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Grounded Theory

Exploring Sexual Attitudes and Beliefs Influencing
Black Fathers' Decisions Not to Marry

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ABSTRACT—This qualitative study explored the sexual attitudes and beliefs of unmarried Black fathers which influenced their decisions not to marry the mothers of their children. Focus groups were conducted to reveal personal narratives about relationships, unplanned pregnancy and marriage. Two theories emerged: sexual attitudes and beliefs associated with the man's initial attraction to the mother of his child could impact relationship formation and images of the man's father could prompt his response in sexual situations including decisions not to marry.

KEY WORDS—Black fathers, African American relationships, unmarried fathers

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Introduction

SEXUAL ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS INFLUENCE BEHAVIOR AND RELATIONSHIP choices and stem from family values, tradition and life experience. Attitudes and beliefs guide young adults when making relationship choices (Browning & Olinger-Wilson, 2003; Gilmore, DeLa-mater & Wagstaff, 1996; Morman & Floyd, 2002; Ohalet, 2007; Upchurch, Aneshensel, Sucoff & Levey-Storms, 1999). Research with men between the ages of 18–35, at their procreative stage of development has revealed that counseling and support can promote young men to make healthier decisions about sexual relationships and parenting (Marsiglio, 2003; Marsiglio, Hutchinson & Cohan, 2001). During this age range of emergent adulthood, it is a time when young men can be encouraged to consider their thoughts about sexual decision making and relationships. Young men compare their lives to their fathers, family members, and community members through shared values, traditions and experiences (Browne, 2010).

Young men witness trends in their neighborhoods that suggest being unmarried, Black and a father is an accepted phenomenon. Statistics support the phenomenon. In 2013, the Kids Count Data Book reported that 67% of Black/African American children live in single parent homes (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). In 2011 the Centers for Disease Control reported that 72% of births to Black mothers in the United States were to unmarried women (Martin, Hamilton, Osterman, & Mathews, 2013). Pew Research reported that 36% of Black men have never been married (Wang & Parker, 2014).

Common sexual scripts that identify females as “good girls” who make men wait to have sex or remain abstinent; “dirty girls” or “jump offs” who give up sex easily; or “hood rats” who do whatever a man asks under any conditions, continue to suggest to men that involvement with them is also permission not to marry. Men’s views are based on community norms and expectations (Browne, 2010; Gilmore et al., 1996; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003). Therefore, it is important to explore those influences that stem from family, traditions and cultural expectations which impact men’s attitudes and beliefs and help form their decisions not to marry. The findings may impact relationship education programs, community norms around heterosexual relationships and social services provided to men.

Marriage in the 21st Century

Since the 1940s the decline in number of Blacks marrying has been constant (Elliott, Krivickas, Brault & Kreider, 2012). Researchers, especially those connected to the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study (FFS), have provided documentation about relationships and marriage and cited economic instability (McLanahan & Beck, 2010) as one of the reasons why many couples with children were not marrying.

Numerous articles resulting from the FFS share the narratives of unmarried couples about relationships and marriage. Couples said marriage was the ultimate level of a relationship. The ultimate level of relationship was defined as being financially stable, mature enough to make a lifelong commitment (Edin, England & Linnenberg, 2003), and able to trust the partner (Shafer, 2006). Many couples reported they had not achieved that level in their relationships. Others cited the idea of divorce as a prohibition to marriage (Edin et al., 2003; Gibson-Davis, Edin & McLanahan, 2005; Shafer, 2006). Poor relationship quality was also a deterrent to marriage (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004).

Researchers reported that couples were thinking differently about marriage and that men not marrying and being in relationships with the mothers of their children was not unique in the Black community (James, 1998; Zavodny, 1999). For the Black community not marrying as a result of a pregnancy has been prevalent since the Great Migration of the 1920s. From the 1920s through the 1940s Black people moved from Southern to the Northern states and people shared residences due to high economic costs of housing (Tolnay, 1997). In these settings, relationships developed and children were born without the couple marrying. By the 1950s the development of a Black middle class altered ideas about living together and gave way to a new generation of two parent homes where men and women married and worked together to support their families (Staples, 1972). With the start of the 1960s, the number of Black men marrying began to decline (Elliot et al., 2012) as a result of women marrying later and more Blacks remaining single.

According to the 2013 Child Trends database, the number of two parent African American families with children under 18 was 34% of all married couples with children under 18.

