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# “NO COSBY SHOW”: SINGLE BLACK MOTHER HOMES AND HOW BLACK MEN BUILD ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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“NO COSBY SHOW”: SINGLE BLACK MOTHER HOMES AND HOW BLACK MEN BUILD  
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

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B.A. Whittier College, 2006  
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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Counseling, Quantitative Methods, and Special Education  
in the Counselor Education Program  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

May, 2016

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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Maia Niguel Moore

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of Counselor Education and Clinical Supervision

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March 10, 2016

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Maia Niguel Moore, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Counselor Education, presented on March 10, 2016, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: “NO COSBY SHOW”: SINGLE BLACK MOTHER HOMES AND HOW BLACK MEN BUILD ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Kimberly Asner-Self

This qualitative study explored the lives of 11 Black men to better understand how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women. One focus group and a series of individual in-person interviews were conducted with the participants who ranged between 23 and 43 years of age. Participants were asked questions that inquired about their family of origin, messages they received about relationships, how they define masculinity, their perceptions of Black women, and their previous and current experiences building romantic relationships.

Guided by a narrative approach, several different coding methods were used to help reveal six core themes related to the study. Some of the more significant themes include: 1) conflicted feelings towards their parents and Black women; 2) male mentorship; and 3) masculinity. Because the study was conducted using a non-deficit approach, the findings were analyzed using Helms’ “Black racial identity development model”, critical race theory, and intersectionality; to conceptualize the participants’ experiences through the lens of White privilege, racism, oppression, and racial identity.

The study revealed an inequity of empathy among the group of men related to their feelings towards their mothers and fathers. Additionally, then men’s feelings towards their mothers had a

larger impact compared to their fathers on their perceptions of Black woman and how they build romantic relationships. This study is significant because it is the first study to simultaneously explore single Black mother homes and Black men and romantic relationships. Additionally, the study is significant because it provides rich insight about this specific topic and other features of the Black experience along with culturally relevant interventions and implications for counselors and counselor educators.

## DEDICATION

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love - Ephesians 3:16-17*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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respect. Dr. Champe, you have served as an inspiration and the personification of the type of professor I hope to someday emulate.

To my family who I have lived thousands of miles away from over the past three years and have missed so much: I am sure that I have made it look easy, but being away from you all has been anything but easy. Every time, I come home and see Hayden and Austin a few inches taller, my heart breaks. Janice and Jeff, I love and miss you dearly! Ivori and Wallace, thank you for always opening your home to me and making me feel as if it were my own. Thank you both for your love and support. Our speakerphone brainstorm sessions about whatever hair brain scheme I had in the works were priceless and meant everything to me. I am so incredibly blessed to have you both as my brother and sister. Aunt Vickie, thank you for being there for me when I needed you the most. Your kindness will never be forgotten. I love you!

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I would like to end my acknowledgements by thanking and acknowledging two incredibly special people. Mommy and daddy, you both sacrificed so much to make sure I was able to have more than I would ever need. Thank you for instilling in me strong drive and determination. Thank you for teaching me how to persevere and to never take “no” for an answer.

Daddy, thank you for teaching me the importance and the power of silence and the value of hard work. I could not have asked for a father who was more supportive and understanding than you. No matter how old I grew to be, you always treated me like your little “Pete”, and for that, I thank you. You were more than a father to me. You were my best friend, my accountability partner, and you were my daddy. Mommy, thank you for introducing me to God and instilling in me the importance of having faith and believing in something greater than myself. Although daddy was loving in his own way, thank you for showing me what mushy and sappy love looks like. You taught me the power of passion, caring, and expressive love. Mommy, you taught me how to be determined, ambitious, and how to thrive in spite of adversarial conditions with grace, humility, and poise. I strive every day to just be half the woman you were.

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*I would like to give a special acknowledgement to the 11 men who participated in this study. Thank you for your honesty and transparency. Thank you for being willing to make yourselves venerable for a larger cause. This study could not have happened without any one of you.*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The romantic relationship they had was tough. There would be times that I would see them and it seemed like it was cool but I think I remember more bad than good. I don't remember a lot of hand holding, 'let's go out on a date', none of that. I don't remember any of that at all. I don't remember, "Let's sit at the table. Baby, tell me how your day went." No Bill Cosby show – none of that.

- Steven (23 in a relationship)

#### **Introduction to the Problem**

Changing trends within the family structure in the Black community has caught the attention of scholars and researchers (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The percentages of unwed Black men and women have more than doubled in the last fifty years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The number of single Black mother homes has more than tripled in the last fifty years and are significantly higher than that of White single mother homes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Some are concerned as they are wondering if these percentages are an indication of a fracture in the Black family structure that can consequently weaken the Black community as a whole, or, if the change is a reflection of a shift in U.S. societal values and norms related to marriage and family and extend beyond racial, ethnic, and cultural background (Chaney, 2009; Connell, et al., 2005; Williams, 2011).

Although academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and Black studies have done extensive research on common issues and trends which effect the Black community, some counselors and counselor educators (CEs) argue that research on the Black community in the counseling profession is limited (Bethea, 1995; Miller, Nash, & Fetty, 2014; Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992). With less than 8% of Blacks who seek counseling services compared to 16% of Whites, some are becoming concerned that a possible lack of shared knowledge and awareness

across the profession about trends that affect the Black community is one of the causes for the low percentage of Blacks who seek counseling services (Miller et al., 2014). Furthermore, some are becoming worried that multicultural competence is only being taught in courses such as “Counseling Diverse Populations” or “Methods for Cross-Cultural Counseling,” but is not being infused in every course within counselor education or practiced across the board among counselors (Miller et al., 2014; Shallcross, 2013). After all, how effective can a marriage, couple, and family therapist be when working with a Black family and/or couple if he or she lacks an overall knowledge of some of the unique factors that affect the Black community that may also be causing issues in the family.

When reviewing the current literature that investigates done to explore issues related to the Black family structure, it is clear the counseling profession has conducted research directed towards more general issues such as diagnosis and treatment (Shallcross, 2013). Although members from other social science fields have done research on issues related to the dynamics between Black men and women as well as single Black mother homes, no research has been done to explore how heterosexual, cisgender, American Black men raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women. That is, currently there is no research, which looks at the two phenomena simultaneously (Connell et al., 2005; Dixon, 2009). However, research shows that issues relating to intimacy and how a person builds romantic relationships can be strongly influenced by what he or she observes in the home throughout adolescence (Chaney, 2009; Chaney, 2014, Williams, 2011; Oware, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to address the current gap in literature by conducting a qualitative narrative inquiry to explore how heterosexual, cisgender, American, Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women using a

non-deficit based approach. By addressing this gap in research, the goal of this study was to: 1) contribute to the limited empirical research in the counseling profession that explores topics related to the Black community and multicultural counseling overall; 2) facilitate counselors and CEs in becoming more aware and knowledgeable about specific issues that can affect some Black men related to intimacy, family, and the Black community as a whole; and 3) create a better shared understanding for this topic among counselors and CEs that can lead to more nuanced and culturally relevant, and effective interventions and strategies when working with members of the Black community.

**Problem Statement.** In 1950, 35% of Black men were unwed compared to 32% of White men and 38% of Black women were unwed compared to 34% of White women (Dixon, 2009). According to the US Census Bureau, in 2013 64% of Black men were unwed compared to 47% of White men and 72% of Black women were unwed compared to 49% of White women. Although percentages of unwed men and women have increased since the 1950's for both Blacks and Whites, changes in the percentages of unwed Black men and women are more significant than that of Whites. Furthermore, the difference in percentages among unwed Blacks and Whites is staggering, with both unwed Black men and women almost doubling the percentage of unwed White men and women. One could argue that the increase of unwed individuals is reflective of a change in perspective towards marriage that is more societal than it is cultural or racial (Williams, 2011). Surely there are individuals who choose not to marry regardless of race. However, some researchers remain skeptical and concerned about the high increase of unwed Blacks compared to Whites in relationship to other larger etic implications that are unique to the Black community (Chaney, 2009; Williams, 2011). Many Blacks have historically experienced America differently than other racial and ethnic groups (Chaney, 2009; Chaney, 2014; Marbley, 2003; Williams, 2011).

There are various sociological factors that members from the Black community face that members from other racial and ethnic groups do not (Chaney, 2009; Chaney, 2014). For example, studies suggest that micro-aggressions, which are sometimes referred to as the new face of racism, are more commonly directed towards Blacks than they are other ethnic or racial minorities in America (Childs, 2005). Micro-aggressions are defined as intentional and unintentional subtle every-day messages that members from marginalized groups receive from the dominant culture that confirm their inferiority and affirm the superiority of the dominant culture (Childs, 2005; Zook, 1998). Micro-aggressions often discredit the identity and/or the experiences of the marginalized group or persons to which the behavior is directed.

Consequently, although the increased percentages of unwed Blacks might be indicative of a societal change in perspective towards marriage, these percentages could very well mean something different, or at the very least, something more significant for Blacks than they do for Whites (Connell et al., 2005; Dixon, 2009). Since the early 1960's, there has been a substantial increase of single mother homes in the Black community, with 72% of Black children being raised in single Black mother homes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Of course, this percentage included Black single mothers who made the decision to have a child or children despite being unwed. Furthermore, being a single Black mother is not maladaptive or dysfunctional. However, it is atypical from traditional U.S. norms regarding family and marriage (Williams, 2011). Consequently, there has been an increasing interest to explore the reason or genesis behind what appears to be atypical behavior according to traditional U.S. norms.

With that said, some researchers are wondering about the unwed Black mothers whose pregnancies were unplanned or who do not view their pregnancy or pregnancies positively and what, if any, impact that might have on the Black community as a whole (Connell et al., 2005;



Williams, 2011). Furthermore, what other factors such as extended family, definitions of masculinity, and media portrayal of Blacks play a role in some of the changes in the Black family. Although historically various scholars have explored issues and trends that affect the Black community, currently there has been an emergence of individuals within academe who are interested in better understanding possible causes for the increased percentages of unwed Black men and women as well as single Black mother homes (Connell et al., 2005; Dixon, 2009).

***Multicultural competence in counseling.*** As previously mentioned, although attention towards issues related to intimacy and the family unit in the Black community have become a shared interest across various academic disciplines, some counselors are urging others in the field to become more knowledgeable about issues and features within the Black community as a means to provide best practices to clients from underrepresented groups (Chang & Berk, 2009; Henry, 2014; Shallcross, 2013). Also there has been growing concern within the profession that members of the Black community are reluctant to seek counseling services because of a lack of knowledge or awareness among some counselors about issues common in the Black community (Bethea, 1995; Sue et al., 1992). Multicultural competence is defined as an approach to the counseling process that refers to the personal culture of the client (Ahmed, Wilson, Henriksen, & Jones, 2011). Sue et al., (1992) created a framework for counselors to follow when working with individuals from marginalized groups that is based on conceptualizing clients through the lens of their world-view and culture with regard to the client/counselor relationship and diagnosis and treatment.

Since the early 1990s, the conversation about issues related to multicultural and cross cultural competency has evolved and become more nuanced in exploring more covert instances of racism and prejudicial behavior between counselors and clients and CEs and counselors-in-training (CITs) (Jordan, Lovett, & Sweeton, 2012). An important component of continuing to create an

identity for the profession of counseling is creating a strong presence of empirical research that can lead to evidence based research in the field (Shallcross, 2013; Vera & Speight, 2003; Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007). Furthermore, CEs, CITs, and practicing counselors should not have to rely on the research of other social science disciplines such as psychology and social work to help inform best practices based on research related to issues affecting members from marginalized groups (Miller et al., 2014; Worthington et al., 2007). Contributing to empirical research that explores trends and features of the Black community is a component of multicultural competence within the field of counseling. Multicultural competence has been a major force in the counseling profession since the 1990s (Sue, 2006). Not only has there been an increased effort to create and encourage multiculturally competent counselors, there has also been an intentional focus towards increasing research that will help counselors embody behaviors, attitudes, and skills that are congruent with multicultural best practices (Miller et al., 2014; Sue, 2006; Zane & Hwang, 2014).

The American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) states that counselors should possess a cultural awareness and knowledge about self and others (B.1.a; C.2.a.). Counselors are ethically responsible for continually increasing their knowledge and self-awareness while improving their skills when working with clients from diverse backgrounds. This includes the use of relevant and effective counseling theories and strategies that recognize diversity and embrace approaches that support the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of individuals within their historical, cultural, economic, political, and psychosocial contexts. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs Standards (CACREP, 2009) require that counselor educators: 1) train CITs on the projected needs concerning counseling practice in a multicultural society; 2) train CITs on the differing cultural contexts of relationships, issues, trends, and theories

of multicultural counseling, identity development, and social justice; and 3) assist CITs in understanding their role as counselors in being self-aware and promoting social justice (A.14).

Despite the effort that has been made to increase research, there is not much evidence to suggest that counselors and CEs are making significant progress towards multicultural competency in training or in practice (LeBeauf, Smaby, & Maddux, 2009; Miller et al., 2014).

Currently, multicultural competence among counselors appears to be approached as a concept that only involves acquiring knowledge about factors that affect people of color (Sue, 2006). Although knowledge is imperative, it is equally as important for counselors, CEs, and CITs to also adjust the lens through which they view clients, training, and practice (LeBeauf et al., 2009; Sue, 2006). That is, being multiculturally competent goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and fully takes place when CEs view the world and CITs through a socio-political lens that promotes social advocacy, which in turn trains CITs how to conceptualize their clients similarly. In 2015, *Multicultural and Social Justice Competencies* were published which extended multicultural competence by including advocacy as an integral component of counseling and the profession overall (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015). Just as important as it is for counselors to be knowledgeable about the various issues and trends specific to marginalized groups, the revised competency's standards list attitudes and beliefs as the first standard. Attitudes and beliefs are defined as the counselor's level of self-awareness of his or her social and racial identity, power, privilege, assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes towards themselves and members from marginalized groups. Counselor self-awareness should inform the counselor's knowledge, skills, and actions when working with clients. That is, being self-aware should inform not only what members of the profession know conceptually. Self-awareness should also inform how counselors interact with clients from underrepresented groups and how they continually reflect on how their

biases, assumptions, identity, power, privilege, and attitudes impact the client/counselor relationship, as these areas of self-reflection can also be extended to how CEs work with CITs.

Despite the large amount of research that has been done on the importance of counselors and CEs being knowledgeable about issues that members from marginalized groups face, the profession has not done as much research exploring issues that are specific to Black men (Marcheta, 2013). This could be a result of the small percentage of Black men who receive counseling treatment compared to White men. Or, this could be explained by the inherent Whiteness of the profession (Malott & Paine, 2011). In this context, Whiteness is defined not only as a lack of knowledge some White counselors and CEs have about issues that members from minority groups face, but also an unawareness of the importance of being knowledgeable about these issues beyond theory. Furthermore, Whiteness in this context also refers to the role that race and privilege play with regard to White counselors and CEs working with members of underrepresented groups, either in the classroom or in client/counselor relationships. There appears to be a lack of awareness among some White counselors and CEs of the racial power and privilege they possess when working with Black male clients and/or CITs and the role their power and privilege plays in their relationships with clients and/or students (Haskins, Whitfield-Williams, Shillingford, Singh, Moxley & Ofauni, 2013).

With Whites making up 87% of mental health professionals and Blacks making up only 1.7%, it appears counselors and CEs should be intentional and proactive becoming more aware of issues related to specific minority groups (Malott et al., 2011; Shallcross, 2013). Multicultural competence is not a general perspective or way to conceptualize all minority clients from underrepresented populations; as differing ethnic and racial groups do not share the same experiences (Malott et al., 2011; Miller et al., 2014; Shallcross, 2013). It is also worth noting that

members from the same racial, ethnic, and cultural groups do not share all of the same experiences. This is especially true when exploring issues related to intimacy, learned behaviors, and family of origin (Bethea, 1995; Malott et al., 2011). When investigating how some Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women, it is important to be aware of some of the unique and specific factors that some members of the Black community encounter and the intersection between those factors and this phenomenon. The intersection of how some of these factors is what differentiates the experiences of Black men compared to the experiences of men from different racial and ethnic groups.

***Black men and counseling.*** When examining multicultural competence across the profession to better understand why counselors and CEs would benefit from becoming more knowledgeable about various issues related to Black men such as intimacy and family, it is important to first take a brief look at the perceptions some Black men have about counselors and the counseling profession (Shallcross, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (2013), Black men made up 0.6% of adults aged 18 years and over who have received mental health counseling compared to 10.8% of White men in 2012. The low percentage of Black men who received mental health counseling compared to White men is not indicative of the need (Wade & Rochlen, 2012). In 2012, 68.7% of White adults who suffered a major depressive episode received treatment compared to 53.2% of Black adults who received treatment after experiencing a major depressive episode (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, 2013).

According to the 2012 U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health, 56% of Black men believed that depression was typical of the aging process, 45% believed that it is typical for a mother to experience feelings of depression for at least two weeks after giving birth, and 40%

believed it is typical for a spouse or partner to experience feelings of major depression for more than a year after the death of a spouse. Not only are these beliefs untrue, they might also be reflective of a lack of knowledge that some Black men have about mental and emotional health and wellness.

It is evident there are numerous challenges Black men face that can have profound effects on mental health. However, as previously mentioned, the percentage of Black men and Blacks in general who receive counseling treatment is low, especially when compared to Whites (Wade, 2012; Miller et al., 2014; Shallcross, 2013). Some members of the counseling profession have identified several reasons to help explain what factors prohibit Black men from receiving counseling services. Lack of trust towards Whites and individuals in positions of authority or power is one of the primary reasons Black men have reported not receiving counseling treatment (Shallcross, 2013). Black men have experienced various forms of racial injustices, prejudice, and oppression since the early 1600s when the first group of slaves migrated from Africa to Virginia by Whites. The recent incidents of unarmed Black men such as Mike Brown, Walter Scott, Tamir Rice, and Freddy Grey being beaten, shot, and killed by police officers have shed light on the bitter reality that many Black men still experience racial injustices that contribute to them not feeling safe with Whites (Lawson, 2015).

Family of origin is also a contributing factor to the low percentage of Black men who receive counseling services (Shallcross, 2013). Many Black children are taught at a very young age to keep family business, family business -- which also reflects a general mistrust that the Black community feels towards others. Masculinity is also a contributing factor. Shallcross (2013) argues that there is a distinct stigma in the Black community about counseling. Among man Black men counseling is viewed as services that are needed only for people who are “crazy” or who are “less

manly” or “weak”. Some Black men associate counseling or talking to someone else about their challenges as being weak and feel that as a man, they should “tough it out” (Shallcross, 2013). “Black men don’t go to counseling, they go to church.” (Sumter, 2011) Historically, the church has been a safe place of refuge for the Black community. Consequently, Black men are more inclined to discuss challenges with members from their church or other Black men from their community and close social networks than they are to discuss issues they may be experiencing with a White counselor.

### **Relevance to the Profession**

Among people of color there is also a lack of knowledge about how to access counseling services as well as a lack of financial resources and insurance benefits needed in order to afford counseling services (Shallcross, 2013). It has also been reported that some members of the Black community who have previously received counseling services, have indicated that they will never seek counseling services again. In a study conducted with 201 Black men and women, of the 66 Black male participants, 8 shared they received counseling services and all but 1 indicated that they would not seek counseling services again (Constantine, 2009). The 7 participants who stated they would not seek counseling services again, reported working with either a White man or woman (5 out of the 7 worked with White women) and did not feel they were able to connect with their counselors. The Black men also reported that their counselors could not relate to their experiences and they did not feel a sense of empathy from their counselors. Constantine (2009) found that various factors such as differences in race, gender, and socio-economic status between the 7 participants and their counselors had an impact on the participants’ perception of counselors and their refusal to resume counseling services.

Despite the good intentions of White counselors and therapists, it is not uncommon for micro-aggressions to be an issue that negatively impact the therapeutic relationship (Shallcross, 2013). Negative experiences with White counselors only perpetuate the lack of trust and misconceptions some Black men have about counseling. Because of this, it is simply not enough for counselors to approach multicultural or cross-cultural counseling from a theoretical perspective or look at multicultural counseling as a feature of counseling to be knowledgeable about, but not regularly practice. Counselors must begin to not only remain knowledgeable about various issues that affect diverse populations, but also continually assess their practices when working with clients from diverse groups (Sue, 2006).

### **Research Design**

In order to better understand how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women, I used a qualitative narrative approach to conduct this study. More specifically, I conducted one focus group preceded by individual in-person interviews with each of the participants to better understand my two research questions: 1) *How do some Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women?* and 2) *How do some Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes define, experience, and assert their masculinity as it relates to building romantic relationships with Black women?* Both qualitative and narrative approaches to research focus on the process by which individuals create meaning through their lived experiences (Prasad, 2005). As is commonly understood, qualitative research begins with making observations about the participants through the data collection process; and theories or outcomes are then derived at the end of the study based on observations, patterns, and the participants' experiences (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfok Hoy, 2004).



## **Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks**

Both a theoretical and conceptual framework was used in this study. In Chapter 2, a modified version of critical social theory was used as the theoretical framework to discuss and analyze current literature that has been written to document this topic and other closely related topics. More specifically, critical social theory will be used to explore how systems of oppression have historically and currently marginalize Black men. Collins (2000) modified critical social theory to look at not only how social and institutional structures position individuals from differing cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds into categories that are characterized by injustice, but also to examine how the intersectionality of race, class, ability, and ethnicity can play a role in a person's social location in relationship to power and privilege (Collins, 2005).

In Chapter 5, Helms' "Black racial identity development model", critical race theory, and intersectionality were used as the conceptual framework to interpret the findings. Helms' "Black racial identity development model" was instrumental in exploring how the participants' racial identity and world-views as Black men have been co-constructed and how they shape their perceptions of themselves and others. Critical race theory worked well with Helms' racial identity model to analyze the findings relative to how constructions of power in America have been created and maintained by White privilege and supremacy. Furthermore, using these theories provided the space to analyze the findings relative to how privilege and White supremacy have: 1) marginalized the Black men in the study; 2) impacted their lived experiences; and 3) shaped their perceptions about relationships and Black women. Intersectionality helped to examine how the intersection of race, gender, class act axis of oppression and shape the racial identity of Black men through the participants' lived experiences and their perceptions about romantic relationships.

## Definitions of Terms

Before beginning a further discussion on single Black mother homes and the dynamic between Black men and women, it will be necessary to first provide definitions for terms that will be referred to throughout the proceeding chapters in order to guide the reader to better understand the review of literature and the findings of the study.

**Single-mother.** Gonzalez, Jones, Kincaid, and Cuellar (2012) define a single-mother as a mother who does not live with her partner or spouse and who assumes the majority of the responsibilities of raising her child or children. The single-mother is typically considered to be the primary care giver and the person with whom her child or children live with mostly. For the purposes of this study, a single mother would be any single Black woman who acted as the primary caregiver to any one of the participants. This is inclusive of grandmothers, aunts, family friends, stepmothers, etc.

**Co-parenting.** Co-parenting is defined as the process by which two adults combine their efforts in working together by negotiating their roles as parents (Jones, Zalot, Foster, Sterret & Chester, 2007). For the purposes of this study, co-parenting structures will include any household in which a child or children are raised by two adults regardless if they are the biological parents, members from the extended family, and regardless of gender.

**Extended family.** Within many single-mother households, the extended family plays a role in raising the child or children. Extended family can be defined as members of the mother's and/or father's family who contribute and assist with childrearing by providing financial assistance, child care, emotional, and mental support (Jones et al., 2007). Extended families can also include the mother's and father's friends and any other individuals who contribute to the childrearing process.

**Intimacy.** Intimacy in relationships is defined as a union that has a certain level of closeness and familiarity that is usually affectionate in nature and characteristic of a loving personal relationship with another person (Barr, Culatta, & Simons 2013). Intimate relationships typically involve a deep and detailed knowledge about the other person that transcends general knowledge that others might have about that person

**Interracial relationships.** Qureshi & Collazos (2011) defined interracial relationships as any relationship that involves two people from differing racial backgrounds. For example, a Black man in a relationship with a White woman or an Asian woman in a relationship with White man. For the purposes of this study, I will only discuss interracial relationships among Black men and other racial groups specifically.

**Race.** Race is defined by (Qureshi et al., 2011) as a social concept that is based on a person's physical features such as skin color, jaw structure, and facial structure. Race has been used to label and categorize individuals into distinct groups.

**Racial identity.** Racial identity has been defined as a concept or perception that an individual assumes based on assigned racial membership that creates a collective identity among that group (Helms, 1995). Racial identity is a process that is not inherent, but instead, is taught over time, fluid, and can be recursive. There are several models that examine White and non-White racial identity development in stages (Cross, 1971; Helms; 1990; Helms, 1995). For the purposes of this study, Helms' Black racial development model will be used, which includes six stages that describe the process of how members from the Black community transition from feelings of inferiority to developing a positive racial identity (Helms, 1995).

**White supremacy.** Although used differently depending on the purpose and environment, White supremacy is a term in academe that is used to describe how preferential privileges and

power is given to Whites over marginalized groups and is preserved through structural, cultural, and economic systems of racism (Perez-Huber & Solorzano, 2015). These privileges and advantages exist irrespective of racist attitudes being present.

***Micro-aggressions.*** Micro-aggressions are defined as covert and subtle every day verbal and nonverbal behavior that either intentionally or unintentional oppress members from marginalized communities by the dominant society. Many of these behaviors send messages that disempower and subjugate marginalized groups (Childs, 2005).

***Internalized racism.*** Internalized oppression has been defined as the process of how individuals from marginalized groups unconsciously or consciously accept a hierarchal structure that places Whites above themselves and other members from marginalized groups (Bailey, Chung, Williams, Singh, Terrell, 2011). An example of internalized oppression is when a person of color who, unconsciously or consciously, feels that he or she is inferior to Whites based solely on race alone.

***Multicultural competence in counseling.*** Multicultural competence is defined as an approach to the counseling process that refers to the personal culture of the client (Ahmed et al., 2011). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards were developed in the 1990s to serve as a framework to inform counselors on specific standards related to conceptualizing clients based on their culture and world-views (Sue et al., 1992). For the purposes of this study, multicultural counseling competence was used as the foundation for the 2015 multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (MSJCC).

The 2015 MSJCC extended the original framework of multicultural competence to reflect social justice and advocacy (Ratts et al., 2015). MSJCC places emphasis on the intersection of privilege, oppression, and power and how they effect the counseling relationship. Specifically,

intersectionality is examined through the following four central tenants: 1) counselors should possess an awareness of self; 2) counselors should consider clients' worldview; 3) counselors should consider clients' worldview relative to the counseling relationship, and (4) counselors should consider the clients' worldview relative to counseling and advocacy interventions.

***Deficit research approach.*** Deficit-based approaches have been utilized throughout various mental health professions to assess clients' and create solutions and strategies to address their needs (Rapp, 1997). There has been some criticism directed towards research that has been approached with a similar methodology. In the process of some researchers who have attempted to address the needs of members in the Black community, arguments have been made that such approach to research portrays Blacks exclusively through the lens of existing deficits and lack an accurate and balanced strengths based description of the Black community (Bogenschneider & Olson, 1998). As previously mentioned, this study was approached from a non-deficit approach. That is, the findings of this study are presented with a thorough examination of the various etic and sociological factors that shape how Black men see themselves and others in order to provide an honest, rich, and balanced discussion on this topic.

