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**Sometimes love ain't enough : a study of the perceived relationship barriers as reported by 12 heterosexual African American women and men**

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Stephanie Harris  
Sometimes Love Ain't  
Enough: A Study of the  
Perceived Relationship  
Barriers as Reported by 12  
Heterosexual African  
American Women and Men

### ABSTRACT

The goals of the current study were to explore what barriers African American men and women experience in their past and/or current relationships and to explore in what way, if any, these issues correspond with those issues reported by White Americans. This researcher also wanted to examine if gender role issues and racism have contributed to the problems faced by African American couples. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 African American men and women, all of whom had a past and/or current heterosexual relationship of two years or longer. Interview questions focused on the troubling issues in the relationship, perceived causes of these issues, and whether or not the participants related these issues to larger issues such as racism, sexism, and socio economic status.

The major findings of this study were that similar to studies conducted on White Americans, issues revolving around trust, communication, and finances were reported most frequently as troubling issues by participants and that the participants did not necessarily relate these issues to racism, sexism, and/or socio economic status. However, individuals who were in their first long term relationship did not report any of these issues, trust and communication.



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Recently there has been a great deal of literature in the area of relationship dissatisfaction and causes of divorce among Americans. Heightened interest in this topic seems to have stemmed from an awareness of increasing divorce rates and the potential for this phenomenon to rip the threads of an ever so important aspect of the fabric of this country...the American family.

According to The National Center for Health Statistics 2003 and the United States Census Bureau 2005, the marriage rate has fallen 30% since 1970 and the divorce rate has risen about 40%, accounting for a 65% chance of a marriage failing from a 15% chance of marriage failure in the 1970's and that less than half of the households in the United States are married couples, placing single people in the majority for the first time in US history.

Rutgers sociology professor David Popenoe (2005), asserts that this shift in marriage has resulted in increased rates in cohabitation. According to Popenoe, cohabitating couples have twice the break up rate of married couples. Yet 40% of these couples have children together. Sharon Jayson (2005), a writer for USA Today, highlights this issue in an article stating that although many European countries have higher cohabitation rates, divorce rates in those countries are lower, and more children grow up with both biological parents, even though the parents may not be married. "The USA has the lowest percentage among Western nations of children who grow up with both biological parents, 63%", the report says. Concluding that the United States has the

weakest families in the Western world because we have the highest divorce rate and the highest rate of solo parenting.

Surely the topic of divorce is less taboo than it was 30 years ago, but this does not speak to the personal motivations of those who choose to end their marriages.

Researchers, in an effort to examine these causes, have cited findings that conclude that communication problems, financial problems, abuse, infidelity and basic unhappiness as the top five causes of increases in divorce rates (Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Patz, 2000; Amato, 2003). Unfortunately, much of the relevant literature on this topic is quite general and often does not focus on causes of divorce and relationship dissatisfaction as it relates to non-white populations.

According to the National Healthy Marriage Resource website [www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org), (2005) the following differences exist between the two populations in regard to marriage, divorce, and relationship conflict:

- African Americans are significantly less likely to marry than are Whites. Only 50% of African Americans born between 1960 and 1969 were married by the age of 30 (compared to 78% of Whites). Only about 42% of African Americans born between 1970 and 1979 will have married by the age of 30 (compared to 74% of Whites).
- African Americans have higher rates of divorce than Caucasians. Within 10 years of marrying, nearly half (47%) of African Americans have divorced or separated (compared to about 33% of Whites). Within 20 years, nearly two-thirds (63%) of African Americans have divorced or separated (compared to almost half of Whites).
- Due to lower marriage rates and higher divorce rates, African American women are about half as likely as White women to be married at any one time.
- Racial and ethnic differences in rates of cohabitation, or living together, are relatively small. About 7% of African American women (ages 15-44) are cohabiting, which is about the same as for Whites.

In noting these statistical differences regarding marriage and divorce rates of Caucasians and African Americans one begins to wonder whether or not individuals from these two populations interpret relationships and the issues that arise in them differently and if so what these differences may be. Hence the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship barriers that may be attributed to the recent trends of increased divorce rates, decreased two family homes and decreased likelihood for marriage in the African American community.

This study is needed because little is known about how African American men and women perceive these problems and their causes. This might help in building theory and informing clinicians, policy makers, educators, and program developers dealing with these problems.

Realizing that the issues listed above are quite broad, this researcher will focus on one problem specifically: What are the perceived relationship barriers as reported by heterosexual African American women and men? The purposed study is designed to explore what African American men and women believe to be barriers in their past/current relationships, to assess whether or not these barriers can attribute to the increased divorce rate and lack of marriage of African Americans and to compare the information reported by participants to those of white people in the literature.

For the purposes of this study the current researcher defines the term relationship as an emotional connectedness between a man and woman that involves romantic feelings, love, lust and sex. Other terms that should be defined are: long term – consisting of two years or more, and barriers- something that blocks, prevents, or hinders movement or action. It is important to note that, this study operates under the premise

that one's perceptions and beliefs about the opposite sex and oneself determines the quality of one's relationships as well as the expectations of both parties involved.

This is a qualitative study focusing on experiences and opinions of a small group of African American males and females (unconnected), about relationship barriers in their long term heterosexual relationships, while simultaneously pondering the question of why “ Sometimes love ain't enough” to sustain relationships in the African American community.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the union of marriage as an institution and the research that has been done to date about quality of relationships and marital satisfaction. It will specifically address ways that racism, sexism and socio economic factors influence heterosexual African American romantic relationships. This chapter will also explore attitudes revolving around sex, gender, and marriage within the African American community.

#### Marriage as an Institution in the United States

In consideration of the controversy that exists revolving around same sex marriages and the definition of marriage, this researcher feels the need to define marriage, as it will be used in this review. Therefore, for this purpose the operational definition of marriage used is one that has been combined from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2006) and the American Heritage Dictionary (2000) and is defined as a legally recognized union of a man and a woman by ceremony or common law that *may* include sex, love, cohabitation, shared economy/property and mutual childbearing. In keeping with this basic definition of marriage, it is important to note that the act of getting married or being in a marriage carries its own implications in regard to societal norms that include social status, social acceptability, sexual behavior, economics and gender roles expectations all of which will be discussed throughout this review. Perhaps with so many aspects of an individual's daily life being influenced by the union of marriage, one may begin to wonder what role marriage plays in the construct of



American life as we know. For this reason, this researcher will provide a brief overview of the ever-changing institution of marriage union in the United States and the role this status has in both the public and private sectors.

Professor of Law June Carbone of Santa Clara University (2006) focuses on the relationship between our private and public value systems toward marriage, sex and children and public policy. Carbone believes that when the public and private spheres are considered together, a family policy emerges stating that:

U.S. law, policy and social mores have long focused on an overwhelming; some would argue exclusive, emphasis on traditional marriage as the only legitimate locus of child bearing. Within this system the state has regulated marriage, divorce, the status of children and the financial consequences of these relationships, but state responsibility for children's' well being has been largely discarded with the creation and maintenance of the marital union (p.3).

According to Carbone such a policy emerges from a combination of federal, state, and private sources which all emphasize the historical importance of marriage in American family policy. Carbone suggests that this policy consists of a combination of the following:

1. a set of moral codes criminalizing fornication, adultery, and sodomy
  2. regulation of marriage, and reliance on the parents; marital bond to define family relationships, including for example a father's differing ties to marital and non marital children
  3. regulation of the grounds for, and financial consequences of divorce
  4. regulation and sometimes prohibition of birth control, abortion and adoption
  5. policies such as minimum wage and maximum hour provisions, restrictions on the role of women in the workplace and labor laws justified by the importance of securing the availability of a family wage
  6. social security provisions designed to insure against loss of the primary wage earner
  7. AFDC assistance premised on the role of the government in providing a safety net for dependent children
  8. tax and other policies written to subsidize traditional families
  9. the separate spheres ideology that combines state regulation of family creation and dissolution with barriers to intervention in the affairs of ongoing families.
- (p.4)

Carbone believes that taken together

these provisions have historically embraced marriage as the only sanctioned form of sexual expression; state support, both symbolic and financial, for marriage as a gendered division of labor designed to accommodate childrearing; and state subsidization of marriage as a source of financial security to raise a family (p.5).

As for the private sector, the meaning of marriage and marriage trends has not been static. According to Peterson (2001), major transitions in the meaning of marriage have occurred in the years 1600-2000. Peterson states that marriage for almost all Europeans in America in the 1600's existed primarily as "an economic arrangement negotiated between families in which considerations of status, future economic stability and prosperity were the most important in selecting a potential spouse."(p.1) This view of marriage differs with that of more recent times when Peterson believes that most Americans consider the primary purpose of marriage to be a "commitment to emotional and psychological support between two individuals."(p.1)

Ironically, age of marriage and divorce statistics have shown that this current trend of a more internal and emotional purpose for marriage has resulted in individuals marrying at much older ages than in the past as well as in increased divorce rates. Degler (2000) attributes this change in attitudes towards marriage, in part, to the changes in women's roles throughout the years including voting, property and workplace rights as well as a rise in potential income resulting from more women pursuing higher education. Furthermore, with financial security no longer an issue, it stands to reason that women would begin to pursue relationships for more personal and emotional reasons.

Yet, the question still remains, why are people marrying less and getting divorced more?

## Obstacles to Marital Satisfaction

The National Center for Health Statistics 2003 and the United States Census Bureau 2005 offers some startling statistics regarding marriages.