The proposition of this qualitative study suggests that Black communities were in the process of a cultural shift toward the endorsement of non-marital births. Several studies (Bowman & Sanders, 1998; Cohen, 2003; James, 1998; Nomaguchi, Brown & Leyman, 2012; Smith & Beaujot, 1999)

provide a female voice on nonmarital births and marriage, but very few with the male voice. A book by Edin, Kefalas, & Furstenberg (2011) *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage* explored the topic in detail primarily from the female voice. Another proposition was that in the discourse on nonmarital births and marriage the perspective from the male voice was limited. This study wanted to inquire about new scripts regarding marriage from an unmarried father's perspective. The information gleaned from the study was intended to inform and contribute to the field to enhance and improve services for unmarried fathers and ultimately improve their relationships with the mothers of their children. Improving relationships with the mothers of their children may foster stronger connections between fathers and their children.

Black Men, Marriage and Sexuality

The 21st century gave rise to research that focused on the examination of gender roles (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Marriage no longer held the strict attachment to gender roles. It was not uncommon for fathers to care for their children while mothers worked or went to school (Neal, 2006). Educated Black families tended to demonstrate more egalitarian roles in the home, thus teaching a broader context of gender equality to their children (Hill, 2002). Hill discovered that the less education parents had, the more they demonstrated and imparted traditional gender roles to their children. For example, less educated parents wanted both their sons and daughters to participate in higher education, but were still less flexible about their son's choice in career, such as parents encouraging the son to study medicine, not nursing.

Black males' ability to articulate the differences in their relationships with women became more prominent in the 21st century (Neal, 2006; Twohey & Ewing, 1995). Gender roles, once clearly defined, were more relaxed than in previous centuries. Thus, it was more acceptable for men to talk about their feelings despite the traditional belief that sharing feelings was considered to be a feminine trait (Pleck & Sawyer, 1974; Twohey & Ewing, 1995).

Many of the changes that were taking place happened in middle class communities where a higher number of Black Americans were educated post high school. This was contrary to the experiences of young Black fathers in low-income communities where education was less of a priority; gender roles remained constant and changes in styles of interpersonal communication was not a focus of their community. Black men in low income neighborhoods were still being incarcerated at alarming rates (Alex-

ander, 2012), becoming fathers at young ages, and finding it more difficult to shoulder the responsibility that came with fatherhood and relationships (Connor & White, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

Script theory and the theory of Symbolic Interaction provided frameworks for this research. Script theory purported that there are different kinds of scripts. Sexual scripts suggest that people react to sexual situations with expected or prescribed responses from others and their community (Seal, Smith, Coley, Perry & Gamez, 2007; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; Wiederman, 2005). Sexual scripts may be sequenced in nature. For example, a woman is sitting at a bar and bats her eyes to another person. The script is interpreted as an invitation. The expected response is that the person she batted her eyes to will approach. Cultural scripts attach meaning to language that is known among members of a like culture (Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman, & Fraser, 2012; Irvine, 1995). For example cultural scripts may carry different meanings depending on voice inflection or intonation. If one said that someone had on a *bad* outfit or that the outfit was *banging* the script suggested that the clothing was attractive or well coordinated. Being familiar with the script brought meaning or purpose to the conversation and could be gleaned from what was shared. Script theory, both sexual and cultural, within the framework of romantic attraction plays the same role. Dialogue between individuals includes scripts. The scripts relay meaning and offer significance about a person's intention or request.

Script theory provides a framework for understanding the young men's relationships with the mothers of their children, intentions and attractions to the women, and relationships observed from families and friends in the neighborhood. Scripts were learned from relatives and neighbors. The understanding and use of these scripts demonstrated examples of accepted living.

The theory of Symbolic Interaction helped to describe personalization or the meaning men attached to their interactions with others (Day, 2010; Longmore, 1996). The theory also encompasses aspects of script theory as scripts are part of the symbolism that link the communication or action with meaning (Eshlenman & Bulcroft, 2010). This theory suggested that people use symbols to understand and interact with one another. It also suggested that symbols are important to be able to understand others; symbols such as, the style of clothes one wears, the type of vehicle one drives,

a person's concept of money and success, all support understanding the individual. These symbols are directly connected to who the person is or the image they want to portray. Symbolic interaction helped to examine men's behavior related to self-image, personal experiences, and socialization. The symbolism provided by the participants' father's behavior as well as the expectations of community members were linked to their sexual beliefs and attitudes about the mothers of their children. These symbolic images were linked to what the men learned from their community and life experiences.

Method

Procedures

Letters were sent to social service programs, community colleges, churches, trade schools and the Department of Corrections explaining the study and inviting them include men from their programs. The letters were followed by phone calls to further explain the research and recruit hosts. Three non-profit organizations with fatherhood services, one faith based organization, one community college and the Department of Corrections expressed interest in participating. Meetings were held with each agency to discuss the purpose of the research, engage them as a partner and identify a contact person (Host). In addition meeting and several phone calls were conducted with the host at each agency. Hosts were asked to recruit young African American/Black men between the ages of 18–35 who had never been married and had fathered a child but no more than two children with only one woman. Host agencies were asked to collect demographic information including name, age, residence, number of mothers of their children. Hosts were also asked to assess men's comfort in a group setting and willingness to discuss sexual and personal experiences.