***Pathology (of Blacks).*** Pathology is defined as the act of diagnosing and treating something or someone presenting as atypical or abnormal (Kessler, Bergland, Demler, Merikangas, & Walters, 2005). For the purposes of this study, a non-deficit approach was taken, in part, to present the participants' narratives based on the notion that Blacks have always been viewed as atypical due to the construction of Whiteness being established as the norm. I sought to analyze the findings with transparency while using an approach that would not contribute to the pathology of Blacks (Wailo, 2006).

*Cisgender.* Cisgender is defined as when a person self-identifies with the gender that matches their biological sex.

### **Significance of Study**

The intent of this study was two-fold. First, I sought to contribute to existing literature that investigates the dynamic between Black men and women and single Black mother homes by exploring how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women through the lens of family of origin and masculinity using a non-deficit approach. I also hoped the findings of this study would make a meaningful and much needed contribution to current empirical research within the counseling profession. Furthermore, I sought to conduct a study that would yield research outcomes that could possibly lead to new and more nuanced interventions to help inform CEs when training CITs on topics related to multicultural and cross cultural counseling and people of color. That is, I hoped: 1) the outcomes from this study could be used both in theory as well as in practice; and 2) for counselors to become more aware of and knowledgeable about this specific topic and other related topics that emerged from the findings of this study.

My intention for this study was also to provide the participants and others meaning and insight about the lived experiences of this specific population. Also, I wanted the opportunity to indirectly give voice to Black men overall and single Black mothers who are not able to share their own stories. In short, the intention of this study was to provide enlightenment and insight on this topic for researchers; members of the Black community; members of the counseling profession and other professionals from various helping services; and all others who come in contact with the findings of this study.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the dissertation as a whole. In Chapter 3, the epistemology of qualitative and narrative research is defined and a detailed description of the methodology that was used to conduct this study is provided. Chapter 4 explores the findings of the study and Chapter 5 provides a thorough discussion on the implications of the study's findings, and potential next steps for future research. Next, Chapter 2 provides a thorough description of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that were used to conduct a detailed review of current literature on topics related to this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The American idea of racial progress is measured by how fast I become White. It is a trick bag, because they know perfectly well that I can never become White. I've drunk my share of dry martinis. I have proved myself civilized in every way I can. But there is an irreducible difficulty. Something doesn't work.

– James Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, 2010

#### Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, a modified version of critical social theory was used as the theoretical framework to review and analyze current literature related to this topic. Helm's "Black racial identity development model", critical race theory, and intersectionality were used as the conceptual framework to interpret the findings of the study. Before analyzing the literature related to this topic, it is important to first develop a shared understanding of critical social theory and how it has been used to review current research on issues related to single Black mother homes and the relationship dynamic between Black men and women. However, before discussing how critical social theory was used to conceptualize the review of literature, a brief description of Helms' "Black racial identity development model", critical race theory, and intersectionality is provided along with an explanation of how the model and theories were used to examine the findings in Chapter 5.

**Conceptual framework: Helms' "Black racial identity development model".** Helms' "Black racial identity development model" is a framework that was designed to examine the process of racial identity in Blacks. Helms', a counseling psychologist, extended William Cross' (1971) "Black racial identity development model" to include two additional stages to describe the process of how Blacks transition through feelings of self-hatred and internalized oppression to self-acceptance and positive feelings about their racial identity. (Helms, 1995). The model is based on the premise that the mental health and wellness of Blacks is not shaped by race and gender as much



as it is shaped by being placed into groups that have been historically marginalized. For example, if a Black male client seeks counseling services because he is feeling symptoms characteristic of depression after losing his job, he is not depressed because he was born Black. However, there is a chance he is presenting with symptoms characteristic of depression if he lost his job as a result of employment discrimination. Furthermore, his symptoms might appear different or more severe depending on the client’s position in his racial identity development. The six stages of Black racial identity include: 1) Conformity/Pre-encounter; 2) Dissonance/Encounter; 3) Immersion; 4) Emmersion; 5) Internalization; and 6) Integrated Awareness (Helms, 1990). (see table 1)

Table 1:

Helms’ Black Racial Identity Development Model

<b><u>STAGE ONE: Conformity/Pre-encounter</u></b>	identity is adopted by Whites
<b><u>STAGE TWO: Dissonance/Encounter</u></b>	acceptance of marginalization as a member of a minority
<b><u>STAGE THREE: Immersion</u></b>	rejected by Whites and begins to attempt to establish identity
<b><u>STAGE FOUR: Emmersion</u></b>	appreciation of cultural norms and racial identity increases
<b><u>STAGE FIVE: Internalization</u></b>	full commitment and appreciation of Black culture
<b><u>STAGE SIX: Integrated Awareness</u></b>	established balanced and positive racial identity

There are several reasons I chose to use Helms’ “Black racial identity developmental model”. First, I wanted to use the model to situate the participants’ narratives relative to their self-concept of race to examine how the men’s concept of self and race interact with societal forces to

shape their racial identity (Helms, 1990). Additionally, I wanted to explore how the participants' racial identity has shaped their perception of Black women and how they build romantic relationships. Because I used a non-deficit approach, this was instrumental in contextualizing the participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings, relative to the effects of oppression, White privilege, and marginalization. Secondly, Black racial identity development model was used to discuss the implications of the findings to examine how members of the counseling profession can use the model to promote both intrapersonal and interpersonal change in clients through a lens that considers both the individual as well as the environment (Helms, 1990).

***Conceptual framework: Critical race theory.*** Critical race theory was developed in the 1980's by Derrick Bell in response to critical legal studies. Bell observed various existing racial inequalities and forms of oppression in the legal system, which left individuals from marginalized communities at a disadvantage as compared to Whites (Bell, 1995). Researchers and scholars in law studies such as Kimberle Williams Crenshaw and Patricia Williams also made numerous contributions and extended the theory to pay specific attention to racial domination and oppression of people of color.

Critical race theory is based on the premise that racism is embedded in the landscape of American culture and manifests through the allocation of power and privilege to Whites and the marginalization of people of color (Van Thompson & Schwartz, 2014). The construct of Whiteness is the norm and the standard in America. Individuals from minority communities have been categorized as "non-Whites" thereby considered as the opposition to the norm by virtue of race and ethnicity alone (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The theory examines the interaction of authority, power, and privilege in minority communities and how forms of privilege and White supremacy in the U.S. oppress people of color.

**Conceptual framework: Intersectionality.** The concept of intersectionality was originally a central component of Black Feminist Theory and is now widely used as a central tenet among other critical and social theories (Collins, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989; Vest, 2001). Intersectionality has been used as part of critical race theory as a non-essentialist philosophy to examine issues related to gender, race, class, sexuality, national origin, and ability (Delgado et al., 2012). Although an individual can encounter various forms of discrimination based on any one of the above, examining such occurrence follows more of an essentialist philosophical approach for analysis.

Intersectionality, however, analyzes forms of discrimination and oppression in circumstances in which an individual or a group of people have been marginalized for various reasons. For example, Black women are considered to be both racial and gender minorities or gay Latinos are considered to be minorities based on both their race and their sexual orientation. Intersectionality provides the space to examine instances of oppression and discrimination in these circumstances.

**Theoretical framework: Critical social theory.** Using Collin's modified version of critical social theory will help to provide a more in-depth and concrete look into this topic. Critical social theorists postulate that in the U.S. there are certain institutional and social practices that place individuals from differing racial and cultural backgrounds into categories that are characterized by injustice (Hanrahan, 2013). Because certain categories cannot be collapsed together, intersectionality analysis is a critique of reductionist theory that examines how various axis of oppression such as race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality intersect with one another to determine a person's social location and how they are positioned in relationship to power and privilege (Crenshaw, 1999; Vest, 2001).

In Patricia Hill Collins book *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (2005), critical social theory is modified to examine the intersectionality of race,

gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class. Collins (2005) and other scholars, who conceptualize issues related to race through intersectionality analysis -- such as Angela Davis -- argue that a single theory cannot fully describe or analyze an entire population's experiences. For example, feminist theory has been critiqued for only viewing oppression through the lens of White women (Davis, 1983). One cannot assert, that regardless of race and ethnicity, all forms of oppression that women face can be reduced to gender. It is also important to account for factors such as race, class, and sexuality (Vest, 2001).

As previously mentioned, it appears that not much research has been done on this topic as it relates to Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes specifically. Furthermore, there does not appear to be any literature conceptualizing how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women specifically through a theoretical lens (Dixon, 2009). Consequently, using this framework adds a critical etic and emic perspective to the topic and makes a unique contribution to this discussion. Critical social theory also provides a concrete framework to examine how these factors create symbiotic systems of oppression and disadvantage (Collins, 2005). Albeit brief, now that a description has been provided of critical social theory and its utility in conceptualizing and discussing the literature, a discussion can now begin to review some of the more seminal literature that has been done on topics related to this study.

### **Introduction to the Literature**

The relationship dynamic between men and women in the Black community has been researched and documented in both popular culture as well as empirical and evidence based literature (Connell et al., 2005). Historically, there has always been a fascination within the literary community about Black culture (Trombold, 1999). During the early 1930's, the Harlem

Renaissance provided Black writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jean Toomer a platform to document the lived experiences of Blacks through fiction, poetry, drama, and social studies (Jackson, 2000; Trombold, 1999).

The Harlem Renaissance also marked a time and space for sociological development through cultural and radical consciousness from sociologists such as W.E.B Du Bois who first created the “Talented Tenth” and Marcus Garvey who launched the “Back to Africa” movement (Jackson, 2000). Most importantly, the Harlem Renaissance gave Blacks the freedom and the stage to investigate, examine, and make commentary on their lived experiences in a way that promoted sharing, growth, research, and learning about members of the community within the community. Since the Harlem Renaissance, various other writers have documented the Black experience that has reflected the societal climate according to the current time.

Because of what some researchers felt was a shift in the Black family unit beginning in the early 1980s, there has been another push in research to explore contemporary issues related to intimacy, courtship, and marriage within the Black community. Some are concerned that the change in the Black family structure is a symptom of or will lead to a fracture in the Black community as a whole (Connell et al, 2005). Recent discussions about the “unwed professional Black woman” and the “endangered Black man” have extended the conversation about issues in the Black community to examine the relationship dynamic between Black men and women by analyzing both historical racism and oppression as well as current societal systems of oppression in the U.S. (Chaney, 2009; Williams, 2011). Some argue that terms such as, “the endangered Black man” and “the professional Black woman” pit Black men and women against one another and are divisive in nature (Childs, 2005). Carbado (1999) and Childs (2005) argue that terms such as these about Black men and women are subtle micro-aggressions that are inflammatory and perpetuate stereotypes about Blacks

both within and outside of the Black community (Carbado, 1999; Childs, 2005; Zook, 1998).

Consequently, researchers have begun to explore how systems of oppression use the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality to create subtler forms of micro-aggression to negatively impact how Black women and men build and sustain romantic relationships with one another (Williams, 2011).

The percentage of single unwed Black men and women has more than doubled in the last 50 years compared to the percentage of unwed White men and women (Connell et al., 2005). With that said, percentages of unmarried White men and women have also declined since the 1950s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). It is not sufficient to assume the increase of unwed Blacks is cause for concern or is maladaptive (Chaney, 2009). After all, who is to determine that one's marital status is either adaptive or maladaptive. There are some Black men and women who do not wish to marry; however, various members of the social sciences are asking, "what about the Black men and women who do want to get married?" (Chaney, 2014; Connell et al., 2005; Williams, 2011.). For the Black men and women who wish to marry, what is preventing them from doing so? Furthermore, what is preventing them from getting married to one another? Have the numbers of unwed Black men and women increased, resulting in a shift in societal perspective and opinion about marriage? Have other societal and possible psychosocial and psychological factors related to race and oppression led to the increase of unwed Black men and women? Or, are there multiple contributing factors that can help to better explain the decline in marriage in the Black community (Williams, 2011)? This study helped to provide further insight and understanding about some of these questions.

As the percentage of unwed Black men and women continues to increase, the percentage of single mother homes in the Black community has also appeared to significantly increase since 1950 (Chaney, 2009; Eyre & Flythe, 2012). However, some argue that the increase of single mother

homes in the Black community is a systemic phenomenon that has been slowly increasing (Eyre et al., 2012). Despite differing arguments about single mother homes in the Black community being a new phenomenon versus a systemic issue that has slowly increased over time, many are beginning to agree that there is a qualitative disconnect among genders in the Black community, which seems to have impacted the Black family structure (Connell et al., 2005; Gold, Chenoweth, & Zaleski, 2003; Marbley 2003). To explore possible causes for the disconnect between Black men and women, current literature has focused more on various sociological and socio-economic factors such as: institutionalized racism, single mother homes, systemic oppression, discrimination, incarceration, unemployment, poverty, slavery, and negative portrayals of Black men and women in the media (Dixon, 2009).

Some sociology and economic theorists argue that the prevalence of single mother homes in the Black community are the result of government assistance programs in the 1970's that provided incentives to mothers to raise their children alone; making it easier for the father to play a limited role in the child's life, if any role at all (Bernal, 2011; Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007; Hymowitz, 2014). Others challenge this argument (Gonzalez, Jones, & Parent, 2014). For example, although 70% of Black children are raised in single mother homes, 70% of Black single mothers do not receive governmental assistance (Gonzalez et al., 2014; Oware, 2011). Furthermore, inaccurate arguments such as these are laden with assumptions and racial bias that perpetuate derogatory stereotypes about Black women such as the "welfare queen" (Lloyd, 2013).

Similarly, research has been conducted to explore how being raised in a single mother household affects minority children (Jordan, 2009; Oware, 2011). Research suggests that family of origin can play a significant role in how an individual builds intimate and romantic relationships as an adult with others (Bowlby, 1958). Consequently, creating a better understanding about the

different types of family structures that exist and the various direct and indirect messages children receive in the home throughout adolescence, can give insightful information on how an individual's family of origin and his or her experiences in the home as a child can shape or impact the ways in which he or she builds romantic relationships as an adult (Bowlby, 1958). With that said, there seems to be a need to address the gap in literature which explores how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women.

There are specific challenges that some Blacks experience that compound and create additional barriers that individuals from other ethnic and racial groups do not experience in the same way (Connell et al., 2005, Jordan, 2009). That is not to say that these challenges are the most prominent features of Black culture. In fact, some Blacks feel that these challenges are what adds a certain richness and strength to the culture of Black people as a whole (Morrison, 1994). Many in the Black community have had to prevail and overcome obstacles that are unique to the Black experience and still were successful in making meaningful contributions to the Black community, as well as American society as a whole.

Many of those who have researched various barriers that are specific to the Black community such as institutionalized racism, oppression, and White supremacy are doing so as a means to empower, inform, and continue to strengthen the community as well as the world at large (Raley & Sullivan, 2010). That is not to say that other racial and ethnic groups do not experience the same challenges or barriers. However, due to the historical oppression of Blacks, some members of the Black community may experience these challenges differently than how members from other racial and ethnic groups experience oppression (Jordan, 2009; Raley et al., 2010).

Some of the barriers that Blacks face are believed to have an impact on the dynamic between Black men and women and the Black family unit (Chaney, 2009; Connell et al., 2005;



Jordan, 2009). Someone reading research on this topic might wonder, “Why is this important?” One might also wonder, “What difference does it make that Black men and women are not getting married or that 70% of Black children are being raised in single mother homes?” There are a number of researchers and individuals in various disciplines who argue that the increase of single mother homes in the Black community and the increase of unwed Black men and women is cause for concern because there is a cyclical relationship between the two phenomena that might be affecting both Black men and women interpersonally, socially, emotionally, and psychologically (Murray, 2013). A psychologist or therapist might argue that issues related to conflict resolution, academic achievement, and success in the workforce and overall mental and emotional health and wellness are shaped in the home during childhood (Sprenkle, Davis, & Lebow, 2009). Additionally, as previously mentioned, some are concerned that the change in the Black family is an indication or the beginning of a rupture in the Black family unit and for Blacks overall (Connell et al., 2005). However, others argue that legal marriage in the Black community has never been the norm in the U.S. Furthermore, the structure of power and privilege in America has never been conducive to promoting marriage among Blacks. With that said, some researchers have expressed an interest and some are concerned about single homes in the Black community.

This is not to say all Black men who are raised in single mother homes experience challenges in academic achievement or do not go on to enter happy and healthy relationships. Or, that being raised in a two-parent home guarantees that a child will be successful academically or will be able to cultivate and maintain happy and healthy romantic relationships as an adult. Recognizing and exploring how family of origin might share a relationship with some of the emic and etic issues that Black men experience does not suggest that there are no other factors that contribute to Black men experiencing various challenges. However, exploring family of origin to

help analyze the dynamic between Black men and women helps to better explore this topic (Chaney, 2014).

For years, psychologists and counselors have conceptualized clients through attachment theory (Phillip, Wildaman & Larsen-Rife, 2008). Attachment theory is defined as a psychological model that is used to conceptualize how clients build, experience, and sustain interpersonal-relationships (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Bowlby, 1958; Phillip et al., 2008). Attachment theory is based on the assumption that individuals build and experience interpersonal relationships based on their experiences in the home and their ability to build trust with their care giver during infancy and childhood. Consequently, an infant or child's experiences with his or her caregiver in the home can have a significant impact in how he or she builds and experiences long-term interpersonal relationships as an adult (Phillips et al., 2008). As a result, it makes sense to examine family of origin when exploring how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women.

Although recent statistics that report an increase of single mother homes in the Black community as well as an increase of the percentage of unwed Black men and women has caused concern for some, as mentioned before, other professions such as counseling have not joined the discussion (Cashwell, 2015). Furthermore, the profession of counseling has not conducted much research on either topic as a means to become more knowledgeable about presenting issues that Black clients might experience. Current literature in counselor education and supervision makes a strong argument for the importance of multicultural competency among counselors (Sue, 2006). Within the field of counseling, research has been done to identify and explore some of the various issues that are specific to the Black community (Bethea, 1995).

However, some argue that much of the research that has been done only scratches the surface in addressing the numerous challenges that impact the emotional and mental health within the Black community (Bethea, 1995; Dixon, 2009). Issues related to Black men's attitudes and perception towards marriage, how Black men build interpersonal relationships, and courtship and dating are not topics that members of the counseling profession have researched in relationship to creating relevant and effective counseling strategies and interventions to use when working with Black male clients. This topic has especially not been explored to examine how the intersection of factors such as race, sexuality, gender, and class can play affect how a Black male client's presenting symptoms and culturally relevant and appropriate interventions to use (Shallcross, 2013).

Many are concerned that the research that has been done on counseling underrepresented groups is not being put into practice and CITs are not being trained on how to work with specific issues that might arise when working with clients from the Black community beyond theory (Bethea, 1999; Sue, 2006). This literature review explores current research that has been conducted to better understand how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women. This study addressed the current gap in literature within the counseling profession by conducting an empirical study to help better understand this specific topic and other related themes and topics that emerged during data analysis related to Black men, intimacy, the Black family, romantic relationships between Black men and women, and the Black community.

Using a modified version of critical social theory as the theoretical framework, in this chapter, I review the literature by: 1) describing how single mother homes in the Black community have changed since the 1950s and some of the mental and emotional affects that some Black men

experience; 2) discussing the various types of father involvement in single Black mother homes; 3) providing an overview on the various psychological, psychosocial, and societal issues that affect how Black men build romantic relationships with Black women; and 4) examining the implications of this topic with regard to multicultural competence for counselors and CEs.

### **Single Mother Homes in the Black Community**

Although it appears that single mother homes in the Black community is a new phenomenon, the increase of Black single mother homes is a systemic phenomenon that has slowly and steadily increased over the last 50 years (Goodrum, Jones, Kincaid, Cuellar, & Parent, 2012). It was not until the 1960's when the number of single mother homes started to garner attention (Mumford, 2012). Although prior to the 1950s, single mother households did exist in the Black community, they were not nearly as common as they are now (Minkler, Roe, & Robertson-Beckley, 1994).

Research shows that the role of the extended family has always been a strong characteristic of the community and can be traced to West African culture and tradition (Minkler et al., 1994). The African adage “it takes a village to raise a child” was not only preached it was also practiced. However, the West African tradition of extended family was accompanied by both the mother and father raising their children along with members of the extended family.

Since the early 1900's, there has been growing debate about the state of the Black family and causes for the various challenges that the Black family experience (Connell et al., 2005; Williams, 2011). In 1908, W.E.B. Du Bois explored the family dynamic within the Black community in *The Negro American Family*. Du Bois discussed the various societal structures which had a negative impact on the Black family structure such as, disproportionate numbers among men and women, limited opportunities accessible to Black men as a result of institutionalized racism,

and the effects of slavery were cited as challenges that Black men faced which had significant effects on the Black family. Du Bois (1908) argued that these factors created a neo-patriarchal household structure within the Black community.

In 1965, Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Moynihan, released a five-chapter-long report that included statistical information about the Black family (Moynihan, 1965). During the 1960's, there was an influx of single mother homes in the Black community, which caught the attention of Moynihan and others (Mumford, 2012). The purpose for Moynihan's report was not to provide solutions but instead to describe what he thought to be problematic and pathological among Blacks. The report was a seminal work that was as controversial as it was innovative and radical (Rainwater & Yancey, 1967). Moynihan argued that although growing percentages of unemployment and poverty within the Black community were problematic and of concern, the primary cause for the increase of single mother homes in the Black community was a result of maladaptive and damaging features of inner city "ghetto" Black communities. Furthermore, the after effects of slavery, continued, oppression, and the Jim Crow south were contributing factors, which disintegrated the Black family unit. Lastly, Moynihan argued that the absence of Black fathers in the home compounded some of the issues prevalent in some Black inner city communities and the after effects of slavery.

Moynihan began the first chapter of his report arguing that the needs of the Black community shifted in the 1960s from fighting for liberation to demanding equity to Whites (Moynihan, 1965). However, Blacks will never be both liberated and equal to other racial and ethnic groups because: 1) there is an inherent racist nature that is embedded in U.S. culture; and 2) the lasting effects of slavery on Blacks; and 3) how individuals from other racial and ethnic groups perceive and interact with Blacks. Moynihan furthered his argument, saying that certain individuals

from the Black community can be successful, but Blacks will never be successful collectively as a group as compared to other racial, ethnic, and religious groups. Furthermore, the gap between the Black community and other groups in terms of success is widening and would continue to widen given the growing increase of other socio-economic factors such as unemployment, increases in poverty, and increases in the percentages of incarcerated Black men.

Throughout the report, Moynihan discussed the current state of Blacks who live in urban ghetto communities arguing that they were trapped in a “tangle of pathology” that has dissolved the family unit (Moynihan, 1965). Moynihan argued that slavery broke the will of Black people and severed the two-parent family structure and replaced it with a mother-child family structure. Consequently, Moynihan argued that the Black home was matriarchal in structure and most Black children raised in single mother homes were limited in the psychological strength and psychosocial development necessary to be successful.

According to the report, in 1940 2% of White children were raised in single mother homes compared to 16.8% of Black children. These percentages increased in 1963, with 3.75% of White children being raised in single mother homes compared to 23.6% of Black children who were raised in single mother homes (Moynihan, 1965). Moynihan went onto to argue that the increase of single Black mother homes also led to an increase of Black women who relied on governmental assistance. Moynihan said that 14% of Black children were receiving welfare or were being raised in homes in which their mothers were receiving welfare compared to 2% of Whites. In the report, Moynihan also shared statistics from a study that was conducted in 1960 by Aid to Dependent Children in Cook County Illinois, which reported that the majority of single Black mothers who received governmental assistance in the county had been “deserted by their husbands.”

Moynihan stated that issues such urbanization, growing unemployment, effects from reconstruction during 1865-1876 were also causes for the growing numbers of fatherless homes in the Black community (Moynihan, 1965). Black men had lost a sense of heritage and self through slavery and the current state of racism in the U.S. during the 60's only compounded the issue, and led to many Black men leaving their families, and consequently, leaving their partners with the responsibility of raising their children by themselves. The matriarchal structure within the Black community weakened the ability and motivation of Black men to function as authority figures (Mumford, 2012).

Some praised the report for it being groundbreaking in addressing issues in the Black community and others were outrage with the report (Mumford, 2012; Rainwater et al., 1967). Although Moynihan did reference quantitative data on the percentages of various factors in the Black community such as; single mother homes, unemployment rates, numbers of incarcerated Black, and Blacks living at or below poverty, many were outraged by his suggestion that these factors were a result of Black men being deficient. Moynihan quoted Thomas Pettigrew to help substantiate his argument in the report:

The Negro wife in this situation can easily become disgusted with her financially dependent husband, and her rejection of him further alienates the male from family life. Embittered by their experiences with men, many Negro mother often act to perpetuate the mother centered pattern by taking a greater interest in their daughters than their sons. (p.24)

Citing claims such as Pettigrew's to substantiate his report reflected a tone of blame and painted a picture that portrayed Black men as the primary reason for his perception of the disintegration of the Black family structure.

The statistics that Moynihan used to support his argument reflected families who were living in Black inner city communities at or below poverty (Moynihan, 1965). However, throughout the report Moynihan used these statistics to compare Black families with statistics representative of low, middle, and high SES White families. Some found this comparison to be problematic and inflammatory by not comparing Blacks who were living at or below poverty with only Whites who were also living at or below poverty (Rainwater et al., 1976). Subsequent feminist scholars also critiqued the report, arguing that the document was written through a White patriarchal perspective which conceptualized issues related to matriarchy and patriarchy as being right or wrong (Crenshaw, 1989). That is, although Moynihan did reference slavery as a possible reason for increases of Black single mother homes, he did so in a way that suggested that all homes should be patriarchal and households that deviate from U.S. traditional norms were maladaptive. Furthermore, some challenged the absurdity of his assertion that Black children raised in single Black mother homes would not be successful because of psychological and psychosocial deficits (Mumford, 2012). Moynihan essentially assumed that being raised in a single mother was synonymous with a child not having the psychological strength and psychosocial development necessary to be successful.

Moynihan measured success through students' academic achievement and performance on tests. Some researchers and scholars challenged the validity of some of the statistics that Moynihan used in his report due to testing bias. Some researchers argued that research shows Blacks traditionally perform lower on standardized tests and that many traditional forms of standardized



assessments do not accurately measure the knowledge and skill of some members from the Black community (Berger, 1996; Rainwater et al., 1976). In addition, he collapsed variables together by not fully taking into account the role of other sociological variables that might have played a role in the shift in the Black family structure. Although Moynihan did mention that there is not one problem that has caused the shift in the Black family structure, he did not discuss other sociological variables in as much detail. Some felt that Moynihan used a quantitative report to make unmerited, one-sided, inaccurate, and absurd inferences to causation in order to perpetuate stereotypes using the intersection of race, gender, and class to highlight false deficits about Black men as a whole.

