. He looks angry.

Because he's really dark and he's balding.

He looks the oldest and he's bald yep that's it and he has a mustache a really thick mustache on his top lip I don't like that

Additional Comments

As a final question to close out the interview, the participants were asked if there were any questions or ideas that could be added to this discussion. Most respondents, male and female, responded that they hadn't considered many of the questions asked so they felt that the interview was very inclusive. However a few offered some thoughts as to how this interview could improve.

Female

Right, is there something I should change in my mannerisms or thoughts you know am I off base with this line of thinking, my line of reasoning. That would be the only thing, but maybe that would come at the conclusion of your study. What do I need to change? Maybe I would be much better off not thinking outside of my race. Because my mind say yes that's a powerful thing to do because the gene pool of blacks is getting smaller but maybe by doing so I am making it too broad

Males

I would say in relation to finding a mate, your mate's view on kind of blackness and being black and their comfortability in their skin. I've met a lot of women who aspire for more quote unquote Caucasian things in life. Views on hip hop is huge, hip hop kind of defines black culture, and so um, you know I think a deal breaker for me is a woman who doesn't like hip hop, hates everything hip hop related, then on the other side a woman driving around letting her four year old listen to Gucci man, that's another thing.

I think, one what about the media's role in how we see ourselves and also what do you accounts for the strain in black relationships, a part of me doesn't buy that, there's a lot of strain...relationship with your mother, you kind of touched on it I guess, asking about my family, but I think our parents play a big role in how we see relationships in general. That is all I can think of. The pictures are really hard.

Um, maybe um, one of the questions, if the mate has attended HBCU or a predominantly white school, and maybe her speech. Something with speech or

like how she talks, if it's you know, and trying to get back to that what is black. So if she talks more proper or valleyish or whatever. Also if they had, or were raised in a single parent home.

Summary

Most participants in this study reported that they had never thought of these questions before, which may imply a blind approach to entering a relationship or an approach that is dictated by attraction alone. Many of the women expressed a sense of frustration with the mate searching process and those who were married were happy to be done with the process. The men in the study appeared pressured by the process and expressed less frustration. Most of the participants' responses contained some level of internalized racism, some more apparent than others. A particularly interesting find was the male reported embrace of women with more Afrocentric features. However, the overwhelming selection of the lighter skinned African American woman as whom they typically date, put that finding in jeopardy. Additionally, the males' interviews were a lot longer than the women and they were more willingly to expound on a subject than the females in this interview. Perhaps a quantitative study will gather a more balance response.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The major research questions that this study posed were: 1) Does internalized racism affect the mate selection process of African American men and women? 2) Were participants' reported undesirable or desirable characteristics of possible mates match the common stereotypes of African Americans portrayed in American society? 3) Was shadism practiced in the mate selection process amongst African American? 4) "Were there differences in the data among participants of different genders or geographic locations?" This chapter presents this study's findings in comparison to the previous literature on African American mate selection process. According to the findings in this study, internalized racism does appear to affect the mate selection process of heterosexual African Americans. Some participants' reports of undesirable traits were concurrent with common negative stereotypes of African Americans. Additionally, although most participants reported that colorism did not affect their mate selection process, when presented with photographs organized in terms of shade variance their reactions presented some differences to their previous responses. There were also some noticeable differences in the responses between gender and slight differences between geographic locations.

Current Findings and the Previous Literature

There were a large number of factors that this study used to look at the determinants of mate selection. In order to compare this study's findings to the previous literature, the results of this study are categorized into five major sections: 1) attractiveness, 2) values, 3) socioeconomic status, 4) family, race and dating and 5) cultural/racial awareness. Each section will include sub-headings that reveal similar and/or relevant findings.

Attractiveness

In previous studies, questions of physical attractiveness were not asked outright of the participants. In Esmail and Sullivan's (2006) study, attractiveness was linked to skin shade preference and not physical characteristics that one may or may not find attractive. Ross (1997) noted that physical attractiveness was important to men, but stopped short of asking its participants what they thought were physically attractive to them. The current study ventured to identify specific physical characteristics that African Americans deemed attractive in a mate. The men and women in this study found similar physical characteristics to be attractive; a person's buttocks, eyes, height, weight, body type, smile/teeth, face, complexion and hair.

