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## Editor's Note: The Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships Is Finally Here

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# Editor's Note

The Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships Is Finally Here

There are a variety of books and published manuscripts that target the sexual experiences of those within the African diaspora or those who consider themselves to have Black heritage (e.g., Battle & Barnes, 2010; Brooks, 2010; Byrd & Sheftall, 2001; Carbado, 1999; Collins, 2000, 2005; Cross, 1991; Hernton, 1988; hooks, 1981, 1989; Lee, 2010; Majors & Billison, 1992; McAdoo, 1997; Myers, 2003; Staples, 1981, 1982, 2006; Turner, 1994). Many of these sexuality narratives introduced, conceptualized, and offered empirical and qualitative accounts about how those of African descent think, feel, and behave. From these works and others collectively, one may learn that sexual expression is socially constructed, represents a continuum, and is influenced by a myriad of factors including race, socioeconomic status, identity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, media, and education (e.g., Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Irvine, 1994; Tiefer, 2000; Seidman, 2009). While the concept of sexuality is broad and functions as an intersection of the above factors as well as biology, psychology, anthropology, physiology, and sociology, for those of African ancestry, there are several major trans-historic factors that drive each of these micro and macro systems.

One significant factor that has influenced Black sexual expression is the legacy of slavery and the interactions between African men and women with Euro-American people and is well documented in the literature (e.g., Blassingame, 1972; Stamp, 1956). Over the past three centuries, perceptions and attitudes have shifted about Blacks (e.g., extrarelatinal sex; homosexuality; masturbation; etc.) while others have remained the same (e.g., beliefs about incest) (Wilson, 1986). In addition to shifting attitudes over time, stereotypes and myths of African American sexuality (e.g., Blassingame, 1972; Elkins, 1959; Hammonds, 1999; Huggins, 1977; Staples, 1995; Wilson, 1986; Wyatt, 1982) that existed centuries ago are still maintained by other ethnic groups as well as Black folks. These sweeping generalizations

do not allow for the collective experience to be reframed to more relativistic and socially constructed experiences and interactions.

Another compelling socio-systemic influence on Black sexuality and relationships is the legacy of oppression, segregation, poor education, and high unemployment. These macro-systemic phenomena have direct micro-systemic impacts and kept some people from developing healthy relationships with themselves, their partners, and their children (Ewert, Sykes, & Pettit, 2014; Wang, Aminawung, Wildeman, & Krumholz, 2013). Conversely, as it relates to socioeconomic status, many of those who have achieved academically and financially have repositioned themselves and their families in a manner that keeps them isolated from those less fortunate and disenfranchised (Small, 2014). Sexuality is influenced by class structures, racial stratification, access to resources and it seems important to understand the impact and implications of social inequities that may serve as undercurrents to healthy affective, cognitive, and behavioral functioning.

Another significant component in the formation and maintenance of Black relationships has been the tragic outbreak of HIV infection. During the latter part of the millennium until the present, HIV transmission has taken on pandemic proportion among men who have sex with men (Andrasik et al., 2013; Dyer et al., 2013; Kelley et al., 2013; Kelly, Difrancesco, Lawrence Amirkhanian, Anderson-Lamb, 2014; Maulsby, Millett, Johnson, Montoya, & Holtgrave, 2014; Schneider et al., 2013; Scott, Vittinghoff, Sachdev, Gurwith, & Buchbinder, 2014), heterosexual Black women (e.g., Brody et al., 2014; Harawa et al., 2014; Stover & Northridge, 2013) and Black adolescents (CDC, 2007, 2009, 2012). Partner availability, selection, communication, and family systems have all been impacted over the past three decades by increased infection rates. Continued prevention and intervention research as well as comprehensive sexuality education programs are needed in order to reduce the likelihood of transmission.

In addition, over the past 15 years, the internet and social media have created new pathways of communication and sexual expression for society in that access to information has increased as well as the expanded potential for mate selection (Fox & Warber, 2013). On the other hand, an increased number of incarcerations (Wang, Aminawung, Wildeman, & Krumholz, 2013), high school drop outs (Ewert, Sykes, & Pettit, 2014), and poor relational skills have made it difficult for some Black women to find suitable male partners to build and nurture romantic relationships with (Painter, 2013; Sharpe, 2012). Black Americans live longer than ever before because of positive attitudes about aging, nutrition, and health awareness

(Levy, Slade, Kunkel, & Kasl, 2002). Because of extended life expectancy, romantic relationship longevity for many black couples may become challenged due to poor communication skills, chronic relational dysfunction, and a lack of resources to sustain lifetime commitments.