Herbert Gutman was among the many who disagreed with Moynihan. In, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925*, Gutman used qualitative data collected from families and slaves between 1750 and 1925 to support his argument that the Black family was still intact. Using family diaries of freed slaves, census data, bills of sales for slaves, and letters written from slaves to their family, Gutman argued that slavery had not broken the Black family unit. By contrast, the Black family unit remained intact throughout slavery as well as throughout the first migration to the North after the Civil War with former slaves trying to find their family members to reconnect the family unit. Unlike the Moynihan report (1965), Gutman argued that the Black family was effective in passing traditions, cultural norms, and values that were specific to the Black community (Gutman, 1977). Gutman said that young slaves learned the importance and the value of family from older slaves and former slaves who had been freed (1977). Almost 20,000 slaves from North Carolina in 17 different counties were registered as married between 1840 and 1875. Gutman argued that the Black family had not been dissolved as Daniel Moynihan reported and that such claims were made by politicians who wanted to paint an inaccurate and crippling picture of Black

men and the Black family to further oppress and disempower members of the Black community (Gutman, 1977).

### **Black Single Mother Homes Today**

The percentage of Black children raised in single mother homes increased from 6% in 1950 to 25% in 1994 (Jordan, 2009). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), in 2009 there were 11.6 million single parent homes. Of these, 9.9 million were single mother homes compared to 3.4 million in 1970. As of 2010, over 70% of Black children were born to unwed women and raised in single Black mother homes (Oware, 2011). According to the Center for Disease Control (2012), in 2010, 45% of unplanned babies were born to unwed Black women compared to 20% of unplanned babies who were born to unwed White women.

Some research on single mother homes in the Black community tends to share similar assumptions as the Moynihan report on single mother homes in the Black community (Acs, Braswell, Sorensen, & Turner, 2013; Mumford, 2012). Others such as Chandra Chaney (2012) argue that although slavery might be at the root of the significant increase of Black single mother homes and of unwed Blacks, there are various other societal structures and norms that have normalized children being born out of wedlock. Others argue that the rise of Black single mother homes is a result of single mothers treating their sons as their mates. This can give a young adolescent male a distorted understanding of the role of a man, father, and husband in the household. Furthermore, this kind of role confusion can also lead to a distorted or a confused understanding of how to build and maintain healthy romantic relationships. Lastly, there have been several qualitative studies that have found that this type of role confusion, in many cases, can lead to Black men resenting their mother and consequently having a warped conceptualization of Black women in general, based on their resentment or unresolved feelings towards their mother (Jordan, 2009).

More than 20% of Black single mothers do not complete their high school education compared to 13% of mothers who are married (Jones, 2009). As of 2009, one third of single mothers go on to complete college and approximately 48% of single mothers are living below poverty compared to 22% of mothers who are married (Jordan, 2009). These percentages suggest there are a larger number of single-mothers who are not completing their education and who are living at or below poverty compared to mothers who are married. In fact, it is more common for Black men who were raised in single mother homes to observe their mother being taken advantage of financially than Black or White men who are raised in two-parent homes (Raley et al., 2010). In addition, Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes are also more likely to observe their mothers being involved in physical and verbally abusive relationships that foster violence and conflict than White or Black men who were raised in two-parent homes. This is not to suggest that Black or White children raised in two-parent homes do not witness their mothers in abusive relationships; however, it is more common in single mother homes.

### **Extended Family & Co-Parenting**

In many cases, single mothers receive assistance from extended family in raising their child or children (Jones, 2009). The role of the grandmother is also instrumental in many single mother households. In a recent study done among 208 single mothers aged 28 to 40, 31% identified their mother (the child's grandmother) as being one of their largest supporters. Issues around co-parenting often emerge within single mother households. In some cases, the biological father is not present in the child's life. Co-parenting relationships can include significant others of the single mother or even the extended family. When this occurs it is typically referred to as a non-traditional co-parenting structure. Co-parents and extended family can have a very strong influence on the developmental process of a child. According to Wallace (2007), the quality of a co-parenting

relationship also has a large impact on the development of the child or children. Black men who are raised in single Black mother homes benefit greatly from observing cooperative and positive relationships among co-parenting figures. Conversely, Black men, like men from other racial and ethnic groups, who are raised in homes that are characterized by conflict typically go on to emulate similar relationship patterns in their own relationships as adults (Lamborn & Nguyen, 2004).

Mentorship is also instrumental in the development of Black men who are raised in single Black mother homes. Cartwright and Henriksen (2012) interviewed a purposive sample of 13 Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes and 12 Black men who were raised in two-parent homes. The participants' ages ranged from 16 to 23. It was found that the Black men who were raised in a single Black mother home without a male mentor were more likely to not have access to tangible and positive images with regard to how to define masculinity compared to the participants who were raised in two-parent homes. It was also found that lack of mentorship and positive images with regard to masculinity and manhood can have a significant impact on the development of interpersonal skills and conflict resolution. Although mentorship can have a positive effect on the psychosocial development of Black male adolescents, research indicates the presence of the biological father in a child's life has a more positive affect (Sterrett, Kincaid, Ness, Gonzalez, McKee, & Jones, 2015).

### **Black Father Involvement**

It is important to keep in mind that a child being raised in a single mother home is not synonymous with the father not having any involvement in the childrearing process (Sterrett et al., 2015). In fact, according to a report done by the National Center for Health Statistics (2013), Black fathers not living with their children, 5 years old or younger, bathed, dressed, and played with their children more than White and Latino fathers who do not live with their children. The same report

indicated that Black fathers not living with their children, between 5 and 18 years old, helped their children with their homework, talked to their children about important life events, and transported their children to and from daily activities more than White and Latino fathers who did not live with their children.

It was also reported that 67% of Black fathers who did not live with their children saw them monthly compared to 59% of the White fathers and 32% of Latino fathers (Gonzalez et al., 2014). Black and White fathers equally value the importance of supporting their children by providing emotional and financial support and moral guidance (Gonzalez et al., 2014). In many cases, for those who do not live with their children, there is no difference between Black, White, and Latino father involvement. These statistics are surprising to many because of the belief that the Black family is in crisis. Furthermore, these statistics are a direct contradiction to the argument that the Black family is in a state of crisis at the fault of Black fathers.

Although there are numerous misconceptions about Black fathers that have been perpetuated and further pathologize Black men, research shows that Black fathers are more likely to not live with their children than White or Latino fathers, which still may or may not impact the child or children in some way (Sterrett et al., 2015). Although, there is comfort in knowing the bleak picture of crisis and neglect that has been painted of Black fathers is now being followed up with strength based studies that are disproving this image, the question remains, “how does being raised in a single Black mother home affect Black men”?

### **Mental and Emotional Implications**

Osborne and McLanahan (2007) argue that Black children born to single mothers show increased levels of aggressive behavior than children women who are married. Being raised in a single mother home is almost the same as a child experiencing 5.25 partnership transitions

throughout their lives. In many cases, children raised in households without their biological father, have an increased chance of experiencing maltreatment. In a study done by Christine Winqvist and Jerry West (2001), it was found that father involvement in a child's academic life is associated with a higher likelihood of the child earning mostly A's. This was found to be irrespective of the father being the child's biological parent. This was also found to be true in single father homes.

In a correlation study done by Cartwright et al., (2012), it was found that 7 of the 13 Black men who were raised in single parent homes were exposed to crime and violence compared to 4 of the 12 Black men who were raised in two-parent homes. It has also been found that among children who expect a negative future that involves crime present with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression (Cartwright et al, 2012; Gonzalez et al., 2012; Kincaid, Cuellar, & Gonzalez, 2010). In a recent quantitative study done surveying 171 Black men raised in single Black mother homes, using a 14-item scale, it was found that 67% of the participants reported feelings of hopelessness and depression (Gonzalez et al., 2012).

The available research suggests that many of the Black men raised in single mother homes experience issues interpsychically and intrapsychically (Raley et al., 2010). That is, many Black men have challenges in relationships as adults as a result of internalized messages they observed in their home. In addition, many Black men were either taught maladaptive ways to process conflict and crisis internally or were not taught how to process conflict and crisis at all. For example, some Black men who experience challenges intrapsychically might have problems working in a corporate environment or attaining a higher level of skill or education due to feeling internal conflict and stress over social norms, social responsibilities and expectations. There are other issues that may play a role in the challenges that Black men face. With that said, many researchers argue that being

raised in a single mother home is a contributing factor to many of these issues if only by compounding other issues (Gonzalez et al., 2012; Raley et al., 2010).

In a qualitative study done with 22 Black male participants, 7 of the participants reported not feeling comfortable expressing when they experience feelings of sadness or depression (Raley et al., 2010). The same study showed that 8 of the men interviewed expressed a reluctance to share feelings of sadness or depression with their significant other while in a relationship. Twelve of the participants expressed concerns around issues pertaining to masculinity and asserting ones “maleness” while in an intimate relationship. When asked the extent to which their household environment shaped how they share their feelings, 10 of the participant shared that they felt these challenges were a direct result of not having a consistent male role model in the home. To gain a clearer understanding of the meaning behind these statistics, it would be helpful to compare them to similar research that has been conducted looking at White males. Although there is existing research that explores how White men express feelings of sadness and depression, there is very limited research on how White men who were raised in single mother homes experience and express feelings of sadness or depression.

In addition to the various possible psychological effects, involvement in risky behaviors has also been found to be a challenge among Black men raised in single mother homes. In their quantitative study, Kincaid et al., (2010) and colleagues found that maternal psychological control, co-parenting structures, and extended families contributed to risky behavior. Risky behavior is defined as any behavior that causes a threat of harm to one’s self and others. More specifically, this study looked at risky behaviors associated with maladaptive psychosocial development. For example, involvement in violent crimes, drug use, and self-harm as a means to cope with the home environment. The study found that of the 194 participants, 103 had engaged in some form of risky

behavior, which led to or could have led to criminal charges. Research makes a strong argument for some of the possible negative psychological and psychosocial effects associated with being raised in a single mother home can have on Black men (Gonzalez, 2012; Kincaid et al., 2010; Raley et al., 2010). Issues with conflict resolution, expressing feelings and communicating emotions in romantic relationships can impact how an individual builds romantic relationships (Gonzalez, 2012). Having information on some of these factors is useful when exploring how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships.

### **Romantic Relationships between Black Men and Women**

In order to gain a better understanding of how Black men build romantic relationships with Black women, it is beneficial to explore what some have classified as a crisis between Black men and women (Connell et al., 2005). Research shows that there are several factors that play a role in how men build romantic relationships (Collins, 2008). Because Black men experience the world differently than White men, it is important to explore the various factors that impact how Black men specifically build romantic relationships (Bethea, 1995, Chaney, 2009, Williams, 2011).

Some argue that divisiveness between Black men and women during slavery can still be seen today in the Black community and between Black men and women (Bethea, 1999). Bulcroft and Bulcroft (1993) argue that lower marriage rates among Black women are a result of a lack of available Black men who cannot meet their expectations. Emasculation of Black men that took place during slavery still persists and is demonstrated through Black women being more successful in academic achievement (Bulcroft et al., 1993). Black women outnumber Black men 6 to 1 in terms of college completion. This phenomenon is now referred to as the “endangered Black man” and the “unwed professional Black woman” (Ford, 2012). However, some have challenged Bulcroft’s assertion, arguing that Black women are not more academically successful than Black



men (Harper & Davis, 2012). Others argue that statistics used to report percentages related to Black male achievement are typically outdated or is incomplete.

For many of the Black males who struggle with academic achievement, it is important to consider some of the numerous factors that can explain why some Black men are not as successful in academia as Black women (Chaney, 2012; Ford, 2012). Challenges such as institutionalized racism and oppression have a significant impact on academic performance and achievement for Black men (Chaney, 2012; Ford, 2012). Although Black women experience institutionalized racism and oppression also, Black women sometimes experience these factors differently and are able to navigate the educational system a little easier than Black men (Ford, 2012). Black men still earn more money on average than Black women and hold higher positions of power in the workforce. Regardless of the statistics of academic and professional achievement among Black men and women, using terms such as, “the endangered Black man” and the “professional unwed Black women” to describe members of the Black community only perpetuate existing damaging stereotypes about Black men and women (Chaney, 2009).

To extend the exploration of how slavery still affects the relationship dynamic between Black men and women, it is helpful to look at a study that Eyre et al, (2012) did on romantic relationships and cognitive representations of relationships through the role of scripts. Scripts are composed of three specific criteria. Scripts 1) create guidelines for behavior; 2) are composed of expectations for the behavior of others; and 3) help to better understand social situations and their outcomes. Scripting theory is typically used with cultural theory, as it assumes that individuals do not construct approaches and cognitive representations of relationships. Instead, they are socially constructed and learned through language, social roles, cultural, and the family of origin. More

specifically, scripts are taught either implicitly or explicitly in the home and through our culture. Scripts also consider any incongruence between the family of origin and the culture at large.

According to scripting theory, both men and women assume and play roles in relationships. These roles are socially constructed through the family and society. If we apply *scripts theory* to how some of the effects of slavery could impact how Black men build romantic relationships with Black women, one could argue that Black men have been socialized to play certain roles that have are rooted in oppression and loss (Gutman, 1975). Although many agree with the argument, there is growing debate about the extent to which Black men have internalized and accepted certain roles that are rooted in oppression and racial injustice (Chaney, 2009). Many argue that there are numerous other factors that play a role in how Black men build romantic relationships with Black women such as, how men perceive themselves, how they define masculinity, and Black mens' opinions about Black women.

### **Media Portrayals of Black Men and Women**

Some Black men experience challenges with their identity. In many cases, the media portrays Black men as immoral, aggressive, dangerous, and criminally minded (Henfield, 2012; Wood & Hilto, 2013). These negative images can be seen through radio, television, and the internet. For example, the media often uses gender, race, and sexuality to portray many Black male athletes and entertainers as being criminals and “hyper sexed misogynists” (Henfield, 2012). Because there is very little balance between the negative and positive images of Black men in US culture, there is greater chance for negative portrayals and images of Black men to have long-lasting effects on how they create meaning for themselves with regard to their race and gender. Many Black men find themselves uncertain about what is expected of them socially and how to meet those expectations (Wood et al., 2013). Furthermore, some Black men go on to fulfill some of the images that are

portrayed by the media because they have been socialized to think that is what is expected of them. Alter (2010) argues that this is a common example of self-fulfilling prophecy in the Black community that exists in the Black community. Self-fulfilling prophecy also creates role confusion and if accompanied with being exposed to conflict, violence, internalized oppression, and a lack of affirmation and support, could have detrimental effects on the development of Black men and how they define masculinity (Alter, 2010; Henfield, 2012).

Research also suggests that Black men have created their own socially functional definition of manhood and masculinity that is relevant to the experiences of being a Black man in a White society (Chaney, 2009). Chaney conducted a qualitative study with a sample of 24 Black men to explore how they define manhood and masculinity. Chaney compared her findings to Robert Connell's theory of masculinity, which is widely used in research when measuring masculinity. Connell coined the term "hegemonic masculinity" and argued that men tend to embrace masculine characteristics that are valued most by society (p. 223). Connell's theory about masculinity does allow for race and the role of power to be considered when explaining how men define manhood; however, Connell views the role of race and power in terms of diversity, but neglects to recognize the role of systematic racism and oppression that is maintained and upheld by the dominant culture (Chaney, 2009). Consequently, Chaney deviated from the norm and conducted her study using critical race theory to not only explore how race and power impact how Black men define masculinity, but also how racism and oppression impact Black men's definition of masculinity and subsequently how their definition of manhood impacts the ways in which they build romantic relationships.

Using critical race theory was important because it allowed Chaney the opportunity to analyze her findings by looking at how Black men are expected to meet the same set of expectations

as White men in a society that has created societal constructs that hinder their ability to be successful. Consequently, Black men are set up to fail before they get a fair chance to attempt to meet said expectations. Relating back to *scripts theory*, one could argue if a Black man feels a level of incompetence in his ability as a man, he could potentially also not have confident feelings or attitudes about building romantic relationships. The 25 participants in Chaney's (2009) study defined masculinity by: 1) maturity and responsibility for self; 2) responsibility for family; 3) playing the role of the provider; and 4) having a level of self-awareness.

The findings affirmed Chaney's assertion that the traditional hegemonic masculinity model for how men define manhood was not appropriate for Black men. The four categories that the participants used to define manhood might look very different for a White man than they do for a Black man. As previously mentioned, there are existing societal constructs such as systemic oppression and institutionalized racism, which create additional barriers and challenges for Black men to provide and be responsible for their families making the process of self-awareness very different. As discussed earlier, Chaney argues that Black men have a significantly harder time defining themselves as men and achieving a certain level of self-awareness because of how they have internalized various messages related to socially constructed roles intended for Black men to occupy.

Several of Chaney's participants reported that they struggle to be self-aware and others reported that they do not feel self-aware because they are unsure of who they are as compared to who they are expected to be. One might ask, "Why is knowing how Black men define manhood important to understand when exploring how they build romantic relationships?" Research suggests that how a man defines manhood or masculinity and his level of comfort in meeting the criteria for

his definition of masculinity impacts his views on couples and family and consequently how he builds romantic relationships with women (Chaney, 2009; Murray, 2015).

Similar to how Black men perceive themselves and how they define masculinity, Black men's opinions on Black women are also important and affect how they build romantic relationships with them (Chaney, 2009). The media's portrayal of Black women could have an impact on some Black men's perception of Black women (Barrie, 2012). Sara Baartman was one of the first Black female images displayed through the media (Lloyd, 2013). Born in South Africa in the late 1700's, Baartman was sold as a slave when she was in her 20s. A man in London bought Baartman and exhibited her throughout Britain and placed her on display to showcase what he considered as her "abnormal body" (Youe, 2007). "She had protruding buttocks and an extended labia minora, which made society view her as a wild or a savage female." (Lloyd, 2013). Not only was Sara displayed for over ten years in exhibits throughout France as an odd spectacle, cartoons were made of her that exaggerated her features to extenuate the shape of her broad nose, and short jaw line (Lloyd, 2013). She was viewed and treated as a hyper-sexualized animal. After Baartman died her body was dissected on multiple occasions to examine her brain and body tissue, because she was thought to be a freak of nature (Youe, 2007). A European scientist named her the "Hottentot Venus" and then placed her body on display at a museum in France. He charged patrons two shillings to see her body and three shillings to touch her.

Throughout history, various negative images of Black women have continued to be perpetuated through the media. Some argue that Sara Baartman marked the beginning of Black women being portrayed as hyper-sexualized deviants (Lloyd, 2013). More recently, similar portrayals of Black women have been seen in movies like *Monster's Ball* (2001) through Halle Berry's character. Berry played an impoverished southern Black woman who miraculously yet

ironically finds happiness after falling in love with a White prison guard (played by Billy Bob Thornton) proceeding her husband's execution, after a long prison sentence. The most notable scene of the movie depicts Thornton coming to Berry's rescue and then becoming intimate with her, while bending her over as she moans, "make me feel good." Berry won her first and only Academy Award for the movie despite her strong performances in other films such as *Losing Isaiah*, *X-Men*, and Alex Haley's *Queen*.

Another example of how the media has depicted Black women being hyper sexualized is demonstrated in the R. Kelly court case. The then 39 year-old Black R&B singer was acquitted after being accused of having sex with a 14 year old Black female after a sex tape was released of a man who shared a shockingly close resemblance with Kelly, having sex with the minor. Fans and supporters of Kelly, both Black and White, quickly came to his defense by arguing that the adolescent girl led Kelly on and seduced him. Some took to blogging and social media sites saying that the young girl knew what she was doing and "was freakier than an 18 year old" (Dagbovie-Mullins, 2013). Such pseudo-logic illustrates a belief that young Black women become sexually advanced at a young age. "Black women's sexuality could be reduced to gaining control over an objectified vagina that could then be commodified and sold" (Collins, 2005).

Another common media portrayal of Black women is seen through the stereotype of the angry Black woman (Bethea, 1995; Childs, 2005). For example, Sapphire's role in the minstrel show "Amos n' Andy" (Adams, Bentley, & Stevenson, 2014). Or, Pam and Shanneneh in the 1990's hit sitcom "Martin". Another example of this image is the character Florence from "The Jefferson's" (Adams et al., 2014). These women were all portrayed to be rude, intimidating, and demeaning to men. Collins (2000) says:

because the authority to define societal values is a major instrument

of power, elite groups, in exercising power, manipulate ideas about Black womanhood. They do so by exploiting already existing symbols, or creating new ones. (p. 48)

In *Black Looks* (1992) bell hook argues that popular cultural creates and perpetuates negative stereotypes about Black women and appropriate their image to either experience the benefit of the images that are depicted or to assert control over how Black women behave. For example, the common image of the “welfare queen” or the “baby mama” is a common depiction of Black women that is demeaning and oppressive. Consequently, when we think of a baby mama or a welfare queen, it might be natural to envision a Black woman. This is because these stereotypes and derogatory images have been assigned to only Black women. Similar to media images and representations of Black men, there is not an even balance of negative and positive portrayals of Black women depicted through the media, which can make it difficult for young Black girls to create and affirm a positive identity (Adams et al., 2014). As related to this specific topic, there is also a possibility of some Black men internalizing negative images of Black women as well, which could have a negative impact on their perceptions of Black women (Adams et al., 2014; Bethea, 1995).

Negative perceptions of Black men and women were also illustrated in the well-known Kenneth and Mamie Clark experiments. In 1954, Kenneth and Mamie Clark conducted an experiment with 160 Black children between five and seven years of age (Jordan & Reif, 2009). The Clarks wanted to better understand the development of racial identity in Black children. During the experiment, the children were provided a box of crayons and were asked to color objects such as, mice and other animals. The children were told to color the objects according to their appropriate color, which they were able to do accurately. The children were then asked to color

members from the opposite sex the color they want to be. It was found that 80% of the Black children used brown colors, but they used shades of brown that were significantly lighter than the complexion of their own skin. In addition, 52% of the children colored the picture of the opposite sex to be either White or a neutral color. This experiment also introduced issues around self-hatred and internalized oppression in the Black community.

The results from the Clark's study are somewhat similar to a qualitative study Bethea did in 1995. In her study, it was found that of the 20 Black men who were interviewed, over one quarter of the participants stated that they have been in interracial relationships as a result of poor communication with Black women. Some of these men stated that they also found themselves more physically attracted to White and Latina women than Black women. They indicated that they preferred longer hair that "doesn't get nappy when it gets wet." Many also cited Black women "having an attitude" as being another reason they date women outside of their race. The study also found that many of the Black men used generalizations and stereotypes when discussing Black women and their relationship with Black women.

Often the participants would use phrases such as, "Black women always" or "Black women never". Bethea (1995) also found that when the male participants would describe their rationale for preferring to date outside of their race, they became very defensive and somewhat hostile in their description of Black women. However, she neglected to explore why the participants became angry and defensive when talking about Black women with regard to interracial dating. Although the article provided insight into some of the experiences of Black men who date women outside their race and their perceptions of Black women, the writer not inquiring about the participants' appeared anger and defensive response, creates room for further inquiry. Furthermore, the writer's lack of



investigation into the participants' reactions causes possible concerns about the credibility of the study.

In 1979, Michele Wallace challenged and criticized sexism in the Black community in her book, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. In her book, Wallace argues against two common stereotypes associated with Black men and women – the Black macho hyper masculine and hyper-sexualized Black man, and the Black superwoman who is resilient and almost abnormally strong. Wallace criticized Black men and the Civil Rights Movement for its flagrant acceptance of White society's notion of manhood and masculinity (Wallace, 1979).

Wallace challenged various male members of the Black Panther Party such as, Stokely Carmichael for being womanizers and being overtly sexually suggestive and disrespectful towards Black women in the party. She went on to call out various male members of the party, arguing that, like the White patriarchal supremacy the party was supposedly fighting against, some of the male members of the party were misusing their power, position, and privilege within the group to disempower and abuse their own people. In short, combining personal anecdotes with social, cultural, and historical analysis, Wallace also reflects on her former position in the Black Panther Party as well as her position as an educated middle-class Black woman to challenge Black men who acted in ways that perpetuated stereotypes about members from the Black community that White supremacy has historically used to oppress and disempower Blacks (Wallace, 1979).

### **Black Men and Marriage**

Barrie (2012) did a qualitative study with 17 Black men to explore their attitudes towards marriage; she found the participants had positive, ambivalent, and negative feelings towards marriage. There were 8 participants who had positive feelings towards marriage. The participants who shared that they felt positively about marrying a Black woman said they felt marriage would

increase their access to opportunities and resources. The participants felt that, as Black men, society might view them as more threatening, which would limit access to opportunities related to employment, housing, and even loans. The 8 participants also shared they felt positively about marriage because they wanted a partner with whom they have shared similar cultural experiences.

Of the 17 participants, 7 shared they felt a negative attitude towards marriage. Many of the participants shared they felt that marriage represented a loss of freedom (Barrie, 2012). Although feelings related to a loss of freedom might be common among men overall, the participants shared that freedom meant something very different for them as Black men compared to what freedom might mean for men from differing ethnic and racial backgrounds. For many of the participants, having a sense of freedom and independence was very meaningful because they often struggled with feelings related to a lack of independence and freedom in their day to day lives. Like Chaney's (2009) study on masculinity, Barrie found that the participants who had negative attitudes towards marriage cited issues with masculinity and their identity as being a hindrance. That is, the participants shared that because they felt a level of uncertainty about their identities as Black men and how they define and assert their masculinity, they did not feel positive about getting married. The participants who had negative attitudes towards marriage also shared that they felt pressure from Black women to get married which made them more reluctant to do so.

There were 2 participants who had ambivalent feelings towards marriage. The participants who had ambivalent feelings towards marriage shared they did not know what marriage "looked like" (Barrie, 2012). Both of these men were raised in single Black mother homes and shared they did not have a clear understanding of how to maintain a marriage because it had not been modeled in the home. The 2 participants also had ambivalent feelings towards marriage because they felt marriage was something that was not a priority and not expected of them.

Research shows that factors such as, the effects of slavery, how Black men define masculinity, and Black men's' opinions about Black women have a significant impact on how Black men build romantic relationships with Black women (Chaney, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2012). There appear to be various arguments that have been made about the dynamic between Black men and women and how specific etic and emic factors that Black men experience impact the dynamic. However, the counseling profession has not yet examined this issue.

### **Multicultural Competence within Counseling**

The way in which Black men perceive Black women and how they build romantic relationships with Black women is an issue that is relevant to counselors (Bethea, 1995). More specifically, members in the counseling profession as well as other mental health fields are beginning to see the value in being knowledgeable about topics related the Black community (Eyre et al, 2012). The American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics (2014) states that counselors must use best practices when working with clients from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, counselors must maintain an acute sensitivity and awareness with regard to cultural meanings and context when working with clients from differing cultural backgrounds. Whites make up 87% of mental health professionals compared to 1.7% of Black mental health professionals (American Psychological Association Center for Workforce Studies, 2009; Zane et al., 2014). Consequently, it is imperative that counselors become better acquainted with not only some of the psychological and psychosocial issues that have an impact on minority groups, but also the sociological and socio-economic challenges that clients from minority and marginalized groups face.

Eyre et al., (2012) described the dating environment for many Black men and women as "hostile". It is important for counselors to be aware of the various challenges and hostilities that Black men and women may face when trying to build romantic relationships with one another. This

is especially helpful to marriage, couple, and family therapists who work specifically with couples. Issues that Black couples face are sometimes unique and very specific (Shallcross, 2013). Having a historical understanding of race, family of origin, culture and the how they often intersect can help counselors better serve their clients (Bethea, 1995). According to CACREP Standards (2009), accredited counseling programs must reflect knowledge of the current needs pertaining to counseling within a multicultural society. These expectations also apply to educating and empowering CITs on how to use best practices in terms of being multi-culturally competent.

