DEDICATION

"I likely have always been a feminist. I just probably didn't have words for it. I was raised by women who raised me as a feminist without having words for it" (Hunter).

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother L. Diane Morton Moorman, PhD, MHSA, MEd. The most tenacious single Black woman I have ever met. I also dedicate this dissertation to the generations of Black women whose blood flows through my veins and whose words tumble around in my head. Without Diane, Aprile, Brenda, Lawaune, Florence, Sulena, Marion, Thelma, Barbara, Eunice, Eula Hortence, MaMo, Eula Elizabeth, Gardenia, and Abigail there would be no me.

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ABSTRACT

Black Love media are television shows, movies, news articles, dating advice books, podcasts, blogs, and social media accounts that advise and represent the romantic and sexual relationships of single Black women. Made by Black producers for single Black female audiences, these media stress the importance of marriage and relationships. Prior research has found that Black Love media contain misogynistic and gendered messages about relationships, messages associated with problematic beliefs about sex, dating, and relationships. Black Love media have gone underexplored in communication research, and, as a result, we know little about how Black Love media shape single Black women's beliefs about relationships and experiences of singlehood. Through semi-structured interviews and a survey, this project holistically explores how single Black women's beliefs about relationships and prior experiences of being single shape their experiences of singlehood and meaning making of Black Love media. I explore Black Love media's role in participants' media sexual socialization—a field of study that explores the media's role in the acquisition of one's attitudes and beliefs about sex and relationships. Participants were self-identified cisgender, heterosexual, single Black women, ages 25 to 46. Single is defined as never-married, divorced, and widowed women not cohabiting with a romantic partner. Women in casual sexual and romantic relationships are included in this study.

In study one, I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with single cisgender heterosexual Black women (average age 34.7 years) to explore their experience of singlehood

and perspectives on Black Love media. All participants lived in the city of Detroit, Michigan at the time of the interview. This study found that participants' perspectives on the media were shaped by their experiences of singlehood and vice versa. Participants described singlehood as an agentic stage of life that requires adaptability and allows for personal growth. Participants wanted to see values of autonomy, entrepreneurship, and sisterhood in Black Love media's representations of Black women. Participants thought that although Black Love media contain authentic portrayals, these media tend to be dramatic and overly focused on men and relationships. Participants wanted to see more honest depictions of single Black women's lives.

In study two, I conducted a national survey of single Black cisgender heterosexual women (*N = 506,* average age 33.2 years) to explore if greater Black Love television and book consumption and a greater presumption of influence of Black Love media on men and women were associated with respondents' beliefs about the unavailability of Black male partners, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, endorsement of gendered roles for relationships, tolerance for violence in romantic relationships, and reported experiences of single stigma. Grounded in social cognitive and cultivation theories, the survey study found that greater consumption of Black Love television programs and books was associated with more heteronormative, antagonistic, and stigmatized views of partners, relationships, and singlehood. Beliefs about others' Black Love media use were also positively associated with survey respondents' relationship, partner, and singlehood beliefs. This project reveals the value of singlehood to media sexual socialization research and provides broader insights into single Black women's relationships to Black Love media. I discuss this study's implications for sampling, measurement, and study design in communication research.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Of the many representations of single Black women that I have watched, read, and listened to for this project, Carrie Mae Weems' photo essay, *The Kitchen Table Series* (Weems, 2017), is one of the most striking for its honest look at the everyday life of a 38-year-old single Black woman. Weems is the author and protagonist of the piece. She tells her story of singlehood in 20 black and white photographs and 14 text panels.

The piece takes its name from the kitchen table, seen in every photograph, around which Weems and her intimates gather. The kitchen table provides the setting for the series. The kitchen table is a long, rectangular, blond-colored wooden table and runs the length of a narrow dining room. Placed on the table is a rotating series of playing cards, liquor, boxes of chocolates, make-up, mirrors, lobster dinners, cold beers, folded hands, work papers, elbows attached to arms and balled fists propping up smiling faces, smoldering cigarettes, and, at one point, Weems herself. A black metal lamp provides the light for each vignette. The walls are painted white and there is a door, presumably to the kitchen, in the back right corner of every frame. Sometimes a birdcage or an oscillating fan is positioned in the back left corner of the room. A poster of Malcolm X, a woven decorative wall hanging, and an abstract painting each take their turn adorning the back wall. In other pictures, the walls are blank. Surrounding the far end of the table are three wooden chairs, one on either side of the table and one at its head. Weems positions the

camera opposite the head of the table, which allows the viewer to peer down the table's narrow length to see scene after scene of Weems in her singlehood.

The larger photo essay is divided into smaller groups of images, punctuated by text panels that tell the story of Weems' singlehood. These vignettes speak to the themes of love, lust, friendship, work, motherhood, and discovery of oneself. In the first group of photographs we see Weems in the various stages of flirtation with an unidentified lover. Weems sits at the head of a table applying make-up in a round mirror. A man in a hat stands over her, leaning in to caress the crook of Weems' neck. Weems and the unidentified man play cards, drink, smoke, and flirt. Text panels describe the protagonist during this period of her life: "She needed a man who didn't mind her bodacious manner, varied talents, hard laughter, multiple opinions, and her hopes were getting slender" (Weems, 2017, p. 20).

In the second group of photographs Weems and her lover sit in conflict. The woman is fidgety, moving around the scene. The viewer sees Weems sitting pensively, smoking. Then Weems stands at the back of the room, behind her unidentified lover who sits at the head of the table, reading a newspaper. Weems hugs her lover from behind. In the final image of the group, Weems sits down with her head tucked into her knees, drink poured, waiting for her lover to call.

> He said she was much too domineering. He didn't mind a woman speaking her mind, but hey, she was taking it a tad too far. Accused her of talking too loudly, being a little too wild in public places (Weems, 2017, p. 35)…She insisted that what he called domineering was a jacket being forced on her because he couldn't stand the thought of the inevitable shift in the balance of power. She assured him that the object of her task was not to control him, but out of necessity—freedom being the appreciation of necessity—to control herself (Weems, 2017, p. 36).

In the third group of photographs friends visit. They wipe away tears, tell stories, crack jokes, and eventually under their care, Weems makes her way back to laughter. Another friend comes over to fix Weems' hair. The fourth group of photographs shows Weems as a mother. She and her daughter play with make-up, do work, and have a standoff. Weems and a friend supervise a play date between their two girls. Text panels describe the protagonist's mixed position on motherhood: "Her sisters thought the world of their children. Noting their little feats as they stumbled. When her kid finally stood and walked, she watched with a distant eye, thinking, 'Thank God! I won't have to carry her much longer'" (Weems, 2017, p.60).