As previously stated, skin shade/complexion/tone was a key component in many of the studies regarding mate selection (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Ross, 1997). According to Esmail and Sullivan's (2006) study that assessed color preferences in college students, 74% of the male participants and 64% of the female participants found that African Americans of lighter complexion to be more attractive. Looking to recreate the outcomes of that study, the participants in this study were presented with pictures of African American men or women of various complexions, the opposite or converse gender, and

asked to identify whom they thought were most attractive. According to the participants in this study, they similarly chose lighter complexioned women as more attractive with 3 selecting light complexion and 3 selecting medium complexion. However, the women's responses revealed a variance that previous studies did not code for, and that was geographical variance. The women in this study who were from the South found darker complexioned men to be most attractive, whereas the women from the North showed a preference for lighter complexioned men.

Another interesting finding in this study was the differences in what the men reported as attractive and whom they chose as someone they typically dated. The men in this study reported that skin complexion was not an important factor in attractiveness and whom they chose to date. However, when identifying, from photographs, a picture of a woman who closely reflected whom they normally date; the men overwhelmingly chose the lighter complexioned female. These results support the findings in previous studies (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Ross, 1997) that African American men preferred women who are of a lighter complexion. Additionally, this finding supports this study's assumption that shadism is practiced as a part of the mate selection process within the African American community. However, one can assume that, due to the variance in what men report as physically attractive and who they chose to normally date, there may be an unconscious level of internalized racism that may play a part in the mate selection process. Also geographic location may unconsciously influence the mate selection process.

Values

Value characteristics were more notably identified in mate selection studies than were physical characteristics in the previous studies (Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2009; Marbley, 2003; Ross, 1997) According to a previous study (King & Allen, 2009), the characteristics of an ideal partner are: reliable, monogamous, affectionate, financially stable, African American, confident, religious, and spiritual. Allen noted that women tended to want a man who is more financially stable, completed formal education, and should not place a high priority on sex. These desired characteristics were mirrored in Holland's (2009) study. Women desired men with the following qualities: positive work ethic, family oriented, good caregiver, ambitious, goal oriented, positive role model. Marbley's (2003) men wanted women who could commit, communicate, think, and survive. These traits were also repeated in the current study. The men wanted trustworthy and honest (n=3), integrity, morality, good foundation and principles (n=4), compassionate, caring, nurturing and kind (n=5) with were some slight geographical differences in the males' answers. The men from the North predominately favored intelligence (n=2) while the men from the South favored kind, nurturing woman. Women wanted honesty (n=4) and a sense of humor (n=4) was what they valued most in a partner. There were also traits were similar in nature that could be combined, goal-oriented, determined, motivated and hard working (n=4). These desired traits did not support the negative stereotypes that are prevalent about African Americans. Some studies (Czopp & Monteith, 2006; Dixon, 2009) highlighted that common negative stereotypes about African Americans are lazy, undependable, unreliable, low work ethic, poor language skills, unstable work history, poor dressing habits, negative drug test, unintelligent, violent, and overly sexualized. By comparing the common negative

stereotypes and the character values that are being sought by the participants in this study, one might theorize that these participants may seek out more positive traits to combat the negative stereotypes that are commonly thought about African Americans.

Socioeconomic Status

Dixon (2009) noted that when African American couples marry, it is the first time that they will enter into middle class as a result of their combined incomes. King and Allen (2009) found that the income the women requested of their ideal mate was \$16,905.00 higher than the women's actual income. There was a similarity to those results in this study. The women in this study, on average, wanted their ideal mate's income to be at least \$24,000.00 more than their current income. However, I must note that some of the women in this study were in college and their earning potential has the possibility of increasing which would lower the gap between their incomes and that of their ideal partner. Equally, the unbalanced rate of women entering college and higher paid careers compared to men must be addressed. African American women may not be able to find an African American male who will match her earning power or academic accomplishments. And if she does, she may face a new set of issues. In Marbley's (2003) study of college-educated men, the participants responded that an educated African American woman may be seen as intimidating. Additionally, black women with higher levels of education are not impressed with men with graduate degrees. This sentiment could be seen as supported by the women in Holland's (2009) study who reported that they expect a man to match her level of education and drive. This is mirrored by the

responses from the women in this study, where the majority of the women reported that an undergraduate level of education is the minimum level of education that a man must have before they would pursue a relationship. Whereas, with the men in this study, a formal education was not as important as it was to the women. These responses can be seen as supporting two findings that are often found in mate selection literature 1) women are taught to marry up and 2) concordantly men tend to marry women of lower economic status. This can be seen as an issue within the African American community thought with African American women entering college, pursuing higher degrees, and entering the professional workforce at higher rates than African American men.