- Less than half of the households in the United States are married couples, placing single people in the majority for the first time in US history.
- The marriage rate has fallen 30% since 1970 and the divorce rate has risen about 40%, accounting for a 65% chance of a marriage failing from a 15% chance of marriage failure in the 1970's
- 43% of first marriages end within 15 years
- Roughly 1 out of 5 adults has had a divorce
- Red states have a divorce rate 27% higher than blue states

Not surprisingly as researchers have noticed there has been an array of studies that focus on marital satisfaction in an attempt to better understand this phenomenon. Reasons for marital problems vary widely from study to study however; the most frequently cited marital problems involve communication difficulties, general incompatibility, sexual incompatibility, and infidelity, not spending enough time at home and disagreements over money (Burns, 1984; Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Kitson, 1992; Patz, 2000). For example, Cleek and Pearson (1985) conducted a study that focused on the perceived causes of divorce. However, instead of focusing on how one factor for instance differing attitudes regarding child rearing, impacted a couple's desire to divorce, the researchers directed their attention toward seven main dimensions of divorce. These seven dimensions each held 18 underlying possible causes. Cleek and Pearson reasoned that since many interacting factors are likely to contribute to divorce, multicausal descriptions that focus

on the interrelationships between these factors should be more illuminating than unitary conceptions of divorce (p.179).

As a result of the Wisconsin no fault divorce law requiring that individuals requesting a divorce attend a divorce counseling session, the researchers were able to distribute single page surveys including demographic data items as well as cause of divorce to participants who attended these counseling sessions. Eighteen possible causes were listed on the survey provided to participants and any combination of the 18 causes could be indicated as being important in an individual's divorce action. The 18 possible causes for divorce were: communication problems, basic unhappiness, incompatibility, emotional abuse, financial problems, sexual problems, alcohol abuse by spouse, infidelity by spouse, physical abuse, in laws, children, religious differences, mental illness, drug abuse by spouse, one's own infidelity, women's lib., one's own alcohol abuse, and one's own drug abuse.

It is important to note that the demographic data included age, sex, length of marriage, years of education, number of previous marriages and number of children. Race, religion, employment status or income was not included. In 1980, 335 individuals attended 147 males and 176 females. In 1981, 304 attended 128 males and 160 females. Despite these important omissions in Cleek and Pearson's sample set, their findings provide us with significant information in terms of what a significant number of participants report as causes for divorce. The researchers found that communication problems was the most frequently indicated cause for both sexes: 69.7% of females and 59.35 males selected it. Basic unhappiness and incompatibility were ranked second and third by both sexes. Perhaps more striking as well as helpful in regard to the current study

are the differences in ranking of causes of divorce reported by men and women in Cleeks and Pearson's study.

Table 1      Cleek and Pearson's Findings of Divorce Causes

<u>Perceived Divorce Causes</u> <u>by Gender</u>	Females (Ranking)	Male(Ranking)
Communication problems	69.7% (1)	59.3% (1)
Basic unhappiness	59.9 (2)	46.9 (2)
Incompatibility	56.4 (3)	44.7 (3)
Emotional Abuse	55.5 (4)	24.7 (6)
Financial Problems	32.9 (5)	28.7 (5)
Sexual Problems	32.1 (6)	30.2 (4)
Alcohol Abuse (spouse)	30.0 (7)	5.8 (14)
Infidelity (spouse)	25.2 (8)	10.5 (9)
Physical abuse	21.7 (9)	3.6 (15)
In laws	10.7 (10)	11.6 (8)
Children	8.9 (11)	4.4 (16)
Religious differences	8.6 (12)	6.5 (12)
Mental Illness	5.0 (13)	6.9 (11)
Drug abuse (spouse)	3.9 (14)	1.4 (17)
Infidelity (self)	3.9 (15)	6.2 (13)
Women's lib	3.0 (16)	14.5 (7)
Alcohol abuse (self)	.9 (17)	9.4 (10)
Drug abuse (self)	.3 (18)	1.1 (18)

(p.181)

The current researcher believes that these findings are worth noting because it provides insight as to what perceived relationship barriers may be for African Americans despite the fact that the researchers did not account for racial disparities in the study. However, if one factor such as gender could result in the above variation in responses by participants, then perhaps racial diversity would have the same results in different responses from participants in the present study.

Another helpful study that has an important omission is a study conducted by the Creighton University Center for Marriage and Family (2001), suggests that time, sex and

money pose the three biggest obstacles to satisfaction in the lives of newly married couples. The study used a random sample drawn from couples that had completed the FOCCUS inventory and had agreed to participate in future research. A mailing of questionnaires resulted in a total sample of 947 couples, or 1,894 individuals. Out of that a total of 793 individual questionnaires were returned, which the study called a "highly acceptable" response rate of 48.5 percent; 35.7 percent of the returns were completed questionnaires from both spouses. The study found that debt brought into marriage, the couples' financial situation, balancing job and family, and frequency of sexual relations were of greatest concern to those ages 29 and under. Those age 30 and over shared concerns of balancing job and family and frequency of sexual relations, but also added as problem areas constant bickering and expectations about household tasks. Although informative, this study provides no information regarding specificity in regard to how these findings apply to race or socio economic status.

"Time, Sex and Money" is shorthand for the top three problem areas reported by survey respondents: balancing job and family, frequency of sexual relations, and debt brought into marriage. The other top problematic issues the study showed were, in order, husband's employment; overall financial situation; expectations about household tasks; constant bickering; communication with spouse; parents or in-laws; and time spent together with spouse. Again, the researchers of the study offer no information regarding racial diversity.

While the participants in the previous study were newlyweds, a less recent however extremely relevant study focuses on people who were planning a divorce. Aato and Rogers (1997) research consisted of a longitudinal study of marital problems and

subsequent divorce. After conducting their 12 year study, from 1980-1992, Amato and Rogers found 20% of husbands and 20% of wives reported problems in marriage due to the husband's anger and that husbands were significantly more likely than wives to report that their own hurt feelings, criticism, moodiness, and absence from the home contributed to problems in the marriage. They also found wives were significantly more likely than husbands to report that marital problems existed. Lastly, Amato and Rogers found that marital problems involving infidelity, spending money, drinking / drug use or, jealousy, moodiness, and irritating habits contributed in the subsequent divorces of participants. It is important to highlight that Amato and Rogers note that as a result of their sampling method, which consisted of telephone interviews conducted upon random digit dialing procedures, underrepresented African Americans and Hispanics and was mostly comprised of White Americans.

These studies along with others conducted by researchers appear to omit the need for a more culturally diverse sample and offer their findings to the public as generalizable. "While there is no evidence to suggest that the factors contributing to the success of white couples are different from the factors contributing to the success of African American couples, it is a question that merits further investigation" (Ashby 2000). Ashby goes on to substantiate her appeal for more research on African American families by citing Bean and Cranes 1999 review of the six most popular marriage and family therapy related journals, which found that fewer than 5% of articles published over a ten year period focused on racial and ethnic minorities (p.6).

## African American Relationships

According to the African American Healthy Marriage Initiatives website (2006),

36% of African American adults are married, compared to 49% of whites and 47% of Hispanics. 68% of African American births are to unmarried women, compared to 29% for whites and 44% for Hispanics. Lastly 62% of African American households are headed by a single parent compared to 27% for whites and 35% for Hispanics. Nearly 45% of Black men have never married and 42% of Black women have never married. More to the point, an increasing number of Black women will never get married. The percentage of Black women who are married declined from 62 percent to 31 percent between 1950 and 2002. African Americans are at a higher risk, 40-85%, of divorce between couples cohabiting before marriage than whites 20-42 %.( p.1)

### Impact of Race

In thinking about the effects of racism on the relationships of African American women and men, Floyd and Kelly, conducted a cross sectional study in 2006 examining influences of race - related social factors on African American marriages, as reflected in the racial and cultural perspectives held by spouses. More specifically Floyd and Kelly were interested in finding out whether or not racial perspectives affect trust in African American couples, as the researchers believed trust levels to be predictors of marital satisfaction. To conduct this study 93 middle class African American married couples were assessed by using an African American Self consciousness scale, an African American Racial Identity Attitude Scale, a Spiritual Well-Being Scale and a Trust Scale. Floyd and Kelly found that positive outlooks on racial identity are not enough to overcome the effects of stress and economic problems in marital relationships. The positive effects of pro -African American views are only operative “when social economic status is high enough to remove other marital stressors related to



disadvantage.”(p.84) They also found that “afrocentricity did not enhance trust for husbands or wives”, however, the researchers also found that...

immersion of racial identity attitudes was associated with less marital trust for husbands and that the husband’s religious well- being and social economic status were positively associated with marital trust but not adjustment and that none of these correlations were significant for the wives (p.83).

Ironically, the researchers focused solely on racial identity and marriage but did not account for differences in correlation between the men and women in their study.

Similarly, Ashby (2000) conducted an exploratory study titled Happily Married African American Couples. Ashby interviewed five upper middle class married African American couples and found that three out of the five couples interviewed did not feel that race played a significant role in their marriages. Two couples felt that the racial solidarity they shared with their partners was appreciated but was not something that they viewed as “contributing to their marital happiness or success”. Ashby found that the couples noted that how they handled expectations, conflict, parenting, and finances within their marriages contributed greatly to the marital happiness reported within the sample. Although the findings for Ashby’s research report that there were no significant differences in how this African American sample approached marriage than those of the dominant culture, the middle class social status of this studies sample omits the possibility that the intersection between race and financial stability can potentially affect a marriage.