The final group of photographs shows Weems single and alone. She stands at the end of the kitchen table looking directly into the camera. Weems feeds her birds. She masturbates. In the final photograph Weems sits alone at the head of the kitchen table. She plays solitaire, smokes a cigarette, has a drink, and eats from a box of chocolates. The last text panel describes her singlehood:

> In and of itself, being alone again naturally wasn't a problem. But some time had passed. At 38 she was beginning to feel the fullness of her woman self, wanted once again to share it all with a man who could deal with the multitude of her being. But that would have to come later. Presently she was in her solitude, so it wasn't nobody's business what she did (Weems, 2017, p. 76).

The Kitchen Table Series (Weems, 2017) captures an intimate, interior view of one single Black woman's life. Weems' representation of single Black womanhood cuts through the clatter and din of stereotype to portray an everyday experience of single Black womanhood and gives vision and voice to previously unacknowledged dimensions of single Black women's lives (Edwards, 2017; Lewis, 2017). Since the original exhibition of *The Kitchen Table Series* in 1990

(Weems, 2017), Weems has won a MacArthur Genius grant for her work (McArthur Foundation, 2018). She has continued making her art, recently photographing regally dressed R 'n' B singer and actress Mary J. Blige for *W* magazine (Solway, 2017).

In her own interview with *W* magazine, Weems speaks about the lasting impact of *The Kitchen Table Series* (Weems, 2017). To many, myself and Weems included, it is a timeless representation of single Black women that has endured nearly 30 years of social change:

> It's interesting. I started working on it in like 1989 and I finished it in 1990, so it's been around for a long time. I really do think of it as a seminal body of work—it was the coming together of many, many, many sorts of stops and starts and trials and errors, just that sort of struggle of a young artist to discover the nuance of my own voice, my own photographic style, my own vocal utterance. All those things came together in this piece. I still find it remarkable, and I'm still completely surprised by it, and how it's still so completely contemporary. It's very difficult to discern when the work was made; it could have been made 30 years ago, or it could have been made 30 days ago. The sense of time is really displaced within the work. At least I think that that's true (Eckardt, 2016).

At its core, this dissertation is concerned with single Black women and their relationship to their own representation in the media. In many ways, Weems' work captures the spirit of my dissertation project, and the timeless nature of her work speaks to the lasting relevance of single Black women's lives to popular culture. The participants of this study describe their singlehood in ways reminiscent of Weems' photo essay. Like Weems' experience creating the piece, singlehood comprises false starts and stops as well as the discovery of unseen parts of oneself and one's talents. Weems depicts singlehood outside of men. She captures its varied roles and responsibilities, features of being single that participants of this study described as giving

purpose to their lives. Weems portrays a complex and uneasy relationship to motherhood and fertility. As I demonstrate later, motherhood and childlessness meaningfully shape participants' experiences in singlehood, perspectives on their representation, and beliefs about partners and relationships. Weems' work is a self-authored portrayal that captures her own experiences. Participants reject the drama and sexism that frequently shape their representation in the media, favoring authentic portrayals that reflect the content creator's own experiences. Like Weems, the participants of this study celebrate publicly unacknowledged facets of their singlehood.

Through participants' responses, I explore the interconnected and reciprocal nature of Black women's experiences of singlehood and their relationships to their representation in the media. The purpose of this project is to holistically examine how single Black women's prior experiences and beliefs about sex, dating, relationships, and singlehood work with, alongside, and against Black Love media in participants' processes of sexual socialization. Sexual socialization is the process by which one acquires their attitudes and beliefs about sex and relationships (Ward, 2003, 2016). It is a dynamic and context-driven process, the product of interactions with friends, family, romantic partners, and the media (Ward, 2003, 2016).

I take a media sexual socialization approach to the study of single Black women and their media use (Ward, 2003, 2016). Media sexual socialization research focuses on the media's role in shaping an individual's beliefs about relationships and sex (Ward, 2003, 2016). Emerging from the fields of psychology and media studies, this multi-methods body of research has established popular media as an important agent of sexual socialization in the lives of Black women (Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, & Fletcher, 2017; Stephens & Few, 2007). For example, relevant qualitative media sexual socialization research has examined how young Black women make sense of stereotypic sexual scripts for Black women (e.g. Jezebel stereotype) contained in

Black popular culture, and found that stereotypically raced and gendered sexual scripts inform young Black women's expectations of sex and relationships (Stephens & Few, 2007). Relevant quantitative survey research has explored the influence of the Black-oriented media on Black women's endorsement of traditional gender ideologies and stereotypes about Black women, and found that Black-oriented media consumption is associated with greater endorsement of stereotypic beliefs about Black women (Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, & Fletcher, 2017).

In the current project I study Black Love media, for its focus on relationships and varied representations of single Black women. Black Love media comprise an ever-growing number of television shows, movies, news articles, dating advice books, podcasts, blogs, and social media accounts that advise and represent single Black women. Created for Black female audiences, these media stress the importance of partnership and marriage. Examples include relationship advice books like Steve Harvey and Denene Millner's (2009) *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man*; television shows like BET's *Being Mary Jane* (Akil, Akil, & Union, 2012); and magazine features like *Ebony's* February 2016 cover story entitled "Holding on to Black Love" (Mayo, 2016). Black Love media are not new (e.g., Terry McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale*, 1992), but Black Love media have gone underexplored in media research.

Media representations of single Black women have historically lacked nuance, relying on stereotypic constructions of Black Americans and their roles in U.S. society (Means Coleman, 1998). Welfare queens, gold diggers, video vixens, shrill Sapphires, haughty Black ladies too "bougie" to get a man, and strong Black women sick and tired of being sick and tired have been a long-standing feature of popular media (Collins, 2009; Stephens & Few, 2007; Wanzo, 2011). Reflecting this history of representation, Black Love media contain stereotypic messages about Black women and assign them a value contingent upon their singlehood (Wanzo, 2011). Through

advice, these media offer guidance on how to navigate relationships and singlehood (e.g., Harvey & Millner, 2009). Because Black Love media contain stereotypic representations of Black women and prescriptive messages about singlehood and dating, more work is needed to explore Black Love media's impact on single Black women's processes of sexual socialization. In this project, I explored how single Black women make sense of themselves and their singlehood in light of popular representations of single Black women in the media. I examined how single Black women's consumption of Black Love media is connected with their beliefs about partners, relationships, and singlehood. Accordingly, I posed four research questions to guide this project:

RQ 1: What understandings about sex, dating, and relationships do single Black women bring to and take away from Black Love media?