Family Influence

Wilder and Cain (2010) and Dixon (2008) point to the extended family as being an instrumental part of socialization for African American families. However, according to this study, one third of the participants reported that their family had no influence at all over their mate selections process, and with another one third reporting that a minor familial influence. Additionally, the majority of the women and almost half of the men reported that their parents did not offer positive role modeling in how to find a good mate.

Race and Dating: Interracial Dating, Intra-racial Dating

King and Allen (2009) found that 45% of their participants reported that race should not matter when dating. This finding was somewhat supported by the participants in this study. Most of the participants (with the exception of 2) reported that they preferred their ideal mate to be African American. However, all of the participants reported that they would date and even marry interracially. Some of the participants

attributed their willingness to pursue interracial relationships to maturation and higher education. This finding was similar to results that Holland found in her study that the exposure to higher levels of education could change the perspective of student's thoughts on mate expectations. Two female participants attributed the broadening of their choices to the low-sex (male to female) ratio, reporting difficulties in finding the ideal African American male.

Racial Awareness

The previous studies (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Holland, 2009; King & Allen, 2007; Marbley, 2003; and Ross, 1997) on African American mate selection do little to connect the mate selection process to internalized racism or even an Afrocentric awareness of oneself and other African Americans. Further research in this area should be pursued to obtain a better understanding of how internalized stereotypes affect how African Americans see each other as desirable mates and the value they place on their romantic relationships. Most of the participants in this study attributed a sense of pride to being African American, however they also reported being weighed down by being stereotyped. Most reported on the institutional racism that African Americans endure, the stereotypical reactions and micro aggression that African Americans have to endure daily and struggle of having to submerge negative feelings related to the racism, oppression, marginalization and stigmatization in order to exist.

Implications for Clinical Social Work

Theories of racial identity development points to adolescence as a "fertile time for developing a racial and ethnic identity, but the process begins in early childhood and is lifelong" (Miller and Garran, 2008, p. 109). In Williams and Davidson's (2009) study

they found internalized racism in African American children as young as 7 years old. The children involved in the study, when presented with African American and Euro American images, showed more negative views towards African American images. Additionally, when presented with images of African Americans showed more negative views for darker-complexion versus lighter complexion. In Beverly Tatum's (1997) book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, she noted that children as young as three years old start to "notice physical differences such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features" (p. 32) and due to their very concrete thinking, they may often make comments and ask questions about differences that they observe.

This is a point in development in which empowerment based interventions could be introduced to younger children. Young African American youth receive an onslaught of negative message about their identity daily. These negative messages can be found on television, from the media portraying very stereotypical images of African American people, the news that will readily identify a black face when a crime has been committed or a news piece that highlights an African American person who sounds "ignorant" that may get replayed for entertainment purposes on websites such as YouTube or World Star Hip Hop. These negative messages are also found in school curricula, with educational lessons about African Americans that are only limited to covering slavery and highlighting the atrocities of the civil rights movement and with little to no focus on the success and positive contributions African Americans made to society outside the genres of sports and music. This limited scope of academic representation was supported in the responses from some of the participants in the study who reported that their dearth of knowledge about the positive of African American people did not happen until they

reached college and was exposed to the information or had the ability to seek out the information for themselves.

A mezzo-focused approach could be used to offset the effects of internalized racism. More empowerment programs targeted toward younger African American youth during the developmental stage of identification could help support self-esteem, self-efficacy, positive self-regard and embracing images of African Americans of various skin complexions. Skin color preference also continues to be a problem in the African American community. Thompson and Keith (2001) found in their study that in the African American community self-esteem is correlated with skin shade, reporting that the lighter the complexion the higher the level of self-esteem. They also discovered that social success that is achieved through higher levels of education and career achievements helps to counteract the effects of negative self-esteem that a woman of a darker complexion may feel. The findings of this study is not limited just to clinical social workers but also to those who come into contact in a helping capacity with the African American community, pastors, school personnel, afterschool programs teen and young adult organizations.