Over a nine month period nine focus groups were scheduled. Out of the six hosts, two were unable to secure participants. Seven two-hour focus groups were convened with a total of 34 men in four different locations. A total of eighteen sentence completions were developed to elicit responses from the participants which included telling the story of their relationships with the mothers of the children; discussing sex and being cool; unintended pregnancy; marriage; and decisions not to marry. Questions were developed based on three research questions:

RQ1: What were the sexual attitudes and beliefs of unmarried Black fathers that influenced their decisions not to marry?

This question attempted to understand the men’s relationships with the mothers of their children and glean any influences on their decisions not to marry from their environment.

RQ2: What did unmarried Black fathers say was the relationship between an unintended pregnancy and marriage?

This question looked at different attitudes men held about pregnancy as it related to marriage. Specifically, when there was an unintended pregnancy did men think about marrying the woman?

RQ3: What did unmarried Black fathers say was the relationship between being cool and not marrying?

This question attempted to understand attitudes and intentions related to their own experiences as a result of an unintended pregnancy. Table 1 provides the list of questions developed for and asked as part of the focus group.

Table 1. Original Sentence Stems Ordered by the Research Questions

RQ1: What were the sexual attitudes and beliefs of unmarried Black fathers that influenced their decisions not to marry?
When I describe the current relationship between me and the mother of my child I say . . .
When I first met the mother of my child I thought . . .
Before having sex with the mother of my child I thought . . .
When my partner told me she was pregnant I . . .
RQ2: What did unmarried Black fathers say was the relationship between an unintended pregnancy and marriage?
As a Black man, having sex or making love is or are . . .
When I think about unintended pregnancy I feel . . .
Marriage as a result of an unintended pregnancy is . . .
RQ3: What did unmarried Black fathers say was the relationship between being cool and not marrying?
When I think about sex and being cool I feel . . .
When I think about marriage I feel . . .
Not marrying the mother of my child was . . .
Some closing thoughts I have about sex, unintended pregnancy, being cool and marriage are . . .

***Questions not asked:**

Being cool and having sex are related when . . .
My belief about sex and being cool came from . . .
Unintended pregnancy and being cool are related when . . .
My opinions about unintended pregnancy came from . . .
Getting married and being cool are related when . . .
My attitudes about marriage and being cool came from . . .
When I think of my decision not to marry the mother of my
child I think it was because . . .

Emergent topics explored:

Images of their own dads
Non-relationship sex
Unmarried father's legacy

*Questions not used in the analysis.

Participants

Unmarried fathers were defined as Black men, between the ages of 18 and 35 years old, which had never been married; had at least one child; had not fathered more than two children with the same woman; and had not fathered children with more than one woman. The participants were specifically limited to 'never been married' to exclude divorced, separated and widowed fathers. Selecting men that had not fathered children with more than one woman established the man's choice of not marrying compared to why I did not marry mother one or two or three, etc. Table 2 Participant Demographics provides a description of the participants.

The age of the men was limited to 18–35 to capture young men forming their views of marriage and relationships and men who were not high school students. Men between these ages were considered to be in their procreative identity period, meaning they became aware of their ability to procreate and started to examine the extent of their responsibility as fathers (Marsiglio, Hutchinson & Cohan, 2001).

The backgrounds of the men varied, some lived with the mothers of their children; others were non-custodial fathers who visited their children and still engaged in sex with the mothers of their children; and still others were estranged from the mothers of their children and facing child support or-

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Site	Number of men per site	Number of men by site ever incarcerated	
		Current	Former
Fatherhood 1	10		2
Fatherhood 2	8		2
Fatherhood 3	5		4
Correctional Facility	11	11	

Note: Participants n = 34, Age range = 18–35, Mean Age = 27.1

ders. A few of the men, regardless of their residential situation, were still in love with the mothers of their children.

The populations within the focus groups were quite homogeneous. Three of the host programs were fatherhood centers focused on assisting men in obtaining jobs, improving parenting skills, and offering personal and professional counseling. Some of the men in each of these programs were also returning from incarceration. Thus, the host agencies were engaged in activities that prepared men for re-entry into society. With the exception of obtaining jobs, the correctional facility had similar goals for the residents.

Sample

This qualitative study was a stratified cluster convenience sample (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005). The samples were stratified to capture men from various geographic areas in New Jersey that met the study criteria. The clusters represented programs that served men from the northern, central, and southern regions of New Jersey. The sample included patrons and employees from the four centers that participated in focus groups with 2 to 8 participants.