RQ 2: In light of the narratives presented in Black Love media, how do single Black women interpret their own experiences of being single?

RQ 3: How does Black Love media consumption relate to single Black women's beliefs about partners, relationships, and singlehood as well as their tolerance for risk in relationships?

RQ 4: How do age, education, and maternal status influence Black Love media's associations to single Black women's relationship, partner, and singlehood beliefs?

To answer these questions I conducted two studies. First, I conducted a semi-structured interview study with 24 single Black women living in Detroit, Michigan. This study describes Black women's experiences of singlehood, examines Black women's interpretations of Black Love media, and explores Black women's meaning making of singlehood through the lens of Black Love media. Second, I conducted a national survey of 506 single Black women. Grounded

in cultivation and social cognitive theories, this study assesses the relations between Black Love media consumption and survey respondents' beliefs about partners, relationships, and singlehood.

All participants in this project self-identified as single (i.e., unmarried, divorced, or widowed), heterosexual, cisgender, Black women aged 25-46. I focused on this sample of Black women because sexuality evolves over the life course, and the process of sexual socialization is influenced by numerous life events like the birth of children, marriage, divorce, and the stabilizing of careers (Halpern, 2010). The achievement of life milestones changes a woman's relationship to herself, her partners, and her community (Trice-Black, 2013). Life experience also expands the base of information a woman draws from in order to adapt to these life changes (Halpern, 2010). Based on these perspectives, I conceptualize "singlehood" as its own stage of life separate from chronology or sequence, but subject to ones past experiences and personal development. I focused on an older cohort of Black women to explore how age and social roles like motherhood shape study outcomes. I focused on heterosexual and cisgender women in this project because of the focus on heterosexual partnership in Black Love media and the media's preoccupation with heterosexual cisgender Black women's marital outcomes (e.g., Harvey & Millner, 2009).

This project unites three related bodies of research: an interdisciplinary literature that describes Black women's experiences of singlehood (Clarke, 2011); Black feminist media studies research, a qualitative and critical cultural body of work that describes Black women's representation in the media and examines Black women's meaning-making of these portrayals (Means Coleman, 2011); and media sexual socialization research, which examines the media's role in shaping Black women's beliefs about sex, dating, and relationships (Ward, 2003, 2016).

By examining these literatures together, it is my goal to reveal a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of single Black women's relationships to and with the media. I take an intersectional perspective on Black women's singlehood in this project (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). I explore how race, gender, class, and other salient demographic markers like educational attainment locate Black women at the crossroads of numerous sociocultural forces that uniquely shape their experiences of singlehood and interpretations of the media.

This dissertation comprises four additional chapters. Chapter two presents the background and literature review for the dissertation. To begin, I report national statistics describing Black women's rates of marriage and the social factors that contribute to these outcomes for Black women. Second, I summarize qualitative research describing Black women's experiences of singlehood. These summaries track trends in the demographic features of singlehood for Black women, pairing descriptive research with national statistics to produce a comprehensive picture of single Black women's lives. Third, I briefly explicate Black Love media, tracing its commercial origins. Fourth, I present Black feminist media studies research that analyzes Black Love media and its messages, and examines Black women's experiences as consumers of these media. Finally, I summarize qualitative and quantitative media sexual socialization research and theory to better understand how the media may shape Black women's beliefs about sex, dating, and relationships. Based on these summaries, I highlight the potential implications of Black Love media for single Black women's experiences of singlehood, beliefs about partners and relationships, and make my argument for why studies like the ones I have conducted are an important step in uniting and growing these literatures.

Chapter three presents the findings of the interview study. I present three themes that emerged across three important domains of participants' lives: their interpersonal relationships,

personal experiences of singlehood, and relationships to Black Love media. Participants described the importance of their close interpersonal relationships, highlighting two dominant messages about single Black women shared to them by friends, families, and partners. Close friends and family advised participants to delay relationships and pursue personal growth, education, and professional development. Would-be partners and more distant relatives viewed single Black women skeptically due to their lack of a husband.

Speaking of their own experiences, participants described singlehood as a time for growth, freedom from the responsibilities of relationships, and as a stage of life that requires adaptability and flexibility. Based on participant experiences and the guidance they received from friends and family, I argue that singlehood functions as a developmental stage, a period of time during which a woman is committed to growing in herself. Time away from men facilitates this process.

Speaking of their relationships to Black Love media, participants described their interpretations of the representation of single women in these media. Participants rejected dramatic, man-focused, and sexist portrayals, preferring instead authentic media personalities who used their media platforms to lift Black women, as well as agentic portrayals of single Black women's sexuality and competency in singlehood. In singlehood participants were focused on their personal growth and looked to Black Love advice media to support these processes. According to participants' accounts, missing from Black Love media are real stories of everyday women.

I begin chapter three by describing the research paradigm and theoretical framework of the interview project. I go on to describe the study's methods. I include details about the sampling frame, participant recruitment strategies, the study's setting, the interview protocol, and

study activities. I describe the analysis approach used to generate the study's themes, and the methodological rigor of this qualitative study. I then describe the study's domains and themes. I end the chapter with a discussion of the significance of these themes.

Chapter four presents the findings from the survey study. This study has three main goals: to explore the associations between Black Love media and sexual socialization outcomes like relationship and partner beliefs; to explore the viability of singlehood beliefs as sexual socialization outcomes; and to explore the moderating effects of motherhood on the association between Black Love media and the included sexual socialization variables. I begin this chapter by posing three hypotheses to guide the survey study. Based on cultivation and social cognitive theories, these hypotheses posit that greater Black love media consumption and belief in the presumed influence of Black Love media on men and women—a measure of participants beliefs about the impact of Black Love media on other Black men and women—will be associated with more antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, greater endorsement of stereotypically gender roles for relationships, greater tolerance violence in relationships, and more reported single stigma. Next, I present the survey's method. I describe the sampling frame, data collection procedure, survey measures, and data analysis plan. I go on to present the survey results and conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of the survey's findings.

In chapter five, the dissertation's discussion and conclusion chapter, I answer the research questions and highlight the implications of my work. This project demonstrates the value of singlehood to media sexual socialization research, and, accordingly, I call for an expansion of this literature to consider attitudes and beliefs about singlehood. My work has implications for the types of outcome measures, media, samples, and methodological approaches used in media sexual socialization research. I argue for the inclusion of measures assessing general beliefs

about singlehood, experiences of single stigma, and antagonistic beliefs about single women. I advocate for the inclusion of advice media in media sexual socialization studies. These prescriptive media have their own unique implications for shaping attitudes and behavior, and because of these features of advice media, the inclusion of this genre in research helps support new theoretical directions in media sexual socialization research. I stress the importance of including older samples of women and considering social roles like motherhood *and* childlessness.