### Impact of Religion

Adams, (2003) researched the implications of premarital counseling upon marital longevity in the black community. Noting that ninety five percent of Americans continue

to profess a belief in God (p.18), Adams sought to examine whether a correlation between religion and marital satisfaction existed. Among the 53 African American married individuals interviewed, Adams found that a positive correlation existed for 39 individuals who reported praying together with their spouse and their report of marital satisfaction. Ashby's study offers us knowledge of religion's potentially positive role in African American marriages. Yet because this study's sample was obtained by using church members, many who attended the same church, the study offers no information on couples who may hold different beliefs. Incidentally the Southern Baptist community promotes marriage among its members.

### Impact of Gender

Although differences between men and women exist, a common focus of feminist theory and research is geared toward dismantling beliefs about women's inferiority to men and to promote understanding and equality in all spheres of a woman's life. Areas that are frequently discussed are women's roles in regard to childrearing, the workplace, domestic labor and needs in romantic relationships (Mainardi, 1970; Steinem, 1983; Deutsch, 1999; Golden, 2000). The findings of Cleeks and Pearson's study (refer to marital satisfaction section) highlight how different women's and men's needs and concerns can be from each other. In fact, participants in Cleek and Pearson's study report 4 causes for divorce that highlight percentage rates of over 15% difference (See Table 1) between men and women's reasons for pursuing a divorce. These are emotional abuse (31% difference); alcohol abuse (24% difference); physical abuse (28% difference); and infidelity (15% difference). To reiterate, this researcher finds Cleek and Pearson's research to be pertinent to the current study since the findings offer helpful insights as to

what complaints of women may be, despite Cleek and Pearson's omission of racial diversity in their sample. Considering that the gender role expectations of African American men and women differ widely from those of the dominant culture.

Deborah Gray White in her book *Aren't I a Woman?* (1999) discusses this very topic stating that the emphasis placed on idealized Victorian womanhood perpetuated the feeling in Antebellum America that "women needed male guidance because women were fickle and weak willed. However, (African American) slave women demonstrated that sex was not an absolute determinate of skill, will power, aptitude, or even strength" because these women were expected to work just as hard in the fields as their mates. Furthermore, African American women needed independence, emotional, and spiritual strength to endure the killings, separation of families and beatings that were commonplace at the time. African American historian and author Nancy Boyd Franklin (2000) discusses how African American women have been taught to be self-reliant stating that

...many African American women report that since they saw their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers as extremely competent women who both raised children and worked, they have learned self-reliance and were taught to get an education, a job, and to be able to provide for themselves (p.62).

The difference of gender role expectations between white women and African American women continued to exist during the women's suffrage movement. For example consider the fight by Caucasian women for the right to work outside the home and resistance of the expectations to be homemakers, while their husbands/ male counterparts were considered as the breadwinners or sole providers for the family. However the provider for the family is a role African American women have played for

years and many African American males have been deprived of this role despite their desire to perform it, (Giddings, 2001).

In fact, Staples & Johnson (1993), attribute African American men's inability to embrace the pride-indulging provider role to the reality that "many African American men lack marketable skills and functional literacy: the ability to gain employment, sustain upward mobility, and contribute to the family," (p.17) This is problematic because it directly conflicts with the idealized provider role identity that is expected of men around the world. To further complicate this, many theorize that it is this lack of access to the provider role that leads to the overvaluation of the sexual prowess and hyper masculinity that are evident in the behavior of many African American men (Potter, 2006; Black and Weisz, 2003; Bento-Goodley, 2001; and Miller, 2001). Boyd-Franklin (2000) comments on these feelings of inadequacy and demasculation stating that "all these issues – the impact of racial discrimination, the fear of showing weakness, and the need to demonstrate sexual prowess – have weighty implications for intimate couple relationships between African American men and women" (p.37).

In his effort to explore what he deems "one of the most neglected aspects of African American male identity", Diemer (2002), conducted a qualitative study to explore how African American men between the ages of 20-47 identified, understood, and expressed the provider role identity. Diemer found that, as a whole, the participants equated being a man with the breadwinner role and that they considered racial and economic limitations as a real but unjustifiable excuse for not being able to provide for their families. Diemer also found that education and opportunity were listed as the two best ways to achieve this goal. Notably, Diemer acknowledges that the men in his study

were all college students and that the participants' status as students and motivation could allow for such results.

Marbley (2003) conducted a qualitative study on professional African American males' perceptions of the selection of African American females as partners. The inclusion criteria for this study required that participants be 1. male, 2. heterosexual, 3. African American and 4. had achieved an advanced degree. All six participants were diverse in their graduate programs but all had at least one master's degree, ages 24-41, and marital status; four were single-never married and two were currently married. Marbley attained data by using open interviews and informal conversational interviews with the participants. The participants were asked to respond to themes that are common in African American interpersonal relationships such as:

level of education, employment status, institutionalized racism, and sexism, incarceration, sex ratio, psychological functioning, conception of masculinity devaluation and unhealthy intimate conflicts. All of which can be identified as influencing African American females and males who have been historically taxed and stressed by racial discrimination and all the social, economic, political, and educational disparities that has resulted from it. (p. 16)

Marbley used the grounded theory approach to analysis data, revealing four categories. The categories were: feeling intimidated, desired qualities, white women, evolutionary needs.

Feeling intimidated: The researcher found that the men in the study attributed their feeling of intimidation by professional African American women to several factors such as...

men's innate shyness, society's perception of the man as the provider, African American women outpacing African American men in acquiring degrees, and the African American's man perception of the educated African American woman looking for marriage (p.23).

The availability of mates: The participants reported a desire for someone who can commit, communicate, think and survive. For example: someone who can be

considered serious and strong. Participants also remarked that strong willed and independent women who reminded them of their mothers were ideal. (p.24)

African American men and White women: Although the participants agreed that reasons for pursuing relationships with white women include the status symbol, forbidden fruit, Barbie doll image, sex and money. Some of the men remarked that they would only want to be life long partners to an African American woman citing that understanding their plight as African Americans as important to them. (p.25)

Evolutionary needs: The participants stated that they viewed themselves and their lives with more patience and seriousness then they had when they were younger. Suggesting that this change in maturity level made them better mates but less likely to pursue a woman who they felt did not share the same level of maturity. (p.26)

Marbley's research provides an abundance of information regarding significant issues in interpersonal relationships of African American men, such as effects of education levels and attitudes regarding interracial dating and ideal characteristics for a mate. However, the researcher does not account for diversity in gender, socio economic status, religion, education, or employability. All of which can potentially impact the attitudes and responses of participants.

#### Critique of Existing Research

Most of the studies so far lack representation of diversity in the areas of social class, economic status, religion, and education level in their sample. A few examples of this type of omission can be found in studies conducted by: Ashby (upper middle class); Floyd and Kelly (middle class); Marbley (higher educated men); and Diemer (only college students), all of which provide important insights in reference to attitudes, perceptions and relationship satisfactions in African American man- woman relationships, despite the lack of socio economic and/or religious diversity displayed in their samples.

To further complicate the issue of the lack of diversity in regard to African Americans in studies, when studies do focus on lower income, uneducated African Americans, they highlight mostly dysfunctional issues. Perhaps in an effort to shed light on the staggering numbers that report prevalent crack and heroine abuse, teenage pregnancy, underage deaths and economic disparity found in the African American community, studies conducted on African American women often highlight issues of substance abuse, single parenthood, sexual promiscuity, HI V and/or poverty (Ferguson, Owens, Crouse & Sandelowski, 2006; Feist-Price, Logan, Leukefeld, Moore, Corey, & Ebreo, 2003; Hellenga, Aber & Rhodes, 2002). Along the same lines research conducted on African American men (see Tate, Van Den Berg, Hansen, Kochman & Sikkema, 2006; Hunter, Friend, Murphy, Rollins, & Williams-Wheeler, 2006; Okundaye, Cornelius, & Manning, 2001) often focus on incarceration, absentee fatherhood, misogynist behaviors, aggression, and lack of motivation. Understandably these issues are well worth researching and highlighting considering the increasingly high numbers of African American men and women who are affected by AIDS, incarceration, poverty and substance abuse. Here is an overview of some of these statistics.

- According to the United States Department of Health and Human services (2000) the AIDS rate among African American women is three times as high as that among Latino women and 18 times as high as that among White women. As a result African American women make up more than half of all women who have died of AIDS. Overall, African Americans make up 13 percent of the population, yet now account for 41 percent of all AIDS cases in the United States. The Harvard AIDS Institute estimates that by the year 2007 more than half of all our country's AIDS cases will be within the African American community. (p.1)
- According to a report by the Justice Policy Institute in 2002, the number of black men in prison has grown to five times the rate it was twenty years ago. About 10.4% of the entire African-American male population in the United States aged 25 to 29 was incarcerated, the largest racial or ethnic group, by

comparison, 2.4% of Hispanic men and 1.2% of white men in that same age group were incarcerated. Today, more African-American men are in jail than in college. In 2000 there were 791,600 black men in prison and 603,032 enrolled in college. In 1980, there were 143,000 black men in prison and 463,700 enrolled in college. (p.1)

- CNN Money.com (2004) reported that the poverty rate of African Americans remains nearly twice the national rate, with 24.4 percent of blacks living below the poverty line in 2003, slightly higher from 24.1 percent a year earlier. (p.1)
- An article written in the Journal of Psychoactive Drugs by De La Rosa, M., Vega, R., and Radisch, M.A. (2000) states that, substance abuse disorders continue to proliferate in alarming numbers, especially in the African-American community. African Americans comprise approximately 12% of the population in the United States, yet in 1999 African Americans accounted for 23% of admissions to publicly funded substance abuse treatment facilities. (p.32)

Again these statistics and studies provide social scientists, politicians, and the African American community with important information that can potentially be used to advocate for change on the federal, state, community and individual levels. However, this researcher believes that although these issues are pressing, other aspects of African American life, for example the existence of responsible, stable, family systems, is being overshadowed by these problematic statistics. This is unfortunate since as discussed earlier in this review, American family policy thrives on the premise that marriage and family provide social structure, which could assist in changing the disturbing statistics described above.