Data Analysis

Data was gathered with the use of an audio cassette recorder. Recordings were transcribed at the conclusion of each focus group from recording to text using Audacity®. The content was analyzed using the grounded theory method described by Glaser and Strauss (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory, an inductive method of analysis, facilitated the emergence of theory as the data was compared to what was observed, sorted, and coded, then compared to more data col-

Figure 1. Initial Attraction to the Mother of the Child

lected which was also sorted, coded and analyzed (Dick, 2005). Grounded theory was used to define things that shaped human behavior and facilitated the examination of cultural meanings as in sexual attitudes and beliefs that influenced the men's decisions not to marry.

Responses from the men were compared to discover similarities and differences and to gain contextual meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and identify aspects of sexual attitudes and beliefs which influenced their decisions not to marry. After developing lists of similarities and differences from the responses provided for each of the sentence stems, the responses

that were similar were reviewed within the context of the man's response to determine if the meanings were similar. Responses similar in context were sorted into groups. When three or more responses from these groups were similar in context and language and were provided in more than one focus group, they formed the basis of a category. Some important category comparisons were made leading to the development of theory.

As a result of the analysis, content was sorted into several categories including anecdotes about their fathers; stories about the relationships the men had with the mothers of their children; tales about family members; beliefs about women; communication between males and females; the double standard between males and females related sexual behavior; difference between having sex or making love; disease concerns such as STDs and HIV; responsibility; cheating; disrespect; values; being cool; messages from mom; and stability. As categories were sorted four themes surfaced that influenced the decisions of the participants not to marry: initial attraction to the mothers of their children, images of men's fathers, role models of married couples and sexual socialization experiences.

Category Detail

The initial attractions of the men to the mothers of their children fell into three categories: physical, emotional, and sexual. Figure 1 illustrates the initial attractions of the men to the mothers of their children after being sorted and compared to the responses in the sentence completions.

Initial attraction to the mothers of their children

Initial attraction as physical was sorted by the men's comments about how the woman looked, how she carried herself, and the words the man used to describe her, e.g., "beautiful," "bad" (meaning very good), and "real fly." Fourteen (41%) of the participants were categorized as physically attracted to the mothers of their children; all 14 of these participants responded favorably to marriage. Men who were initially physically attracted to the woman continued relationships even if the couple stopped having sex. Initial physical attraction was represented on the chart in grayscale because it did not help to answer the research questions. Men whose initial attractions were physical sustained relationships with the mothers of their children over a period of and responded that they thought they would marry at some point in their lives.

Some of these men had reservations, but none were opposed to marriage. For example the following narrative came from a man whose initial attraction to the mother of his child was physical. He was still in relationship with the mother of his child and described her as sexy and beautiful. He shared his views on marriage.

Ah, actually the baby's mom asked me to marry her before. And being I loved her and she asked me when she was pregnant, too, you know I thought about it . . . cause it really wasn't on the table but it was a thought . . . can I do this? Maybe I should. Then when I thought hard on it, it just changed, and I knew I couldn't do it. Not something I want to be doing just now, I'm just 21 years old. I got a lot of life to live and a lot of fun to have.

Men whose attraction was emotional had a relationship for a period of time, but something happened to cause the relationship to deteriorate. Nine (26%) of the participants were categorized as initially emotionally attracted to the mothers of their children. Men's responses described their feelings for the woman or communicated a sharing between the two people, e.g., "I wanted her in my life," "She was the one for me," and "we used to sit and talk for hours." Men emotionally attracted to the mothers of their children developed a relationship before having sex, thus having the opportunity to engage and join with the female to discover other things about her. Discontinued sexual relations did not contribute to relationship break up but something that affected the men emotionally did. Men found the need to explain what happened in or to the relationship. Five of the nine men were no longer in relationship with the mother of their child and expressed conflicted feelings toward marriage. Four of the men were still having sexual relationships with the mothers of their children and rejected getting married.

This man shares his experience about meeting the mother of his child.

. . . when I first met my daughter's mother, I felt all those descriptions you hear in movies and read in books . . . meet someone that makes your heart pump, and makes it so you can't breathe, and makes it so that you are not in control of your emotions . . .

The same man shared his feelings about the break up. "I was becoming insecure and being unhappy and insecure in a relationship is unhealthy and I was the only one experiencing that and I was becoming a sad and de-

pressed and hurting man.” When asked about marriage he said, “When I think about marriage I feel . . . stuff, anxious, fear . . . marriage is a wonderful thing . . . Problem is when you get married you got to deal with the idea of divorce and that is what bothers me the most.”

Another narrative where the initial attraction was emotional shared in this way, “. . . I was in love with her when I first met her but everything just went down . . .” This man’s narrative shared stories of physical and verbal abuse from the mother of his child, but when asked about marriage he responded, “I want to get married and then I don’t.”