### **Conclusion**

Although literature exists on the dynamic between Black men and women as well as single mother homes in the Black community, there is not much literature on how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women. However, the limited amount of current literature makes a clear argument that the negative effects of being raised in a single Black mother household can be associated with or contributes to the challenges that exist within romantic relationships in the Black community. Furthermore, Black men approach and build romantic relationships with specific perceptions and scripts in mind that are partly influenced by childhood experiences.

With that said, additional research has emerged which suggests that: 1) Black men overall are not absent in the family structure; 2) even if a Black father does not live in the same home as their child or children, there is a large percentage of Black fathers who are present in the lives of their child or children; 3) it appears that more Black men have a positive attitude about marrying Black women than what has been previously argued; and 4) the decline in marriage between Black men and women could be indicative of an overall shift in society in terms of values regarding marriage and partnership along with other societal factors related to race.

Additional research should be done to explore how the experiences of this specific population build romantic relationships within their own racial group. Specifically, research should be done to examine this issue from both a sociological and psychological framework. This study is unique because it creates a bridge between the current literature on Black single mother homes and the current literature on the dynamic between Black men and women. I sought to explore not only how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women, but also their attitudes towards romantic relationships, intimacy, Black women, and the type of messages they have received about masculinity.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another.

-Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987

#### **Research Problem**

The primary goal of this qualitative narrative study was to collect stories and experiences from a group of Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes while paying specific attention to how they build romantic relationships with Black women. Additionally, I sought to learn what messages they have received related to masculinity about building romantic relationships as well as their overall attitude and perception towards Black women.

Qualitative research is based on three philosophical assumptions to collect and analyze data that complimented the purpose and objective of this study. The first assumption in which qualitative research is based states that reality is subjective (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). That is, reality is constructed by the participants involved in the study. Consequently, unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers assume there are multiple realities. Furthermore, research should include observation of the phenomena or phenomenon in question through the lens of the participants (Guba et al., 1989). The second assumption is that individuals create their own reality through lived experience and there is a recursive relationship between one's reality and his or her lived experiences. Individuals create their reality based on their lived experiences yet their lived experiences are a result of their truth or reality (Giorgi, 2005). The third assumption is that the researcher should interact with the phenomena involved in the inquiry (Guba et al., 1989).

Now that an introduction of the study can be provided as well as brief description of the three philosophical underpinnings and assumptions of qualitative research, a description of the

methodology utilized to conduct the study will be provided. More specifically, this chapter includes the following: 1) a detailed discussion about the research study design; 2) a description of the methods used for participant selection, procedures, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation methods; and 3) a discussion about issues regarding ethical considerations, trustworthiness, limitations of the study, and my positionality to the research as well as my biases related to the topic. First, a detailed description of the research approach for the study is provided.

### **Research Approach**

The goal of qualitative research is to understand, interpret, identify, and evaluate phenomena without controlling for variables (Heppner & Wampold, 2008.). As a result, using a qualitative research approach was most appropriate for my study because I wanted to hear the stories and experiences of the participants. Qualitative research is defined as providing thick and rich data, as qualitative approaches allow the space to gain a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the phenomena and persons being studied (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Furthermore, qualitative approaches to research are typically the most appropriate way to collect and analyze data exploring topics that are especially sensitive and complex. As such, qualitative research is often used to conduct research studies within various social science disciplines related to human behavior (Heppner et al., 2008). Because of the sensitive and complicated nature of my topic, a qualitative approach allowed me to better understand some of the experiences of Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes and their experiences and feelings about building romantic relationships with Black women by exploring how their experiences have constructed their reality and how their reality has constructed their experiences (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2013).

Along with using a non-deficit based approach to the study, utilizing a qualitative method along with my conceptual framework, helped to create a clearer and richer picture of the participants' experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Because the participants were provided the opportunity to do so, many of the men discussed their experiences and feelings in the context of race, which again, complimented the conceptual framework during analysis.

Narrative research or analysis is an approach to gathering and analyzing qualitative data by developing new understandings about various ways language shapes personal and shared realities (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zibler, 1998). Narrative approaches are based on the primary idea that individuals conceptualize their experiences and share their stories through storytelling (McLeod, 1997). Following a constructivist perspective, narrative research is based on the ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed through how people assign meaning to their experiences (Lee, 2011). Furthermore, individuals develop an understanding of the world through how they understand themselves, society, and other people (Lee, 2011; Ponterotto, 2005).

Qualitative researchers who use narrative approaches believe stories told by their participants can be treated as a primary source of data and should not be reified (McLeod, 1997; Riessman & Speedy, 2006). Narrative research also creates a platform for marginalized groups to share their narratives that might not otherwise be heard (Riessman, 2008). Additionally, the researcher does not discover stories or narratives through the participant (Riessman, 2008). Instead, the researcher is a part of the construction of the participant's narrative (Riessman et al., 2006). Furthermore, the researcher does not have direct access to the participant's narratives; they are reproductions or imitations of the direct experience (Riessman, 2008).

When conducting a narrative study, narrative research examines the interview itself both as a whole source of information as well as from within interview (McLeod, 1997). That is, narrative



analysis collects data on what the participant shares, what the participant does not share, and how the participant shares his or her story (Mishler, 1986). Furthermore, the research approach used should inform how data is interpreted and analyzed and the circumstance of the interview shapes the meanings of the interview questions and the responses (Charmaz, 1988; Mishler, 1986).

Narrative approaches have also evolved past the purpose of research and are now widely used by members of the counseling profession to what is now referred to as narrative therapy (Morgan, 1999). Narrative therapy is a theoretical framework that conceptualizes clients through the stories they share with their counselors (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Using a narrative approach for this study was the most appropriate method because I was not interested in the participants' stories alone. I used a narrative approach because I hoped to also explore how the participants shared their story and how they shared their story with me as a Black woman specifically (Clandinin, 2000). I also wanted to explore how time played a role in how the participants shared their experiences (Chase, 2005). For example, if a participant shared a specific story from his childhood he might have relived that experience differently during his interview than how he experienced the event as a child. To this end, I hoped to better understand how participants attributed meaning as adults to childhood and adolescent experiences.

### **Population**

The target population for this study consisted of 11 self-identified heterosexual, cisgender, American Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes. I aimed for the sample to be composed of Black men from differing backgrounds relative to their SES growing up as well as their current SES. I also wanted the participants to differ relative to the geographic region in which they were raised; educational background and academic achievements; career; and father involvement in their lives as children and adolescents. As previously discussed, I also wanted the

sample to be diverse in terms of who served as the men's primary female caregiver. I was also interested in interviewing participants who formed various relationships with older male mentors and their mother's significant other(s).

More specifically, the criteria for inclusion included:

1. The participant had to be raised in a home by a single Black mother regardless of the length of time.
2. The participant had to be between 23 and 43 years of age.
3. The participant had to have access to attend both the focus group and in-person interviews.

My goal for having only three criteria was to have a more diverse sample to allow for richer and more detailed data and to increase the likelihood of revealing both typical as well as atypical findings. Similar to my rationale for only having three criteria, the purpose of recruiting participants from varying backgrounds within the specified criteria was to have a more diverse sample so that I could compare data based on the differences. Recruiting participants from differing backgrounds within the specified criteria was also beneficial in addressing issues with transferability, credibility, and conformability (Chase, 2005).

### **Selection of Participants**

Participants were recruited through email, social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and word of mouth. Purposeful sampling and criterion-based selection were used to select the group of men. Purposeful sampling is defined by Patton (2002) as "information-rich cases for in-depth study." Because I wanted to gather rich information from a specific sample population with the purpose to better understand a specific topic, I used purposeful sampling with criterion-based selection in order to increase the likelihood of recruiting a diverse sample that also met the purpose of the study. Another reason I chose to use purposeful sampling was because I wished to

collect data that was consistent with current literature and also contributed new perspectives to the topic (Morse, 1991). Using purposeful sampling provided me with the flexibility to change and modify my selection criteria if I noticed the current criteria only provided data that was typical for my target population (Coyne, 1997). However, this did not prove to be the case.

### **Participants**

The participant sample in this study was composed of 11 self-identified heterosexual and cisgender, American Black men, between 23 and 43 years of age, and were raised in single Black mother homes. Relationship status among the participants ranged between married, divorced, currently in monogamous romantic relationships, and single. Having children also ranged among the men. Roughly half of the men had children and the number of children each man had varied.

The men also ranged in terms of their primary caregiver. For example, the majority of the men were raised by their mother; however, some of the men were raised by both their mother and grandmother, and one of the participants was raised by his mother and father. None of the participants were raised without their mother in their life and none of the participants were raised by a member of their extended family other than their grandmother. Furthermore, none of the men were raised solely by their grandmother. Reasons for the men's' fathers being absent or inconsistent in their lives also differed as well as the level of father involvement in the sample. This was also true for the number of participants' whose parents who were once married: with 4 of the participant whose parents were divorced and the remaining participants' parents were either never married but in a romantic relationship at one point or never in a relationship. The majority of the participants reported having a male mentor in their lives; however, only one reported his father as his mentor.

The men’s previous and current SES, educational background, and career differed among the participants as well. The following table provides a more specific and concise list of the participants and focuses more on family of origin and their primary caregiver, mentorship, and current relationship status and family life (see **table 2**).

Table 2:

Participant Information

Name	Age	Primary Caretaker	Father Relationship	Father’s Absence	Mentor	Relationship Status	Children	Academic Background
Jason	30	Mom	Passed away	Death	N	Relationship	1 daughter	BA
Thomas	28	Grandmother/Mom	Passed away	Death	N	Single	None	High school graduate
Matthew	30	Mom/Dad	Positive	Married	Y	Single	None	BA/MA (in progress)
Anthony	36	Mom	Positive	Divorce	Y	Divorced	1 son, 1 daughter	MS
Richard	43	Grandmother/Mom	Positive	Home: N Relationship: Y	Y	Married	1 son	High school graduate
John	33	Mom	Indifferent	Divorce	Y	Married	None	BA
Steven	23	Grandmother/Mom	Indifferent	Home: N Relationship: N	Y	Relationship	1 daughter	BA
David	30	Grandmother/Mom	Negative	Home: N Relationship: Y	Y	Single	None	High school graduate
Michael	28	Mom	Negative	Home: N Relationship: Y	Y	Single	None	MA
Rodney	39	Mom	Negative	Home: N Relationship: N	Y	Married	2 sons, 1 daughter	High school graduate
Marcus	25	Mom	Negative	Divorce	Y	Married	1 daughter	MS (in progress)

## **Data Collection**

Triangulation was achieved by collecting data through one audio-recorded focus-group session proceeded by in-person semi-structured interviews. A focus group session was conducted with the 11 participants prior to the start of the individual interviews. Both the focus group session and the individual interviews were conducted in St. Louis, Missouri in a private and confidential room on the second floor at a gelateria and coffee shop.

During the focus group session, I posed a list of questions to facilitate conversation among the participants. There were three reasons I chose to conduct the focus group session prior to the start of the interviews. First, I planned to use the focus group session as an added measure to ensure the questions I posed during the individual interviews were appropriate and would be effective in extracting information to better understand the participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Facilitating the focus group proved to be beneficial in meeting this goal. For example, if I posed a question during the focus group session that elicited a strong reaction from the participants, I was able to follow-up about that topic during the individual interviews. Consequently, some of the questions that were asked during the focus group session were posed again during the individual interviews in order for the participants to provide a more detailed response.

Conducting the focus group session first was also effective in creating more buy in or investment from the participants (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2006). During the focus group session I was able to observe the participants and identify anyone who was less involved in the group discussion. Participants' behavior in the focus group was oftentimes telling and provided relevant data that I could follow-up with during the individual interviews (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2013). In addition, the focus group session was used as a multi-method approach to enrich my

understanding of the experiences of the participants through having the ability to observe their verbal and non-verbal behaviors.

The interview protocol included 13 focus group questions and 15 individual interview questions to address the two research questions: 1) How do some American Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women? and 2) How do some American Black men define, experience, and assert their masculinity as it relates to building romantic relationships with Black women? Six of the focus group questions and eight of the individual interview questions explored how the men build romantic relationships with Black women (see appendix A). Four questions for both the focus group and the individual interviews investigated how the participants define, experience, and assert masculinity as it relates to how they build romantic relationships with Black women. Ten additional general questions regarding dating were posed during the individual interviews. The use of semi-structured questions as part of my interview also allowed for transferability. Interviews were in-person so that I could observe the participants' non-verbal behaviors, which I believe contributed to my interpretation of the findings.

Observations were my third method to collect data. I took notes after the focus group session and after each interview in order to have a written record of my observations of the participants' behavior and other observations that were pertinent to the data (Patton, 2002). Although reflective journals are not used for data collection, I also used research memos as a measure to continually assess my feelings and thoughts throughout the study (Ortlipp, 2008).

### **Human Subjects**

In order to begin the data collection process, I had to gain IRB approval from Southern Illinois University's Human Subjects Committee. In order to gain IRB approval, I provided the Human Subjects Committee with information on the purpose of my study, the methods I planned to

use to collect data, my plans for participant recruitment and selection, how I intended to analyze and interpret the findings, how I would ensure the study was conducted ethically, and how would maintain the confidentiality of the participants. Once I received approval from IRB, I used several methods for recruitment. Participants were recruited through sending emails describing the nature of the study to online list serve communities within various academic disciplines and professional fields (see appendix B). I also utilized social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to recruit participants (see appendix C). Additionally, I recruited participants through snowball sampling. When a prospective participant contacted me to express their interest in participating, I reiterated the purpose and goal of the study. If still interested, I conducted a short screening process to ensure the prospective participant met the three criteria for inclusion. After confirming that the participant met the inclusion criteria, we scheduled a date and time to conduct the individual interview.

One focus group session was conducted prior to the start of individual interviews and lasted approximately 80 minutes. I began the focus group session by asking the participants to describe their home environment as a child. This included information regarding their primary caregiver, siblings, where the men lived as children, SES, involvement of the participants' fathers and other members of the extended family. My primary role during the focus group session was to allow the participants to share their stories with one another freely and observe their behavior and interaction. I also paid specific attention to how the men shared their stories. The individual interviews ranged between approximately 63 to almost 120 minutes. Prior to each interview, participants were read a statement of informed consent.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities and to ensure confidentiality. Prior to the start of the study, the participants were informed of the purpose and the goal of the study. Information explaining the study was provided before the participants confirmed their participation, and again, before the first individual in-person interview. Participants were also provided information on the interview procedures and the nature of the study. Lastly, participants were made aware that participation in the study was voluntarily and they could choose to not participate at any time.

A notice of informed consent was provided to the participants (see appendix D). The men were asked to read and sign the form prior to the focus group session. I also read the notice aloud to each participant before the start of both the focus group session and individual interviews. Participants were notified that there might be a need for a follow-up interview in the case that there were unanswered interview questions or I needed clarification with regard to something that was said during the interview. However, there was no need to conduct additional interviews with any of the participants. Both the focus group session and each individual interview was audio recorded. The audio recordings were kept confidential and destroyed after data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed. During the interview and transcription process, audio recordings were kept in a locked file cabinet and the transcribed interviews were saved on a locked laptop. I was the only person with access to both the file cabinet and the locked laptop.

To address the threat of the men participating in the study for monetary gain, I did not use gift cards or other monetary incentives for participation. Instead, participants were able to choose a foundation to which I donated \$15 for their participation on their behalf. If the participant did not have a preference, I automatically donated \$15 to the Black Lives Matter non-profit organization.



## **Rigor and Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that trustworthiness refers to four criteria in qualitative research that measure the worth of a study. These four criteria are similar to measures of reliability and validity in quantitative research, but are adjusted to accommodate the deductive nature of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). The first of the four criteria is *credibility*. Credibility refers to the level of confidence the researcher has that the findings are true (Shenton 2004). I addressed issues related to credibility by conducting one focus group session preceded by in-person individual interviews. Credibility was also addressed by providing an exhaustive review of the current literature related to the topic. In addition, I addressed issues related to credibility by conducting member-checks with the participants throughout the study to ensure accuracy. Member-checks were carried out by creating Google docs for each of the participants. Google docs were used to disseminate transcripts to the participants throughout the study and at the conclusion of the study after I completed my oral defense. Each of the participants was given a link to their personal and confidential Google doc to access the focus group session transcripts and the transcripts from their individual interviews.

The second criterion that measures the worth of a qualitative study is *trustworthiness*. One of the necessary measures of a trustworthy study is *transferability* (Lincoln et al., 1985). Transferability refers to the extent to which a study's findings are applicable in other contexts (Shenton, 2004). I addressed transferability by purposeful sampling from a diverse sample of Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes. Related to transferability, *dependability* is another factor that measures a study's level of trustworthiness (Lincoln et al., 1985). Dependability refers to the extent to which findings are consistent and can be duplicated (Shenton, 2004). Dependability was addressed in this study by ensuring consistency by conducting the individual

interviews and the focus group session in the same location. To strengthen dependently, questions were prepared and posed to each of the participants regardless if I modified other questions as a result of themes that emerged from the previous focus group session and prior interviews. The last criterion related to trustworthiness is *confirmability* (Lincoln et al., 1985). *Confirmability* refers to the extent to which findings reflect the participants' responses and not my personal biases and assumptions. I achieved *confirmability* by triangulating the data and continually assessing my positionality throughout the study through the use of memos and consulting regularly with members of my research committee.

### **Data Analysis**

The audio recordings of the interviews were professionally transcribed. Once recorded data was transcribed, I began coding. The focus group session was transcribed immediately at the conclusion of the session in order to identify possible emerging themes that might indicate the in-person interview questions needed to be modified.

**Organizing the findings.** Coding was an integral part in organizing the findings of this study for several reasons. The first reason coding was such an important part in organizing the findings was due to the large amount of data I collected; with some interviews exceeding the anticipated time going well over 90 minutes. Additionally, some participants provided very rich and detailed narratives of their experiences. As a result, it was crucial for me to ensure I was able to not only use labeling to organize data, but it was also necessary for me to engage in a reiterative process of linking the participants' stories to the research topic and the research topic back to the participants' stories (Richards & Morse, 2007).

Coding was done in 7 stages. Although I used *priori* and *open* coding to help organize the data and identify similarities and differences in the data, the primary coding methods I used were

*structural* coding, *interactional* coding, *emotion* coding, and *values-based* coding. Prior to conducting the focus group session, I planned to only use *structural* and *interactional* coding but after reviewing transcripts from the focus group session, the findings reflected a significant presence of the men's values and feelings. Consequently, I used *emotion* and *values-based* coding as well.

*Priori* coding was the first stage of the coding process. *Priori* codes are defined as a list of possible themes or categories that have been established prior to collecting and analyzing data (Richards et al., 2007). Based on the current literature, prior to the start of conducting interviews I had a list of themes I anticipated might emerge. I used *priori* coding by making note of themes that were found in the current literature prior to the focus group session and keeping record of quotes, phrases, memos, and field notes while conducting interviews. *Priori* coding allowed the space to become more familiar with the transcripts in order to analyze and unpack the participants' narratives in greater detail. This coding method was also useful in keeping record of significant interactions and occurrences that took place during the process. During the second stage, I used *NVivo* to assist with *open* coding. *Open* coding was used to organize the findings into sections and then identify similarities that revealed categories or themes (Auebach & Silverstein, 2003).

During the third stage, I used *pattern* coding, which helped me better categorize and organize the findings that I previously coded during the second stage of coding. In other words, *pattern* coding allowed me to collapse larger and broader themes that were identified during *open* coding into smaller themes or subthemes related to broader overarching patterns to further analyze and synthesis the findings (Auebach et al., 2003). Because of the sensitive nature of this topic, the current literature, and my interview protocol, I anticipated there might be differences in language and how the participants' constructed their stories with me compared to how they shared their

stories with the other participants. Consequently, after using *pattern* coding, during the fourth stage of organizing my findings, I used *structural* coding.

My interest was not only to hear the participants' narrative, I was also interested in learning how the participants shared their stories. Although themes are important in *structural* coding, emphasis is also placed on the way participants share their stories (Labov, 1982). Language plays a significant role in coding and categorizing data. Fortunately, while using *structural* coding I was able to observe similarities and differences in how the participants shared their stories. Labov (1982) argue that there are various levels behind meanings. The same word or phrase can hold different meanings depending on the person and his or her life experiences and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, exploring not only how the participants have attributed meaning to their experiences, but also the language they choose to use when sharing their stories was vital during data analysis.

To examine how the participants co-constructed their stories, I used *structural* coding during the fifth stage. This method allowed me to code and categorize the findings according to how the participants shared their stories with me specifically and how they shared their stories with one another during the focus group session (Labov, 1982). Because I was interested in observing if the participants shared their stories with me differently during interviews than they did during the focus group, this was important. While *structural* coding provided the space for me to explore how participants shared their stories with me compared to how they shared their stories around the other men during the focus group session, *interactional* coding extended this component of *structural* coding by examining the participants' stories as a process that is co-constructed by the participants and the researcher (Riessman, 2008). I realized that by me being a Black woman asking Black men sensitive questions about their experiences with Black women romantically and their mothers, I

might have an influence on how the participants answer certain questions, if not all questions. Because of this, I approached the coding process with this assumption. While using *interactional* coding, I realized the participants' feelings and values were strongly reflected in their narratives.

During the sixth stage of coding, I used *emotion* coding to further tease out themes that reflected the participants' feelings and emotions (Richards, 2007). The use of *emotion* coding was also important because I wanted to pay specific attention to the language the participants used to express their emotions specifically. *Values-based* coding was used during the seventh and last stage of coding. I used *values-based* coding in order to unpack themes related to the participants' values, culture, and worldviews (Richards et al., 2007).

*Values-based* coding was also important, as I am using critical race theory and intersectionality theory to analyze the findings in Chapter 5. Because of this, it was important to identify themes related to the ways in which the participants view the world based not only on their experiences overall, but more importantly their experiences as Black men; and how factors such as oppression, racism, and prejudice have shaped their worldviews and perspectives. In addition, similar to how *emotion* coding was used, *values-based* coding was useful in helping to identify language the participants used when discussing their values and world views as well as any differences or similarities in the ways they shared their stories with me as compared to the other participants.

***Interpretation.*** Interpretation is an important ethical consideration when conducting narrative research (Riessman, 2008). Interpretation refers to a process that begins before collecting data when writing the literature review. Effective interpretation is also based on analyzing data by not reifying the findings; instead, discussing data as it is. Discussing data as it is allows the participants to be found through the data analysis process. In short, effective interpretation depends

on the researcher facilitating in the process of storytelling from the beginning of the study in a way that does not seek to find truth, prove or disprove a hypothesis, or carry out a personal agenda.

To interpret the findings of the study, I used Helms' "Black racial identity development model", critical race theory, and intersectionality. The three approaches to analysis were instrumental in analyzing the findings through the intersection of race, White privilege, oppression, and racial identity. Coding the findings to identify themes related to language, interaction, emotions, and values and analyzing the data further by exploring the role of language, interaction, emotions, and values within the context of racial identity and the intersection of race, power, gender, class, White privilege, and oppression added richness and transparency to the data that has not yet been done.

As previously mentioned, I am aware that by me being a Black woman talking with a group of Black men about a sensitive subject, the participants might have been reluctant to answer some questions I feel the focus group was helpful in allowing the participants to feel more comfortable sharing their stories, in the event they felt uncomfortable approaching the interview process. The use of research memos were beneficial in the reflectivity of my study. While interpreting the data, I referred regularly to my memos to ensure that I was interpreting the findings in a way that did not reflect my bias but acknowledged the impact I may or may not have had on the data.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Throughout the study, it was be important for me to continuously write memos to myself and meet regularly with my co-chairs to ensure I was not allowing my biases and beliefs to shape or effect the direction of the study and the way I interacted with the participants. I was fully aware that my gender and race could affect the interaction between the participants and myself as well as how the participants interacted with one another during the focus group session. Conversely, I also

considered the possibility of the participants being indifferent to my race and gender and my being a Black woman could have very little to no impact on how the participants responded to questions or their behaviors. With that said, because I am used a narrative approach to collect my data, I approached the study with the assumption that I would be co-constructing the participants' narratives with them as they shared their experiences (Mishler 1986; Riessman, 2008).

Consequently, I was careful and accounted for instances when it appeared a participant was providing an answer or making a statement in a way that he thought would be pleasing to me or make comments that he thought I would want to hear.

Additionally, I knew some of the participants might be reluctant to share certain details and experiences with me because I am a woman. For example, I knew there was a possibility that some of the men might not feel comfortable answering personal questions related to intimacy because I am a woman. Or, some of the participants might not want to appear vulnerable. I was also aware of how the participants might perceive my level of academic achievement because I not sure what ideas or assumptions the participants might have made about me or study before, or for that matter, after the conclusion of the interviews. On the other hand, I considered the cases in which a participant might be reluctant to share his experiences with anyone, regardless of race or gender. Again, it was not known how the participants would respond to my presence as the researcher, which made it important for me to be aware of the multiple possibilities and possible effects I could have on how the men shared their stories.

Awareness was the best way to address many of these issues. I hoped my experience as a counselor would be beneficial in how I approached and facilitated open and honest conversations with my participants about my role and their perceptions and/or misgivings about me, the other participants, and the study. I feel that my experience and skills as a counselor were helpful in

creating an environment that assisted in the participants feeling safe and encouraging honest dialogue among most of the participants.

If any issues surfaced between a participant and myself, I knew it would be important to address the issue(s) with the participant before beginning the interview process or as soon as possible. However, to my knowledge, there were no issues that emerged during the focus group session or individual interviews. Before the start of the focus group I thanked the men for the participation and reminded them that the results of the study would not be used to judge their individual characters and it is normal to experience feelings of anxiety or apprehension when sharing personal information that is sensitive in nature; especially with strangers. I wanted to normalize any anxiety the participants might have felt about being interviewed and any assumptions they might have made prior to the start of the study. It was my hope that by opening the focus group session with this approach, I would be able to build trust with the participants. This method appeared to be effective with most of the participants.

### **Potential Researcher Bias**

While being raised in a Black household, I became aware of the construct of race and issues related to the Black community as a child. My mother, especially, made me mindful both of my femaleness as well as my Blackness at a very young age. I was also raised to be aware that others saw me as a Black girl and eventually as a Black woman before they saw anything else. I believe my parents made me aware of my race and gender not only because I grew up in a predominantly White and Asian suburban area outside of Los Angeles, California, but also because my parents felt it was necessary to instill in me a sense of pride in who I am as well as prepare me for some of the challenges I might have to overcome as a result of being a Black woman. As I became older, discussions about issues such as racism, access to resources and opportunities to Blacks, family,



and dating and intimacy in the Black community became regular topics of discussion within my circle of friends. However, at that time, I did not have a clear understanding of the research and some of the more critical theories rooted in some of the historical and political trends and features of the Black experience to help shape and contextualize many of the discussions I was having related to the Black community.

As I approached this research study, I knew I had to be aware of my personal biases and assumptions about the topic. Based on my previous experiences dating Black men, hearing the experiences of others, and reading current literature, I developed several biases about my topic. However, through creating a thorough review of the literature, I have found that many of the assumptions I had about Black men and relationships were inaccurate. As within any ethnic or racial group, I do believe there are various challenges that exist within the Black community. For example, I am personally concerned about the high percentage of single Black mother homes. I am also concerned about the high number of teenage pregnancies in the Black community as well the increased numbers of unmarried Black men and women as compared to the percentage of unmarried White men and women.