Another issue with these studies is that they perpetuate an already damaging stereotype of African Americans, which makes it more difficult to dismantle discriminatory attitudes in society.

Limited awareness of the issues that African American men and women face individually and as couples exists, however, this researcher has been unable to find



research that allows participants to offer *their own knowledge* and interpretations of what they perceive relationship barriers to be in *their own lives*, while participating in an educationally, economically, religiously diverse sample. This researcher fears that by not allowing African American people the opportunity to offer their own descriptions of their experience, researchers will, in essence become part of the problem and further stifle a significant aspect of our work .....the voices of those we study. Perhaps it is this very omission that has caused the minimal research that has been done on this topic by other researchers.

As a result of these narrow study foci, it is difficult to assess how African Americans interpret these research topics as well as how they affect their families and romantic relationships, if at all. Therefore, the driving force of this study is to allow African American men and women an opportunity to provide us with their own narratives about what is indeed happening in their everyday lives that may or may not be causing trends in their relationships, marriages and family life. The next chapter will elaborate more fully on what methodology, sample criteria, and recruitment strategies this researcher has used in order to assure that this study recognizes diversity and attempts not to perpetuate stereotypes about this already marginalized population.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Problem Formulation and Design

The purposes of this study are: 1. To explore what barriers African American men and women experience in their past and/or current relationships, 2. To provide a forum in which African American men and women can answer questions about their opinions/ beliefs about the relationship turmoil, as well as about what circumstances lead to these issues, and 3. To explore in what way, if any, gender role issues, social economic status and racism have contributed to the problems faced by African Americans couples in committed heterosexual romantic relationships. This study examined the barriers in romantic relationships that may lead to the increase in divorce rate and the decrease in actual marriages in the African America community.

#### Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 12 individuals (6 men and 6 women) who identified as heterosexual, African American and between the ages of 25-60. Participants needed to be in and/or have been in a “long term relationship” with another African American of the opposite sex for two years or more. Therefore, there were 3 categories of participants; I) those who are currently in a relationship, II) those who had been in a long-term relationship in the past but were not at the time of the study and III) those who had past and current long-term relationships. The exclusion criteria for this study were individuals who are not English speaking as the interview was conducted in English. Pregnant women and individuals who are/were in a relationship where one of the individuals reported being seriously ill, were also excluded from this study as the

potential for these physical conditions to change the dynamics of the relationship for better or for the worse are high and would thus impact the study.

The sampling techniques consisted of a combination of convenience and snowball nonprobability sampling. These techniques were chosen as a result of this researcher's limited access to individuals who met the criteria and time restraints placed on the completion of this study.

### Recruitment

For recruitment purposes, flyers advertising the study (See Appendix B) were posted in neighborhood churches, schools, shopping malls, and community health centers in the Hartford, West Hartford, and East Hartford and Manchester towns of Connecticut. It is important to note that none of the participants were found as a result of using these flyers perhaps due to this study's topic matter and the potential to cause distress or unwanted memories of relationships. However, snowball sampling by giving flyers to loved ones, colleagues, and friends and asking them to pass them on to others who might seem interested was the most effective method, as all 12 participants were attained this way. Once contacted by a potential participant via telephone, a brief qualifying questionnaire (See Appendix C) was given to determine eligibility for participation.

### Data Collection

Following qualifying and agreeing to participate in the study, this researcher and the participant met at a mutually agreed upon interview location, where the participants were presented with a consent form (See Appendix D) which outlined the purpose of the study as well as the potential risks and benefits associated with the study. The consent

form also notified participants of their assured confidentiality as well as their right to refuse and/or withdraw from the study at any time up until the designated date.

Interviews were only given to those individuals who read and signed the consent form.

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour. All interviews were conducted by this researcher. Following the completion of the interview, participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire that provided demographic information (See Appendix F). Participants did not receive compensation, financial or otherwise, for participating in the study. Once interviews were completed, a transcriber was hired and asked to sign a transcriber confidentiality form. The transcriber received only audiotapes with participant numbers and was not provided with any identifying information on the participants to further assure participant confidentiality.

The instrument used for data collection was a set of open-ended interview questions (See Appendix E) developed by this researcher. Three different sets of interview questions were devised by this researcher to consider relevant questions depending on the participants qualifying relationship status, as described in sample section.

The participants were asked questions about the long-term relationship that qualifies them for the study. The interview questions asked participants about their experiences in their past and/or present relationship(s). One or two additional questions were added to allow participants to discuss past relationships. The questions explored what opinions and beliefs participants held about the relationship issues they are reporting on.

### Data Analysis

Interview responses were coded according to themes and content. This researcher also cross-referenced demographic information to the themes and content found in the data. The main objective of the data analysis was to consider the data in terms of relevant literature. Patterns in the themes and content of participant's responses were considered and addressed. All data including possible negative and divergent findings were included and considered.

### Limitations

As a result of the time sensitive nature of this project this researcher was unable to enlist more individuals for participation thus potentially affecting the generalizability of this study. Also, due to the limited access to a diverse sample of men and women who qualified for the study, this researcher was unable to find the same number of male and female participants for all three categories. Finally, with the U.S. Census Bureau, (2004), reporting that 17.6% of African Americans have a college education, it is worth mentioning that the sample attained in this study is not representative of the African American population as a whole since 5 out of 12 of the sample had a 4 year degree.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purposes of this study were to explore what barriers African American men and women experience in their past and/or current relationships to provide a forum in which African American men and women could answer questions about their opinions/beliefs about what they considered the relationship turmoil to be, as well as about what circumstances lead to these issues, and lastly to explore in what way, if any, gender role issues and racism have contributed to the problems faced by African Americans couples in committed heterosexual romantic relationships.

#### Sample Description

Twelve African Americans adults participated in this exploratory study. There were a total of 6 women and 6 men and the ages ranged from 25-60. Five participants were between the ages of 25-35. Four were between the ages of 36-45, and lastly 3 were between the ages of 46-60. All participants were high school graduates. Six had post high school education, one reported an associate's degree, and three reported a bachelor's degree and two had master's degrees. Nine of the 12 participants identified themselves as Christians and the remaining three claimed no religious affiliation. Eleven of the participants had at least one child. The annual salaries ranged from below \$15,000-\$75,000 with the average annual income range being between \$25,000 - \$45,000. Lastly, three participants were in present long-term relationships (Category I); four had only a long-term relationship in the past (Category II); and five had both (Category III). Marital status of these three groups can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Relationship Categories and Marital Status of Participants

Marital Status	Relationship Category			Total
	Only Present (I)	Only Past (II)	Both (III)	
Married	3	1	3	7
Not Married	0	3	2	5
Total	3	4	5	12

It is important to note that of the four who had only long term relationships in the past, three had not been married.

#### Presentation of Data

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit information from the participants regarding their experiences, opinions, and behavior in past and /or current relationships. All three categories were given the same questions, with the exception of categories II and III, who were asked about the effects of past relationship problems on either not starting a new relationship (Category II) or its effect on new relationships (Category III).

#### Troubling Issues

All twelve participants were asked to discuss their experiences with troubling issues in their current and/or past long-term relationship(s) for question #1. Participants in the present study reported combinations of the following as reasons for troubling issues in their relationships; communication, finances, lack of trust, infidelity, and lack of commitment, expectations and difference in parenting. Troubling issues listed most frequently by both men and women in the study were: Trust (3 men and 2 women); Communication (2 men and 2 women); and Finances (2 men and 2 women).

Communication issues reported by participants reportedly stemmed from not being clear on needs, different communication styles, and partners being unwilling to discuss and/or admit issues within the relationship. Trust issues stemmed from infidelity, being irresponsible, and withholding important information. How to save, spend, distribute and discuss finances was also reported as a primary issue for participants.

Comments from a few participants who listed one or more of these top three responses are:

One female participant stated:

I would say finances are always a big one for short and long-term but mostly long-term relationships. Um, I think we as a people have a very difficult time putting our finances together to achieve a higher goal or to achieve a goal. A lot of times um, with men they like to have their own money separate from women and although you're supposed to be working together they like to know that they have their "mad money" or rainy day money and maybe, you know, with the change of the century and everything women are maybe the same way. They like to have their own stash but I think money is a big factor and a lot of times that's the cause of a lot of breakups and stress in my relationship.

One male participant stated:

I would definitely say handling money, and how to raise children, finances, communication, um, stuff like that.

Another male participant stated:

I believe we never even got a chance to know each other but the marriage happened anyway. But then we realized that trust and communication were big big issues in the relationship.

Another male participant stated:

...for a long time in the relationship we were emotionally disconnected but physically secure. We had to open up and trust each other emotionally. Until I let her in she was always going to be the enemy trying to change me or be my mother.



Other issues that were reported by at least two participants were: Lack of commitment (i.e. not wanting to participate in family activities, not wanting to acknowledge the relationship, and being reluctant to marry); Infidelity, selfishness (i.e. putting personal needs and desires before those of the relationship, being inconsiderate, and not contributing to the household bills); and traditions (i.e. disputes about whose family morals, values, and traditions would be upheld in the household). It is important to note that although these responses are pertinent, they were not always shared by both genders. (See Table 3 for a detailed illustration of troubling issues reported accompanied by the number and gender of participants that reported these issues).