Finally, men whose initial attraction to the mothers of their children was sexual were focused on the act of having sex with the woman. Eleven (32%) of the participants were categorized as initially sexually attracted to the mothers of their children. These men’s responses relayed their pursuit to have sex as the basis of the attraction. “I didn’t even think we could be together. All I wanted to do was to get in and out [have sex].” The same man rejected marriage as an option. “Me, personally I don’t believe in marriage. I done seen too many marriages crash and burn.” Another narrative in the same category said, “When I first met the mother of my child, I’ll hit it [have sex].” Then when asked about marriage he said, “I wasn’t planning on marrying her in the first place . . . everything you take into a marriage you supposed to have in a relationship . . . love, trust, all that.” Each of the types of initial attractions identified the reason the men engaged relationships with the mothers of their children.

Initial attraction being sexual was identified by the man’s responses intimating that he wanted to have sex with the woman, e.g., “hit it,” “get in and get out,” “it was a one night stand.” Men in this category did not develop relationships with the women. None of the men in this category were still having sex with the mother of their child or still in relationship with her. The responses from men whose initial attraction was sexual rejected marriage.

The initial attraction responses showed that there was a connection between a man being in a relationship with a woman and a man’s opinions about marriage. These responses showed up consistently in the constant comparison process of grounded theory. Men that were initially physically attracted to women were open to marriage compared to men who were initially emotionally or sexually attracted to women were less likely to be in favor of marriage.

Images of Their Fathers

A total of fourteen men (42%) provided unsolicited comments about their fathers. Comparisons were made between the unmarried father's image of his own father, his attraction to the mother of his child, his relationship with the mother of his child, and his decision not to marry. The fathers' images of their dads were sorted into three categories: neglected and/or abandoned, glamorized and/or sexualized, and responsible. Positive or negative images were based on the men's description and reaction when talking about their dads. The category descriptions for abandoned/neglected were based on the situation described by the father. Glamorized/sexualized was based on the description of the father being idolized, the unmarried father reacting with pride when he talked about his dad, or when a sexual connotation was provided in the description of the unmarried father's dad. Men describing their dad as responsible described what they learned from them. Images of the participants' fathers were connected to father absence or presence in the participant's life, neglect and abandonment, fathers' demeanor, and something they gained from their dad. The images ranged from fathers' as a sexual being, to fathers that abused, neglected or abandoned their sons. Some men also shared that it was their intention not to repeat their father's behaviors.

A father initially sexually attracted to the mother of his child described his own father in this way, "I didn't really trust women, because my father he was a [stud] . . . he [father] was a real pimp type dude. You know all the Cadillac's, you know what I mean. He was a lady's man." The man was

Table 3. Participant responses about marriage

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
Favorable toward marriage	9
Unfavorable toward marriage	9
Marriage took understanding	9
Marriage was age related	6
Expressed doubt about marriage	5
Marriage was about commitment	5
Marriage was about trust	3
Marriage was a trap	3

proud of his father's image. When he talked about his attitudes about women and specifically the actions of the mother of his child, it was similar to his image of his father. "When I met my baby's mom, it was just a little one night stand . . . don't think I would have ever married her."

One of the participant's emotionally attracted to the mother of his child recounted an image of being neglected by his dad. He compared it to an unintended pregnancy. "Unintended pregnancy, I kinda think of my father that way . . . something you didn't want, something you didn't want to deal with, or something you choose not to deal with." He also felt that marriage was something he was not able to deal with. ". . . when I met my daughter mother, I knew I wanted her in my life, like wanted her in my life forever . . . marriage is a lifelong commitment . . . I knew at the time I wasn't prepared for none of that."

Another participant, also emotionally attracted to the mother of his child suggested that his father taught him responsibility and that was demonstrated in the care he had for his child of whom he had custody. "I remember . . . from my dad certain responsibilities which I took from his death . . . if my seed was gonna' be there then I was gonna' be there regardless." He was not opposed to marriage as long as it meant the woman accepted his child. "We want to be married, but the young lady . . . have to understand that it is we . . . as in me and my son."

One of the incarcerated participants emotionally attracted to the mother of his child reflected on his image of his father.

I never had no pop . . . My pop come . . . he'd drop off a little couple rocks [cocaine] . . . but that's not what I needed. I needed that love and affection, know what I mean? . . . Dad always running here and there always locked up, worrying for this, worrying for that. So when I came of that age [to do] time . . . I was ready . . . and I was going to do time. I knew this all came with it so it's like I took that oath like, it is what it is.

Father images resonated with the men and illustrated similarities in fathers and sons attitudes and relationships with the mothers of their children.