Based on the current literature and my own personal beliefs, I think there are various causes for these issues that are both rooted in historical systems of oppression as well as current systems of oppression (Bethea, 1995; Chaney, 2014; Eyre et al., 2012; Marbley, 2003). I realize these are my concerns, and consequently, they are reflective of my own personal value system. My views and assumptions about various issues in the Black community are personal and are not gospel in terms of what other members of the Black community should value or should not value. This process of conducting this study has been instrumental in developing an appreciation this topic for its

complexity. I have found there is no simple black or white answer or explanation for many of the issues that I used to frequently discuss with my friends and others.

After the death of a close family friend who was shot and killed in South Central Los Angeles at 17 years of age, I decided to begin mentoring teenagers who also lived in inner city low SES Los Angeles neighborhoods. I quickly became aware of some of the challenges and issues that many of these Black teenage boys faced. I also became aware of the harsh realities that these young adolescent males faced as a result of being raised in low socio-economic households. Many were also raised in single Black mother homes and felt an immense amount of pressure to help contribute financially to bills and various other household expenses. Many of the teenage boys I spoke with also expressed a desire to have a male role model in their lives. I soon decided to leave my current career as an entertainment publicist and return to school to earn my master's degree as a counselor. Specifically, I wanted to work in inner city schools that were known to have large percentages of minority students who were considered to be at risk of dropping out of high school.

Since beginning my career as a counselor, I have done a significant amount of research on historical and systemic racism and how racism and oppression has impacted, and continues to impact, members of the Black community. I have also done a considerable amount of research on how factors such as institutionalized racism, family structure, popular culture, and the after effects of slavery has had a significant impact on the mental and emotional health and wellness of some members of the Black community. Through reading and having conversations with members of various academic disciplines, I realized that there is a significant amount of research about single mother homes in the Black community. There is also a considerable amount of research on the dynamic between Black men and women. However, it appears that no one has explored, how Black men from single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women. After

reviewing the literature, I also realized that there is a significant amount of literature about topics related to Blacks that is written from a deficit perspective.

As a single Black woman, issues around intimacy, dating, and partnership have been somewhat important to me. As I previously mentioned, I have had countless conversations with friends and other Black men and women about relationships and intimacy -- more specifically, relationship dynamics and intimacy between Black men and women. In 2009, an article was published that reported that 63% of Black women were single compared to 34% of White women. My friends and I were in complete disbelief of the high percentage of single Black women. However, the article highlighted what many of my friends and I had been talking about for years. At the time we did not consider that the percentage published was also composed of Black women who did not want to be married. Additionally, we did not consider that the article did not offer causes for these statistics relative to the intersectionality of being a Black woman in America and how factors such as racism, sexism, negative portrayals of Black women in the media, and internalized oppression could help to create a clearer and more accurate description of the issue. All we saw, what we felt, was a ridiculously high percentage of Black unmarried women, and although at the time neither my friends or myself were actively wanting to get married, we feared when the time came we would meet the same fate.

My friends and I often used to confide in one another about our experiences dating Black men. I found that many of my friends and I shared similar experiences and challenges in dating. Through reviewing current literature and speaking with others who have researched similar topics, I have come to realize that some of the experiences that my friends and I shared are common to dating regardless of race. With that said, some of the challenges my friends and I experienced *are* real and are also *unique* to the Black community and can be connected to issues that Black men and

women face due to larger etic sociological factors that affect Blacks differently compared to members from other racial and ethnic groups.

### **Conclusion**

My goal for this study was to find data that speaks to the truth behind my participants' experiences. More importantly, to collect findings that were not written with a hidden agenda or from a deficit-based perspective, but instead tells the stories of my participants. I believe that the family structure in the Black community has many implications for the progression of Black people as a community. It was my hope that I would be able to use the findings from this study to begin my career in exploring various phenomena that affect the Black family and the Black community as a whole.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

We must find the love they lock away from us and give it to ourselves.

-Della Hicks Wilson, 2013

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, I sought to explore how heterosexual, cisgender, American Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women. Secondly, I was interested in better understanding how this specific group of Black men define, assert, and experience masculinity as it relates to building romantic relationships with women Black women. The findings of this qualitative inquiry are based on one focus group session followed by in-person interviews. The resulting findings present 11 Black men's personal experiences being raised in a single Black mother home as well as their previous and current experiences building romantic relationships with Black women.

The patterns and themes that emerged from the participants' stories as well as direct quotes that substantiate the themes presented in this chapter include: 1) conflicted feelings; 2) male mentorship; 3) masculinity; 4) conflict between personal desire and social messages about relationships; 5) gender roles in relationships; and 6) fear of rejection. In this chapter I will: 1) discuss my process of data analysis and the types of codes that helped reveal the study's themes and 2) provide a detailed exploration of the themes that emerged from the 11 men's narratives.

#### **Themes**

This chapter continues with an emphasis on the six themes that emerged during two rounds of data collection and seven rounds of coding. This section will also explore the experiences of the

11 Black men who participated in the study. The themes that developed during data collection reflect the participants' feelings and lived experiences relative to their family of origin, feelings towards their parents, previous and current experiences with and in romantic relationships, and their perceptions of Black women. In addition, a brief discussion will be provided of how critical race theory, intersectionality, and racial identity theory were also used to further analyze the themes. First, I will provide a discussion about the coding process and the codes in which the six themes were discovered.

### **Coding**

Using seven different types of coding methods alongside critical race theory, intersectionality, and racial identity theory proved to be beneficial in contextualizing the 11 Black men's lived experiences through the lens of gender, racial identity, and White supremacy. The seven different coding methods that were used were also beneficial in revealing the six themes that emerged.

As discussed in Chapter 3, during *priori* coding I created a list of codes I anticipated would be applicable to this research based on current research exploring topics related to the study. While using *NVivo* during *open* coding, I mainly sought to organize data by labeling statements that were distinctive and to identify similarities and differences in the participants' narratives. *Structural* coding was then used during the fourth round of this process.

During the fourth round of coding, I began using codes related to how the men used language during the focus group session and individual interviews. I discovered some of the participants used language and various forms of jargon and colloquialisms differently in the focus group with the other participants compared to the language they used during the individual interviews. This was one of the methods of coding in which many of the participants' conflicted

feelings towards their fathers, mothers, and Black women emerged. Many of the participants used words to describe their feelings that were either synonyms or were contradictory. After inquiring further into their word choice and asking some of the men to elaborate on their feelings, I realized that differences in language among the participants were a result of their conflicted feelings.

Although there appeared to be a strong connection between the differences in how some of the men used language and conflicted feelings they had towards their fathers, their mothers, and Black women, it is important to note that differences in the use of language could also be a result of factors other than the men's conflicted feelings towards their fathers, mothers, and Black women. For example, Richard and Rodney seemed more reluctant to share their experiences related to sex, relationships, and their perceptions of the Black women with me during their individual interviews compared to how they shared their experiences with the other men in the focus group. This could be explained by them not feeling as comfortable sharing sensitive and personal information about themselves with me because of my positionality to the research. For example, the participants might not have felt comfortable sharing potentially negative or explicit thoughts about Black women with me directly because I am a Black woman. One of the participants explicitly stated that he did not want to disrespect or offend me.

During the fifth round of coding, I examined the ways in which the 11 men's narratives were co-constructed between the participants and myself. It is hard to say which specific themes emerged through *interactional* coding, as *interactional* coding assumes the stories the men shared were all co-constructed with myself and the other participants (Auerbach et al., 2003). Consequently, *interactional* coding was similar to *structural* coding with regard to the outcome. That is, some of the differences in language the participants used and the way they shared their stories during the focus group compared to individual interviews can also be explained through

*interactional* coding as well. Some of the men also demonstrated a noticeable change in their demeanor and affect depending on the setting. For example, during the focus group session the same 2 participants who demonstrated noticeable changes in language (Richard and Rodney), said very little to me during the focus group session. The majority of their comments during the focus group session were directed primarily towards the other men. This made me think about my presence as a woman among 11 men and the impact that I might have had on some of the men during the focus group session.

*Emotion* coding was also used to further analyze the participants' feelings and emotions relative to their lived experiences. Conflicted feelings towards their fathers, mothers, and Black women were further affirmed through *emotion* coding. How the men define and experience masculinity and how it has shaped the ways in which they build romantic relationships also emerged through *emotion* coding. Some of the participants' fear of rejection and conflicts between having a desire to be in a romantic relationship and social messages the participants have received about romantic relationships and commitment surfaced during this round of coding as well.

During the last round of coding values based coding further confirmed how the 11 men define, experience, and assert their masculinity and how that process has shaped how they build romantic relationships with Black women. In addition, fear of rejection and conflicts between having a desire to be in a romantic relationship and some of the various social messages the men received about romantic relationships and commitment were also confirmed. A new theme emerged during the last round of coding that was related to specific gender-based roles the men felt men and women should occupy in romantic relationships.

In effort to not contribute to pathologizing the lived experiences of all Black people, critical race theory and intersectionality provided the space to analyze the themes and the participants'



stories in the context of how conditions of racial inequality and injustice, institutionalized racism, White supremacy, internalized oppression, and the intersection of race, gender, and class are used as axis oppression. In order to further explore the participants' narratives, in the next section each of the six themes will be discussed in greater detail with supporting direct statements from the 11 men.

### **Themes and The 11 Men's Stories**

#### **Theme #1: Conflicted Feelings**

Many of the participants expressed conflicted feelings of anger, resentment, frustration, abandonment, rejection, understanding and empathy during both the focus group session as well as their individual interviews. Some of the men also expressed a desire to be accepted and wanted. The men's conflicted feelings were divided into three sub-themes: 1) conflicted feelings towards their fathers; 2) conflicted feelings towards their mothers; and 3) conflicted feelings towards Black women.

*Sub-theme #1: Conflicted feelings towards father.* Two of the participants' (Jason and Thomas) fathers died when they were children. Jason's father died when he was 11 years old and Thomas' father died when he was seven. Prior to their passing they reported having positive relationships and feelings towards their fathers. However, both indicated that although their memories of their fathers were positive, their memories were also vague and limited with regard to their childhood memories. Thomas and Jason's fathers both were shot and killed as a result of gang violence. Three of the participants (Matthew, Anthony, and Richard) shared having positive feelings towards their fathers and two of the participants (John and Steven) expressed having indifferent feelings towards their fathers. With the exception of Jason and Thomas, the four men who reported having positive or indifferent feelings towards their fathers indicated at some point they experienced feelings of anger towards their fathers but they were not as vocal as the other four

participants. The other four participants (David, Michael, Rodney, and Marcus) expressed conflicted feelings of anger, frustration, rejection, and a desire for their fathers to be a part of their lives.

All four participants shared feelings of anger, burden, and frustration because the men felt they had to be responsible for their household at a very young age. David, Michael, and Rodney expressed anger towards their father that was caused by feelings of burden and abandonment for others reasons. During the focus group session, Michael expressed feelings of anger he felt towards his father for leaving him and his family after his parents divorced when he was seven years old. He went on to explain that because his father did not make an effort to build a relationship with him he felt he was responsible for building a relationship with his father, which he felt was an unfair and unnecessary pressure to place on a child.

I didn't want to see my father. It had gotten to a point... When I had to be around this man one time, I tried to take his life out of anger for leaving me and my mother, but I couldn't take his life because he was standing there and I couldn't make a move. So I was like, "This is my father I have to try."

Michael (28, single) said

In this statement Michael not only expressed his feelings of anger towards his father but he also indirectly expresses a desire to be wanted and accepted by his father. Rodney (39, married) shared similar feelings during his individual interview when discussing how he felt about his father's inconsistency in his life as a child.

The crazy thing about it is... I think what makes me the most angry is I thought it was my fault. I thought he was in and out because I was doing something wrong. I remember doing all kinds of things as a kid

trying to prove myself to him so he would stay and not leave again. It pisses me off to think about that. It was not about me. He was a coward. It pisses me off.

Although some of the participants expressed feelings of anger, it is important to note that some of the same participants also expressed a level of understanding towards their fathers. For example, David (30, single) said:

It was tough. I knew my dad loved me, but he made a lot of bad decisions. My dad started off, I guess, trying to do the right thing, sort of, but he just got lost in the streets. My dad got really heavily involved in gangs and drugs. This was the case for both my mom and my dad, which impacted me and my siblings a lot. It really put a strain-- he cared about his kids. He really did. At first, he tried, but when you get caught up in that lifestyle, it just takes everything. It sucks everything out of you. So it just made our relationship really tough. After that, for a while, all the way pretty much up to middle school through high school, it would be tough. But sometimes we would have positive moments. I'd joke with my brother and say me and my dad had our full house moments, but it was still tough. I mean... I was angry with him overall but he did what he could.

Despite their anger, David, Rodney and Marcus shared there was still a part of them that wanted a relationship with their fathers and/or they understood why their fathers were not consistently in their lives if at all. Similarly, some of the men shared having conflicted feelings towards their mothers as well.

*Sub-theme #2: Conflicted feelings towards mother.* Matthew, David, John, Michael, Rodney and Steven expressed strong feelings of resentment towards their mothers and John and Steven both openly expressed feelings of anger towards their mothers. The men presented varying reasons for their conflicted feelings towards their mothers. Several of the participants reported their anger was a result of them blaming their mothers for their father not being in the home. When I asked Matthew (30, single) about his feelings towards his mother he said, "I kind of blamed my mom for the divorce. Sometimes I would think, 'Well, it's your fault my dad's not here.' Even though I kinda knew better, I still blamed her." Some of the participants also reported having feelings of anger as a child because they felt their mothers were not in the home as much as they would have liked. Matthew (30, single) went on to say:

I know I blamed my mom a lot for not being at the house. She was in the military until I was 6 or 7, and then, like I said, by the time she got out of the military, she was working. She taught aerobics and she was doing Mary Kay. So she would be gone a lot. My babysitter was my next-door neighbor, so I was either there or as I got a little older, I was at home alone. I didn't really understand everything. I was just like, "You're always gone." I would blame her for it, and as I got older, I realized that she was always gone to make ends meet. She was working. But to me, it was just like, "Ideally, you should be here. I shouldn't be warming up dinner in a microwave." So it was a lot of me being young and not understanding. It messed up the relationship that I had with her. I just had a view that she was everywhere but at home all the time.

Matthew (30, single) shared that he moved in with his father when he was 16 because he felt his mother was too strict and they were having difficulty getting along.

She would never let friends come over to the house. "I don't need those kids in my house." Whereas, my dad was more open. Even now, some of my friends will go visit my dad even when I'm not around. He's just that type of person. My mom would say, "They're not my kids. I don't want them here. They drive me crazy." I would have to be at home when the streetlights came on. Whatever time of the year it was, when the streetlights came on, I had to be home. Whereas with my dad, I had a set curfew. My mom was really strict about things because she says she was worried. We've talked about it after the fact. She just really worried about me. My dad was like, "I know you'll be okay." But my mom was like, "You're my only son, so I need to know where you are at all times."

After asking Matthew to elaborate on if his mother's rules were the only cause for them not getting along, he said,

She would never really give an explanation after she made a decision. "I don't have to give you an explanation. I'm your mom. You're going to listen to whatever I say, and that's the end of it." A lot of the time, regardless of what it was, she would just say it and there was nothing else to talk about. I don't know why I remember this but she wanted me to rake the leaves one time in the front yard. We didn't even have a tree in the front yard. The next door neighbor had a tree, so I was like, "Tell them to rake the leaves." She told me if she came home and the leaves weren't raked, I wouldn't be allowed go

outside for a year. I was on punishment for a year, literally on punishment for a year. I would sneak out when she wasn't home, because she would be gone so much, but she put me on punishment for a year to prove a point that if I tell you to do something, it needs to be done. It was like a joke to my friends that I was always on punishment, but it was from October to October that I wasn't allowed to play video games or anything. Those type of experiences can make a kid really angry at their parent. Not just temporarily angry.

Similar to Matthew, David (30, single) shared that much of his resentment towards his mother stemmed from some of the decisions she made and how he felt her decisions negatively affected him.

When my mother got older she made a lot of bad decisions, which impacted her kids. That was just hard, because when you're a kid there's only so much you can do. It's not like at 7 years old you can say, "This sucks. I'm out of here. Peace." [chuckles]. That lack of control and her bad decisions really frustrated me and made me angry

David (30, single) went onto share:

So, that created some tension growing up, not like tension that I was a bad kid and disobeyed my mom in that way. It created some tension in the sense that I harbored a lot of bad things in my heart towards my mom, which later strained our relationship.

Although the participants expressed feelings of anger and resentment towards their mothers, they reported, as adults, being able to rationalize their mother's decisions to an extent. Or, at the very least make peace with their decisions. Yet, John and Steven shared they both still struggle with

feelings of anger and resentment towards their mother; and Matthew shared although he has now reconciled much of the anger he felt towards his mother, he still struggles with some negative feelings towards her for not being in the home as much as he thought she should have been throughout his childhood. It was also interesting that John and Steven whose fathers both left them and their mothers in the midst of difficult financial and emotional upheaval, were reluctant to share how they felt about their fathers, but were able to share very strong feelings of anger towards their mothers who they shared struggled and worked several jobs to support their families. The feelings some of the men have towards their mothers seemed to also impact other aspects of their lives as well. Anthony (36, divorced) who reported having positive feeling towards his father shared that he sometimes holds Black women to higher standards compared to White women as a result of his anger and feelings of blame that he has towards his mother.

***Sub-theme #3: Conflicted feelings towards Black women.*** All of the participants expressed conflicted feelings towards Black women. Similar to the feelings many of the participants reported feeling towards their mothers, several of the participants reported having conflicted opinions and feelings about Black women. One overarching opinion that emerged related to the participants' feelings about Black women was based on their some of their experiences with Black women who they felt were combative. During the focus group, when I inquired about the participants' perceptions of Black women, Marcus (25, married) said:

My experience with black women is, I would say, there's some combativeness to them. Sometimes they are too combative. Some Black women I know will compete on every topic or every subject. Please don't get me wrong. I think Black women have great qualities. But unfortunately, when I think about Black women, one of my first thoughts goes back to my experiences with some of the

Black women I have been around who are really combative. My mother included. Several of the participants indicated they felt Black women's position in society was a primary cause for their combative nature. Matthew (30, single) shared his perceptions of Black women during his in-person interview:

I think when I look at Black women, they really are probably the strongest humans on the earth. They really are. I think a big thing that I see with them is that their competitive nature comes from them having to be strong in society, so they feel like they have to be right or they have to show dominance, kind of like a male would. I guess in our society, Black women are unfortunately at the bottom, and they realize that. Because of that, like I said, they feel like they have to be strong. They feel like they have to be right and they have to demonstrate that to the world. When they enter into relationships, it becomes a combative relationship, where it's almost like two males being together. We both feel like we have to compete.

During the focus group session, Marcus was the first of the 11 men to share that he perceives some Black women to be combative. Once Marcus shared his feelings, the other participants echoed his sentiments and began using the term to describe their perceptions of some Black women. When I asked the participants to elaborate more on what they meaning of the terms they used to describe some of the Black women they have encountered, three of the men provided vague answers. Steven said, "Umm... I can't think of anything right off my head, but you know. The stereotypical Black woman attitude". Steven and some of the other participants' responses made me wonder if some of the men themselves were clear on their use of the word or if some of the words they used to describe their perceptions and experiences with Black women were



borrowed from societal constructs and stereotypes of Black women opposed to accurate and authentic reflections of their experiences.

*Sub-Theme #3: Conflicted feelings towards Black women (negative effects of popular culture).* Pop culture and the media was also brought up among the participants in relationship to their feelings of frustration and anger towards Black women. Several of the men voiced frustration and anger about their experiences with some Black women who they felt perpetuate negative stereotypes or allow themselves to fit inherently oppressive social roles assigned by dominant White culture. During his individual interview David (30, single) said:

I know some amazing, wonderful African-American women. I personally have friends and I go to church with some amazing, Godly black women who love the Lord, who are wonderful, intelligent, and beautiful. I care for them deeply. With that said, I also know a lot of African-American women who have drunk the Kool-Aid and my heart breaks for them. My sisters being some of the them. Now, these are my sisters. I would live or die for my flesh and blood. So I see that dichotomy. So, I definitely want to be careful not to stereotype all Black women, for sure. I do agree with what one of the gentleman said in the focus group, that Black women are some of the most exploited groups of people in society. You don't have to go very far to see that. Turn on the TV and watch "Love and Hip Hop" or whatever and it's a sad, sad, sight. But with that said, it is tough. It's very tough. I've had some very hard experiences myself with trying to pursue African-American women.

David (30, single) added:

Yeah, the whole big bootie, twerking... The ratchet and super loud and

ignorant.. the Ludacris P-Poppin video or the Nelly Tip Drill video image.

The stiletto's, Nicki Minaj look,,,, I've literally had talks with people, White and Black, and that's their image of Black women and it's sad. People really think that's the image of Black women; they got big booties, weaves, and are loud. I'm not knocking that image. I'm just knocking it when that's the only thing that comes to mind.

During his individual interview Steven (23, in a relationship) said, "It's like Black women are looking for something else, but they can't find it because they're not in love with themselves." All of the participants shared they felt some Black women attempt to define themselves through rap videos and reality television because they have not created an identity for themselves outside of popular culture.

***Sub-theme #3: Conflicted feelings towards Black women (expectations of Black men).***

Another prevalent topic discussed that was related to the participants' anger and frustration towards Black women with regard to the larger society was their experiences with some Black women's expectations of Black men. Ten of the 11 participants reported having experiences with some Black women who they felt had unrealistic expectations of Black men which they felt were rooted in the negative impact that popular culture has had on the Black community.

Black women are a gift and a curse at the same time because they have so much to offer. They know how to bring the best out of their mates. That at least has been my experience with many of the Black women I have dated. But then at the same time there is confusion because of their surroundings and society socially conditioning them to think stuff like "Love and Hip-hop" and all that other kind of negative stuff is cool. So it changes your outlook as

a man. Some of the Black women I come into contact with have a negative connotation, even when you just say hi or just do something chivalrous, they sometimes take it the wrong way and blow it way out of proportion. I have had this happen even in situations when was not trying to flirt. I was trying to do something nice just to show that I value Black women and some have taken it somewhere that it didn't need to go, because of a misguided opinion about something. But again, at the same time, then you have the good part of Black women.. The part that tries to nourish you, give you positive feedback - actually doing good and positive things. Michael (28, single) said during his individual interview

Similarly, during the focus group session, David (30, single) shared:

I've literally been around Black women who have said, "Oh, we don't have enough good Black men around.". Like I'm just invisible. I really try to stand up for what's right. I'm not in prison. I've got a master's degree. You know what the statistics are of Black men who have post-graduate degrees? I'm also going to be working on my PhD soon. When they say stuff like that.... I hate to say it but when I date non-black women, at the very least they'll have a conversation with me. I've never had a non-Black woman completely dismiss me or treat me as though I am invisible. That's what's so hard and I'm not the only Black man who feels like that. My friends that I talk to say the same thing.

During the focus group John (33, married) added:

That "there's no good Black men out there" argument is frustrating and makes me mad sometimes. I always ask, "Are you really looking for a

good man? What do you think makes a good Black man?" The image that sometimes our own culture puts out there... That a real man looks like a rapper or has tattoos everywhere is considered to some Black women as a good Black man and if you don't fit that mold. Forget it.

As the discussion about Black women became somewhat heated in the focus group session, Rodney (39, married) stepped in and changed the pace and the direction of the conversation and said:

Some of the things you guys are saying I think are definitely true. But at the same time, it's not all Black women. It really comes down to how they grew up and their past experiences. As somebody who has dealt with women that weren't just Black. I honestly don't see that as the norm among Black women. Black men will say, "Oh, well, I like to deal with White women because you don't get that." I mean, you still do. Or, at least you can. Again, I think it comes down to the woman's previous experiences as well. A lot of Black women I have dated have prided themselves for being strong, but at the end of the day, they want somebody who will overpower them... Or be strong for them sometimes so they don't have to be strong all the time. Sometimes it's weird because it'll be the same woman who feels like she has to run things all the time who deep down wants a man who will step up and take the load off. Make it easier.

Although all of the men voiced anger and frustration towards Black women, their feelings conflicted with concern, a sense of protection, and understanding. Many of the participants actively expressed frustration towards Black women because they felt some played an active role in fulfilling and affirming negative stereotypes. The participants also expressed frustration and anger towards some Black women who they felt were combative and had unrealistic expectations of

Black men. Although many of the participants felt the reason for some of the negative interactions they have had with some Black women were a result of racial and societal challenges and barriers that Black women experience that non-Black women do not, the participants seemed to direct their anger solely with Black women as opposed to also directing their angst towards society.

### **Theme #2: Male mentorship**

Eight of the 11 participants shared that their fathers were either completely absent from the home or were not consistently in their lives. Four of the participants shared their fathers never provided a positive male influence in their lives and 9 of the 11 participants reported having a man other than their biological father serve as a consistent positive male role model or influence in their lives as children and throughout their adolescence. At the start of the focus group session when the participants were asked to describe their home environment Jason (30, single) said, “Yeah, it was just primarily my mom. It wasn't a whole lot of male influence in my life growing up. My mom has three other sisters and my grandfather passed away, so there was never really males on their side of the family.”

When I asked David (30, single) to talk about a man who served as a consistent positive male influence in his life he stated:

There was a church I went to when I was growing up in Chicago. I remember spending most of my young childhood on the west side of Chicago; growing up in the hood. Who would think that I was just a dumb kid growing up in a rough area and a rough environment and some White surfer dude from California would be the biggest positive male influence in my life to this day, I praise God always for this guy. He played a huge role when we moved to the neighborhood that I pretty much lived in from fifth grade until I graduated

from high school and moved to a college in Carbondale. I went to the youth group at the local church there. He was a positive influence in my life through countless situations and was a huge role model. A positive role model.

During Michael's (28, single) individual interview, he shared:

My uncle was a positive influence in my life until he passed. Not in terms of financially, but as far as being that role model. He would show me, "This is what a man does, this is how you do things, this is how you get food on the table." That's who I looked up to.

Similarly, during his individual interview Marcus (25, married) stated:

My uncle who was married to my dad's sister, they grew up together. He's always been my role model, probably more so than my dad. I'd say other than him, probably friends that I grew up with -- their parents. My parents weren't together, but I had a couple of friends who did have a household with a father figure in the home. I'm an only child, so my friends were very important to me. I was always around them. That shaped me more so than I can say my parents did when it comes to what I want to do in life. But still, to this day, like I said my uncle.

John (33, married) reported that he mainly relied on outside organizations and groups to provide him with male mentorship. He said:

My mom's side of the family was all females so I really didn't have a lot of men around me. I found myself joining different groups that basically played a positive role in my life. Those experiences stayed with me. Even when I got out of high school and went college and wanted to join a fraternity.

Two of the participants (Thomas and Jason) whose fathers were shot and killed reflected on what they learned from their fathers prior to their death. Thomas (28, single) shared:

Well, my dad was killed when I was seven but I remember a lot from that time. I remember watching him being successful in major accomplishments like becoming a Navy Seal. He was coming from the hood in St. Louis. So, that kind of accomplishment was a really big deal. I was proud. I remember he taught me about style. I remember he would have a lot of girls and all that stuff, but that wasn't really-- that was pops and—He would teach me about music and stuff like that.