Table 3 Troubling Issues Responses by Gender

Male	#'s	Females	#'s	Totals
Trust	2	Trust	3	5
Communication	2	Communication	2	4
Finances	2	Finances	2	4
Lack of Commitment	2	Lack of Commitment	0	2
Infidelity	1	Infidelity	1	2
Selfishness	1	Selfishness	1	2
Traditions	1	Traditions	1	2
Quality Time	1	Quality Time	0	1
Immaturity	0	Immaturity	1	1
How to raise the children	0	How to raise the children	1	1
Sharing	0	Sharing	1	1
Compromise	0	Compromise	1	1
Different morals and value	1	Different morals and value	0	1
Expectations	1	Expectations	0	1
Safety / Security of family	1	Safety / Security of family	0	1
Different Priorities	1	Different Priorities	0	1

The current researcher observed that, men seemed to be more self reflective in their comments as opposed to the women who were more blaming. When asked about troubling issues in her relationship, one female participant stated:

...he needs to just work on how he deals with stuff as a black man which is hard for him because he saw his parents went through similar issues and they didn't handle it well. So how is he supposed to know?

Another female stated:

.....the other person was selfish and immature.

Another female stated:

He wasn't willing to take responsibility for his actions...

Another female stated:

We were just raised differently so what might have been okay in his home when he was younger definitely was not in mine. You know? But he has a stronger personality than I do so he normally gets his way...

One male responding to this question stated:

fear of rejection and of lack of understanding by my partner kept me from communicating how I felt and what I needed.

Another male stated:

...I can't say that I always have consideration for my mate and her thought process and how that might impact or affect her"

Another male stated:

Because I'd swear that I was missing something or wanting to do more...I was really figured that I didn't need to be with one person. So because I cheated I felt like I could always do better and I treated her bad.

Another male stated:

...two people trying to be in a relationship it's time consuming and you can become more selfish when it comes to your own needs and your quality time"

Responses from participants were similar for categories II and III (those who had discontinued relationships in the past). However, participants in category I, who did not have previous long term relationships, did not list at all trust or communication problems

as troubling issues in their current relationships. The negative comments in category II and III were perhaps referring mostly to previous and discontinued relationships.

Here is a break down of responses of participants to this question by category.

Table 4 Troubling Issues Responses by Category

Category I	Category II	Category III
Compromise Different morals and values Expectations Finances Safety / Security of family Traditions	Communication Different Priorities Finances Infidelity Lack of commitment Trust	Communication Finances Immaturity How to raise the children Lack of Commitment Quality Time Selfishness Sharing Trust

A few responses by Category II and Category III participants to this question are:

One male participant stated:

... both of my relationships have been healthy relationships except for communication issues and I would really put the burden on myself for not learning to communicate more effectively with my partner.

Another male participant responded:

Probably distrust or no real commitment. When I say no real commitment I mean that if I had to prioritize people in my life it would be my children first then that relationship would come last and that's always been an issue. Not to mention the fact that I have cheated in the past.

In regard to responses by categories, it is important to note that participants from all three categories and both genders commented on finances. Here is a table displaying economic status of participants and responses of troubling issues.

Table 5 Economic Status and Troubling Issues

Low Below 15,000 – 35,000	Medium 35,001-55,000	High > 55,001
Communication Immaturity Finances Quality Time Selfishness Sharing	Different Priorities Finances Infidelity Lack of commitment Trust	Compromise Commitment Communication Different values and morals Expectations Finances Safety / Security of family Traditions

Possible Causes

When asked why they felt these issues existed participant responses varied from pointing out the selfishness of their ex to being fearful of intimacy and immature as a result of up bringing or lack of healthy relationships to role model. Participant responses were more personalized and specific then in the previous question. Furthermore, 8 of the 12 participants reported some responsibility for causing the troubling issues in the relationship. Three female and one male gave responses that took no ownership of issues in the relationship throughout the entire interview.

One female participant stated:

I think the person probably wasn't, you know, mature enough or he just wasn't mindful of his behavior in my opinion. I wanted to forgive him um, because we were young so, I just think that he probably wasn't at that level yet of learning how to love a person. You know, 50/50, you give 50/50 in each relationship so...

Another female stated:

Because of my partner. Not because of me, because of my partner and the different background, our different backgrounds. I had a mother and a father but he basically raised himself. We were just brought up with different priorities.

Another significant observation regarding participant responses to possible causes is that the majority of responses to this question mirrored responses given for troubling issues. In other words, troubling issues were the causes of turmoil. Participants provided very little variation in their responses between the two questions, although they did elaborate on the troubling issues that caused turmoil in the relationship. As a result of this, participant's responses to possible causes for troubling issues were very personal in nature and did not seem to prompt any thought about broader cultural issues, as the current researcher intended.

However, one participant discussed different experiences within the home and differences in how her parents and her spouse's parents responded to issues as a possible cause of the lack of trust and communication in her marriage.

She stated:

That's a two-fold question to me, um, because in my own mind playing things that I ask myself about this individual, you know, it's a cultural thing where, you know, "black men like money" or he just doesn't have it in him to trust, to trust that I have his best interest at heart, which is something he has to deal with in his own time because, you know, you can't make somebody trust you like you can't make somebody love you. They either do or they don't and if they don't they have to figure out why is it that they can't get past certain things and I think that that stems from way before me. I know that my in laws had big time money issues and he was brought up thinking that money was such a big deal and that he will never have enough. So he is stingy and selfish. He doesn't know any other way....

One male stated:

She was very needy and she never had anything good to say about the relationship. You know? Misery loves company...

#### African American vs. Whites

Upon being asked if they thought that the issues they had mentioned existed for certain groups or if they viewed them as personal, the majority of participants responded

“personal”. Three of them asked this researcher for clarification after which they also responded “Personal” to this question as well. However, when participants were asked whether or not they felt that the issues they had listed were more common for African American men and women and in what way they thought they differed for white Americans, participants stated that they felt that differences in how the two races raise children, treat their partners and utilize white privilege as differences. These responses contradicted the participant responses for the previous question and it is this researcher’s belief that many participants may have been unclear about the purpose of the study and the combination of the micro and macro level scopes of the project.

It is worth noting that although several participants discussed what they perceive to be differences between African American and White Americans, no corresponding troubling issues was observed by this researcher.

One female participant responded:

See, I think things are different for African-American women, many women, and I think the difference between African American and white is that white people they got a head start. You know what I mean, they started this whole situation. So, their reference point is a whole different from ours. I think that they have a little more grounding in their own type of values. Because their values are totally different from ours, I believe.

One male participant responded:

Uh, you know, I don’t think there’s a huge difference, I think trust and commitments are universal issues but I believe that it’s much more dominant with African-Americans. I think universally relationships are hard. It takes a lot of work to make it last and I also believe, like I said before, I think that if one partner is not willing to compromise a little more than the other person then somebody’s going to be walking regardless of what their race is.

Another female participant responded:

I think, um, I think all nationalities go through these things but I think, like white men are more loving than Black men. Black men I think they always have to try to prove themselves to somebody and sometimes most of them haven't grown up with a father so they don't know what it is to treat a woman, you know, so I think most of these issues do mainly affect Black people.

### Changes

Ways the participants thought changes can occur include having a personal desire to change as well as increased self esteem and sense of self. It is important to note that participants that had these responses were speaking in general and were not stating that they felt that they personally needed to increase their own levels of self esteem and sense of self.

One male participant stated:

The only way to make it better is if you make it better. somebody else can't help you to make it better. You've got to make it yourself to make it better. You know? you got to know what you're doing wrong is wrong and do what's right if you love her. If she wants to go out to eat then you make that time to go out to eat. If she wants to go out to a movie, you know, go out to a movie.

One female participant stated:

Well, I think that if we as African-Americans really get a better sense of ourselves and feel better about who we are as a people, I think that might help a lot. It would help build the confidence we need, that way if we find ourselves weighing compromises you wouldn't feel like somebody was looking over your shoulder and always telling you what to do. Always thinking I got to do something somebody else is telling to do and I don't want to do it and that type of thing. If you felt better about culturally and as an individual I think that would make a big difference.

Another male participant stated:

Well, I think that um, if we as African-Americans really get a better sense of ourselves and feel better about who we are as a people and our legacy. I think that might help a lot that way if we end up weighing compromises you wouldn't feel like somebody was always telling you what to do or something like that. You know? I got to do something somebody else is telling to do and I don't want to do it and that type of thing. If you felt better about who you are I think that would make a big difference.

## Professional Help

Having discussed troubling issues, possible causes, and beliefs regarding changes, participants were questioned about their thoughts on how professionals can help with issues in relationships. In response to this question, participants generally felt that professionals can help African American couples with these kinds of problems by providing a safe, objective environment where couples can speak openly and honestly, receive clarification of issues and learn tools to communicate and get along more effectively. Participants noted the importance of each partner possessing the ability to compromise and being committed as essential components of being successful when receiving outside help from a professional.

Here are a few participant responses to this question:

One male participant responded:

First of all, sitting down talking one at a time letting you get everything out in the open can help but you have to be willing to go the extra mile because if you're not then you're not going to be able to do it. But communication is one of the biggest things one of the major things in a relationship. If you don't have communication you don't have anything. So, sometimes a third-party does need to step in and listen to both parties, you know, not fighting with anybody just hearing each other's side and trying to find a way that you can meet somewhere in the middle because nobody's perfect and everybody's different so no two people are going to have the same exact opinion.

One female participant stated:

I think by having them talk and try to be open about the relationship. Helping people find out the issues that they are facing within the relationship and teaching the man and woman what is expected of them when they're in a relationship. You know showing them how they need to nurture one another and um, I guess working on their minds.