Most important, the implication for the social work profession is that clinicians may not be aware that internalized racism may be considered as part of the presenting problem when working with African American clients. Adhering to the practice of person-in –environment, recognizing the part racism plays in the lives of African Americans is important. Clinicians who utilize traditional methods of therapy when working with African American clients in the areas of marriage, conflict resolution or issues around self-esteem, may naively overlook internalized racism resulting in an

unaddressed issue in treatment. Because internalized racism can be unconscious, it may be the core issue of many problems because there is shame associated with talking about racism, Internalized racism is often missing from the discussion around marriage and family formation.

Clinicians working in couples counseling can gain a better understanding of the dynamics behind African American couples and the differences in the typical set-up of traditional relationships of the male as the breadwinner and the wife as the emotional support. Within the African American community, women are entering professional careers at higher rates and higher levels of education than men. The results found in this study which is repeated in other studies, show that African American women still want to “marry-up” or at least desire a man who meets them on their same level in terms of educational accomplishments. This may be unrealistic expectation. The dynamic of perhaps having to be the breadwinner while also desiring a male counterpart to be the head of the household may create tension and resentment in the relationship.

Additionally, clinicians should understand that the socialization message that men should be the head of household and this being an issue for some African American men not meeting that standard, could further complicate the matter. Further research on the mate selection process in the African Americans and /or people of color should be done to understand the weight that gender, culture plays on African American relationships. Greater access to resources is needed for couples and/or marriage counselors that focus on maintaining commitment and highlighting unique challenges that may differ than the messages given during socialization by the predominant society.

Limitations and Biases

This study is limited in generalizability to the larger population due to the small sample size. There were only 14 participants involved in the study. A comparison in gender responses based on geographical location was also attempted which further reduced the size of comparable participants. A study done with a larger representation would help the findings be more generalizable. Increasing the size of the qualitative study that allowed for some randomization of the sample, would serve as the basis for a quantitative study. Additionally, a quantitative study would help to limit researcher bias and limit the lack of objectivity of the participants or the participants need to curb their responses to satisfy the interviewer.

The data collection instrument used in this study had not been tested for reliability or validity. Also, standardized measures for internalized racism were not used. This study was preliminary and limited in scope. Repeat research studies using this interview format or an interview format that has been peer-reviewed would contribute to the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Being raised in an Afro-centric household in the south, racism and racial identity have always been factors in my life. My personal experience could be seen as a strength and as a limitation to this study. The strength of my experiences gives me insight on this issue within the African American community and the profound effect that it can have not only on the self-esteem of African Americans but also on the relationship formation process. This experience has enabled me to see the way assimilation into American society, racism, and prejudice has been and currently is a problem that African Americans are challenged with daily. The limitation of my personal experience can create a biased approach to the formation of the study, the interview and the interpretation of the

participant responses. The low rates of marriages and high rates of single parent households in the African American community has inspired to do this particular study. My hope is to help address these issues by issuing a call for more informed research.

Recommendations for Future Research

These findings may also be used to inspire larger studies on the effects of internalized racism on African Americans. The field of social work could benefit from fostering more research within the field studying African American relationships from an empirical point of view. Increasing the amount of research on African Americans by African Americans in this area is extremely important and significant. One must be cautious not to create further tensions within the African American community in which the blame game is played between men and women. For example, Senior Editor of *Beyond Black and White*, an online magazine blog, Jamila Akil responded to recent statistics presented by the United Negro College fund that stated, “Black women are enrolling in college in record numbers—numbers higher than any other race, ethnic group, or gender (2013). Akil (2013) stated that black women should limit the levels of education to a bachelor’s degree only and look for a husband. She attributed the low rates of African American marriages to black women pursuing higher degrees. Akil (2013) stated in her article “perhaps instead of seeking a degree, more black women should be seeking a husband” and “Black women are not getting husbands, so instead they are attempting to get a college degree”. Instead of placing blame within the African American community, more efforts to identify barriers to healthy relationships in order to help create ways to overcome them by creating more programs for couples based in empirical research.