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CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Structural Trends in Never-Marriage Among Black Women

When we talk about single Black women in contemporary U.S. society, typically we are talking about never-married women. Single Black women, like all single people, are classified by the U.S. Census as unmarried adults, a category that includes divorcees and widows who have not remarried, and never-married adults (United States Census Bureau, 2017b). After a long and steady rise, divorce rates have tapered off (Kreider & Ellis, 2011), and rates of widowhood have remained stable and relatively unchanged for the past two decades (United States Census Bureau, 2017a), but rates of never-marriage are increasing sharply for all adults, with Black Americans leading this trend (Kreider & Ellis, 2011).

In 1996, 57.7% of Black women ages 25-29 and 25% of Black women ages 40-44 had never been married (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). During this same time period, 31.1% of White women, 30.5% of Hispanic women, and 41.5% of Asian women ages 25-29; and 7.7% of White women, 9.0% of Hispanic/Latino women, and 3.1% of Asian women ages 40-44 were never-married (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). In 2009, the most recent year that data are available, 70.5% Black women ages 25-29 and 33.1% of Black women ages 40-44 had never been married. In contrast, 43.3% of White women, 36.8% of Hispanic/Latino women, and 51.6% of Asian women ages 25-29; and 11.2% of White women, 15.2% of Hispanic/Latino women, and 5.9% of Asian

women ages 40-44 had never been married. Although their rates of never-marriage far exceed those of women of other racial/ethnic groups, when compared to rates of never-marriage for Black men, Black women's rates are consistent. In 1996, 61.8% of Black men ages 25-29 and 23.8% of Black men ages 40-49 were never married (United States Census Bureau, 2016). In 2009, rates of never-marriage increased to 73.1% for Black men ages 25-29 and to 24.2% for Black men ages 40-49 (United States Census Bureau, 2016).

Scholars of Black family formation attribute Black men's and women's marital outcomes to structural factors primarily associated with race, as opposed to other forces associated with gender or class (Cherlin, 2010; Clarke, 2011). Rising rate of cohabitation and shifting gender roles have influenced partnership outcomes for all Americans and called into question the necessity of marriage for women of all races (Cherlin, 2010; Lundberg, Pollak, & Stearns, 2016; Traister, 2016). Among Black women, however, researchers point to three additional structural forces that uniquely contribute to Black women's partnership outcomes: lower rates of interracial partnership for Black women; a male-to-female sex-ratio imbalance wherein single Black women outnumber single Black men; and a mismatch between Black men and women by their educational and professional attainment. As part of this discussion I describe how interpersonal discrimination, mass incarceration, Black men's mortality, inequalities in educational attainment between Black men and women, and intimate partner violence contribute or are related to lower rates of marriage for Black Americans.

Sensitive to critiques about how this discussion can be used to further marginalize Black Americans, I contextualize my discussion of structural discrimination among broader discussions of Black women's romantic desires, love in relationships, and mutual support between single Black women. To be clear, a discussion of interracial partnership, sex ratio imbalances, and

gender disparities in educational attainment are not intended to further narratives of Black American deficiency, but rather to be honest about the structural factors circumscribing Black women and men's partnership outcomes. To omit a discussion of these structural inequalities from my discussion of Black women's singlehood would be to overlook the already under-discussed consequences of structural oppression for Black American's experiences of love relationships and tell an incomplete story of Black women's singlehood (Charles & Luoh, 2010; Clarke, 2011; Coates, 2015).

Rates of interracial partnership are increasing for all U.S. adults, but more slowly for Black women, who have the lowest rates of interracial marriage of any demographic group in the U.S. (Cherlin, 2010; Johnson & Kreider, 2013; Livingston & Brown, 2017). In 2015, 12% of new heterosexual marriages including a Black woman were interracial partnerships, compared to approximately 24% of all new heterosexual marriages including a Black man (Livingston & Brown, 2017). Rates of interracial marriage vary by educational attainment; approximately 30% of Black male newlyweds with a college degree are married to a woman of another race, compared to 13% of Black female newlyweds from a comparable educational background (Livingston & Brown, 2017). For Black Americans who have earned a high school degree or less, 17% of Black male newlyweds and 10% of Black female newlyweds are partnered to a person of another race (Livingston & Brown, 2017). Researchers argue that low rates of interracial partnership for Black women are due to anti-Black sentiments and stereotypic representations that portray Black women as unfit to marry (Clarke, 2011; Livingston & Brown, 2017).

Further restricting single Black women's access to romantic partners is a sex-ratio imbalance wherein unmarried Black women outnumber unmarried Black men. The U.S. Census

estimates that there are 9,154,000 unmarried (i.e., divorced, widowed, and never-married) Black men and 12,766,000 unmarried Black women ages 15 and older in American society (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a). This constitutes a sex ratio of about 72 unmarried Black men for every 100 unmarried Black women ages 15 and over. Among all Americans, the U.S. Census estimates that there are 58,251,000 unmarried men and 65,213,000 unmarried women ages 15 and up, constituting a sex-ratio imbalance of about 89 unmarried men for every 100 unmarried women (United States Census Bureau, 2017a).

Sex-ratio imbalances are a global phenomenon (Abramitzky, Delavande, & Vasconcelos, 2011; Pollet & Nettle, 2008). In societies with fewer women than men, women can be more selective about their partners, typically marrying younger, at higher rates, and to partners with better economic standing than women in societies with greater parity between the numbers of unmarried men and women (Abramitzky, Delavande, & Vasconcelos, 2011; Pollet & Nettle, 2008). In societies with fewer men than women, men tend to be less committed in their romantic relationships, marrying later, at lower rates, at older ages, and to women with greater economic standing than men from societies with greater parity between men and women (Abramitzky, Delavande, & Vasconcelos, 2011; Durante, Griskevicius, Simpson, Cantú, & Tybur, 2012). In societies with fewer available romantic partners, women tend to remain unmarried for a greater proportion of their adult lives and prioritize careers and professional accomplishment (Durante, Griskevicius, Simpson, Cantú, & Tybur, 2012). Other research suggests that in these societies, partnered women are at an increased risk of contracting STIs (Ferguson, Quinn, & Sandelowski, 2006) and experiencing intimate partner violence (The World Health Organization [WHO], 2018).