Another male response to this question was:



Okay, I think that they can help as long as you have willing participants therapy is a good thing. I wouldn't want to invite somebody to dinner and they don't come with an appetite, probably wasting my time, my food and my money, you know what I mean, so, I say that to say that, you know, that help is there and I thank God for those that are in those positions to be a help to people but they have got to want it.

### Use of Role Models

The final interview question that all participants had in common was whether or not they had other African American couples in their lives that they used as role models or whose relationships they admire. Overall, participants seemed to be open to learning from other couples however, they were also weary of being too much like couples they felt had issues. Participants reported being reluctant to model their relationships after others stating that every situation is different. Although participants mentioned parents, none of the participants stated that they would want to model their relationship after their parents or that they consider their parent's relationship to be ideal.

One male participant answered:

Um, yeah there are a few people that I really admire, their partnerships, their marriage, um, I really believe that the quality of life that they have. You see that there is no way they could have it unless they walk together with it, unless they work very hard together wanting it. You know, you don't see one trying to outdo the other. It's very even and um, you know that man is the head of his household and that his wife upholds him and that their children, you know, are very blessed because they have created an environment in the household that they established. I mean their children are very successful because of it and I think that they in turn taught their children how to be good husbands and good wives. You know? So, yeah, there are a few, there are a few out there but, you know, you sit down and you talk to them, the wisdom and the knowledge that they give you is just unbelievable but the main thing is that they've had to learn to work together. No partnership will be successful without that process of learning how to work together but you've got to find out what works for you because what worked for them to come together may not be the same situation for the next person. They had to just learn how to put all the pieces together between the two of them. I think we all need to do that too.

Another female participant stated:

I don't. I don't know anybody. I just try to take it and do what I have to do in order for me to keep my sanity and keep the relationship going. I just try to contribute the way I think that I should but I can't think of anybody of hand whose relationship I try to role model. I wouldn't want to be like my mother and father. I mean they had a nice marriage but it wouldn't work for me. I think you have to find your own way in life. I don't have an ideal couple. I can't think of one person that I'd like to be like, that I'd like my relationship to be like. (laughs)

Another female participant stated:

Well, in a sense yes, in a sense no. My parents they've been together for over 25 years. However, they're not married so I would like to be in a relationship, a long-term relationship and stick it out like my parents has but I would like to be married.

### Participants with Past Relationships

In addition to the questions answered above, participants in categories II and III were asked how the issues they listed contributed to the end of their past relationship(s) and if these issues have in some way prevented them from starting a new relationship.

Of the 4 participants in category II (2 females and 2 males), two (one male and one female) felt as if the issues in their past relationships made it difficult for them to engage in new relationships.

One male participant in category II responded:

I want to make myself clear; I don't want to invest the time that I put in a long-term relationship right now coming out of a relationship that I had been in for 7 years. I'm not ready to make that commitment and I'm afraid of the communication part might be an issue and I don't want to deal with it at this point, at this point.

In discussing the role of their relationship issues in their separations, the four participants in category II had varying answers as to why they moved on. However, all

seemed to finally come to a decision that the relationship was not working and causing distress which they believed motivated them to change their situations.

One female participant stated:

Because the lack of communication caused me to make a decision that we needed to go our separate way. If I couldn't talk to him then we need to move on.

Another male participant stated:

I couldn't trust her so there was no need for me to be with her.

Another male participant answered:

She just got tired of taking my crap. I mean we were together so long and she wanted more and I was acting like I was going to be missing something....so she finally left me and move to Georgia. She's married now and I feel crazy because I could have been with her but I was so immature.

Of the 5 participants in category III (2 males and 3 females) both men and one female stated that past issues in relationships did not prevent them in some way from pursuing new relationships. Of the two females in this category that responded yes, the reasoning for their reluctance had less to do with wanting a relationship than it did with being unable to trust someone again.

One of them responded:

Yeah, it kind of made me afraid to try a new relationship because I just assumed whoever I was going to meet next time would be like whoever I was with.

The other responded:

For a good while it was hard to put my trust in someone else. It was hard to believe the things someone else was saying... I had a lot of issues, mainly trust issues.

The 2 men in category III believed that their past experiences have made them wiser and more experienced thus making it less difficult to pursue another relationship.

One of them stated:

No way. It gave me experience to start another relationship.

Another stated:

(laughing) not at all... not at all. Like I said, I've acknowledged that it's something that I continually have to incorporate into my marriage and as long as I'm open to that possibility ... it hasn't prevented me in the past or I'm assuming in the future, um, to develop in relationships.

### Final Comments

Despite the relatively small sample of participants, responses and data given are both varied and rich. Participants offered an abundance of information about the troubling issues in their relationships presenting some surprising observations. For example that lack of trust and communication issues, high on the list of those who had prior relationships in the past (Categories II and III)) were not mentioned at all by those who only had a present relationship (Category I). This researcher was also surprised by the less self-reflective comments by female participants as well as the mentioning of finances by all three categories despite economic status. Unfortunately, participant's responses were vague regarding possible causes for troubling issues in their relationships.

The next chapter will offer a discussion of the participants experience in relation to the literature on relationship barriers and satisfaction. The implications of this study for social work practice as well as suggestions for further research will also be included in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purposes of this study are: 1. To explore what barriers African American men and women experience in their past and/or current relationships, 2. To provide a forum in which African American men and women can answer questions about their opinions/ beliefs about the relationship turmoil, as well as about what circumstances lead to these issues, and 3. To explore in what way, if any, gender role issues and racism have contributed to the problems faced by African American couples in committed heterosexual romantic relationships. Twelve heterosexual men and women served as the sample for this study.

The major findings of this study were that participants reported that troubling issues within their relationships revolved around finances, trust and communication. These findings are consistent with those issues identified by researchers such as Burns (1984), Cleek & Pearson (1985), Kitson (1992) and Patz (2000) whose research was conducted with predominately white samples. Furthermore, participants did not report associating these issues with broader issues such as sexism, racism and socio economic status. In fact, finances were listed as a troubling issue in relationships by several participants with salaries ranging from below \$5,000 - \$100,000. According to Patz (2000), issues regarding finances can stem from lack of finances, how to use finances, who is in charge of finances and different spending styles, all this may account for the broad response by so many participants.

The differences in the levels of self reflection presented by the male and female participants were also significant. This researcher found that many of the women utilized a more blaming approach to the problems in the relationship. While the men shared more about the role they themselves played in the distress caused in the relationship. This finding is consistent with those presented by Aato and Rogers (1997), who did not directly comment on the levels of self reflection between their male and female participants but did report finding that 20% of husbands and 20% of wives reported problems in marriage due to the husband's anger and that husbands were significantly more likely than wives to report that their own hurt feelings, criticism, moodiness, and absence from the home contributed to problems in the marriage. This researcher found that participants who were in their first relationship did not report issues of communication and trust. Since none of these participants had been in their relationships longer than 3 years, perhaps this particular finding can be attributed to the newness of the relationship and/or that the other participants were responding to their past discontinued relationships. Lastly, this researcher found that several participants mentioned increased sense of self and self esteem as important factors for change, however these responses were more general and did not reflect how they might promote changes to the troubling issues in their personal lives. This researcher attributes this less introspective response to the manner in which this researcher presented the question and the need for the questions intended to be worded more clearly for the participants

#### Implications for Social Work Practice

Although this study did not yield findings that reflected a correlation between the relationship issues faced by African American couples and more systemic issues such as

racism, classism, and sexism, it does not mean that these insidious issues do not cause distress for African American couples. However, it is impossible to make assumptions for an entire community based on the findings of this small study.

Having said this, it is important that cultural awareness, sensitivity and openness are present when dealing with marginalized and oppressed client populations such as those in the African American community among others. “One should familiarize themselves with historical and condemnatory information regarding African American’s in America. Such a familiarity will not only help clinicians to establish a rapport with their African American clients, it will also provide them with a context for understanding the stories shared by their clients”(Ashby, 2000).

The data collected from the 12 men and women for this study suggests that the observations of researchers like, Burns (1984), Cleek & Pearson (1985), Kitson (1992) and Patz (2000), who primarily studied white couples, have implications for African American couples. If the results of this study promote further research on African American couples, social workers and other clinicians should feel confident utilizing these studies as a reference point to assist couples in need.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

Future research on the causes of dissatisfaction in African American romantic relationships is indicated by this study. This was an exploratory study with a small sample intended to spawn further research, the sample was small. The data collected for this study cannot be generalized or applied to population of African –American couples as a whole. Therefore, this study should be replicated with a larger, more diverse sample

of African Americans to produce data that could be considered representative of the troubling issues and causes of these issues faced by African American couples.

The majority of the couples interviewed for this study identified themselves as Christians (10 out of 12) and college educated (5 out of 12). Replicating this study with a more religiously and educationally diverse sample of African Americans might produce different findings.

Also, questions asked in interviews for future research should be more specific and tested thoroughly to see if they yield quality results. Finally, additional studies in this area should include variables like gender role expectations, role of religion, parenthood, single or two family household upbringing and socio economic status.



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## APPENDIX A

### Human Subjects Review Application

**Name:** Stephanie Harris

**Contact Information:** sharris2@smith.edu

**Project Title:** Sometimes love ain't enough: A study of the perceived relationship barriers as reported by 16 heterosexual African American Women and Men.

#### **Project Purpose and Design**

The purposes of this study are: 1. To explore what barriers African American men and women experience in their past and/or current relationships, 2.To provide a forum in which African American men and women can answer questions about their opinions/ beliefs about the relationship turmoil , as well as about what circumstances lead to these issues, and 3.To explore in what way, if any, gender role issues and racism have contributed to the problems faced by African Americans couples in committed heterosexual romantic relationships. This study examines the barriers in romantic relationships that may lead to the increase in divorce rate and the decrease in actual marriages in the African America community. Examples of these barriers may be: differences in spending, child rearing and/or religious practices just to name a few.