Due to the limited amount of research conducted in the area of African American mate selection, there are areas of research that could stand to benefit from the findings of this study. Turner, Wieling and Allen (2004) noted that due to the current and historical disparities within the mental health field, research has limited, overlooked and/or excluded communities of color from conceptual, theoretical and methodological frameworks that inform interventions. This oversight has ignored the lived experiences and salient factors that are important to minority groups. This neglect has resulted in poorly devised interventions (programs and psychotherapy) that do not adequately address the needs of communities of color. Turner, Wieling and Allen (2004) also noted that minorities who are used in research are often included in comparative studies that act to normalize the thoughts, interactions, development and lived experiences of being “white” and furthers the process of “othering” communities of color by identifying their thoughts, interactions, development and lived experiences as deficits. The lack of culturally sensitive and empirically tested research done on behalf of communities of color has provided a very narrow scope of interventions targeted towards minorities. Additionally, most interventions are created based on the comparative research and are formed to “fix” the perceived deficits within communities of color. Turner et al (2004) pointed out that the approach to conducting culturally sensitive research is complex due to the intersections of race, culture, ethnicity and economics (p.258). One framework that the authors pinpointed in the article was a cultural variance model. This framework could be used a way to approach evidenced based research with communities of color. Turner et al (2004) defined the cultural variance model as one that does not include a comparative group “as it is believed that because of unique backgrounds, each ethnic

group develops fundamentally different adaptation and/or resilience processes (p. 259).

An effort should be made to promote more research in the areas of minorities with a culturally sensitive lens. Universities, hospitals, etc. should provide funding for more culturally sensitive evidenced based research that includes, race, culture, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as separate factors, to provide a greater dearth of information to adequately inform appropriate clinical interventions. The outcomes from these evidenced based practices can inform the type of interventions that are created to help combat the effects of internalized racism.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Dear XXXXXXXX

My name is Afrika Cotton, and I am a graduate student in the Advanced Standing MSW Program at Smith College School for Social Work. I am doing an exploratory research study for my Master's thesis requirement. The focus of this study is to gather information about the mate selection process of African Americans and the possible relationship to internalized racism. *Internalized racism* is the process of adopting other peoples' stereotypical beliefs about oneself or the community in which a person belongs. The effects of internalized racism can be seen as color prejudice (or shadism), self-hatred, low self-esteem, and stereotyping (Miller & Garran, 2008).

Would you please help me find participants who would be interested in engaging in an interview about their mate selection process? I am looking for participants who are African Americans between the ages of 18 and 44 without first or 2nd generational mixed ethnicity.

My study will focus on whether internalized racism consciously or unconsciously its possible relationship to the African American mate selection process. The study will also determine whether gender difference and geographic location increases or decreases the levels of experienced internalized racism.

All interested participants will be given a screening questionnaire. If you know anyone who meets the criteria to participate, please direct them to the acotton@smith.edu. The forwarding of this email to other potential participants would be very helpful!

If you have any questions about my research or the nature of participation, please feel free to email me (acotton@smith.edu).

Thank you for your time, assistance with, and interest in my research topic.

Sincerely

Afrika Cotton
MSW Candidate, Smith College School for Social Work

Appendix B

Facebook Post

Dear friends,

Currently, I am working on obtaining my Master's degree. As a part of that process, I must execute a thesis study. The focus of this study is to gather information about the mate selection process of African Americans and the possible impact of internalized racism.

I need your help in recruiting participants. All those who qualify for the study, will be contacted to participate in an interview session about their mate selection process. Potential participants should be African Americans between the ages of 18 and 44.

Participation in this study is confidential. Participants in the study will be given a numerical code and a pseudonym. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants may refuse to answer any interview questions(s), and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If possible, please forward this post to anyone who meets the criteria to participate or please direct them to the acotton@smith.edu in order to take part in the screening questionnaire. The forwarding of this post to potential participants would be very helpful!

If you have any questions about my research or the nature of participation, please feel free to email me (acotton@smith.edu).

Thank you for your time, assistance, and interest in my research topic!

Sincerely,

Afrika Cotton
MSW Candidate, Smith College School for Social Work

Appendix C

Screening Questions

1. Are you between the ages of 18 and 44? y/n
2. Do you identify as African American or Black? y/n
3. Were your parents, grandparents and great grandparents born in America? y/n
4. Would you consider your English as your first language? y/n
5. Would you consider yourself to be biracial or multiracial? y/n
6. Are you heterosexual? y/n
7. Are you transsexual or transgender? y/n

If the potential participants answered “yes” to questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and “no” to questions 5 and 7, then they will be contacted to set up a date/time for the interview.