Missing Married Couples as Role Models

Men talked about marriage and role models for marriage. Twenty-five (74%) of the men provided responses about marriage and married couples. Table 3 Participant Responses About Marriage lists categories and the number of responses men offered about marriage.

Some responses were direct such as, “Marriage ain’t nothing but a license and a ring.” Other responses suggested a lack of readiness. “It’s like when you’re in a relationship, it’s like now you go out or whatever, when you married, where you going?” This suggested the man’s desire to have a social or private life, or his own time was something he did not think was possible in marriage. Then there were also suggestions of feeling or being trapped.

I mean, like I don’t like feeling trapped. I need to get loose . . . no I don’t even think that’s why marriage don’t even come to my mind because I don’t even got time for myself why would I think about marrying somebody? Marriage is like you deal with [stuff], but to me it ain’t really no difference because you still can do the same thing in a relationship.

Men talked about the discouragement of seeing very few Black married couples.

I’m envious because I don’t see any old Black people walking down the street hand in hand helping each other cross the street without having to say something demeaning or, or disparaging to one another. I mean an eighty year old or ninety year old couple walking together makes me feel happy like I wish I was them because I would want to see Black people like that, but unfortunately I don’t . . . see folks married for sixty years that are Black. So I don’t even look at color no more I just look at marriage and I am envious of that kind of set up.

Men who acknowledged knowing married Black couples said they did not see it among the younger generation. Lasting marriages was something that took place in the past. There was an indictment that the younger generation was part of the cause of the demise of marriage.

My grandmother and grandfather been together since they were 17. They [just about] died together, man. At like seventy, eighty years old, know what I’m talking about? The more that time goes on and the generations [don’t marry] it’s like certain [a] hit they installing in the generations, you feel me?

As men talked more about marriage and relationships, concern for the lack of communication and commitment was discussed. For example, this response about commitment, “Marriage is about commitment. I don’t see folks married for sixty years that are black. Marriage is foreign to our [Black] children, hard to find men and women that are married for thirty, forty, fifty

years.” This man was very concerned about his own level of commitment. “So if I just be married, I can only be with her, so I can’t be married unless I’m serious about her. I just can’t jump into that and not be serious about it.” Still others talked about communication, “. . . to me the best thing that people lack, male and female, in a loving relationship, is the lack of communication.” In one focus group, the discussion about marriage centered on the attributes of marriage so men talked about trust, communication, love, and commitment. “Marriage . . . is trust, man. Like it say in the vows, till death do you part, know what I mean . . .”

Participants’ comments identified a concern for the lack of Black married couples as role models and listed some of their criteria for marriage.

Sexual Socialization Experiences

Non-relationship sex or some may call it casual sex, hooking up, and in some cases friends with benefits, was normalized behavior among the participants. Non-relationship sex was the way men were expected to behave (Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman, & Fraser, 2012; Morman & Floyd, 2002; Pleck & Sawyer, 1974). Not having sex or not having a lot of sex was a reflection of one’s manhood. Thirteen (38%) men provided unsolicited comments about non-relationship sex. They talked about women who had sex the on the first date or the first time they met. A woman who had sex on the first night was not considered to be a good girl. A woman who displayed her sexuality in the same way as a man, having sex without the demand for a relationship, was considered to be a jump off (secondary relationship). This attitude was expressed by several men. The feedback came up without prompting. “She had a track record of being a jump off. A jump off is a female that’s fast, out there in the streets, you know sleeping with any and everybody.” Another respondent expressed his attitude as it related sex with a woman who is considered a jump off, “I just get in and get out . . . whether the woman gets pleased or not I just get mine and get out.” Along the same lines men spoke of sexually assertive women.

. . . it’s like it’s a turn off . . . If that’s what you want, it’s like a girl just throwing it at you. Make you feel like something wrong with that. Why you so easy? It’s a turn off. If it’s just too easy, then it’s something wrong with that.

Men compared non-relationship sex to making love and explained that there was a difference in the two. The following narrative provided one explanation.

The first one, [non relationship sex explicative] is just a jump off . . . I'm done, thank you, I got mine, you got yours, nice knowing you . . . Sex, it's just like . . . you're worried about feelings . . . and a little more . . . Making love is just some old thing that is hard to explain. It's slower.

Another said that making love was reserved for a special woman. "However having sex to me is just pleasure. Making love is just to that one you call your queen or your wife." As they defined the special women, they defined them as good girls. These were women who made them wait to have sex.

. . . she gained my respect first cause she's one of the rare women that I didn't get real, real quick, you know what I mean. It took a couple weeks and stuff. With other women it don't take that long, but with her, I kinda expected that with her because I had to get to know her and stuff, know what I mean. So she kinda gained my respect.