The data from this study will be used for the completion of Smith College School for Social Work thesis requirement and for professional presentations and publications of this topic.

### **Describe the characteristics of the people who will participate**

The selection criterion for this study consists of 16 individuals (8 men and 8 women) who identify as heterosexual, African American and are between the ages of 25-60.

Participants need to be in and/or have been in a “long term relationship” with another African American of the opposite sex for two years or more. Therefore, there are 3 categories of participants; I) those who are currently in a relationship, II) those who have been in a relationship in the past but are not now and III) those who have past and current long term relationships. The exclusion criteria for this study will be individuals who are below 25 years of age or above 60 years of age. Also excluded from these sample criteria are individuals who are not English speaking as the interview will be conducted in English. Pregnant women and individuals are/were in a relationship where one of the individuals are seriously ill, are also excluded from this study as these physical conditions can change the dynamics of the relationship for better or for the worse thus impacting the study.

The sampling techniques will be a combination of convenience and snowball nonprobability sampling techniques. These techniques have been chosen as a result of my limited access to individuals who meet the criteria and time restraints placed on the completion of this study.

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment for this study will be done by advertisement, word of mouth and convenience. In understanding the need for a qualified yet diverse sample set, I will advertise the study in churches, colleges, shopping centers, and community agencies. Once I am contacted by someone who has an interest in participating in the study, I will ask them a total of 8 questions that will be used to determine whether or not the individual qualifies for participation. After pre qualifying for the study, the participant will then be asked when and where they would like to meet to conduct the interview. Options will include public places such as offices, libraries, coffee shops, etc. I will also distribute flyers amongst friends, loved ones, and colleagues, suggesting that if they know of anyone who may be interested they can give that person a flyer. This way the individual can contact me, answer the brief pre qualifying questions, and set up a time

and place to meet with me via telephone and we will not need to involve anyone else to relay information between us. Also, if I meet someone who I feel qualifies for the study I will ask them if they would be willing to participate and offer them a flyer as well.

I believe that by offering flyers to everyone and not deviating from this approach, the likelihood for miscommunication, breach of confidentiality and confusion will diminish greatly. Furthermore, by placing the responsibility on the potential participants to take the initiative of contacting me instead of pressuring them, will assure that most of those who contact me will actually want to participate in the study or at least have some interest about the topic.

**Describe precisely the nature of the participation in research.** (A copy of any data collection instruments to be used is attached.)

Once qualifying for participating in the study (meeting the criteria listed above) via telephone, we will meet in a place that is mutually agreed upon to conduct the interview, possible locations include offices, library, coffee shop, etc. Upon meeting, the participant will be asked to read and sign the informed consent form. After signing the informed consent form the interview will begin. The participant will be asked questions about the long-term relationship that qualifies them for the study. The interview questions will vary depending on which category the participant falls in. However, all interview questions will ask participants about their experiences in their past and/or present relationship(s) depending on which category the participant is in. The questions will also explore what opinions and beliefs participants hold about the relationship issues they are reporting on. (Interview questions and demographic information are attached). The anticipated duration of the interview will be 45 minutes to 1 hour. Upon completion of the interview, the participant will be asked to complete a brief demographic information sheet that will give information about the participant's age, education level, annual salary, religious affiliation, parental status and marital status. Once this entire process is complete, the participant will be given a list of resources that may prove helpful should they experience any distress over the interview discussion or content.

**Potential Risks of participation in this research project.**

Minimal risk from participation is anticipated. Participants may experience distress when reflecting on experiences in their past or current relationship. A list of referrals to community providers will be given to all participants along with a copy of their signed consent.

**Potential benefits of participation in the research project.**

Possible gains include insight into possible causes of turmoil in past/current relationships as well as identification of areas of growth. Participation might give respondents satisfaction that the information gained from this data might help me and other professionals in our understanding of issues that are prevalent in the dynamics in romantic relationships between African American men and women.

**Payment for participation.**

Participants will not receive payment for their involvement in this study.

**Describe the informed consent procedures to be used**

All participants are adults and can therefore provide their own consent. Written consent forms (see attached) will be read, discussed and signed upon meeting with participant, the participants signature will be received at that time, prior to interview.

The participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any point before or during this study. There participants will be notified in the consent form that there is no penalty for withdrawal from the study and that final date for withdrawal, after completion of the interview, is March 31, 2007. They will be given my contact information so that they may contact me at the email or phone listed below for questions or concerns about this study, before, or after the interview is conducted

**What precautions will be taken to safeguard identifiable information about individuals?**

The audiotapes will be listened to and transcribed by me and possibly another transcriber. We will listen to the tapes in private to protect the confidentiality rights of the participants. The transcriber (if one is used) will be asked to sign a confidentiality pledge (see attached). The consent form will be kept separate from your interview. Any identifying information will be removed from the interviews and the interviews will be



assigned a number to further assure privacy. Confidentiality will also be protected by presenting the data as a whole in any publications or presentations, without reference to identifying information or characteristics. Finally, all data, audiotapes, notes and consent forms will be kept secure for a period of three years as stipulated by federal guidelines after which time they can be destroyed or continued to be maintained securely.

**Student's Signature:**

**Date:**

**Advisor's Signature:**

**Date:**

APPENDIX B

Participant Recruitment Flyer

**YOU ARE BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN  
A MASTERS THESIS PROJECT**

**I AM A SOCIAL WORK GRADUTE STUDENT WORKING ON MY THESIS:**

**I AM SEEKING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AND FEMALES BETWEEN THE AGES OF 25-60 WHO ARE/OR HAVE BEEN IN A LONGTERM HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIP OF TWO YEARS OR MORE WITH ANOTHER AFRICAN AMERICAN TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY.**

**THIS STUDY EXAMINES THE BARRIERS IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS THAT MAY LEAD TO THE INCREASE IN DIVORCE RATE AND THE DECREASE IN ACTUAL MARRIAGES IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY. EXAMPLES OF BARRIERS MAY BE: DIFFERENCES IN SPENDING, CHILD REARING OR RELIGIOUS PRACTICES.**

**ALTHOUGH RESEARCH HAS BEEN DONE ON THIS QUESTION, SELDOM HAVE AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN BEEN ASKED FOR THEIR EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS.**

**BY PROVIDING FIRST HAND INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT AFRICAN AMERICANS CONSIDER TO BE RELATIONSHIP BARRIEERS, YOUR PARTICAPANTION CAN BE HELPFUL IN ASSISTING PROFESSIONALS TO COMPOSE AND IMPLEMENT PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER FAMILY LIVES IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY.**

**PREGNANT WOMEN WHO ARE CURRENTLY IN A RELEATIONSHIP, THOSE WHO ARE/WERE IN A RELATIONSHIP WHERE ONE OF THE INDIVIDUALS ARE SERIOUSLY ILL, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO DO NOT SPEAK ENGLISH ( THE INTERVIEW WILL BE CONDUCTED IN ENGLISH) ARE NOT INVITED TO PARTICIAPTE IN THIS STUDY.**

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO ASSIST ME IN THIS RESEARCH, PLEASE CONTACT ME AT:**

**Stephanie Harris (xxx)xxx-xxxx**

## APPENDIX C

### Brief Pre-Screening Questionnaire

1. **How old are you?**
2. **What is your ethnicity?**
3. **Have you ever been in a heterosexual relationship with an African American for two years or more?**
4. **Are you in a heterosexual relationship with an African American now?**
5. **Are you or your partner pregnant?**
6. **Do/Did you or your partner have an illness that may affect your relationship?**
7. **Do you speak and understand English?**
8. **Do you have any questions and/or concerns that you would like to discuss with me before you participate.**

## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

My name is Stephanie Harris and, I am a student at Smith College School for Social Work and I am conducting a study exploring relationship barriers that occur between African American men and women who are in or have had long term relationships with another African American of the opposite sex. The purposes of this study are 1. To explore what barriers African American men and women experience in their past and/or current relationships, 2.To provide a forum in which African American men and women can answer questions about their opinions/ beliefs about what they consider the relationship turmoil to be, as well as about what circumstances lead to these issues, and 3.To explore in what way, if any, gender role issues and racism have contributed to the problems faced by African Americans couples in committed heterosexual romantic relationships.

Basically, I am looking at what issues you deal with that hamper your relationship(s) and why you think that is happening.

This knowledge might be very important for better understanding problems that occur in committed romantic relationships for African American men and women and for helping to inform professionals about those problems.

The data from this study will be used for the MSW thesis requirement at Smith College School of Social Work and may possibly appear in publications and presentations on this topic.

#### **Nature of Participation**

You are being asked to participate in a study. Participants of this study will be individuals who identify as Heterosexual African Americans, are between the ages of 25-60 and who have had and/or are currently in a committed romantic relationship for two

years or more. Pregnant women who are currently in a relationship, those who want to report on a relationship where one of the members are/were seriously ill and individuals who do not speak English (the interview will be done in English) are not invited to participate in this study.

Once qualifying for participation in the study, we will meet in a place that is mutually agreed upon to conduct the interview; possible locations include offices, library, coffee shop, etc. Upon meeting you will be asked to read and sign the informed consent form. After signing the informed consent form, demographic data such as age, race, education level, annual salary, religious affiliation, parental status and marital status will be taken. Finally, you will be asked between 7-10 questions about the long term relationship(s) that qualifies you for the study. **The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour.** After the interview is complete, you will be given a list of referrals that may prove helpful should you experience some distress over the interview discussion or content.