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Dear Potential Research Participant,

My name is Afrika Cotton, and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a study on the mate selection process of African Americans with a focus on the possible impact of internalized racism. Data obtained in this study will be used in my master's thesis. The goal of this study is to provide more substantive data in this research area.

The requirements for participation are African Americans between the ages of 18 and 44 who are currently in and/or seeking heterosexual relationships. Very little research has been done about African American mate selection process.

If you choose to participate I will ask you about your thought process on choosing a mate, the qualities and characteristics you find attractive and/or desirable and those you do not find attractive/desirable. In addition, I will ask you to provide demographic information about yourself. Depending on your location, the interview will be conducted in-person or via Skype. The interview will be tape recorded and later transcribed. Direct quotes from the interview may be used in the thesis; but all identifying information will be disguised. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. I may also contact you after the interview for the purpose of further clarification and/or elaboration if necessary.

The risk of participating in the study may be that some of the interview questions could generate negative thoughts and/or uncomfortable feelings surrounding the topic. Enclosed in this mailing is a list of websites advertising psychotherapy resources that can be found in your state that you may refer to if you experience psychological distress as a result of participation in this study.

One benefit for participating in the survey may be that you will think more critically about your mate selection process. Unfortunately, I am not able to offer financial remuneration for your participation.

Your participation in this study is confidential. Once you agree to participate in the study you will be given a numerical code and a pseudonym. Your pseudonym will accompany any direct quotes that may be used in the thesis. Quotes will be disguised in addition to being written with a pseudonym. All recordings and transcripts will be labeled with your number. In addition, I will lock consent forms, recordings and interview notes in a password protected zip file on my personal computer during the thesis process and for three years thereafter, in accordance with federal regulations. After such time, I will either maintain the material in its secure location or destroy it. The demographic information obtained will be used to reflect the subject pool aggregate to provide further

confidentiality to the participants. Finally, if an additional data handler, transcriber, or analyst is used in this study, I will require her/him to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any interview questions(s), and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by indicating in writing that you are no longer interested in participating. You have until April 1, 2013 to withdraw from the study; after this date, I will begin the Results and Discussion sections of my thesis.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

_____ Signature of Participant

_____ Date

Please return this consent form to me by March 01, 2013 to indicate your intention of participating in the study (I suggest that you keep a copy of this consent form for your records).

Please include your name, telephone number and email address so that I may reach you. If I do not hear from you by then, please consider that I did not receive your information and resend it or call the number below.

If you have any further questions about this study, participation, rights of participants, or this consent form, please feel free to ask me at the contact information below or you may contact the, Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at dlburton@smith.edu.

Thank you for your time, and I greatly look forward to having you as a participant in my study.

Sincerely,

Afrika Cotton
XXX-XXX-XXXX
acotton@email.smith.edu

Appendix E

Psychotherapy Resources

Below you will find a list of psychotherapy resources that you may refer to should you experience psychological distress as a result of participation in this study.

Georgia

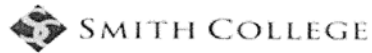
- The Georgia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (GAMFT)
<http://www.gamft.org/>
- Mental Health Georgia
www.mentalhealthgeorgia.com/
- Psychology Today
<http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/>
- Healing Circles, Inc
<http://www.healingcircles.org/>
- A.T.L. Psychotherapy & Consulting Services
<http://www.atlpsychology.com/>
- Thriveworks Atlanta Counseling
<http://www.atlanta-counseling.com/>

Massachusetts

- Department of Mental Health
www.mass.gov/dmh/
- Psychology Today
therapists.psychologytoday.com/
- NetworkTherapy.com
www.networktherapy.com
- Massachusetts Association for Marriage and Family Therapy,
www.mamft.org/

Appendix F

Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

February 14, 2013

Afrika Cotton

Dear Afrika,

Thank you for making all the requested changes to your Human Subjects Review application. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished).

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marsha Kline Pruett" followed by a stylized initial "MKP".