Researchers attribute Black Americans' sex-ratio imbalance to Black men's higher rates of mortality and mass incarceration. Black men have some of the highest mortality rates of any demographic group in the United States, a disparity that cuts across age (Case & Deaton, 2015; Cooper & Smith, 2011; Geronimous, Bound, & Colen, 2011). In 2014, Black men ages 25-44 had a mortality rate of approximately 1060 deaths per 100,000 compared to 872.3 deaths per 100,000 for White men and 626.8 deaths per 100,000 for Hispanic men (Kochanek, Murphy, Xu, & Tejada-Vera, 2016; Murphy, Kochanek, Xu, & Arias, 2015), disparities driven by inequitable access to medical care, higher rates of chronic disease, and disproportionately high rates of violence (Geronimous, Bound, & Colen, 2011).

As for mass incarceration, Black men make up approximately 7% of the total American population but comprise nearly 35% of the current U.S. prison population (Carson, 2014). It is estimated that approximately one of three Black men will spend some portion of his life under the supervision of the state through incarceration or parole (The Sentencing Project, 2013). In addition to taking Black men out of their communities where they could meet female partners, time in jail, prison, or parole can stall educational and professional attainment for Black men once they leave the supervision of the state (Visher, Debus, & Yahner, 2008). The mandatory disclosure of one's criminal history on applications for work or school drives down educational attainment and employment opportunities for Black men (The Sentencing Project, 2013; Visher, Debus, & Yahner, 2008). Because economically stable and more highly educated people are most likely to marry (Copen, Daniels, & Mosher, 2013; Kreider & Ellis, 2011), mass incarceration further complicates partnership by limiting Black men's access to jobs and education.

Not just the product of structural discrimination, Black women's agency plays an important role their access to romantic partnership. Previous studies have focused on women's desired traits for their would-be romantic partners (Cahee, 2014; Eastwick & Finkell, 2008). Prior research has found that women typically prioritize a man's earning prospects when determining his marriageability (Eastwick & Finkell, 2008). For Black men with lower levels of education or criminal backgrounds, it may be a difficult to meet a female partner's financial expectations due to the suppression of earning power associated with racial discrimination (The Sentencing Project, 2013; Visher, Debus, & Yahner, 2008). Other research conducted with Black women has found that Black women prefer partners who are honest, have a sense of duty to the family and the home, and have mental and emotional fortitude to withstand the racism of American society (Cahee, 2014).

In addition to undermining the formation of would-be partnerships, structural discrimination has implications for Black women's experiences of relationships, specifically her safety. Black women are among those most likely to killed by an intimate partner and have the third highest rates of intimate partner violence (IPV; Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014). Nearly 44% of all Black women will experience some form of IPV in their lifetimes (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014). IPV includes physical and sexual violence; reproductive and sexual coercion, such as explicit attempts to impregnate a partner against her will; emotional/psychological abuse; and controlling behaviors, such as isolating a person from their friends and family or interference with employment, education, or medical care (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists [ACOG], 2013; WHO, 2012). Male partners are the primary cause of these outcomes for Black women (WHO, 2012). Male control in families and relationships, economic stress, male non-monogamy, and a disparity in educational attainment between partners where a

woman has a higher level of education than her male partner contribute to women's experiences of IPV (WHO, 2012). Bolstering these relational factors are social forces privileging male authority and exacerbating gender inequity (WHO, 2012). An experience of IPV is associated with problematic sexual health outcomes including HIV transmission and unsafe sexual practices (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014). For U.S. Black women, who experience disproportionately high rates of HIV and STIs, an experience of IPV can exacerbate problematic health outcomes for an already vulnerable constituency.

These data offer a macro-level view of U.S. Black women's singlehood, a view that identifies the structural factors that circumscribe Black women's partnership outcomes. But this oft-cited demographic perspective offers only one, limited, and relatively pessimistic view of Black women's singlehood. Qualitative research chronicling the lives of single Black women and conducted primarily by Black female scholars moves beyond the demographic features of singlehood and provides a more descriptive and nuanced view of single Black women's lives.

Descriptive Research Examining Black Women's Singlehood

Accounts of single Black women's lives are spread across literatures, touched upon by anthropologists (Stack, 1974), sociologists (Clarke, 2011), Black feminists (Lorde, 1984), marriage and family formation scholars (Dickerson, 1995), and public health researchers (Berman et al., 2013), among others. Study methods range, comprising first-person accounts (Omolade, 1986), ethnographies (Stack, 1974), and participant interviews (Clarke, 2011). This section summarizes academic work from across this interdisciplinary qualitative literature. There is no one set of conclusions that can be drawn about single Black women's lives from these studies. The participants in these studies have families, jobs, romantic partners, financial obligations, hobbies and activities, and children. Rather, this section of the review focuses on

two defining features of this literature: single Black women's education/socioeconomic status and their motherhood/childlessness.

Singlehood studies conducted with Black women commonly focus on two distinct populations of Black women: poor and working-class single Black mothers (e.g. Stack, 1976) or college-educated, professional, never-married Black women without children (e.g. Harris & Hall, 1998). Research exploring the lives of poor and working-class single Black mothers frequently highlights their resilience in childrearing and coping in the face of racism, classism, and gender discrimination (Omolade, 1986; Stack, 1974). Omolade (1986) describes how, as a single Black mother in 1980s New York City, she worked with other single Black women to collectively meet the needs of their community. Omolade and the other single mothers in her Black women's collective created childcare networks and offered each other love and emotional support as they balanced work commitments, navigated conflict with family and romantic partners, and resisted the racism, classism, and sexism of the 1980s New York City family services agency. Stack (1974), Lorde (1984), and Collins (2009) speak to similar themes in their work, highlighting the important role that non-traditional family structures and kinship networks populated by mothers and mother-like figures create for one another. Berman and colleagues' (2015) interview study of 20 young mothers ages 18-24 highlights the stakes of not having access to the kinship networks that Stack (1974), Lorde (1984), and Collins (2009) describe in their work. Berman et al.'s (2013) piece demonstrates how social isolation and a lack of access to social support renders young Black mothers vulnerable to various forms of sexual violence and housing instability.

One critique of this research is that it over represents the experiences of poor and working-class Black women with children. As a response to this work, a more recent body of research has emerged exploring singlehood among more affluent Black women. Clarke (2011)

examines educated and professional Black women's barriers to romance, reproduction, and family, what Clarke terms *inequalities of love.* Through an ethnography and interview-based study conducted with 58 college-educated Black women. Based on her participants' accounts, Clarke argues that college-educated Black women's lower rates of marriage were, in part, the product of structural inequality. Clarke's participants expressed guilt, conflict, sadness, and frustration over what they felt were limited outlets for their sexual expression and reproduction. Many of Clarke's participants considered casual sexual relationships, childbearing out of wedlock, or having children with multiple partners out of the question, but still yearned for passionate and satisfying sexual lives and the opportunity to bear children. Clarke specifically points to respectability politics—a socially conservative set of beliefs and cultural practices originating from Black religious circles that critiques and polices the behavior of Black American's (Higginbotham, 1993)—as an external and internalized force governing the behavior of the educated Black women in her sample. Likewise, Gilchrist's (2011) edited volume examines the lives of never-married and childless Black female professors. The volume's contributors explore the trade-offs of work and life, highlighting how Black women's roles in the academy chafe against their ability to pursue marriage and family goals. Gilchrist's (2011) volume highlights the emotional toll that the false dichotomy of needing to choose work or family presents to single Black women.