He went on to say:

I would say that after my dad passed, there were a lot of men in my life. I wouldn't say all positive, but at one point in time, I got some information from them, I learned from them. I have four uncles, all of them have been to prison, but I learned things from them. I learned not to go to prison. I learned street stuff... But as far as a positive influence, I would say it was a guy my mom used to date. He showed me how to build stuff, to be a creator of something. He also showed me the importance of having a positive mind and how to be optimistic. He was a little older, but he showed me pretty much how to be a man. Not by telling me, just watching him I learned a lot. Watching some of the things that he did was cool for me. I was impressed because he could create things out of thin air. He was just a good guy.

Although Matthew (30, single) shared that his father was not a consistent positive male influence in his life, he felt they had a strong relationship. He shared:

My dad is like my best friend. He always has been my best friend. Our relationship has always been great. It was a little bumpy when I first went away to college, just because I was having too much fun. Looking from as far back as I can think, we've always-- I would say he was my best friend. Our relationship has always been really strong.

Another participant shared about the positive influence he felt his father had in his life.

There is absolutely no way I can complain about my father. My parents divorced when I was 16 and honestly, I was actually happy that they did. Not because I did not want them to be married, but because I got tired of watching them not be happy because they were so determined to make me happy. My dad was at every basketball and football game, took me out on the weekends, talked to me about sports, my grades, and girls. Hell, he bought my first car. I can honestly say he was in my life just as much after the divorce as he was prior to my parents divorcing. He is a great man. A great, great, great, man! Richard (43, single) said.

All of the participants connected the importance of having a consistent positive male role model or mentor to how a young man defines and experiences the process of coming into manhood. Many of the participants spoke about the importance male mentorship had in this process as though masculinity and the journey into manhood are similar to rites of passage for adolescent Black males' transition into manhood.

### **Theme #3: Masculinity**

The majority of the participants defined masculinity through the lens of independence. The men referred to respect, wisdom, adaptability, financial stability, and the ability to provide for their



family when asked to describe their definition of masculinity. The participants also referred to some of their experiences in romantic relationships as well as societal roles and social constructs for Black men related to masculinity.

I've always felt like to be a man, you have to be able to stand on your own when it comes to finances and other things like that. I also think about not being confrontational but you have to conduct yourself in a certain way that demands respect from other people. I think one thing-- it took me a long time to get there. From high school to college, I struggled with getting too much advice because I felt that people looked at me a certain way, because of where I was from. In school, I felt non-Blacks expected me to be ghetto or be a thug, which they looked down on. But in my neighborhood, my friends expected me to be tough. So, I struggled with those different images of a man. As I got older, I realized it didn't take violence to get respect.

Marcus (25, married) said

In the focus group David (30, single) shared how his faith informs how he defines masculinity.

David said:

This is a hard question [chuckles]. Whenever I think of manhood and masculinity, the first place I turn to for that definition is scripture, it's the Bible. I don't turn to society. I don't turn to another man. The basic answer to your question is-- what others have said - a provider, standing up for what's right, an example to others, and lastly, most importantly to me, is going hard for the Lord.

During Jason's (30, in a relationship) individual interview he referred to his role as a father and how that has shaped his definition of masculinity.

I think being a man is just overall making wise decisions and learning to adapt to your environment. Because I am a father, I have a little girl, I've got to know how to be the man of the household. Mostly because I'm the first person she's going to look at to define or reference the qualities of a man or masculinity. So how I treat her, how I respect her, how I act around her. It's the same way I learned from watching what my dad was doing. How I looked at him is going to have the same impact on how my daughter's going to look at me.

Several of the participants brought up issues related to masculinity in relationship to their previous romantic relationships. David (30, single) stated:

I don't want to stereotype because not all Black women want the stereotypical Black man, but I have had some challenges with how I define myself as a man, especially when it comes to dating Black women and it appearing like some of them preferred a tough guy or how they defined masculinity and what was attractive – that's what I used to use to define myself. I don't want to stereotype. I'm just speaking on my personal experiences. But I'm not that dude. I'm the tall, thin guy and I'm not some thug dude. I'm not going to walk around tough, hard; acting like I got a chip on my shoulder. When I was growing up, that was the depiction of what a man looked like; the man that's tough and who can fight. But you know what? That wasn't me. I'm not saying I'm going to back down from a fight. I definitely ain't no punk, but I'm not going around trying

to prove that I'm tough either. At the end of the day, I feel like manhood and masculinity is the fact that I can persevere through hard times, I can go to work, instead of trying to slang rocks, I can help my mom pay rent, I can work hard in school and go to college and go to youth group. If my friends are out there on the block, I can go tell them about Jesus and that I know there's a better way. I can say, "You don't have to be out here doing this. It's a better way, man."

Similar to how many of the participants expressed frustration about how popular culture and the media have a negative influence on Black women's behaviors, many of the participants also spoke to the challenges they have experienced in relationship to defining and asserting their masculinity according to social roles that popular culture has created for men.

I grew up in the hood. That's just what it is. I grew up in the hood and I don't shrink back from that. Actually, I'm thankful. I'm thankful I grew up in it. It taught me things in life. It gave me tools in life that I still use to this day. Growing up on the streets-- I'm not ashamed of the environment I grew up in. I stand to that. So, I'm not ashamed that I'm a Black man that grew up in a rough environment. I'm proud to be a Black man. So, I preface this statement first with that, but yeah, it was tough because growing up it was the visual picture of the dude who looked like 50 Cent or the dude that looked like Taye Diggs, or Tyrese or whatever. That was the picture our community emphasized. But I created my own definition based on other factors.

John (33, married)

Similarly Rodney (43, married) explained:

I think a man can stand up and say, "I don't have to follow the crowd" and

stand up for what's right. Instead of going to have sex and bragging about how many girls you have, I can stand up and respect Black women.

That's what I think a man is, but that was hard because growing up my guys would look at me and say that's what made me soft.

All of the participants expressed at some point in their lives experiencing challenges in creating a definition of masculinity for themselves. Many of the participants shared not having a positive male influence in their lives as being the source of many of their struggles. Other participants expressed a tension they felt between conflicting societal and familial expectations of masculinity for Black men compared to what masculinity looks like for White men as contributing factors during their process of defining and asserting their masculinity. However, it appeared that all but one participant (David) felt fairly confident in their masculinity and were able to successfully create a definition of masculinity for themselves. Similar to the various conflicts the participants expressed with regard to their feelings towards their parents, Black women and conflicting societal and familial expectations related to masculinity, all of the participants expressed at some point experiencing conflicts between having a desire to be in a romantic relationship and social messages they received as children and throughout their adolescence about relationships and commitment.

#### **Theme #4: Conflicts between Personal Desire and Social Messages about Relationships**

One of the most dominant themes that emerged from the research was a conflict that the participants either have previously experienced or were currently experiencing related to having a desire to be in a committed relationship and some of the social messages they received about romantic relationships, marriage, and commitment.

Both my parents told me marriage ain't all it's cracked up to be [laughter].

It's funny but neither one of them ever really pushed me towards getting

married. Probably because their marriage ended so badly. They felt they were better off never getting married again. I think in a way it's affected relationships that I have been in. When they start to get too serious, I kind of-- not really pull away but I typically do something that would mess them up. I know at one point, my mama almost got remarried, and probably a month or two before the wedding, she just called it off. She told him, they could still date but she did not want to get married. He ended up leaving her. My dad never even got close to marriage again. But there is a huge part of me that wants to be in a relationship. I have always gravitated towards long-term relationships. Although, I have had issues with infidelity. But I know I want to get married and have a family. Matthew (30, single)

During the focus group session David (30, single) stated:

I remember when I was in high school, the first girl I technically dated. I took her to Red Lobster. I came home my dad was like, "Are you crazy?" I've been married to your mother 27 years and still haven't taken her to Red Lobster [laughter]. He was like, "You don't do that! Take her to McDonald's, she'll be all right." That's what I was taught. You play the game. You do what you've got to do and you move on to the next one. That's what men do, and maybe even have a couple on the side, which is the complete opposite of who I am.

John (33, married) went on to reflect on his memories of observing his mother involved in a romantic relationship during his individual interview. John shared:

For a period of time my mom was close with this one guy and I never

really knew what that was about. He was known in the neighborhood as a drug dealer and a bad guy. I don't know if they were just close friends or if it was more. I never really asked about it. Her and my dad got into it about that. That made my dad angry, but like I said, I never really delved very far into the details.

Like John, Steven (23, in a relationship) never observed his mother in a romantic relationship.

I didn't actually observe my mother or father in a relationship. Either my mom never was in a relationship or she hid it really well from me. To this day, I don't know and I never asked her about it. I never really want to ask her. But as far as what I saw between my parents, they'd have little pockets when he'd be gone for a period of time, come back, gone again. You know...

In addition to familial influences, several of the participants brought up societal influences and how they have contributed to some of the conflicting feelings they have had about committed relationships. Anthony (36, divorced) reflected:

I was taught you respect women and you protect your sisters. But on the other hand, what I learned from listening to hip-hop or watching whatever music videos or TV shows was completely different. A lot of the rappers I listened to growing up said, you hit and you move on. Then I think about -- all the men in my family cheated on their wives. So, that brings me back to --you play the game, you have your main chick, and you've got a female on the side.

All of the participants shared they wanted to be in long term relationships and get married. In fact, the 4 men (John, Richard, Rodney, and Marcus) who were married shared they were all happily married and felt confident about their decision to get married. The only participant who shared he did not have a desire to be in a romantic relationship at the time was Anthony, who recently divorced his wife after 5 years of marriage. However, Anthony did that share at one point he did experience a conflicted feelings about wanting to be in a romantic relationship and societal, familial, and self-imposed messages he received related to romantic relationships. Masculinity and the 11 men's experiences with conflicted feelings about wanting to be in a relationship and messages they received about romantic relationships all seemed to be somewhat connected with the gender roles the men felt men subscribed to related to romantic relationships.

#### **Theme #5: Relationship Roles**

Several of the participants shared similar beliefs and opinions regarding what they felt a man and a woman's role should be while in a romantic relationship. When discussing what they felt a woman's role should be in a relationship, many of the participants shared that the woman should play what some referred to as a more "traditional role". Michael (28, single) said, "It's important for a woman to allow a man to be the man. I haven't committed to anything just because I haven't found someone who I'm ready to build with. I'm not trying to be with somebody who won't let me lead." Thomas (28, single) added to Michael's sentiments by sharing that he felt it is important for a woman to trust her significant other to make the right decisions. He said:

She has to be vocal enough to voice her own opinion but be supportive at the same time. The relationships that I've been in have failed because there was too much head bumping. I'm like, "If you don't trust me enough to let me lead, then why are you with me?" I feel that should be the

woman's role in a relationship. She needs to be there to help out, but she has to be supportive of me. If she's not supportive of the man, the relationship's not going to work.

When discussing what the participants' felt a man's role should be in a relationship, several of the participants provided similar responses to how they define masculinity. For example, the participants all felt a man's role is related to being a leader and referred to money and income.

I think the man should lead. It has nothing to do with money. Even before marriage-- relationships I have been in, when it came down to it, I didn't care how much money they had in their accounts. When it comes to things, it's up to me. I'm the type that-- if I ask you out, I'm going to pay for it. If you want to, that's fine. I'm going to somehow sneak the money back into your account because that's what I feel my role is. John (33, married)

Rodney (39, married) added:

Even if we are facing rough times and my wife is making more money than me, I still am accountable for the house. I have been laid off twice in the last seven years. Obviously, each time she was making more money than I was. But I love that my wife never made me feel inadequate. Never. There were times I felt insecure about the situation, but she always did her best to support me and made it more comfortable for me to be the head of the household, which I feel, ultimately, is the man's role in a marriage. Of course, it's a little different for non-married couples, but many of the same ideas still apply.

The 11 men appeared to follow traditional American White norms when defining constructs such as masculinity and the roles they felt men and women should occupy while in romantic relationships.



Much of what the participants shared with regard to gender roles in relationships was based on money and functioning as the head of the household. The men also all agreed that women's roles include facilitating as a source of support to their significant other. It seemed the participants all shared the opinion that it is important for women to not only support their mate, but to also behave in ways that make their mate feel like he is the head of the house.

### **Theme #6: Fear of Rejection**

Based on the men's collective thoughts on the importance of a woman helping her partner feel "like a man", it might not be a surprise that the last most significant theme that emerged during the study was the men's fear of rejection. Ten of the 11 participants expressed their fear of rejection to some extent. In his individual interview, David (30, single) shared:

I've dealt with a lot of rejection with girls and women in my life. I was always the guy that was, "Oh, that's just so-and-so. He's cool. He's just my friend," or I always was the guy who was the third wheel. Or, I was always the guy that, "Oh, you're cool to hang out with. You're cool to be around, but dating? Eh..." So, whenever I talk about dating or romantic relationships, it's always-- I'm not saying I'm not willing to talk about it. I'm willing to talk about it, but it's tough.

He went on to say:

I almost prepare myself internally for rejection. I don't even think that's healthy. Maybe I need to talk to somebody about that, but just due to my past experiences, I'm always on guard to be rejected. I always think, "Okay, I know it's coming soon." So, when it does come, I'm not as hurt by it because I was preparing myself for it to happen.

Although the group of men were not as vocal about their fears of rejection as they were about the other five themes, David, Matthew, Rodney, Richard, and John all shared their fears of rejection. In addition to fears of being rejected by their fathers and Black women, some of the men also expressed fears of failed relationships and not being a good father. Interestingly, the five men did not discuss their fears of rejection in the focus group but instead expressed their fears of rejection during their individual interviews.

### **Summary of Findings**

This chapter provided a detailed presentation of the findings and themes that were most common among the participants. This chapter also included verbatim quotes from the participants to explore how this specific group of Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women and how they define, assert, and experience masculinity as it relates to building romantic relationships with Black women. The central themes that emerged from the participants' narratives include: 1) conflicted feelings; 2) male mentorship; 3) masculinity; 4) conflict between personal desire and social messages received about relationships; 5) gender roles in relationships; and 6) fear of rejection.

Conflicted feelings of anger, resentment, abandonment, frustration, understanding, and a desire to be accepted was the most prevalent theme in this study. Consequently, there were several related subthemes: 1) conflicted feelings towards some of the participants' fathers; 2) conflicted feelings towards the participants' mothers; and 3) conflicted feelings towards Black women. The importance of male mentorship was also a central theme that emerged throughout the study. Many of the participants all shared similar experiences with regard to their biological father not facilitating as a consistent positive male influence in their lives. Seven of the 11 participants felt their father's absence or inconsistent presence in their lives had a negative effect on how they

defined masculinity and some of the messages they received as children and throughout adolescence about relationships, marriage, and commitment.

Concepts related to masculinity was another theme the participants referenced throughout the study. As previously mentioned, the majority of the participants felt not having their fathers in their lives consistently contributed to some of the challenges they experienced asserting their masculinity. The participants also expressed experiencing some sort of conflict between having a desire to be involved in a romantic relationship and some of the messages they received about relationships, marriage, and commitment. The five themes all contributed to the sixth theme, which was fear of rejection. Several of the participants shared that they either currently feared rejection, or at some point struggled with a fear of rejection. The men referred to stereotypes and socially constructed roles of Black men and women through both the focus group session as well as the individual interviews.

Although the findings did not provide a black or white answer to the study's two research questions, in the tradition of qualitative inquiry, the findings provided a rich and complex answer that is not black or white, but instead is multi-dimensional. When exploring how this specific group of Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women, the findings indicated that there were several different factors that impacted this process. The participants' conflicted feelings towards their fathers, mothers, and Black women were of particular importance when examining how this group of men build romantic relationships. The men's conflicted feeling towards their mothers and Black women appeared to be especially influential in how the men build romantic relationships with Black women. The other five themes also significantly impacted how the men build romantic relationships with Black women.

Likewise, the six themes not only answered the second research question but the six themes also appeared to all have a relationship with one another when exploring how this specific group of Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes define, assert, and experience masculinity as it relates to how they build romantic relationships with Black women. For example, for most of the men, conflicting feelings they felt towards their mothers seemed to overlap and have an influence on their perceptions of Black women, and some of the men's perceptions of Black women appeared to have a relationship and intersect with their fears of rejection, their conflicting feelings towards their fathers, and their opinions about gender-based relationship roles.

Critical race theory, intersectionality, and racial identity theory were all three used to help provide reference and contextualize the participants' stories during analysis. In Chapter 5, I will provide a more detailed discussion of the findings through the lens of the previously mentioned theoretical frameworks. Current literature argues the experiences of Blacks are unique compared to the experiences of non-Blacks (Jung, Vargas, & Bonilla-Silva, 2011). When exploring the intersection of various systems of oppression and anti-Black racism when discussing topics related to intimacy, family, values, and building interpersonal relationships, it becomes evident that it is necessary for additional emic and etic factors that should be taken into consideration when investigating these topics (Jung et al., 2011). Blacks in the United States attempt to define and construct meaning for themselves and one another in a society that has been built in and around racism and White privilege. Furthermore, internalized oppression of Blacks adds additional sociological, economically, emotional, psychosocial, and psychological barriers and challenges for some Blacks depending on their position within their own racial identity.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Statistics say I shouldn't be married. I'm a Black man. I didn't grow up with a father in the home. In fact, for a long time I hated his gut, and even now, he's not my favorite person. I was raised in the hood. Used to bang. All that. And I'm here; married, with two beautiful daughters who I teach to avoid the type of boys my daddy, on the rare occasion he was there, taught me to be.

-Rodney (married, 43)

This study captured the lived experiences of 11 Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes to explore how they build romantic relationships with Black women. Additionally, the study was also designed to better understand how masculinity influenced or has shaped how the participants build romantic relationships. The two guiding research questions of this study were: 1) How do some Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women? and 2) How do some Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes define, assert, and experience masculinity as it relates to building romantic relationships with Black women? This chapter provides an overview of the study, a brief recap of the conceptual framework that was used to analyze the findings, and a discussion of the 11 men's narratives to highlight the study's six most significant emergent themes and how they help answer the two research questions. Significance of the findings, implications of the results, recommendations for further research, and my personal reflections as the researcher will also be discussed.

This study sought to contribute to the limited empirical research within the counseling profession on the lived experiences of Blacks and address the current gap in literature by using the participants' stories to better understand how Black men build romantic relationships with Black

women through the lens of family of origin and within the context of racial identity, oppression and intersectionality. The six cycles of coding helped reveal the study's six core themes: 1) conflicted feelings; 2) male mentorship; 3) masculinity; 4) conflict between personal desire and social messages about relationships; 5) gender roles in relationships; and 6) fear of rejection. After identifying the key themes, the study's findings were then further analyzed using critical race theory, intersectionality, and Helms' "Black racial identity development model".

Critical race theory was used to examine the interaction of authority, power, and privilege in minority communities and how forms of privilege and White supremacy in the U.S. have oppressed the 11 Black men who participated in this study. A special focus was placed on intersectionality to contextualize the findings and themes through the lens of critical race theory by examining how the intersection of race, gender, and class has shaped the 11 Black men's experiences and their perceptions of Black women and romantic relationships. As discussed in previous chapters, Black racial identity development model was also used to analyze the findings by situating the participants' narratives in relationship to their self-concept and the interaction of their racial identity and larger societal forces (Helms, 1990).

### **Discussion of Key Findings**

In this section of the chapter, I will provide a detailed discussion of the six key themes that emerged during the study. I will also connect each theme with current literature that either supports or does not support the study's findings. That is, I will simultaneously discuss how the study's findings are both consistent as well as inconsistent with current research while presenting a thorough analysis of the data. Additionally, I will also present findings that are new contributions to the current literature. The six themes that will be discussed include: 1) conflicted feelings; 2) male

mentorship; 3) masculinity; 4) conflict between personal desire and social messages about relationships; 5) gender roles in relationships; and 6) fear of rejection.

### **Theme #1: Conflicted Feelings**

All of the participants expressed conflicted feelings during both the focus group session and during the individual interviews. The men shared conflicted feelings of anger, frustration, abandonment, resentment, understanding, and a desire to be accepted and wanted. Some of the participants expressed conflicted feelings towards their fathers, mothers, and Black women, while others expressed conflicting feelings only towards their mothers and Black women. Despite the participants' feelings towards their fathers, nine of the men shared conflicting feelings of anger, frustration, resentment, abandonment, and some understanding towards their mothers, and Black women. The men seemed to reconcile their feelings towards their fathers differently. Building off of Chapter 4, feelings the men expressed during study will be divided and discussed in three sub-themes: 1) conflicted feelings towards their fathers; 2) conflicted feelings towards their mothers; and 3) conflicted feelings towards Black women.

*Sub-theme #1: Conflicted feelings towards father.* Four of the participants expressed having conflicted feelings towards their fathers. This was compared to two men whose fathers died when they were children and consequently had limited memories of their fathers. This was also compared to two men who shared they have feelings of indifference about their fathers, and three participants who outwardly expressed positive feelings towards their fathers. The remaining four men expressed various reasons for their conflicting feelings towards their fathers. One common cause for the four men who expressed anger towards their fathers was a result of them feeling an obligation to protect and be responsible for their mothers and siblings as children and adolescents.

Current research has discovered similar findings. Black and Latino adolescents appear to feel it is their responsibility to be accountable for the well being of their mothers and siblings in homes in which the father is absent (Beach, Jones, & Franklin, 2009; Mincy, 2006).

The men also discussed feelings of anger and resentment towards their fathers not only because their fathers were absent from the home, but the participants also felt anger and resentment towards their fathers because they had to initiate contact with them. That is, the men expressed anger because they had to seek out their fathers in an attempt to cultivate a relationship. The men expressed they felt this was an inappropriate and almost abusive responsibility to place on a child. This finding is an important and new contributing piece of information about the participants' feelings towards their fathers, because, from what I have found, there is no existing research which has revealed similar finding.

Although the four participants were vocal about their feelings of anger and resentment, they were also able to express a level of understanding and even empathy towards their fathers. All but one of the participants said they felt their fathers' actions were the result of ignorance. Marcus (25, married) said, "At the end of the day.... I guess he did the best he could do. He did what he knew." Marcus' sentiment seemed to be echoed among the majority of the participants. The men were able to identify a generational continuity or tradition of parenting among their fathers. In other words, the men felt that their fathers' absence or inconsistent presence in their lives was a result of their fathers being raised in single mother homes. The men also cited other sociological factors that impacted their fathers' behavior such as the negative impact of drug use, gangs, unemployment, incarceration, violence, and other issues related to race and poverty.

One could argue the mens' awareness and understanding of the various causes for their fathers' absence from their lives confirms what many researchers have said about familial issues in



the Black community. As previously discussed, some contend the underlying cause for increased numbers of unwed Blacks and single Black mother homes is indicative of a fracture in the Black community that has been caused by larger societal issues such as: racism, oppression, discrimination, generational single mother homes, and the after effects of slavery (Chaney, 2009; Connell, et al., 2005; Williams, 2011). When examining how this group of men build romantic relationships the mens' awareness of some of these issues is significant, as it provides keen insight on how the participants' viewed fatherhood and the various challenges Black fathers have to face and overcome in America. Moreover, this sub-theme provides more information on how the men view romantic relationships, and similarly, the challenges Black men encounter when trying to build relationships and families.

*Sub-theme #2: Conflicted feelings towards mother.* Six of the participants expressed feelings of resentment and frustration towards their mothers and two of the men expressed feelings of anger along with feelings of resentment and frustration. Several of the participants shared that blame was one of the primary causes for their anger towards their mothers. For example, some of the men blamed their mothers for their fathers not being in the home. The men also blamed their mothers for not being in the home themselves. All but two of the participants said that they understood their mothers were not home frequently because they had to work multiple jobs to sustain the household financially. Current research supports these findings. Black single mothers have traditionally been placed under a microscope with regard to being a “good mother” (Elliot, Powell, & Brenton, 2015). These pressures are societal and then internalized by the women themselves. With 48% of single Black mothers living at or below poverty and only one-third going on to earn college degrees, many single Black mothers have to work multiple jobs in order to make ends meet.

The participants also expressed anger and frustration because some of the men felt their mothers were rigid, overly protective, and strict. Steven (23, in a relationship) said, “She was the matriarch so I respected her, but she always had to be right. Sometimes it was worse than a Tyler Perry movie.”

When examining the men’s feelings towards their mothers it appeared most of the men were able to reconcile their feelings of anger towards their fathers and create some sort of logical explanation for their fathers not being in the home. Four of the men voiced an understanding for their fathers not being in their lives and openly expressed a desire to have a relationship with their fathers. However, the men appeared to not give their mothers the same leeway.

This leaves one to wonder, “What made it almost permissible for the men’s fathers to have an inconsistent and disruptive presence in their lives but did not make it permissible for their mothers to be away from the home to work multiple jobs in order to ensure their families were supported?” When looking at the intersection of race and gender, it appeared the men held their Black mothers to different standards as compared to their fathers. Although this finding was initially alarming, it is not necessarily a completely new concept. That is, there was inequity in how the participants expressed their empathy between their mothers and fathers. In previous studies with Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes it was found that although the participants had feelings of disappointment, anger, and abandonment towards their fathers they still held onto the desire and need for respect and loyalty from them because they could easily identify with the experiences of being a Black man in America (Beach et al., 2009).

In order to take this discussion one step further, when looking at the intersection of race and gender, another layer of complexity and examination is added to the men’s feelings towards their mothers as compared to that of their fathers. The men’s anger about their mothers being away from

the home despite their understanding of the need for them to work, could be a result of some of the men not being able to relate entirely to their mothers' experiences. They were able to relate to the inherent challenges of being Black in America, but seemed to assign socially constructed gender roles and norms to their mothers. That is, the men appeared to be able to excuse their father's absence or inconsistency but were not able to excuse their mothers for not being in the home because they prescribed a different set of socially constructed expectations to their mothers, in which the mother is expected to be in the home and serve as the glue that holds the family together (Elliot et al., 2015).

Referring back to the men's sentiments about their mothers being overbearing and rigid, there seems to be a thread between most of the participants' thoughts and opinions about their mothers and American images and stereotypes of Black women. Current literature has documented the myth of the "angry Black woman" (Collins, 2000; West, 1994). This image plays out in several different narratives in U.S. culture. Some of the participants referred to their mothers as a matriarch without understanding the negative historical racial and gender-based connotation it carries.

The image of the matriarch (also termed the failed mammy), which was created to denote the role and responsibility of the African American woman in the social and economic failure of African American families. That is, the overly aggressive, unfeminine matriarch, rather than focusing on discriminatory social policies and economic inequalities, she emasculated her African American male partner. Additionally, her willingness to assume the traditional male role led to the emasculation and unemployment of African American men. (Collins, 2000)

Of course, the men who referred to their mothers as matriarchs were unknowingly using a term that has been assigned to single Black mothers to categorize them and further oppress Black women. Consequently, this argument is not being made to further pathologize Black men through condemnation or judgment. This point is being made to speak to the long-standing racist and oppressive system and norms to which Blacks are expected to thrive in and the magnitude of internalized oppression within some members of the Black community.