Marsha Kline Pruett, M.S., Ph.D., M.S.L.
Acting Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Jean LaTerz, Research Advisor

Appendix G

Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

1. What is your gender? (Male, Female)
2. How old are you? _____
3. In terms of race, how would you identify yourself? (Black, Black American, African American, Afro American, American)
4. Are you employed? (yes, no) (Full time, Part time)
5. What is your current income? (under \$10,000; \$10,000-\$19,999; \$20,000-\$29,000; \$30,000-\$39,999; \$40,000-\$49,999; \$50,000-\$74,999; \$75,000-\$99,999; \$100,000-\$150,000; over \$150,000)
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Grammar, High school or equivalent, Vocational/technical school, Some college, Associates degree, Bachelor's degree, Master's Degree, Doctoral degree, Professional degree (MD, JD, etc))
7. What is your current marital status? (Divorced, Living with another, Married, Separated, Single not dating, Single dating, Engaged, in a relationship)
8. Where were you born and raised? (state only please)
9. In which state do you currently reside?
 - 9b. How long have you been living there?
10. Which of the following best describes the area you live in? (Urban, Suburban, Rural)
11. Do you rent or own your home?

12. Do you have children? (yes/no)
13. How many under the age of 16?
14. Do they live with you? (part time/full time)

Interview Questions

Physical Characteristics

1. What are the top 5 physical characteristics/attributes you look for in a mate?

Probes

- *Can you talk more about those qualities?*
- *What do you imagine the race to be?*
- *What do you imagine skin complexion*

2. When looking for a mate, could you describe the importance of skin tone or skin complexion?

Probes

- When choosing someone to date, would you prefer him or her to be light, medium, dark complexion?*

3a. The latest trend within the African American population is women going natural. What are your thoughts on natural hair versus permed hair? (male question)

3b. What are your thoughts on men and their hair? Do you seek out “good hair”? (female question)

Probes

- *Do you find women with natural hair unattractive? Why or why not*
- *What are your thoughts on women who wear afros, braids, dread locs?*
- *Would you date a woman with weave/hair extensions? Why or why not*
- *Is the length or the texture of hair important? Why or why not*

Values

4. What values/character qualities do you look for in a mate? Do you think that an African American man/woman possesses these qualities?

5. Is your mate’s religion important to you? Why or why not? Is religion a deciding factor when choosing a mate? Why or why not?

6. Would you date someone who has been to jail before/ incarcerated?

7. What are your thoughts of your mate using recreational drugs (weed, ecstasy, LSD, heroin, cocaine)

7b Alcohol and/or nicotine

Education

9. How does the level of education affect your decision when choosing a mate?

Probes

- *Would you date someone with less education than yourself? Why or why not?*
- *Would you date a high school drop out? Why or why not?*

- *What level of education is your preference?*
- *Would you rather date someone attractive than smart? Please explain*

SES

10. Reasonably speaking, how much must a potential mate earn before you consider them for long term partnership or date 30,000; 40,000; 50,000; 60,000 or higher

Probes

- *Would you date someone without a car? Why or why not?*
- *Would you date someone who is unemployed? Why or why not?*
- *Would you date someone who spent beyond his or her financial means? Why or why not?*
- *Do you prefer your mate to wear name brand clothes? Why or why not?*

Family

11. What part does family play in your mate selection process?

Probes

- *What kind of a mate would your family want you to select?*
- *How is that different from what you would pick?*

12. Would you date a single parent?

Would date someone if they have children by more than one person? Why or why not?

13. Do you feel like your parents provide a good example of how to find a good mate? Why or why not?

Career

13. What career path would you prefer in a mate?

Probes

- *Would you date someone who wanted a career rapper/singer? Why or why not?*
- *Would date someone who wanted a career actor/actress? Why or why not?*
- *Would date someone who wanted a career professional athlete? Why or why not?*

Race

14. Have you dated outside of your race?

Probes

- *How do you feel about dating outside of your race?*
- *Do you find yourself being more attracted to those outside of your race?*

15. Would you marry someone outside of your race? Why or why not?

Self-hatred/self acceptance

16. What does it mean to be black?

17. How do you classify yourself?

18. What are the negative things that you have found with being black?

19. What are the positive things associated with being black?

20. Have you had any issues of dating within your race? (certain skin complexion, certain type, felt that you didn't measure up)

What are your thoughts when I say these statements?