In this descriptive work, the media play a relatively small role. For the most part, engagement with the media is focused on content, examining the implications of single Black women's representation to the outside world of politicians, employers, and potential partners (Clarke, 2011; Collins, 2009; Gilchrist, 2011; Omolade, 1986). Although they have not extensively examined the media's role in their work, these authors concede its value, calling for

more research to examine just how the media shape Black women's experiences of singlehood (Clarke, 2011). In many ways, Black feminist media studies research answers this call, examining the ways single Black women are represented in the media and the meanings single Black women make of these portrayals (Tounsel, 2015). In the next section I summarize this critical cultural and qualitative body of research, to identify the dominant themes of Black Love media, an important source of present-day representations of single Black women. This work also examines Black women's relationship *with* the media, comparing single Black women's experiences to these portrayals and exploring participants' meaning making of single Black women's representation in the media.

Portrayals of Singlehood and Marriage in Black Love Media

Black Love media comprise an ever-growing number of television shows, movies, news articles, dating advice books, podcasts, blogs, and social media accounts that advise and represent single Black women. Created with Black female audiences in mind (Gibson, Run, & Morrow, 2013; Harvey & Millner, 2009), Black Love media stress the importance of marriage, and guide Black women through their process of finding a partner. As an industry, it is difficult to estimate the impact of Black Love media. Information about the sales of specific books is proprietary (*The New York Times*, 2018). However, Black Love media do include many *New York Times* Best Sellers like Harvey and Millner's (2009) *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man*; Gibson, Run, and Morrow's (2013) *Manology*; and Franklin, Good, and Vandahey's (2016) *The Wait*, demonstrating their national popularity. From Nielsen ratings, we know many Black Love television programs are popular among Black female audiences (The Neilsen Company, 2017). Sixteen of 20 most popular television shows among Black women 18 years or older are programs that could be classified as Black Love media. Included in these television shows are three of

VH1's *Love and Hip Hop* franchises (Hull, McLaughlin, Scott-Young, & Springman, 2011); Bravo's *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* (Dunlop & Eskelin, 2008); and ABC's *Scandal* (Beers, Rhimes, & McGuigan, 2012). What make Black Love media a worthy object of study, are not their sales per se, but rather their ubiquity, cultural impact, and content.

Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man (Harvey & Millner, 2009) was the book that launched a thousand advice careers. Following the release of Harvey and Millner's book, many popular Black celebrities have authored advice books of their own. For example, Amber Rose, the ex-girlfriend of Kanye West who is famous for parlaying expressive sexuality in wide ranging career including a talk show, podcast, and line of sunglasses. In 2015, Rose published *How to Be a Bad Bitch*, which includes general life advice but also approaches to dating and relationships. La La Anthony, former MTV video jockey and current wife to the unfaithful NBA celebrity Carmelo Anthony, wrote *The Love Playbook: Rules for Love, Sex, and Happiness* (Anthony & Hunter, 2014). Demonstrating their cultural impact, Black Love media have a long reach morphing from books, to movies, to television shows. For example, since its release *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (Harvey & Millner, 2009), has been turned into two movies and has a book sequel; moreover, on his network television talk show, Harvey dispenses dating and relationship advice to his viewers. *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (Harvey & Millner, 2009) grew out of a segment featured on Steve Harvey's drive time radio talk show *The Steve Harvey Morning Show* (iHeart Radio, 2018), where Harvey and his cohosts answer relationship and dating advice questions posed by their listeners.

Black Love media are replete with messages that label single Black women and place limits on their sexuality and relationships. Films like Tyler Perry's *Acrimony* (Areu et al., 2018), show the violent extremes that single Black women will supposedly go to if their male partners

jilt them. In *Acrimony* (Areu et al., 2018), a recently dumped Taraji P. Henson stalks and almost murders a man who ended their relationship. Dating advice books and television shows like Bravo's *To Rome with Love* (Bullock et al., 2018), a reality television show that follows five single Black women as they look for love in Italy, offer readers and viewers tips and tricks for securing a mate, all while tracking protagonists' messy paths to love. News articles and think pieces like the *Chicago Tribune*'s February 6th story "Dating while black: Not enough black men? Dating tips for single parents" (Rockett, 2018) provide yet another journalistic exploration of single Black women's in ability to find partners.

Critical cultural communication research has explored the features of Black Love media to examine the messages they contain about single Black women and relationships (Boylorn, 2008; Charleston, 2014; Tounsel, 2015; Wanzo, 2011). Analyses focus on dating advice and the representation of single Black women. Researchers offer critiques of what they see as gendered portrayals of relationships in these media (Wanzo, 2011), offering Black feminist (Boylorn, 2008) and womanist critiques (Tounsel, 2015). Qualitative studies examine viewer meaning-making of these images, relying on auto-ethnography (Boylorn, 2008), focus groups (Charleston, 2014), and participant interviews (Tounsel, 2015). I summarize these studies below.

In her seminal text *Black Feminist Thought* (Collins, 2009), Patricia Hill Collins' (2009) expounds on the history of Black feminism and articulates the concept of controlling images of Black women, which summarize five dominant stereotypes of Black women. Critical cultural researchers frequently invoke Collins' controlling images of Black women in their analyses of Black Love media. "Designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Collins, 2009, pg. 76-77), controlling images of Black women are a long-standing feature of the American media

landscape. Collins identifies five controlling images: the mammy, a slavery-era image who is represented as dark-skinned, corpulent, and servile to Whiteness; the matriarch, a prototypical angry Black woman whose overly aggressive, unfeminine behavior has left her single and alone; the welfare mother/queen, who is lazy, reproductively prolific, and manless, partnering herself to the government for federal welfare dollars; the Black lady, a hard-working and high-achieving middle class professional who is alone, rendered unfeminine because of her direct competition with Black men for jobs and education; and the Jezebel, whose insatiable, hypersexual appetite serves as the justification for her sexual violation (Collins, 2009, p. 79-93).