### **Recording**

The interview will be audio recorded. Notes will be taken by me during the course of the interview. These notes will also become part of the data collected and will be analyzed. I will transcribe and analyze the data. Another transcriber may also be used, should this occur the additional transcriber will be asked to sign a transcriber confidentiality form to assure that your information is protected. . Furthermore, any identifying information will be removed from the interviews and the interviews will be assigned a number to further assure privacy throughout this process.

### **Risks**

Minimal risk from participation is anticipated. You may experience distress when reflecting on experiences in your past or current relationship. These feelings are normal, however should you need to talk more about your feelings a list of referrals of community service agencies is attached to this form. This referral list can be used as a resource should you experience distressful feelings that require professional support.

**Benefits**

You may gain new insight into possible causes of turmoil in past/current relationships as well as identify areas of growth. The information gained from this interview will help me and hopefully others in offering information and understanding of issues that are prevalent between African American men and women.

**You will not receive monetary compensation for your participation in this study.**

**Confidentiality**

This interview will be audio taped. The audiotapes will be listened to and transcribed by me and possibly another transcriber. We will listen to the tapes in private to protect your confidentiality. The transcriber (if one is used) will be asked to sign a confidentiality pledge. Again, this consent form will be kept separate from your interview. Any identifying information will be removed from the interview and the interview will be assigned a number to further assure privacy. Confidentiality will also be protected by presenting the data all together in any publications or presentations, without reference to identifying information or characteristics. Finally, all data, audiotapes, notes and consent forms will be keep secure for a period of three years as stipulated by federal guidelines after which time they can be destroyed or continued to be maintained securely.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any point before or during this study. There is no penalty for withdrawal from the study. The final date for withdrawal, after completion of the interview, is March 31, 2007. You may contact me at the email or phone listed below for questions or concerns about this study, before, or after the interview is conducted.

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Contact:**

Stephanie Harris (xxx) xxx-xxxx sharris2@smith.edu

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Questions

(Category I those who are currently in a relationship)

1. Could you tell me about your experiences with troubling issues in your long term relationship?
2. What role do these experiences play in your relationship?
3. Why do you think these troubles exist?
4. Are there special groups for which you think these circumstances exist for or do you see them as personal?
5. Do you think these troubles are common for African American men and women and in what way do you think they differ for white Americans?
6. Do you have ideas on how changes in these issues/circumstances can occur?
7. In what ways do you think that professionals can help African American couples with these kinds of problems?
8. Do you have examples (other African American Couples) that you try to follow? Please elaborate?



Category II (Those that have been in a relationship in the past but are not now)

1. Could you tell me about your experiences with troubling issues in your long term relationship(s)?
2. How did these experiences you describe play a role in the separation?
3. Have these issues prevented you in starting a new relationship?
4. Why do you think these troubles existed?
5. Are there special groups for which you think these circumstances exist for or do you see them as personal?
6. Do you think these troubles are common for African American men and women and in what way do you think they differ for white Americans?
7. Do you have ideas on how changes in these issues/circumstances can occur?
8. In what ways do you think that professionals can help African American couples with these kinds of problems?
9. Do you have examples (other African American Couples) that you try to follow? Please elaborate?

(Category III Those that have past and current long term relationships)

1. Could you tell me about your experiences with troubling issues in your long term relationship(s)?
2. How did these experiences you describe play a role in the separation?
3. Have these issues prevented you in starting a new relationship?
4. What role do these experiences play in your relationship?
5. What circumstances seem to play a role in these problems? In other words why do you think they exist(ed)?
6. Are there special groups for which you think these circumstances exist for or do you see them as personal?
7. Do you think these troubles are common for African American men and women and in what way do you think they differ for white Americans?
8. Do you have ideas on how changes in these issues/circumstances can occur?
9. In what ways do you think that professionals can help African American couples with these kinds of problems?
10. Do you have examples (other African American Couples) that you try to follow? Please elaborate?

APPENDIX F

Demographic Information

*Please provide the following information as part of your participation in the study.*

**Gender**

Female    Male

**Age** \_\_\_\_\_

**Education Level**

- High School Not completed
- High School Diploma/GED
- Some College
- Technical or Vocational Certification
- Associates Degree
- Bachelors Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate Degree
- Other: Specify

**Annual Salary**

- Below \$15,000
- \$15, 000-\$25,000
- \$25,001-\$35,000
- \$35,001-\$45,000
- \$45,001-\$55,000
- \$55,001-\$75,000
- \$75,001-\$100,000
- over \$100,000

In long term relationship in the past  
Married Y/N (please circle)

Length of years:

Both Y/N (please circle)

**Religious Affiliation**

- No Religious Affiliation
- Christian
- Catholic
- Muslim
- Jewish
- Protestant
- Southern Baptist
- Other: Specify

**Parental Status**

- No Children
- Children

**Relationship Status**

In long term relationship at present  
Married Y/N (please circle)

Length of years:

## APPENDIX G

### Coding for Demographic Data

#### **Gender**

- 1= Female
- 2= Male

#### **Age**

- 1= 25-30
- 2= 31-40
- 3= 41-50
- 4= 51-60

#### **Education Level**

- 1= Not Completed
- 2= High School Diploma/GED
- 3= Some College
- 4= Technical or Vocational Certification
- 5= Associates Degree
- 6= Bachelors Degree
- 7= Master's Degree
- 8= Doctorate Degree
- 9= Other

#### **Annual Salary**

- 1= Below \$15,000
- 2= \$15,000-\$25,000
- 3= \$25,001-\$35,000
- 4= \$35,001-\$45,000
- 5= \$45,001-\$55,000
- 6= \$55,001-\$75,000
- 7= \$75,001-\$100,000
- 8= over \$100,000

#### **Parental Status**

- 1=No Children
- 2=Children

#### **Relationship Status**

- 1= In long term relationship at present
- 2= In long term relationship in the past
- 3= Both

#### **Length of years in current relationship**

- 1= under 10 years
- 2= 10-20 years
- 3= 20-30 years
- 4= 30 years or more

#### **Length of years in past relationship**

- 1= under 10 years

- 2= 10-20 years
- 3= 20-30 years
- 4= 30 years or more

**Marital Status**

- 1= Currently Married
- 2= Married in the past

**Religious Affiliation**

- 1= No Religious Affiliation
- 2= Christian
- 3= Catholic
- 4= Muslim
- 5= Jewish
- 6= Protestant
- 7= Southern Baptist
- 8=Other

## APPENDIX H

### Transcriber Assurance of Research Confidentiality

#### **Statement of Policy**

This research study is firmly committed to the principle that the research confidentiality must be protected. This principle holds whether or not any specific guarantee of confidentiality was given by respondents at the time of the interview. When guarantees are given, they may impose additional requirements which are to be adhered to strictly.

#### **Procedures For Maintaining Confidentiality**

- All volunteer or professional transcribers for this project shall sign this assurance of confidentiality.
- A volunteer or professional transcriber shall be aware that the identity of participants in research studies is confidential information, as are identifying information about participants and individual responses to questions. Depending of the study, the organizations participating in the study, the geographical location of the study, the method of participant recruitment, the subject matter of the study, and the hypotheses being tested may also be confidential information. Specific research findings and conclusions are also usually confidential until they have been published or presented in public.

It is incumbent on volunteers and professional transcribers to treat information from and about research as privileged information, to be aware of what is confidential in regard to specific studies on which they work or about which they have knowledge, and to preserve the confidentiality of this information. Types of situations where confidentiality can often be compromised include conversations with friends and relatives, conversations with professional colleagues outside of the project team, conversations with reporters and the media, and in the use of consultants for computer programs and data analysis.

- Unless specifically instructed otherwise, volunteer or professional transcribers upon encountering a respondent or information pertaining to a respondent that s/he knows personally, shall not disclose any knowledge of the respondent or any information pertaining to the respondent's testimony or his participation in this study. In other words, volunteer and professional transcribers should not reveal any information or knowledge about or pertaining to a respondent's participation in this study.
- Data containing personal identifiers shall be kept in a locked container or a locked room when not being used each workday in routine activities. Reasonable caution shall be exercised in limiting access to data to only those persons who are working on this research study and who have been instructed in the applicable confidentiality requirements for this study.

- The researcher for this study, Stephanie Harris, shall be responsible for insuring that all volunteer and professional transcribers involved in the handling of data are instructed in these procedures, have signed this pledge, and comply with these procedures throughout the duration of the project. At this end of this project, Stephanie Harris, shall arrange for proper storage or disposition of data, in accordance with U.S. federal guidelines and Human Subjects Review Committee policies at the Smith College School for Social Work.
- Stephanie Harris must ensure that procedures are established in this study to inform each respondent of the authority for the study, the purpose and use of the study, the voluntary nature of the study and the effects on the respondents, if any, of not responding.

**Pledge**

I hereby certify that I have carefully read and will cooperate fully with the above procedures. I will maintain the confidentiality of confidential information from all studies with which I have involvement. I will not discuss, disclose, disseminate, or provide access to such information, except directly to the researcher Stephanie Harris, for this study. I understand that violation of this pledge is sufficient grounds for disciplinary action, including termination of professional or volunteer services with this study, and may make me subject to criminal or civil penalties. I give my personal pledge that I shall abide by this assurance of confidentiality.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX I

Human Subjects Review Approval

October 27, 2006

Stephanie Harris  
14 Dillon Road, Apt. A1  
Hartford, CT 06112

Dear Stephanie,

Thank you for resending the questionnaires. They are fine and we are now able to give final approval to your very interesting study.

*Please note the following requirements:*

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

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain signed consent 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). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Your project promises to develop some very useful information. Good luck with it!

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Nel Wijnhoven, Research Advisor