- *I think the majority of black people are ghetto*
- *Black women are loud*
- *There are no good black men/women*
- *I believe that not many African Americans have degrees past undergraduate school*
- *Black women are aggressive*
- *Black men are lazy*
- *Black men are absentee fathers*
- *Black women can't keep a man because they are emasculating*
- *Only lighter complexioned African Americans are attractive*
- *Black people are better at sports*

Picture Questions

I will present you with 3 sets of four pictures throughout the course of the interview. The pictures will be revealed for 5 seconds. Please select the picture that you find most attractive.

Look at the pictures in front of you. I will ask a few questions please select the picture that is most appropriate.

1. Which of these pictures is closer to the people you normally date?

2. Who do you find most attractive? What are the qualities that make them attractive?

3. Who do you find least attractive? What are the qualities that make them unattractive?

Closing Questions

1. Are there any other questions/topics that I didn't ask that you feel would be relevant to this discussion?
2. What was this interview experience like for you?

Appendix H

Pictures of Men

Set 1



A



B



C

Set 2



A



B



C

Set 3



A



B



C

Set 4



A



B

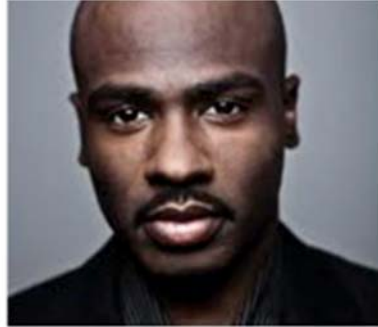


C

Group Set



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I

Appendix I
Pictures of Women

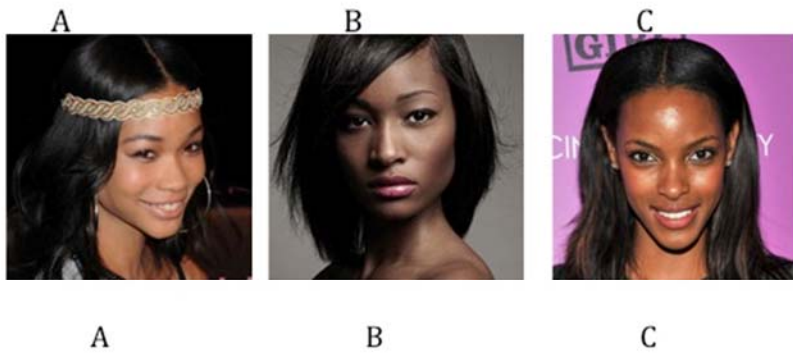
Set 1



Set 2



Set 3



Set 4



Set 5



Group set



A

B

C



A



B



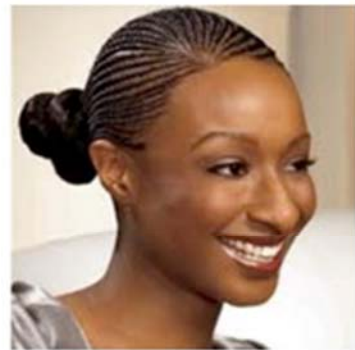
C



D



E



F



G



H



I

Appendix J

Recruitment Email Responses

Shrine of the Black Madonna

Re: Afrika's Thesis Request
2/12/13
Randy Brown

Sis. Afrika,
We will be honored at the Shrine of the Black Madonna to support you on your thesis project. Please let us know the next step.

Peace,
Cardinal Randy "Mwenda" Brown
Senior Pastor

Ade Oguntoye

Ade Oguntoye <aogunto2001@yahoo.com>
Feb 10 (3 days ago)

Greetings

I would love to help you with your thesis in whatever way possible.

In Service

Michael Funk

Michael Sean Funk
Feb 11 (2 days ago)

Greetings Afrika,

I hope all is well, I'ts been a minute. I am curious to know how things have been going in the pioneer valley for you (aside from the blizzard beating everyone up).

Sure, I would be more than willing to assist you with spreading the word about your research. Do you have a copy of the recruitment letter so I can view it?

I am actually an HSR committee member, though it appears I was not assigned to your application. If you could send me a copy of your application that will be useful as well (I can perhaps also provide feedback).

Since I am not representing an agency or institution, I am unclear as to why you need a letter of approval from me? Regardless, I can put something together for you by the end of the week.

Looking forward to catching up soon.

One Love,
Mike Funk