Wanzo (2011) examines the presence of the "Black lady" stereotype in Black Love media, exploring the representation of professional Black women as unfit for marriage. She analyzes three case studies in her piece: the marriage of the Obamas, Harvey and Millner's (2009) *Act Like a Lady*, and Disney's *The Princess and the Frog.* Through these case studies, she argues that representations of the love lives of professional Black women idealize romantic love and traditional family structures, mocking Black women for their inability to secure romantic partnerships. I conducted my own analysis of Black Love advice books (Moorman, 2016), exploring the role of Collins' controlling images of Black women in three advice books of the genre: Harvey and Millner's (2009) *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man*; Tyrese and Rev. Run's (2013) *Manology: The Secrets of Your Man's Mind Revealed;* and *The Wait* by actress Megan Goode and her husband Devon Franklin (2016). I found that these books rely on stereotypic constructions of Black women in relationships, employing controlling images of single Black women to advance their messages. Single women are portrayed as shrill matriarchs driving their partners away; Jezebels, too quick to have sex; and Black lady professionals who are incapable of yielding to their male partners. Other work employs Black feminist and womanist analyses of

the female protagonists within the cinematic work of Tyler Perry. Researchers find that Perry, too, relies on stereotypical images of Black women in his work (Brown & Campbell, 2014). Scholars find that through his character of Madea—Perry's older Black stateswoman cross-dressing alter ego—Perry offers guidance reinforcing traditional gender roles in relationships (Lyle, 2011; Patterson, 2011).

Other analyses focus on the representation of male partners in Black Love media. Williams' (2010) analyses explore the role of hegemonic masculinity and misogyny in *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (Harvey & Millner, 2009). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as "the pattern of practice, i.e., actions as well as a set of role expectations, that allowed for men's dominance over women" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Williams identifies three articulations of hegemonic masculinity in Harvey and Millner's book. First, by Harvey's definition, men do not talk; communication is women's responsibility. Second, men derive their worth, value, and performance of masculinity from women's feminine performances. Third, men need and are entitled to an abundant sex life, which Harvey frames as necessary for male functioning. Williams argues that the misogynist constructions of men's needs in relationship are counterbalanced by the sexist performances of femininity that they command from women, fixing both men's and women's roles in relationships.

Other work examines additional characteristics of Black Love media. Tounsel (2015) identifies and critiques the role of "single-doom" narratives in Black Love media. These narratives negatively portray singlehood for Black women, emphasize the importance of marriage for women, and exaggerate the desperation of single Black women. In Black Love media, single Black women are frequently mocked and blamed for their own relationship outcomes and numerous ills challenging Black communities (Wanzo, 2011), with authors and

producers attributing high rates of HIV, poverty, mass incarceration, and the erosion of family values in Black communities to the choices of single Black women and mothers (e.g., Franklin, Good, & Vandehey, 2016). Male scarcity narratives are another feature of Black Love media, exaggerating the lack of "good" Black men (e.g., Rockett, 2018). Reviere and Byerly (2013) performed a critical feminist discourse analysis to explore the extent to which women show agency within sex and relationship advice articles in *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence* magazines. The authors found that *Essence* presented a more agentic portrayal of women compared to *Cosmopolitan*. *Essence* featured more articles that reminded its readers that they could be happy while single, encouraged them to advocate for and to secure their own sexual pleasure, and urged them to be intolerant of the most extreme forms of disrespectful male behavior, like infidelity. The comparison bodes well for *Essence* readers, but Reviere and Byerly found that Black women who read *Essence* are still exposed to messages that privilege marriage, prioritize male advice, and offer fixed representations of Black womanhood, messages that are better by degree but not substance. Other work supports Reviere and Byerly's conclusions (Jagesic, 2014).

Qualitative Black feminist media studies research explores how these themes are received and made sense of by their Black female consumers. Bobo's (1995) interview study conducted with explored Black women's responses to the movies *Waiting to Exhale, Daughters of the Dust*, and *The Color Purple*, three wide-release motion pictures that prominently featured Black women in leading roles. By tracking the shifting, and at times contradictory, thoughts of the Black women featured in these films, Bobo's study highlights the negotiated position Black women find themselves in, in relation to the representation of Black women in the media. Harris and Hall's (1998) interview study explored professional single Black women's reactions to the representation of singlehood in the movie *Waiting to Exhale.* The goal of their study was to

explore how gender roles functioned for Black women in *Waiting to Exhale* compared to how they are manifest in the lives of single Black women. This study highlighted an early tension between the expectations placed on Black women and the extent to which single Black professionals were able or interested in enacting these gendered roles.

Black feminist media research has evolved with the media landscape. More recent studies have explored reality television and dating advice media and have shifted in focus, exploring the perspectives of Black women content creators working in media industries. Boylorn's (2008) autoethnographic study offers a first-person, oppositional reading of the representation of Black women in reality television. Boylorn identifies the impact of stereotypic representations of Black women in contemporary television on her own growth and identity development, and she describes how she has had to negotiate her own race and gender identity in response to these representations. Charleston's (2014) focus group study explored Black women's responses to the portrayals of gender and relationships in the book *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (Harvey & Millner, 2009). Charleston's participants identified and critiqued the misogynistic themes of the book. Participants stated that the representation of men's and women's roles in relationships presented in the book contributes to conflict between Black men and women, introducing barriers to healthy relationships. Tounsel's (2015) interview study examined how Black content creators make sense of Black womanhood through their simultaneous processes of meaning-making and media creation. Tounsel engages a range of representations in her work from marriage crisis narratives to *Scandal's* Olivia Pope. Through nimble readings of these texts—interpretations of media that allow participants to engage with what resonates and disregard the rest—and their own agency within the media industry, Tounsel's participants, although left wanting more, were able to find representations that reflected their experiences.

Sociological and critical cultural media studies research highlights a tension between the reality and the representation of single Black women's relationship outcomes. Although Black Love media claim to support single Black women on their path to partnerships, the gendered representations of single Black women work against partnership formation and the health and longevity of these partnerships (Losocco & Walzer, 2013). Relationship advice, and by extension other forms of media, supporting hegemonic masculinity and stark divisions in gender roles serve other ideological agendas, like promoting male authority in relationships. Theory and research suggest that misogynistic and gendered messages about single Black women erode the foundation of Black women's relationships (Losocco & Walzer, 2013), misrepresent their experiences of singlehood (Harris & Hall, 1998), and compromise would-be partners' views of Black women as wives and mothers (Clarke, 2011; Hurt et al., 2014). Less clear is how consumption of and engagement with Black Love media and their messages influence single Black women's ideas about themselves, their partners, and their own experiences of singlehood. Media sexual socialization research offers some insight into this process.