The discussions of non-relationship sex encouraged conversations about the double standard around gender. "Yeah but when they [women] do it; the way we [men] do it, they be considered whores, tricks, and all the other names. We [men] just considered dogs." Men seemed to accept male sexual behavior without an emotional connection though there were differences in sexual behavior related to gender. When men were asked where these attitudes came from they said, "From the hood," "from older cats," "I learned it from my cousins and my uncle." They learned from their kin-folks, their families, and their communities.

In all of their examples men were socialized by others to have sex. The sharing of oral traditions from their relatives and peers helped formulate the men's sexual attitudes and beliefs.

Discussion

What were the sexual attitudes and beliefs of unmarried Black fathers that influenced their decision not to marry the mother of their child? Collectively, as men told their stories, the sexual attitudes and beliefs about the mothers of their children were influenced by the men's initial attraction to the women, the role men's fathers' image played in their lives, what the men learned from society about sex and relationships, and the message men received as a result of the absence of married couples in the community in which they lived. Messages received from the community or the sex-

ual scripts now being conveyed had changed in the community as marriage was no longer the expected behavior as a result of an unplanned pregnancy.

Not Marrying: Social Factors and Their Meaning

The narratives of the participants revealed that social factors such as initial attraction, images of their fathers, exposure to married couples and sexual socialization, played a role in men's decisions not to marry. The motivation of the man's initial attraction to the mother of his child took place before he had sex with her and thus established the reason why he wanted to be with her. The images of the participants' fathers were replicated in him, the participant, whether his father was absent or a constant figure in his life. These images showed up in how men described their fathers and in what the man observed or learned from their father's interactions with women. Interactions men observed helped to formulate sexual attitudes and beliefs about women. Men replicated the behaviors of their father's interactions with women with the mothers of their children. Men's narratives revealed similarities in how their attraction to the mothers of their children was similar to examples provided by their father's treatment of women.

In the conversations about marriage men had very little exposure to or experience being with married couples, but they had opinions and feelings about marriage. Role models of married couples were not available to these men; they had not lived with marriage as a cultural norm. Very few men talked about knowing or relating to people who were married. There were no coaches to offer advice about marriage as not many people in their circle of life were married. Their ideas about marriage were not favorable and most saw only the negative sides of marriage from a vantage point of what they lived.

Men expressed the potential challenges they anticipated if they married, such as finding the right woman, the possibility of divorce and finding a woman who understood him. Men made several references to how they met women and how they learned about engaging in relationships with women as a result of their socialization. The socialization came from parents, kin folks, peers, and the community. The social factors repeated in the narratives suggested that men were prone to follow the scripts they learned related to sex, relationships, and marriage.

Attitudes and beliefs about sex and women with common words and themes were consistent across focus groups. Men only wanted to be in relationships with women they thought were good girls. Men defined good

girls as wifey, queen, better half, and the one they wanted to be serious with. The language was positive about partner choices and intimated they had given relationships some thought.

Contrary to the literature indicating that men are socialized to refrain from showing or sharing emotions (Jourad, 1974; Levant, 1997; McClean, 1997), these men expressed their feelings openly and without hesitation. As a result of their narratives, men could define what they thought marriage was supposed to be but had not experienced someone in this type relationship therefore they had no vision for it in their future.

Conclusions

Two theories emerged as a result of the research. The first theory suggested that sexual attitudes and beliefs of the man associated with initial attraction to the mother of his child impacted relationship formation. Assumptions of the theory included: initial attractions that were emotional or simply sexual were single focused and not formed on establishing a relationship; when initially emotionally attracted to women men experienced challenges in the relationship; challenges posed difficulty with men's ability to cope with problems or an inability to resolve issues.

Script theory posits that people react to sexual situations with expected or prescribed responses learned from various variables such as community, culture, internal reflections and social roles (Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman, & Fraser, 2012). The scripts between the fathers and the mothers of their children were not synchronous. The responses to the relationships were not what they expected. Men felt remorse, sadness, and confusion when the relationships ended making it difficult for them to imagine the possibility of marriage and in some cases future relationships. Men found the need to explain what happened in or to the relationship and were conflicted about marriage. Some doubted that they would ever get married.

Men sexually attracted to women were getting their needs met thus did not have a reason to get married. They did not need the woman once she participated in providing the level of sexual gratification the man wanted, nor did he want to engage with her in something long term. Narratives from men whose initial attraction to the mothers of their children were sexual did not offer prospects of marriage or possibilities for ongoing relationships.

In both cases the scripts used between the men and the women were not aligned. According to script theory there is an expected response in the

sexual situation (Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman, & Fraser, 2012). For men initially emotionally or sexually attracted to the woman, the scripts did not seem to provide the expected response in the romantic or sexual situations. Narratives revealed abusive partners, relationships deteriorating over time and fear about marriage.