Finally, relational diversity and the public acknowledgement of same sex couples recently took center stage when America's first Black president endorsed gay marriages and several African American professional athletes publicly acknowledged their sexual orientation/identity. Black sexuality and relationships will continue to evolve as beliefs, ideas, and values change to accommodate a fast paced society. The journal seeks to capture the evolution, fluidity, and social construction of romantic relationships, friendships, and kinships and how they affect the larger community.

The *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships (JBSR)* is about intimacy and relational (e.g., romantic, friendship, family, etc.) expression and its shifts over time, context, and circumstance as well as how individual and collective interactions reveal themselves. What makes this journal unique is that it is an ongoing collection of quantitative, qualitative, conceptual, and clinical studies specifically targeted at the range of the sexuality of those who are a part of the African diaspora. Race, class, gender, sexual orientation/identity, contraceptive skills, physical and emotional ability, desire/fantasy, parenting, aesthetics, sexual decision making, construction of power, and politics will be addressed in context, with linkages to how each of these factors have impacted individual and systemic sexual and relational expression.

This journal is a scholarly invitation for us to explore and dialogue with others about the evolution of Black sexuality and how it reveals itself in romantic and familial relationships. Scholars from the fields of psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, human services, law, and education have an opportunity to offer critical accounts about how sexuality manifests across various populations.

This quarterly narrative serves to give voice and visibility to groups who have not been adequately addressed or have been misrepresented in the literature. Inasmuch, the journal seeks to be a scholarly forum for those who investigate the experiences of the coerced and manipulated, or those who have yielded their power to unquestioned relational or systemic pressures. The journal serves as a continuation of other Black sexuality works (e.g. Battle & Brown, 2010; Collins, 2005; Wilson, 1986) that have highlighted and validated historic and contemporary changes that have informed intimate decision-making among individuals and selected groups. At the con-

clusion of the scholarly masterpiece, *Black sexualities: Probing powers, passions, practices, and policies* (Battle & Barnes, 2010), one of the editors, Dr. Sandra Barnes, suggests the concept of “doing sexualities”. This infers that subsequent scholarly works about Black sexuality acknowledge “the vast array of sexual realities and expressions that exist and the need to pursue inquiries that can appropriately capture them—meaning more rigorous research from various frames of reference.” The *JBSR* follows this charge as it promotes the scholarly inquiry about intimacy and relational attachments of those who identify with or partner with those from the African diaspora. Additionally, it serves as a formal, conversational medium about strategy development, policy formation, and relevant community initiatives that can improve sexual health.

As a Black sexologist and sexuality therapist, I have had numerous discussions with scholars, clinicians, and students across the country who have expressed that a journal that focuses on sexuality, race, and relationships has been needed for a long time. For those who made this assertion, they thematically added that a journal with this concentration could help fill a void by offering the field a means to highlight research and policy efforts and serve as a formal venue for scholarly exchange. There are journals available from the fields of sexology (e.g., *Journal of Sex Research*; *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*; *Archives of Sexual Behavior*; *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*; *Journal of Homosexuality*; *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*; *International Journal of Sexual Health*; etc.) psychology (e.g., *Journal of Black Psychology*; *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*), Black studies (e.g., *Journal of Black Studies*; *Western Journal of Black Studies*; *Journal of Pan African Studies*; etc.), and sociology (e.g., *Issues of Race and Society: An Interdisciplinary Global Journal*) but none of them specifically target sexuality, sex history, or sexual functioning of those of African descent. There may be an article or two over several issues within these journals about Black sexuality and relationships but the thrust of these aforementioned journals rests within the noted disciplines without targeting a specific population. Barnes and Battle (2010) suggest, “. . . some of the best work will be interdisciplinary, multimethodological, both academic and applied, and culturally sensitive.” Serving as an interdisciplinary inquiry and the need for a targeted journal, the *JBSR* provides an opportunity to exclusively address and explore intersectional themes and issues (e.g., sex, race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc).