*Sub-theme #3: Conflicted feelings towards Black women.* All of the participants shared they had conflicted feelings of anger, frustration, and understanding towards Black women. Several of the participants expressed frustration and anger towards some Black women who they felt were combative. Similar to what some of the participants expressed about their mothers, most of the men shared they felt some Black women “always had to be right”. Some participants compared their mothers to Black women. From a psychological standpoint, this finding is in line with various psychological developmental theories that posit that individuals are attracted to people who remind them of their primary caregiver (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Conversely, other studies suggest that Black men who hold feelings of resentment or anger towards their mothers are more likely to project those feelings onto Black women (Chaney, 2012; Jordan, 2009; Thompson, 2003). This is not to suggest this is the cause for all of the participants’ feelings towards Black women. However, connecting the findings to current research helps to contextualize the participants’ opinions and perceptions of and about Black women through a more psychological and sociological human developmental lens.

Some of the participants also expressed feelings of anger and frustration towards Black women because of experiences they have had with some women who they felt perpetuate negative stereotypes. For example, some of the participants discussed their frustration toward some Black

women they have observed who have embodied certain personas that are typically seen in music videos or reality television shows such as, “Love and Hip Hop” and “Basketball Wives”. Although all of the participants were vocal about their strong dislike for some Black women’s behavior, they were also very clear in their understanding of the role that popular culture has played in the development of these oppressive stereotypes and socially constructed roles of Black women. With that said, the mens’ anger was not directed towards popular culture, historical racism, or White supremacy. The participants directed their anger directly towards Black women. In fact, although implicit in their statements, the participants never used the words like, “oppression” or “racism”.

While using Helms’ “Black racial identity development model” to assist in analyzing the findings, the men appeared to fall into what Helms refers to as the immersion phase (1990). The immersion phase is described, as the third of a six-stage model in which a man or woman feels rejected by Whites through experiences characterized by instances of racism and oppression and begins to attempt to establish his or her own Black racial identity. However one characteristic the men demonstrated during the study that was not congruent with the criteria described in the immersion stage was reflected in how and to whom they directed their anger while discussing Black women. When expressing their feelings of anger and frustration towards Black women, it appeared the participants fell between the first and second stage of Helms’ racial identity model: the pre-encounter and encounter stages. The pre-encounter stage is described as a period in which a Black man or woman aspires to assimilate into the expectations of the dominate culture.

The encounter phase is characterized by a member of the Black community being forced to acknowledge his or her cultural identity as a result of a sequence of events of being rejected and marginalized by Whites. The men demonstrated characteristics described in the encounter phase by expressing an awareness of the negative stereotypes and socially constructed roles that have been

made of Black women through current negative images of Black women in the media. However, as discussed prior, the participants directed their anger towards Black women and did not express any feelings of displeasure with those who have created the negative images of Black women that exist. That is, it appeared the men felt safer directing their anger towards Black women, which was interesting given my positionality to the researcher by me being a Black woman.

### **Theme #2: Male Mentorship**

The findings indicated a strong relationship between having a consistent male mentor and the healthy development of a young boy into adolescence and adulthood. Although all the participants shared that male mentorship is important in a young man's life, only three of the 11 men reported their fathers serving as a consistent and positive male mentor throughout adolescence into adulthood. The number of men who reported their father serving as a consistent and positive male influence supports current research.

Although research shows that 67% of Black fathers who do not live with their children see them monthly compared to 59% of White fathers, these statistics do not examine the quality of the relationship these fathers have with their sons (Dunbar, Perry, Cavanaugh, & Leerkes, 2015). In fact, three of the participants shared they were in the presence of their fathers frequently; however, they also reported their fathers' presence did not provide a positive influence.

These findings suggest that a man's physical presence in his child's or children's lives is not synonymous with facilitating as a positive role model or being instrumental in their son's journey into manhood. It has been found that young Black men who had a consistent and positive male presence in their lives presented with marginally lower feelings of anger, depression, and sadness as compared to young Black men whose fathers were either in their lives but did not serve as a positive male influence or who were completely absent from their sons' lives (Williams, 2011). It

has also been found that young boys tend to experience fewer issues with anger, sadness, and depression when the father is absent from the home compared to the father being present but having an inconsistent and/or not serving as a positive influence (Dunbar et al., 2015).

With that said, it has also been found that a father's level of socialization within U.S. society has not been shown to have a relationship with a young man's depressive symptoms, but has been shown to influence other modeling and mimicking behaviors. For example, if a young boy witnesses his father not being in the home regularly he may either demonstrate behaviors that are the exact opposite of his father and have a strong presence in his child's life or he might follow in his father's footsteps and not have an active role in his child's life at all. It is also important to mention, in relationship to fatherhood, almost all of the participants had children out of wedlock or were not married or in a relationships with the mother of their child or children. This includes one of the four men who were married. Although this might suggest that many of the participants may have followed in their father's footsteps, it does not confirm causation.

Despite the majority of the participants reporting not feeling that their fathers served as a consistent positive male role model or mentor in their lives, all but one of the participants said they had a man in their lives who provided a positive and consistent male influence. Most of the men said their uncles acted as their mentors. Others reported that family friends, youth pastors, and members of Black Greek organizations served as their mentors. As previously mentioned, all the men agreed about the importance of mentorship in a young man's development. Many of the participants named various reasons why mentorship is instrumental in a young man's life that were specific to race. The participants' discussed the various experiences many young Black men experience and the benefit that mentorship contributes in helping an adolescent Black male in navigating those experiences. To that end, the men who shared not having a consistent positive

male role model or mentor, shared they felt many of the obstacles and challenges they were faced with would have been easier to handle if they had a mentor to provide them with guidance.

Additionally, all of the men expressed their thoughts on the importance of mentorship in a young boy's life in relationship to how one experiences and defines masculinity or manhood.

### **Theme #3: Masculinity**

The findings revealed that there is a relationship between masculinity and how this group of men build romantic relationships. The findings also revealed a correlation between the process of how this group of men defined and experienced masculinity and how they build relationships. The men shared various struggles they experienced in defining and asserting their masculinity. A common struggle among some of the men was related to not having their father or another consistent and positive male influence in their lives as children. Furthermore, all the participants agreed that men provide a specific type of support and encouragement that a mother or woman cannot provide.

Similar to current literature, the findings showed that the process of defining, experiencing, and asserting masculinity differs for men among varying racial and ethnic groups (Chaney, 2012). It has been found that Black men struggle to meet conventional standards of masculinity that have been constructed by and for White men who have access to power and privilege that exceeds that of Black men (Englar-Carlson, 2006). When examining how some Black men construct masculinity, *intersectionality* also becomes a vital part of this examination especially when looking at Black men who were raised in low SES neighborhoods and households. Consequently, class and SES act as additional intersecting factors that contribute to the marginalization of Black men.

There also appeared to be a strong association with money and financial ability in how the men viewed masculinity. All of the men referred to money when sharing how they defined



masculinity. Along with money, there was also a relationship between being the leader in the family and how the men defined masculinity. Again when looking at the earning potential and topics related to employment and income in relationship to race, it is important to consider access, power, and privilege. This is especially true when looking at socially constructed gender roles and expectations. According to U.S. traditional norms, men are expected to work and women are expected to take care of the home. If we look back on shows like “Leave it to Beaver” and “Father Knows Best” we see a very similar narrative. In fact, based on current research most American men associate masculinity with financial resources and the ability to sustain a household through income and leadership (Chaney, 2012). Consequently, Black men are held and hold themselves to the same standards as, say, White men but are faced with different challenges such as discrimination at the work place, institutionalized oppression, and glass ceilings. These added obstacles make it that much harder for many Black men to occupy traditional roles that have been created to define masculinity in the U.S., which can indirectly impact how Black men build romantic relationships.

#### **Theme #4: Conflict between Personal Desire and Social Messages about Relationships**

Similar to the study’s findings related to masculinity and the mens’ opinions about masculinity, they all expressed experiencing a conflict between having a desire to be in a romantic relationship and social messages they received about relationships, marriage, and commitment. Furthermore, similar to masculinity and gender-based roles, this conflict seemed to impact how the men build romantic relationships with Black women.

The men expressed this conflict manifesting through what they felt to be both societal and familial pressures and expectations. Moreover, the men talked about the conflicted nature of these expectations. Like masculinity, most of the men reflected on the expectations they felt their family and friends placed on them to be “players” and having multiple women as opposed to societal

messages that would echo the same message while simultaneously encouraging marriage and family. The opposing messages seemed to cause a great deal of confusion among the participants, causing them to sometimes unintentionally sabotage their previous romantic relationships. The participants expressed either currently wanting to be in a relationship or having the desire to be in a relationship at one point in their lives but being torn by conflicting direct and indirect messages they received from their family and society as a whole.

Current research suggests one of the most significant challenges between Black men and women are issues related to internalized oppression (Chaney, 2009). Research tells us that some Blacks subscribe to stereotypes that have been created about Black women: the jezebel and the angry Black woman or the matriarch (Collins, 2009). This is true for both Black men and women. Earlier in the chapter, we discussed the perpetuation of the image of the matriarch in single Black mother homes. More specifically, we discussed several participants who referred to their mothers as the matriarch because they felt their mothers had a rigid yet powerful demeanor. In fact, those participants did not seem to realize they were actually using a term that was created to be used a derogatory and oppressive term towards Black single mothers. We also discussed the jezebel stereotype as described by some of the men who expressed their anger towards Black women who embodied various stereotypes that sexualize Black women. Not only do we know that internalized oppression within the Black community is real, we also know that men who are raised in single Black mother homes are 4 times more likely to subscribe to these stereotypes about Black women than Black men who are in two-parent Black homes (Beach et al., 2009). Consequently, when examining how messages the men received about relationships have conflicted with their intrinsic desire for companionship not only with a woman, but a Black woman specifically, it is detrimental to look through the lens of oppression and anti-Black racism.

### **Theme #5: Gender Roles in Relationships**

The study found that this group of men's opinions about gender-based relationship roles impacted not only how they build romantic relationships with Black women but also how they defined, experienced, and asserted their masculinity as it relates to building romantic relationships with Black women. Most of the men shared that they considered their opinions about relationship roles to be "traditional". Similar to how most of the men defined masculinity, all but one of the participants shared they felt men should be the primary financial provider in his relationship. Likewise, the men also said women should support their significant other and "make the man feel like a man".

The findings are very similar to studies that have been done previously. According to *scripts theory*, men and women both assign and occupy specific roles in romantic relationships. These roles are socially and culturally constructed through both family and society (Eyre et al., 2012). *Scripts theory* can be applied to better understand any romantic relationship regardless of racial or ethnic background. In order to examine the men's opinions about gender-based roles and how their opinions shape how they build romantic relationships, once again, it is important to also examine how race and gender intersect with socially constructed values and norms related to gender roles in relationships. As discussed in the previous section on masculinity, a conflict emerged between the men's opinions about financial responsibility and their ability and access to resources when we look at factors such as racism in the workplace and employment discrimination.

### **Theme #6: Fear of Rejection**

Fear of rejection was found to share a connection with how this group of Black men build romantic relationships with Black women. All the participants expressed feelings of anger abandonment and rejection by either their fathers, mothers, or Black women. Many of the

participants expressed a history of being rejected thereby leaving them almost numb yet still fearful of rejection. Not only did the men share previous experiences of rejection from Black women they also expressed experiencing societal rejection. This is in line with a study Chaney (2012) did examining Black mens' attitudes towards marriage. Many of the men in that qualitative study shared similar sentiments. As mentioned before, because men are expected to meet certain expectations related to wealth, masculinity, and overall success, an additional layer of complexity is added for Black men (Mincey, Alfonso, Hackney, Luque, 2015). Historically, Blacks in general have been rejected time and time again.

Rejection in relationships is no different from the rejection the men expressed experiencing in other capacities. Consequently, some of the participants shared that they developed various coping strategies and defense mechanisms to deal with their fears of rejection. Despite the desire for companionship, one of the primary strategies for dealing with rejection was avoiding relationships and commitment altogether. One participant shared that he always mentally prepares himself for relationships to dissolve or some other form of disappointment. He then said, "I'm sure this effects the relationships I've been in... Not for the best." The men also vocalized a desire and the ability to move past their fears of rejection in order to fulfill their desire for companionship. Moreover, the men also demonstrated a strong desire to be in relationships with Black women specifically.

### **Significance of the Findings**

The findings from this study are significant to the profession of counseling for a number of reasons. First, in relation to the gap in research this study addressed, they reflect the lived experiences of Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes and how they build romantic relationships with Black women. Second, the study also examines the role masculinity plays in this process. This is the first research study, of which I am aware, that simultaneously

explored both Black single mother homes and how Black men build romantic relationships with Black women. Additionally, the findings are significant because they contribute to the limited empirical research that exist within the profession about current and more contemporary issues and trends related to family, relationships, marriage, and commitment within marginalized groups. The study is also significant because the results reflect the narratives of 11 Black men within the context of racism, oppression, and White supremacy while providing implications for practice within the profession.

The themes that emerged from the participants' narratives can help inform counselor educators and practicing counselors about various factors that can impact and influence romantic relationships, marriage, and the family structure in effort to contribute an overall awareness and knowledge of some of the historical and current issues that affect Blacks -- Thus, contributing to multicultural counseling competence and ultimately helping counselors in becoming more effective when working with clients from the Black community. Additionally, the findings can help practitioners develop new and more relevant strategies and interventions when working with clients and students who might have previously or who are currently experiencing similar circumstances. It is imperative that counselor educators and counselors not only become better educated on the experiences of individuals from marginalized communities, it is also crucial that counselor educators and counselors make an intentional effort to contribute to the current literature designed to improve and create new interventions and perspectives about working with Black clients.

In order to provide a more detailed discussion about the significance of the study, in this section I will: 1) problematize the conceptual framework used to analyze the data and expose some of the gaps that were found as a result of the study's findings; 2) discuss the ways in which the study has expanded the theories used to analyze the data; 3) explain how the findings contribute to

the current discourse about this population; and 4) provide a discussion about the implications of the findings to profession of counseling.

### **Theory**

While examining the results of the study, I asked myself a number of questions. First, why did the participants only express conflicting feelings of anger and frustration towards Black women for perpetuating stereotypes, but not express anger towards the society in which they referred to frequently as the root cause? Secondly, why did the men not express anger about the socially constructed roles they identified that were in some cases unattainable for certain Black men to occupy? Third, why didn't any of the men express anger or frustration about how White supremacy has rejected them and generations of Black men before them? Furthermore, why did the participants appear to be reluctant to refer directly to terms and concepts such as racism and oppression when discussing socially constructed roles that have been made for Black women but were able to discuss their thoughts and feelings on the effects of racism explicitly when talking about Black fatherhood and their own fathers? Lastly, why did the men only bring up Whites when making a comparison between their experiences of White women being more agreeable than some Black women? In other words, what prevented the participants from explicitly stating their opinions about racism, and instead, using society as a synonym for Whites or White supremacy? While wrestling with these questions, the first thought that came to mind was *internalized oppression*.

Using Black racial identity development model was beneficial in conceptualizing some of these questions in terms of the participants' racial identity and their own world-views within the context of being a Black man exposed to various forms of oppression and racism in America. As a result, I was able to make an educated guess as to where the participants might place on the model's scale. Although Helms discussed the fluidity inherent in the six stages of racial identity and

development, stating that individuals can occupy any number of the six stages simultaneously, the model does not entirely take into consideration *intersectionality*.

Critical race theory and the Black racial identity development model worked complimented one another well because critical race theory offered a meta-analysis of how race, privilege, and power, affect people of color and Black racial identity development model provided more of a microanalysis on the racial identity development of the men through the lens race, power, and oppression. However, placing an intentional and specific focus on how gender, race, and class intersect in the marginalization of Blacks helped me consider the role that gender norms and expectations played alongside the participants' racial development. For example, using intersectionality along with Black racial identity development model helped me to better understand why the men might have expressed more empathy towards their fathers compared to their mothers or Black women. Consequently, this study expanded Black racial identity development model and offered a more nuanced perspective of exploring the population by not only including features of critical race theory, but mainly through examining the mens' feelings and thoughts by analyzing the intersection of race and gender.

### **Contribution to Current Research**

In addition to the contributions the study made to the profession of counseling and how the study's findings expanded current theory, the study also contributed to the current discourse about some features of the Black community related to marriage, family, intimacy, fatherhood, and masculinity. Furthermore, the findings have contributed to existing research about this population though a non-deficit approach, which has been a widely criticized framework that has been used in some research on Blacks (Connell et al., 2005). In the true essence and philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research and constructivism, using critical race theory, Helm's "Black racial identity

development model”, and intersectionality to analyze the findings provided the space to authentically explore the 11 mens’ narratives and lived experiences with the understanding that the participants’ world view influenced how they understand themselves (Creswell, 2009). More specifically, the mens’ understanding of themselves as Black men and how they understand others is socially constructed not only by their personal experiences, but also by larger sociological forces outside of themselves.

The study also contributes to the current discourse by taking into account that the participants’ self-concept and their lived experiences have also been shaped their world views and have also been co-constructed by larger societal factors. Consequently, this study provides a unique and rich discussion about the lived experiences of this population by also looking at the cyclical relationship of how their personal experiences and various sociological factors intersect and have co-constructed their world views and how they understand themselves in a way that does not contribute to the pathology of Blacks; but instead provides a more critical understanding when researching this population within the context of systemic oppression, intersectionality, and racial identity.

### **Implications for the Practice**

The findings provide a vivid picture of the 11 participants’ lived experiences .The study also presents a compelling argument about some of the needs Black men might have relative to counseling. However, in what ways do the findings better inform practitioners in the field? Additionally, what inferences can be made from the findings in terms of counseling theory? The themes for this study revealed a number of implications for counselor educators, individual clinical mental health counselors, group counselors, school-based counselors, and other professionals in the mental health field who work with people of color.



**Counselor educators.** In 2012, the high profile court case for the murder of Trayvon Martin created a media frenzy behind the killing of the unarmed Black 17-year-old who was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a 28-year volunteer neighborhood watch captain, when Martin was walking home from a local convenience store after purchasing candy and a beverage. In 2014, incidents of excessive force by White police officers that resulted in the deaths of several unarmed young Black boys and men such as, Tamir Rice (12 years old), Michael Brown Jr. (18 years old), and Eric Garner (43 years old), and others further exposed and confirmed racial tensions in America. These horrific incidents also exposed the bitter reality about racism that many Black men face on a daily basis.

During this time, professionals in clinical mental health fields such as counseling psychology began contributing to empirical and evidence based research about working with clients from marginalized communities; and Black men specifically (Daniel & Searson, 2015). At the Association of Counselor Educators and Supervisors' bi-annual 2015 conference, the program was bursting with numerous presentations discussing various strategies on how to instruct CITs on vital components of multicultural and cross-cultural counseling competence and the importance of serving as social justice advocates for their clients. However, despite the interest and concern that various members in the counseling field expressed about the mental health and wellness of Black men, virtually no research was produced to help members of the profession create more culturally relevant and nuanced ways to research and work with Black male clients in theory or in practice. The results of this study reflect very similar realities that were reflected in the killings of Martin, Garner, and others. That is, the study not only provides a description of the lived experiences of Black men with regard to family and intimacy, the study also provides significant implications for

the counseling profession on the importance of understanding how the racial landscape in America has continued to marginalize and oppress Black men.

When examining current curriculum for a number of mental health and school based counseling masters programs, one common theme that can be found among some of these programs is the routine “Counseling Diverse Populations” course. Better yet, when looking at syllabi that has been downloaded onto the American Counseling Association’s website, many of the programs only designate one to three class sessions to discuss topics related to counseling individuals from marginalized communities. Based on the findings of this study, I argue that issues related multicultural counseling should be integrated throughout the entire curriculum and not treated as an obligatory gesture. Furthermore, the findings indicate the need for counselor educators to create curriculum that has been developed and implemented with an intentional and deliberate focus on social justice, advocacy, and multicultural and cross-cultural competence. Although this study focuses on Black men, family, and intimacy, the findings also highlight a need for CITs to take courses that increase knowledge about various marginalized groups in terms of their lived experiences and their social location in relationship to power and privilege in the United States.

For example, curriculum should include seminars that provide a safe environment for CITs to discuss their own racial identity, biases, and world-views as well as some of the historical and current trends that affect Blacks. Helms’ racial identity model, is not only a useful tool for CITs to be trained on to help conceptualize their Black and White clients relative to issues related to race, but the model is also useful in helping Black and White CITs better understand their own racial identity and the ways in which it may affect their identity as a counselor and how they work with clients and students of color. Opportunities to promote awareness and encourage introspection and critical discussion about race can also be carried out through having students write journals,

assigning course work that involves reading about and discussing current events pertaining to people of color, and inviting a panel of guest speakers from various marginalized groups to share their experiences with CITs related to race and racism.

Lastly, the findings highlight the need for CEs to remain current on research and recent events related to Blacks and individuals from other marginalized communities. Similar to what has been said about training CITs, counselor educators should be aware of their own world-view and racial identity and how their racial identity could effect working with Black male CITs. The findings indicate that some Black men experience various struggles related to conflicting feelings towards their parents and Black women. The study also suggests the participants experienced distinct and unique challenges related to asserting their masculinity and building romantic relationships along with fears of rejection, and the positive impact consistent male mentorship had on all of these factors. This information is not only important for CEs to disseminate to CITs, but this information also provides further insight to CEs on how to be effective educators in the classroom when working with Black male CITs. More specifically, the study reflects the need for CEs to be aware of how these themes might have an impact on Black male CITs world views and their experience of instructors who are not Black or who are Black women. Research about Black male CITs argues that many do not feel supported by their faculty (Tennille, 2011). As a result of the low number of Black male CEs and practicing counselors, Black male CITs report that it is challenging to connect or receive mentorship from faculty with whom they share similar experiences with and cannot relate to some of the challenges they encounter as a Black men in the profession.

The findings also imply the need for CEs to incorporate experiential learning activities such as case studies and role playing exercises to help CITs better conceptualize possible issues that

might arise and brain storm relevant strategies and interventions to use when working with Black male clients and other people of color. Adult learners can greatly benefit from certain behaviors and attitudes being modeled in the classroom by the CE for them to mimic (Bandura, 1993).

Consequently, it is imperative for CEs to feel comfortable talking about issues related to racism and oppression. More specifically, CE's should be willing to share some of their own prejudices and how they inform them as counselors. This is especially helpful for White CITs who might struggle with feelings of guilt or shame for the discrimination and oppression Blacks experience. Self-disclosure is a strategy that CEs can also use to normalize CITs possible feelings of anxiety and angst for having various biases and prejudices.

*Counselors.* The results of the study also have several implications for clinical mental health counselors, marriage, couple, and family therapist, and school counselors. Regardless as to whether a clinical mental health counselor is providing services to clients at an agency or a private practice, being aware of the some of the lived experiences of Blacks can be instrumental in assisting the counselor in creating a therapeutic alliance with his or her client. As discussed earlier, one of the reasons Blacks reported not seeking counseling services is due to an overall mistrust of Whites. The findings of this study reflect the mens' challenges in being a Black man who is trying to meet the expectations of socially constructed definitions of masculinity, manhood, and success that have been created by White supremacy and White privilege.

Additionally the findings also reflected the mens' fears of rejection. Although the participants mainly referred to their fears of rejection caused by some of their interactions with Black women and their parents, most of the men also shared pain they experienced as a result of feeling rejected by White America. Being able to relate to the client by demonstrating an awareness and interest in their experiences may help break down barriers of mistrust. In addition, it is equally

important for counselors to also be knowledgeable about various systems of oppression that exist in the U.S. that adversely affect members of the Black community. This can also help to build a stronger and more trusting therapeutic alliance between the counselor and client.

The findings also help inform assessment and can help prevent misdiagnosis. Assessment is an integral part of diagnosis and treatment (Whiston, 2013). Furthermore, a counselor should be well-versed in how to select, administer, and explain the results of any instrument or assessment he or she uses to diagnosis clients. This not only applies to evaluating the psychometric properties of the instrument, this also applies to the counselor having an understanding of the difference between norm referenced and criterion referenced assessments relative to working with clients from marginalized populations. For example, most instruments that measure diagnoses such as depression and anxiety use a set of criteria to assess where the client falls within a certain continuum. The Beck Depression Inventory is a criterion-referenced assessment. Some of the themes revealed in this study might influence how a Black male client would answer questions on the inventory. Masculinity and fear of rejection are two themes that might influence the client to answer questions in a way that is not completely truthful. Consequently, it is important for counselors to have an active knowledge of the some of the factors that could affect assessment scores and have additional strategies for diagnosis to use in conjunction with traditional forms of assessment.

The same can be said about selecting interventions and strategies when working with a Black male client. Based on the findings, it would also be beneficial for counselors to consider the intersection of race, gender, and class in relationship to some of the themes from the study. Feminist counseling strategies might be one way to help counselors when conceptualizing some Black male clients in relationship to their social position in America when assessing their

presenting symptoms (Evans, 2005). This would also allow for counselors to take into consideration the client's SES, as well as psychocultural, sociocultural, and socio-racial factors that might have an influence on how the client is presenting or more appropriate interventions to use with the client (Helms, 1995).

Group counselors and marriage, couple, and family therapists can also benefit from this study. For example, group counselors can modify traditional group theory by conceptualizing groups progress and development through a socioracial, sociocultural, and psychocultural lens that contextualizes the group and how members interact with one another as a microcosm of how group members might present in the outside world with regard to race. Furthermore, any one of the stages of group process such as *norming*, *storming* and *performing* might look very different with a group of Black men compared to a group of men from a different racial or ethnic background.

The study suggests several implications for school counselors as well. This is especially true for school counselors who work in urban school environments with a large population of Black students. There is a good chance school counselors working in this environment might work with Black male students who are being raised in single Black mother homes. Consequently, it is crucial for school counselors to be aware of some of the possible experiences that could affect Black male students mentally, emotional, academically, and socially. Lack of mentorship appeared as a significant factor that could impact how a Black male adolescent develops. If the student is reluctant to speak with counselors, having an understanding of some of the student's possible experiences can inform school counselors on how to approach the student to help him feel more trusting in using them as a resource. This is also important when considering the other themes that were revealed such as fear of rejection. Overall issues that a Black male student might experience can also play a large role in their performance academically, their behavior, and their emotional and

mental stability. Consequently, before placing a student on an independent education plan or suspending him for fighting excessively, it would be important for school counselors to keep these factors in mind and attempt to determine the root cause of the student's behavior.

The findings from the study provide some information about how Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women and how masculinity shapes that process. There are numerous factors that influence the development of Black men as it relates to building romantic relationships. Many of these factors intersect and share relationships with one another. Factors related to historical and current racism and oppression also have a significant impact on the development of Black men as well. Consequently, when exploring issues related to the socialization and development of Black men it is important to consider multiple perspectives and not conduct research, teach, or work with a Black males in a counseling capacity using a single method approach. The complex nature of the experiences of Black men necessitates a dynamic and complex conceptualization and approach.

### **Limitations**

The objective of this study was to explore how Black men conceptualize romantic relationships, how they learn about romantic relationships, and messages they received about romantic relationships. Furthermore, how family of origin shapes this process specifically with Black women. A qualitative research method was used in order to provide the participants the opportunity to share their lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings as they related to their family of origin and previous and current relationships. Using in-depth and open-ended questions was beneficial in not only collecting rich data, but also in allowing for a smaller sample size in order to achieve saturation (Creswell, 2009). Themes began to repeat themselves within the first six individual interviews, which was a strong indication of saturation.