The second theory suggested that that an unmarried Black father's images of his father could prompt his response in sexual situations including decisions not to marry. Assumptions of the theory include: not all men have good relationships with or know their fathers; men examine their fathers' attitudes and behaviors from a distance based on their experiences or exposure to them; and men raised by their fathers know their fathers and internalize lessons learned from their fathers. The theory of symbolic interaction purported that people's sexual behavior was related to their self-image and personal experiences (Longmore, 1998). Men's sexual attitudes and beliefs about women were related to the images of their fathers. There were three basic images provided by the men; abandoned or neglected, glamorized or sexualized, and responsible. All of the images were related to personal experiences men had concerning their fathers.

The first image that men shared about their fathers reflected being abandoned or neglected. These were painful images including behaviors that men did not want to repeat. Men talked about the nagging *what if* question, wanting to know what went on between his parents that caused them not to stay together. The men who shared negative images were also initially emotionally attracted to the mothers of their children. They appeared insecure about their relationships, and conflicted or resistant to marriage, but responsible when it came to their children. They reflected on their self image and the message it transmitted to them as the symbolic interaction theory suggested. The social script in action for these men was fathers were men who took care of their children, men were providers.

Men who shared glamorized/sexualized images of their dad repeated the behavior of their father. They reacted to the script as they learned it. Their self-images were strong in that they were confident about their actions. They were proud to refer to their dad as cool, pimp like, or having a swagger (confidence). These men were all initially sexually attracted to the mothers of their children and none of them established a relationship with her. They talked about the mother of their child as a jump off, wanting to get in and out of the sexual interaction, and having a one-night stand. The self-concept of the unmarried fathers was likened to that of their image of their dad, thus they continued to respond to the script as they learned it.

These men rejected marriage as it was part of the script as well. The social script in action for these men was non-relationship sex was the expected behavior for men.

The fathers whose image of their dad was one of responsibility were also carrying out the script they learned. Two of these men were initially physically attracted to the mothers of their children and one was initially sexually attracted to her. One of the men established relationships with the woman, but all of the men were engaged in caring for their child. One man had custody of his child, one was still living with the mother of the child, and the other one participated in the life of the child. These men defined what they believed it would take to marry. Two of them rejected marriage with the mothers of their children, but did not reject marriage for their future. The man living with the mother of his child did not reject marriage to the mother of the child. The self-concept of the unmarried fathers whose dads' images reflected the lessons of responsibility showed that they learned responsibility from their dads and were repeating the script. The social script for these men was the American idiom, like father like son (Boatner & Gates, 1975).

Recommendations for the Field

The conclusions from the men's conversations offer suggestions for the field. Men experiencing emotional break-ups may benefit from interventions that strengthen their ability to assess their feelings and interpretations of various relationship statuses (e.g., casual, committed, marriage, etc.) and what goals they want to accomplish in their lives and relationships. Activities that cause men to respond to questionnaires or personal inventories could help men discover aspects of self of which they are not cognizant. Creating men's groups, facilitated by men identifying as both married and single that included experiential learning would give participants the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills from others. Married facilitators could serve as role models especially when married men shared their stories. Such small group experiences facilitate the ability for participants to learn from one another. This style of learning promotes normalization of questioning attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, cultivates a deeper understanding of self (Hedgepeth & Helmich, 1996), and may be a start to thinking differently or possibly reinventing themselves.

Seminars that educate men about feminism, the fluidity of sexual relationships and women as sexual beings might diminish some of the men's

sexual attitudes about women and help debunk the double standard. Doing this might allow men to re-examine some of what they have learned over time from kinfolk and family. Activities such as developing genograms and eco-maps that cause men to explore family dynamics may allow them to examine patterns in their lives. Examining family patterns may encourage men to consider different ways of thinking about women, sex, and relationships.

Men who were conflicted or uncertain about marriage might benefit from the opportunity to attend fatherhood programs that also involve relationship education. These programs expose participants to the range of emotions expressed in relationships, provide realistic exercises to address conflict, deal with emotions, and engage in empathic listening (Hawkins & Ooms, 2010). Relationship education programs establish safe spaces for individuals, or individuals and their partners to practice relationship skills. Relationship education programs help to improve communication skills between partners. Programs that inform and impart skills rather than encourage or promote marriage would help men learn about relationship development and gain perspective about what they wanted from emotional and romantic relationships. This is very important as the cultural script in the community does not support marriage as a result of a nonmarital pregnancy.

One of the significant components of this study was the ability to hear men speak in their own voices about sex, relationships, and marriage. The narratives of the men offered insight into what Black men learned in their neighborhoods and how that impacted their intimate and friendship relationships with women. Even more important, the men's voices provided an introduction to understanding things that influence men's sexual attitudes and beliefs about marriage in the 21st century.

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