While intersectionality may serve as one of the primary substrates of *JBSR*, it is my hope that we are able to begin/continue scholarly dialogue

and questioning about a variety of areas of sexuality that have a history of sensitivity and elusiveness. These areas include but are not limited to:

- Abstinence based versus comprehensive sexuality education efforts and its impact on Black youth.
- Sex trafficking, sex tourism, sex work (e.g., prostitution, erotic entertainment), sexual harassment, and the hegemonic politics that enable these institutions and behaviors.
- HIV/AIDS/STIs prevention and interventions and the attempts to reduce transmission.
- The fluidity of masculinity/femininity, sex role adoption and the possibility of transcending binary discourse.
- Sexuality language and how it serves to empower, disempower, engage and alienate various populations.
- Reproductive politics and how Black women and men negotiate time, space, and circumstances that may influence decision-making.
- Explicit and implicit systemic movements of Black family constellations and the spaces, roles, and boundaries that members occupy.
- The assumptions, entitlements, and discourse around sexual identities and orientations and how people gain access and chose/reject membership to various groups (LGBTQIAI). The utility of queer theory and deconstructing “other.”
- The role of fantasy, desire, the continuum of sexual arousal, and stages of sexual desire of Black men and women.
- Aesthetics and body politics and how beauty is socially constructed.
- The dynamics of aging and how it impacts romantic relationships, friendships, and kinships.
- Media (television, radio, Internet) representations of sexuality among Black folks with special consideration given to reality television programming, cinematic comedy and drama, hip-hop, and YouTube.
- The use of the Internet and engagement in cyber-pornography, cyber-dating, cyber-stalking, cyber-bullying, cyber-rape, and cyber-victimization.

- The recognition and awareness of sex addiction and its impact on relationships.
- The history of sexuality and the Black church.
- The politics of emotional intelligence—from anxiety to security and despair to euphoria.
- The evolution of Black feminism and womanism.
- Alternative lifestyles and sexual expression including kink, BDSM, paraphilias/fetish, polyamory, incest, etc.
- Examination of power differentials and hierarchies related to sexual coercion and manipulation.
- Sexual globalization and its shifts from difference to sameness and back to difference.
- Sexual scripts, intimacy negotiation, partner availability/selection, models of courtship, attachment styles, and philosophies about love.
- The formation, maintenance, and longevity of Black friendships, romantic (casual and committed) relationships, and acquaintanceships.
- Heterosexism and homophobia in the Black community through the lenses of structural functional, symbolic interactionism, social conflict and various other theories.
- Sexuality therapy, consultation, and policy formation.
- Verbal and nonverbal communication strategies and skills.
- Expectations, assumptions, and stereotypes of Black male and female sexuality.
- Parenting strategies and developmentally appropriate disciplinary strategies for Black children.

Within the light of the aforementioned suggested topics for manuscript submission to the *JBSR*, there are several articles that add to the literature of Black sexuality and relationships. The first article by Dr. Monica Melton examines the activist efforts of HIV-positive Black women in Florida. She

illustrates the importance of using this population to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS and community based political participation.

The second manuscript for this issue is a wonderful contribution by Drs. Mincey and Norris from Xavier University of Louisiana. They investigated the health of Black women and how depressive symptoms, parental influence, and self image impact sexual behavior. The researchers were able to shed light upon the sexual behaviors of emerging adult Black women and young adult Black women.

Drs. Turner, Pastrana, and Battle used a nationwide sample (1,374 Black LGBT people) to gather compelling data on perspectives that individuals had towards their medical providers' comfort. The authors discuss the utility of being "out" and how it positively influences the interaction between patient and medical provider.

The final manuscript in this inaugural *JBSR* issue comes from Drs. Younge, Boyer, Geter, Barker, and Corneille. Using a phenomenological approach (semi-structured interviews), the authors used a convenience sample of Black male students to explore a discussion about sexual decision-making at a historically Black college/university (HBCU). Several themes emerged that are useful and highly meaningful to the discourse and literature about Black male sexual expression.

I am looking forward to our scholarly dialogue over the years and sharing this opportunity with you. Please know and accept that your insight and feedback is welcomed about how to improve the journal, galvanize the field, and empower those in academic, clinical, political, and community systems. With that said, our collective effort and vision has allowed the Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships to finally be here.

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