Data collection for this study included one focus group session with 11 men and was proceeded by individual interviews with each participant. Although it is acceptable to only have 11 participants when conducting semi-structured focus groups and individual interviews (Creswell, 2009), the sample size was not large enough to make generalizations. Another limitation of the study was related to the participants all being from various cities in Missouri or Illinois. Although the purpose of this study was not to make generalizations in the same way a quantitative study would, if one wished to do so, this sample characteristic would prohibit generalizations from being made.

Another limitation of the study was related to the interview protocol. Although race was brought up throughout the interviews and became a significant factor throughout the analysis of the findings, the interview protocol did not include direct questions about race other than inquiring about the men's perceptions of Black women. However, when issues related to race, gender, and stereotypes emerged, I posed follow-up questions to gain a more detailed response from the men. One of the most significant limitations of the study was my positionality to the research. By me being a Black woman, as previously mentioned, some of the participants might have answered questions differently. This is especially true due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions that were posed during both the individual interviews and the focus group. Although, I was interested to observe any differences in the men's behaviors between the focus group and the individual interviews, I cannot help but wonder if my positionality skewed the findings. In fact, one of the participants asked me out to on a date at the conclusion of his individual interview, which I believe is an indication that he might not have been completely transparent during interviews in an attempt to make himself more desirable. Despite the study's limitations, numerous steps were taken and great care was placed to ensure the study was conducted ethically and to address trustworthiness via



multiple methods of data collection, member checks, the use of professional transcription, and numerous types of coding methods both by hand and through the use of NVivo software.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The study provided a rich narrative to help better understand how some Black men build romantic relationships with Black women relative to family of origin. However, there are additional topics and issues that emerged during the study that should be examined further. The first recommendation for further research would be related to the use of Helms' "Black racial identity development model". Using the model as one of the conceptual frameworks to analyze the findings was beneficial in conceptualizing the participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings through the lens of racial identity. Using this model as part of a mixed methods or a purely qualitative study would be my first recommendation for further research. While conducting the focus group session and the individual interviews, I reflected on which of the six stages were characteristic of the men in terms of their self-concept and how they viewed others. However, because that was not the purpose or primary objective of the study, I only used the model to analyze the findings. Consequently, additional research should be aimed at better understanding how and if racial identity effects how Black men build romantic relationships with Black women.

My second recommendation for additional research would be to further explore the relationship between Black men and their mothers and their feelings and perceptions of Black women and how they build romantic relationships with Black women. Building off of the second recommendation, my third recommendation would be to conduct a study to explore the effects of popular culture on Black mens' views of fatherhood. Additionally, further research should be conducted to look at what factors contribute to unwed fathers remaining in their child's life.

From a theoretical standpoint, my last recommendation for research would be for attachment theory to be used in conjunction with critical race theory to further examine this research topic. Attachment theory and other psychodynamic approaches to counseling and psychotherapy might help explain how and why the participants' experiences with their mothers had such a large impact on how they build relationships as opposed to the impact the relationship they had with their father.

### **Conclusion**

There is a presence of current research that exists on Black single mother homes and the relationship dynamic between Black men and women (Chaney, 2009; Connell, et al., 2005; Williams, 2011). Still, much of the current research tends to lean towards more of a deficit approach or does not provide a detailed discussion on the effects of White supremacy and the various forms of oppression that also affect these and other topics related to the Black community (Connell et al., 2005). Consequently, I felt the need to conduct a qualitative study to explore both phenomena simultaneously, with a non-deficit approach using Helms's racial identity model and critical race theory with a focus on intersectionality.

The study's findings supported current literature on mentorship having an impact on masculinity and masculinity having an impact on how men build romantic relationships with women. Furthermore, the findings were also similar to current literature that indicates Black men have a different experience in how they define, assert, and experience masculinity and the process of how masculinity effects how they build romantic relationships. Other themes that emerged from the study included the participants expressing having conflicted feelings towards their parents and Black women, conflicts between personal desire and social messages about relationships, opinions about gender roles in romantic relationships, and fear of rejection. Current literature has found

results that are similar to the six themes; however, there are subtle differences. Additionally, the study added to existing literature by acknowledging and discussing the participants' experiences relative to their racial identity and societal forces in greater detail.

The question is not "if" but "how". Research suggests that Black men are getting involved in romantic relationships. Furthermore, the research also suggests Black men are getting married. Perhaps, not at the rate of their White male peers, but they are getting married and they are also entering into committed relationships (Barrie, 2009). The findings of this study revealed the same outcome, with four of the participants who reported being, "happily married." It was also found that the participants having negative feelings towards their fathers did not negatively affect their desire to get married or enter relationships. However, there was a relationship between how some of the men build relationships and their experiences being raised in a single Black mother homes. Similarly, current literature argues that Black men who are raised in single Black mother homes are less likely to feel comfortable sharing feelings of sadness or depression (Henfield, 2012).

In fact, some of the men's conflicted feelings of anger, frustration, and resentment towards their mothers had a negative impact on their views and perspectives of Black women. Additionally, as previously discussed, several of the participants expressed feelings of anger and resentment towards their mother for not being in the home regularly due to their work schedule. Some of the same participants reported having positive or indifferent feelings towards their fathers who they reported had an inconsistent and somewhat negative presence in their lives. Furthermore, how the men build romantic relationships with Black women appeared to be influenced more by their feelings towards their mothers than their fathers.

The intersection of race and gender along with traditional American White gender-based norms appeared to have an effect on the men's feelings about their mothers, fathers, and Black

women. The participants appeared to have higher expectations of their mothers in relationship to being present in the home and sustaining the family unit. The participants seemed to also use a different set of expectations that did not require their fathers to be consistently in the home. It also appeared that the men expressed an inequity of empathy towards the mothers compared to their fathers. This finding supports current literature which indicates that Black men who are raised in single Black mother homes typically have a strong desire to be respected and to remain loyal to their father despite their fathers' involvement in their lives or lack thereof (Beach et al., 2009).

When the participants expressed anger and frustration towards some Black women for being combative and perpetuating negative stereotypes, they directed their feelings towards Black women and virtually no blame was placed with the structure that created the stereotypes. The men appeared to have an awareness of the detrimental impacts of racism and oppression in the Black community in which they discussed when some of the men explained their feelings about their fathers' absence. Furthermore, the men were able to articulate how they felt historical racism and oppression has negatively impacted the Black family structure with regard to their fathers' decisions, but did not make the same connections when discussing their feelings about their mothers and Black women.

Black racial identity model and critical race theory, with a focus on intersectionality, was instrumental in analyzing the mens' feelings towards their parents and Black women. Using both theories helped to conceptualize the mens' narratives in relationship to their racial identity and how systemic racism, internalized oppression, and White supremacy has impacted their understanding of themselves and others. Because the men seemed to vacillate between the first three stages of the racial identity model, it helped to better understand how the men were using traditional White gender roles when expressing their opinions about Black women -- that they themselves admitted were not created for Blacks to occupy -- when expressing their feelings about their experiences as

Black men and their fathers. As with many individuals from marginalized groups, this revelation highlighted the effects of internalized racism. That is, some of the men were not aware that the same set of inherently oppressive standards and gender-based expectations that they spoke out against --when directed towards Black men -- were the same type of oppressive standards and gender-based expectations that have had an influence in shaping their feelings and perceptions of their mothers and Black women.

Mentorship was found to be a significant factor in the participants' lives. The men all shared various challenges they experienced throughout their adolescence and expressed the benefits in having a consistent male mentor in their lives to help guide them through some of those challenges. Conversely, some of the men also shared that some of their romantic relationships might have suffered as a result of not having a man in the home to model what being a husband or a committed partner entails. Building off of the participants' feelings about the significance of mentorship, the men also agreed that mentorship played an important role in how they defined, asserted, and experienced masculinity. All of the men shared various challenges that exist in Black men meeting U.S. standards of masculinity.

The group of men also expressed experiencing conflicts between a desire for and social messages about relationship. This theme also shares a close relationship with the three above - mentioned themes. The men expressed, at times, having a desire for companionship and to be in a relationship -- while simultaneously -- receiving social messages and feeling they had to meet certain societal expectations that were not conducive to being in a romantic relationship as a Black man. The participants also shared that they received messages encouraging them to not get involved in romantic relationships and instead date multiple women and use them for their sexual pleasure. Coincidentally, the men shared that they received very similar messages about what masculinity

looks like. On one hand, the men reported that some of their family and friends encouraged them to embody more of a “thug” or “player” persona. On the other hand, the men reported feeling society encouraged marriage and family to some extent, but also encouraged “playing the field” and not committing. The men’s fear of rejection also shared a strong relationship with the other themes. The men expressed fear of rejection as a result of feeling they have been rejected by their parents, Black women, and society.

One of the study’s most significant findings was the power of internalized oppression. Throughout the study, some of the participants shared opinions and thoughts that were deeply embedded in U.S. oppressive norms through instances in which the men appeared to apply double standards in their expectations of men and women which were laced in misogyny. However, it is important to note that this group of Black men have been socialized to subscribe to certain notions about patriarchy and men and women. In fact, like my own, their racial identity is also embedded in White supremacy.

The concept of race itself is a construct created to oppress and maintain White privilege and oppression (Connell et al., 2005; Spaulding & Metcalf, 2015; Williams, 2011). Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity, to some extent, subscribe to certain U.S. norms that are inherently oppressive to individuals from marginalized groups. In fact, Black writers, producers, and directors in the entertainment industry, such as Mona Scott Young and Tyler Perry who write and direct movies and reality television shows have been accused of actively and overtly perpetuating negative and oppressive images of Blacks. For example, Tyler Perry who wrote and directed *Diary of A Mad Black Woman* (2005), has been widely criticized for his character, Madea, who some feel emasculates Black men, supports images of “coonery and buffoonery”, and further perpetuates the angry Black woman stereotype (Spaulding et al., 2015). Similar criticism has been given to the

creator of “Love and Hip Hop”, Mona Scott Young, for projecting images of Black women who are promiscuous and use their bodies for career advancement in the entertainment industry (i.e. “the jezebel”). In fact, the participants themselves referenced the negative images portrayed on Young’s show on several occasions. Consequently, it is no surprise that the men have internalized some of the negative and oppressive images of Blacks that Americans are bombarded with daily. However, what seemed to be missing among some of the men was an awareness of the ways in which they have oppressed themselves and other members of the Black community.

This study provides a clear argument for the need for counselors and CEs to be knowledgeable about historical and current trends and issues related to not only Black men, but individuals from marginalized communities overall. Continued knowledge and awareness can help increase percentages of Blacks who seek counseling, limit misdiagnosis, help create stronger client/counselor relationships, assist CEs in becoming more effective instructors thereby producing more effective counselors, and create and implement more efficacious and culturally appropriate interventions when working with students and clients of color. Furthermore, it is also detrimental for counselors and CEs to have a firm understanding of their own racial identity and world-views in relationship to how they work with their clients and students.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black men who were raised in single mother homes and how they build romantic relationships with Black women using a non-deficit approach. The study offers a rich and detailed narrative of the participants’ lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings related to their parents, Black women, romantic relationships, masculinity, and fatherhood. This qualitative study contributes to the current discourse about this topic by simultaneously exploring Black single parent homes and the relationship dynamic between Black men and women through the lens of race, power, privilege, and oppression. This study also

provides significant implications to the profession of counseling on the importance of being knowledgeable and contributing to current research about the experiences and social positionality of Black men.

### **Researcher's Reflections and a Note of Love**

As a Black single woman who happens to fall in the same age group as many of the participants and who hopes to marry and have my own family someday, it is crucial that I continuously assess my own biases and reactions to the findings. This topic is very personal and near to my heart, as I have personally observed both positive and negative interactions between Black men and women with regard to love, family, commitment, marriage, and intimacy that has left me both hopeful and optimistic yet concerned and disappointed.

While reviewing and analyzing transcripts, research memos, and field notes, I realized there was somewhat of a parallel process taking place between myself and some of the participants. Before I began reviewing current literature on family and relationships in the Black community, I had a somewhat fixed and pessimistic opinion about the relationship dynamic between Black men and women. Although I was raised in a two-parent home in which I observed my parents as being happily married, I also had several friends who did not share the same experience. I never thought I personally had profound issues in relationships, but I was unwed and would often have conversations with friends about positive and negative dating experiences with Black men. Unfortunately, most of what I heard was based on the latter. Also, during this time there was an emergence of negative social media memes and message post circulating that were extremely demeaning and derogatory towards Black women. I witnessed as both Black men and women laughed at posts referring to Black women as “bitches” and “hoes” as almost a synonym for their names.



My pessimism was mainly fueled by disappointment and hurt by some of the interactions between Black men and women that I observed. When I first began my research, I read a number of articles that increased my concern. I then began to expand my network of Black educators and administrators in higher education. One of my mentors recommended that I read *Teaching to Transgress*, *Ain't I a Woman*, and *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* by bell hooks. I then read *Black Feminist Thought and Black Sexual Politics* by Patricia Hills Collins. These books, along with countless meetings with one of my dissertation co-chairs completely changed my perspective. I realized that much of what I read previously was written from a deficit approach, which motivated me to examine the ways in which research in and of itself could pathologize Blacks. I also realized the complex and dynamic nature of issues related to the Black family and intimacy between Black men and women that go beyond my limited opinion and life experiences. Imagine that.

Consequently, I made it my goal to conduct this study from a non-deficit approach that does not contribute to the pathology of Blacks. Furthermore, I wanted to conduct the study in a way that reflected the dynamic nature of this topic. During data collection, many of the men expressed having conflicted feelings with regard to various topics. One of which included their feelings and perceptions of Black women. Despite successfully progressing through what I thought to be a rite of passage in moving more into critical consciousness. I *still* hoped to hear the participants share how much they adored Black women. In fact, at first I felt myself become tense, when the participants began expressing perceptions about Black women that were not completely positive. However as time went on, I began to hear another narrative. I was able to move past my own defensiveness and hear the mens' story behind their stories.

I observed as some of the participants struggled to make sense of their feelings and experiences, which for many of the participants, was the first time they processed their feelings aloud. Just as I was going through a process of consciousness and becoming more aware of the intricate nature of this topic, many of the men were going through a similar process related to their own experiences, as they shared their stories.

I still continued to struggle to maintain a balance between my position between conducting and analyzing the data. Initially, I planned to use Black Feminist Thought to analyze the findings. After going to a job interview in which I blundered through a research colloquium on my very preliminary findings for this research, I received some blunt and direct feedback by a faculty of dynamic counselor educators, counseling psychologists, and professors, which at first made me want to crawl into a hole and cry, and later made me want to jump for joy. I received a number of suggestions from the faculty on how to present and discuss my findings, which marked another breakthrough for me as a developing and evolving researcher, counselor educator, practitioner, and social justice advocate for people of color.

After incorporating some of the feedback I received, I still experienced challenges presenting the findings. I found myself worried about appearing as “the angry Black woman” who was blaming “the White man”. Or, using the Black man as a scapegoat. While revising the second draft of Chapter 5, I realized that I was allowing myself to be oppressed in the same way I am vehemently against. I then decided I would not silence myself. My struggle analyzing the findings for this study is very similar to the struggle I observed the participants experience and is also similar to the struggle that people of color are faced with daily, regardless if we allow ourselves to acknowledge it or decide to turn a blind eye.

The results of the study not only reflect the narratives of 11 Black men who have been hurt and disappointed by a system that was not designed for them to succeed; this study also reflects the evolution of my own cultural identity. I am proud to be a Black woman. Consequently, I had to ask myself, why would I shrink away from my pride and passion? Why would I actively silence my own voice and the voice of the 11 Black men in this study? Answer: to make myself and others feel more comfortable with the reality of what many Blacks experience. I do not seek to make the readers uncomfortable. I also did not anticipate feeling the emotional discomfort I felt while conducting this research. However, I am thankful for the discomfort. I am thankful for the confusion, the embarrassment, the self-doubt, and the moments of insecurity. Most importantly, I am thankful for my growth as a counselor, as a counselor educator, and as a Black woman. I would like to close with a quote by Audre Lorde that I feel reflects my journey as the researcher and my relationship with the research. I dedicate this quote as a love note to this study:

Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down and suggest it's personal. And the world won't end. And the speaking will get easier and easier. And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had. And you will lose some friends and lovers, and realize you don't miss them. And new ones will find you and cherish you. And you will still flirt and paint your nails, dress up and party, because, as I think Emma Goldman said, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution." And at last you'll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix A**  
Interview Protocols

Cover Sheet

Interviewer Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Notes from previous contact:

Notes on Identifiably Issues (fill in following the interview)

## **Project Overview for Participants**

### **Project Overview**

#### Greetings

The purpose of this study is to address the current gap in literature by conducting a qualitative narrative inquiry to explore how American, heterosexual Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women. By addressing this gap, I hope to 1) contribute to the current empirical research in the counseling profession about topics related the Black community and multicultural counseling overall, 2) facilitate counselors and counselor educators in becoming more aware and knowledgeable about specific issues that can affect some Black men related to intimacy, family, and the Black community as a whole, and 3) create a better shared understanding for this topic among counselors and counselor educators that can lead to new, relevant, and effective interventions and strategies when working with members of the Black community. Before I read over the confidentiality and risk reduction procedures, is there anything more you'd like to know about the study?

The focus group session will last approximately 60 minutes and the interview session will last about 45 minutes to 1 hour. I will ask participants to talk about their experiences as a Black man being raised in a single Black mother home and how those experiences have or have not shaped how they build romantic relationships with Black women.

I will treat all responses with a high degree of confidentiality. I will not use your name or the names of other persons mentioned; instead, I will use pseudonyms to refer to persons. I will also use a variety of editing and masking techniques to minimize the risk of revealing your identity. During the interview, please feel free to point out to me any issues that you would like kept "off the record."

I want to clarify that your participation in this study is completely free and voluntary; that you may refuse to respond to any questions; and that you may discontinue with the study at any time. I also want you to know that we are in no way attempting to evaluate your character, opinions, or ability to be a culturally competent member of the community.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

## **Individual Interview Protocol for Black Men who were raised in Single Black Mother Homes**

### **RQ#1: How do some American Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women?**

1. Please describe what your home life was like as a child.
2. Please describe who your primary care giver was.
3. Please describe your relationship growing up with your mother or primary caregiver.
4. Please describe your relationship growing up with your father.
5. Please describe any relationships you had with influential and consistent male figures.
6. Please describe messages that you received from you mother about relationships whether explicit or implicit.
7. Please describe your definition of a romantic relationship.
8. Please describe messages that you received from a male influence in your life about relationships whether explicit or implicit.
9. Please describe the kinds of romantic relationships you witnessed your mother having?

### **RQ #2: How do some American Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes define, experience, and assert masculinity as it relates to building romantic relationships with Black women?**

1. When you think of masculinity, what image(s) and/or word(s) come to mind?
2. What does masculinity mean to you?
3. How do you define masculinity for yourself?
4. What experiences have you had that you feel has shaped or impacted your definition of masculinity?

### **General Dating Questions:**

1. At what age did you begin dating?

2. At what age did you become sexually active?
3. What are your thoughts of how a man should behave in a relationship?
4. What do you think the women's role should be in a relationship?
5. Please describe your first serious relationship?
6. Please describe your current dating life?
7. What do you think have been the largest influences on how you perceive Black women in general?
8. What do you think have been the largest influences on how you perceive dating?
9. What do you think have been the largest influences on how you perceive marriage?
10. What do you think have been the largest influences on how you perceive fatherhood?
11. Please describe what you look for in a relationship?
12. Do you think your perspective would be similar or change if you were raised in a home in which your father's role was different? If so, how?

### **Follow-up**

10. Are there other persons whom you would recommend I speak to, or documents (e.g. secondary sources) that you can provide that would give me a more information about additional leaders who manage programs like this or provide me more information about these types of programs?
11. May I contact you if I have any follow-up questions? What is the best way to do so?

**If you think of anything after today that you would like to add, please feel free to contact me.  
Thank you very much!**

### **Focus Group Interview Protocol for Black Men who were raised in Single Black Mother Homes**



**RQ#1: How do some American Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes build romantic relationships with Black women?**

1. Please describe the kinds of romantic relationships you witnessed your mother having?
2. At what age did you begin dating?
3. At what age did you become sexually active?
4. What are your thoughts of how a man should behave in a relationship?
5. What do you think have been the largest influences on how you perceive Black women in general?
6. What do you think have been the largest influences on how you perceive dating?

**RQ #2: How do some American Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes define, experience, and assert masculinity as it relates to building romantic relationships with Black women?**

1. When you think of masculinity, what image(s) and/or word(s) come to mind?
2. What does masculinity mean to you?
3. How do you define masculinity for yourself?
4. What experiences have you had that you feel has shaped or impacted your definition of masculinity?

## **Appendix B**

**Southern Illinois University – Carbondale  
Counseling Wham 223 - MC 4618  
Carbondale, Illinois 62901**

### **Recruitment E-mail Letter**

Hello,

My name is Maia Moore and I am a doctoral student in the Counselor Education program at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. I am contacting you because you are a Black who was raised in a single mother home between 23 and 43 years of age.

My study seeks contribute to the lack of empirical research on the relationship dynamic between Black men and women, by talking to heterosexual Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes to better understand how they build romantic relationships. Towards this end, this research study has three objectives: 1) contribute to the current empirical research in the counseling profession about topics related the Black community and multicultural counseling overall, 2) facilitate counselors and counselor educators in becoming more aware and knowledgeable about specific issues that can affect some Black men related to intimacy, family, and the Black community as a whole, and 3) create a better shared understanding for this topic among counselors and counselor educators that can lead to new, relevant, and effective interventions and strategies when working with members of the Black community.

I am reaching out to you today to request a time to talk about your experiences as a Black man who was raised in a single Black mother home to hear how your experiences throughout childhood and adolescence has shaped and currently shapes how you build romantic relationships with Black women.

The information I gather from our interviews will help me build a comprehensive picture of how family of origin and childhood experiences impact decisions that are made into adulthood

The study will include participation in one focus group session scheduled for (date) that will be composed of the 9-14 other participants and one in-person one on one interview with myself. If you let me know your schedule, I will set up a time that convenient for us to speak individually after the focus group session.

I can be reached at this e-mail address, [maia.moore@siu.edu](mailto:maia.moore@siu.edu)mailto:[smjones@siu.edu](mailto:smjones@siu.edu). Kimberly Asner-Self, Ed.D. is advising and supervising this research study. Should you wish to reach Dr. Asner-Self she can be contacted at [kasner@siu.edu](mailto:kasner@siu.edu). If you wish to participate in this study, please contact Maia Moore via email and provide a phone number and/or email address where you wish to

be contacted. If you are not able to respond to this inquiry, I would greatly appreciate it if you could refer me to another person who may be able to answer to these questions.

Thanks in advance for your time and consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Maia

## **Appendix C**

**Southern Illinois University – Carbondale  
Counseling Wham 223 - MC 4618  
Carbondale, Illinois 62901**

### **Social Media Recruitment Message**

My study seeks contribute to the lack of empirical research on the relationship dynamic between Black men and women, by talking to heterosexual Black men who were raised in single Black mother homes to better understand how they build romantic relationships. Towards this end, this research study has three objectives: 1) contribute to the current empirical research in the counseling profession about topics related the Black community and multicultural counseling overall, 2) facilitate counselors and counselor educators in becoming more aware and knowledgeable about specific issues that can affect some Black men related to intimacy, family, and the Black community as a whole, and 3) create a better shared understanding for this topic among counselors and counselor educators that can lead to new, relevant, and effective interventions and strategies when working with members of the Black community.

If you wish to participate in this study, please contact Maia Moore via email and provide a phone number and/or email address where you wish to be contacted. I can be reached at this e-mail address, [maia.moore@siu.edumailto:smjones@siu.edu](mailto:maia.moore@siu.edumailto:smjones@siu.edu). If you are not able to respond to this inquiry, I would greatly appreciate it if you could refer me to another person who may be able to answer to these questions.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in the research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4553, Email: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)

## Appendix D

Southern Illinois University – Carbondale  
Counseling Wham 223 - MC 4618  
Carbondale, Illinois 62901

### Informed Consent Form for Participants

The purpose of this form is has two parts:

- To introduce the study and provide information about the study
- To provide participants with information related to informed consent

#### **Introduction**

My name is Maia Niguel Moore, and I am a third year PhD student in the Counselor Education program at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. I am inviting you to participate in a study that I am conducting. The purpose of the study is to explore how the experiences of American Black men raised in single Black mother homes shapes how they build romantic relationships with Black women. You will be provided with information about this study, however, you do not have to decide to participate today and participation is completely voluntary.

#### **Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of this study is to explore how the experiences of Black American men who are raised in single Black mother homes shape the way they build relationships with Black women. Your experiences will be used to better understand the relationship between Black men and women and will be reported in print. The hope of this study is to contribute additional perspectives and better insight into how family of origin plays a role with other sociological issues to shape how Black men build romantic relationships with Black women. Furthermore, to gain better insight into issues around relationships and marriage within the Black community for purposes of research, counseling, and academia.

#### **Method of Study:**

If you choose to participate in this study, it will take approximately 120 minutes of your time, which will be split between one 60 minute one-on-one in person interview and one 60 minute focus group session with 9-14 other participants. Questions will explore your personal experiences related to your home life growing up as a child and experiences into adulthood. Questions will also explore your previous and current perspective about romantic relationships and how you currently build romantic relationships with Black women. Interviews will be audio recorded for purposes of transcription. However, all information will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. Once audio files have been transcribed you will be provided a link to a secured Google document to

confirm the accuracy of the transcription before I start the interpretation and data analysis process. The final data will also be disseminated using the same method. All audio files will be kept safely in a safe and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Only those directly involved with this project will have access to the data. It is my goal to create a safe and protected environment that is conducive for sharing and discussion.

### **Focus Group Session**

All written publications or reports based on this research study and written by the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of individuals in the group. Only group data will be reported and no names will be used. Since a focus group involves a group process, all members of the group will be privy to the discussions that occur during the session; therefore, absolute confidentiality on the part of the participants, themselves, may be difficult to ensure.

I can be reached via email at [maia.moore@siu.edu](mailto:maia.moore@siu.edu) or via phone at 310-251-0823. My research advisors, Kimberly Asner-Self, Ed.D. and Sosanya Jones, Ed.D. can be reached email at [kasner@siu.edu](mailto:kasner@siu.edu) and/or [smjones@siu.edu](mailto:smjones@siu.edu).

***Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research. I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand a copy of this form will be made available to me for the relevant information and phone numbers. I realize that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time. I also acknowledge:***

- My participation in this research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his/her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is 618-453-2368.
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-2368.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.

- If video and/or audio taping is part of this research, I ( ) consent to be audio taped. I ( ) do NOT consent to being audio taped. Only the principal investigator and members of the research team will view the written, video and/or audio taped materials.
- Written, video and/or audio taped materials ( ) may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research ( ) may NOT be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.
- My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

***I have read and understand the material above specifically related to participation in the focus group session. Any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand a copy of this form will be made available to me for the relevant information and phone numbers. I realize that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.***

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in the research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4553, Email: siuhsc@siu.edu

VITA

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Dissertation Paper Title:

“NO COSBY SHOW”: SINGLE BLACK MOTHER HOMES AND HOW BLACK  
MEN BUILD ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Major Professor: Dr. Kimberly Asner-Self