Sexual Socialization Implications of Black Love Media

Whereas critical cultural research analyzes the representations, themes, and messages within the media, media sexual socialization research examines the process of how consumption of the media is related to viewer beliefs about sex, dating, and relationships. Sexual socialization is the "process by which knowledge, attitudes, and values about sexuality are acquired" (Ward, 2003, p. 348). A qualitative and quantitative body of research, sexual socialization studies have repeatedly identified the importance of social context and interpersonal relationships in shaping human processes of sexual development. Two dominant theoretical approaches inform this work. Social cognitive theory posits that learning about takes place in the context of ones social world

and is shaped by institutions, interpersonal relationships, and major sources for information like the media (Bandura, 2002). Sexual scripts theory is another dominant theoretical approach in sexual socialization research; it posits that humans rely on schemas of appropriate sexuality to guide their behavior in sexual relationships (Simon & Gagnon, 2003). Authors identified three levels at which scripting occurs: Cultural scenarios, which considers the roles institutions in scripting sexual behavior; interpersonal scripts, which considers the role of personal relationships in shaping expectations about sexual encounters; and intrapsychic scripts, which can be described as an "internal rehearsal" or fantasies about sexual encounters during which individuals rehearse for sexual encounters (Simon & Gagnon 2003). Based on this research scholars, have found that peer relationships (e.g. friends, spouses, romantic partners; Bowleg, Lucas, & Tschann, 2004; Stephens & Phillips, 2003), familial relationships (e.g. parents and siblings; Clark, 2011; Stephens & Phillips, 2003), institutions (e.g. clubs, schools, religious communities; Lottes & Kuriloff, 1994), and racial and identity socialization (e.g. investment in racial indentity; Stephens & Phillips, 2003), are key sources for the sexual socialization of Black women and men.

Media sexual socialization research, on the other hand, explores the media's role in sexual socialization, focusing on how the media's messages about sex, gender, and sexuality influence viewer attitudes and beliefs about dating and relationships (Ward, 2003, 2016). Media sexual socialization research considers how the media influence sexual socialization, working alongside peer, family, and institutional forces to shape and individuals ideas about sex and gender. This research is homogeneous, primarily conducted among White, highly educated, and high-income participants, and as such, research conducted with adult-aged Black women is

comparatively limited (Ward, 2003, 2016). Where possible, however, I focus on research examining Black Love media, conducted with all-Black or racially diverse samples of women.

Qualitative media sexual socialization research conducted among young Black women and girls has explored adolescents' understandings of the sexual objectification of women (Stephens & Few, 2007), the representation of gender and femininity in the media (Kaplan & Cole, 2003), and Black women's attitudes towards relationships (Hartley, Wight, & Hunt, 2014; Len-Ríos et al., 2016). This work comprises interviews and focus groups showcasing how adolescents process media content (Werner-Wilson, Fitzharris, & Morrissey, 2004), navigate messages about sex, gender, and relationships presented in the media (Kaplan & Cole, 2003), and draw conclusions about themselves, their peers, and the world around them (Hartely, Wight, & Hunt, 2014). I summarize findings from this body of research below.

Stephens and Few (2007a, 2007b) conducted two focus group studies exploring Black adolescents' understandings of eight hip-hop-specific caricatures of Black women: diva, gold-digger, freak, dyke, gangster bitch, sister savior, earth mother, and baby momma. Like Collins' controlling images of Black women, Stephens and Few's scripts for Black womanhood are raced, classed, and gendered caricatures of Black women's sexuality. In their first study, Stephens and Few (2007a) explored how these hip-hop caricatures of Black women shaped adolescents' sexual identity development and their general evaluations of Black women's sexuality. The authors found that Black adolescent girls based their appraisals of these caricatures on what they perceived older male figures like fathers would find acceptable, or younger male peers would find attractive. In these same ways, Black adolescent girls made sense of themselves and their own sexuality, prioritizing men's perspectives of over their own ideas about themselves. Stephens and Few (2007a) attribute this pattern of sexual identity development

to internalized heteronormative values conveyed by these caricatures. Other research reinforces these results, finding that the Black girls in these studies use media representations of Black women to makes sense of and inform their understandings of their own sexuality, the sexuality of other Black women, and roles for Black women in relationships (French, 2013; Stevens & Few, 2007b).

Quantitative media sexual socialization research statistically tests the relations between media consumption and a range of variables including sexual or self-objectifying beliefs (Ward, 2016), and views that sex is recreational, men are sex-driven, and women are sex objects (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). Researchers have also explored acceptance of violence against women (Rodenhizer & Edwards, 2018), desired partner traits and relationship types (Taylor, 2012), and attitudes towards relationships (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007). This work comprises experimental, longitudinal, and cross-sectional survey studies (Ward, 2003, 2016), exploring a range of content including reality dating programs, television shows, movies, and music videos—forms of media that contain messages about gender, relationships, and sexuality.

Black Love media have not yet been examined for their contributions to dating and relationship beliefs, but exposure to reality dating television shows (e.g., *The Bachelor, Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire*), a related genre, has been connected with these variables. Zurbriggen and Morgan (2006) surveyed 334 undergraduate students (54% White) to explore the relations between reality dating programs and five relationship beliefs: adversarial sexual beliefs (e.g., men are out for only one thing); sexual double standards (e.g., a woman who initiates sex is too aggressive); the importance of appearance in dating (e.g., in dating it's all about appearances); and the belief that men are sex-driven (e.g., men think about sex all of the time).

Zurbriggen and Morgan (2006) found that consumption of reality dating television was associated with greater endorsement of all of these beliefs. Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, and Smith (2007) found similar results in their survey of 197 undergraduate students aged 18-25 (81% White). They explored the relations between consumption of dating television shows and three commonly explored relationship beliefs: the belief that sex is recreational, men are sex-driven, and that women are sex objects. Ferris et al. (2007) found that more frequent viewing of dating television shows was associated with greater endorsement all of these beliefs. Other work conducted among predominantly White adolescents supports these findings (Ward & Friedman, 2006).

In addition to media type, researchers have explored how consumption of media containing stereotypic representations of Black women is related to Black women's beliefs about gender roles in relationships. In an experimental and survey study, Ward, Hansbrough, and Walker (2005) explored the influence of rap and rhythm-and-blues music videos on Black high schoolers' gender beliefs. The authors explored whether exposure to music videos with stereotypic representations of gender would be associated with students' endorsement of heteronormative gender beliefs. The endorsement of heteronormative gender beliefs is problematic because these beliefs are associated with problematic outcomes like lower sexual agency and reduced condom use self-efficacy (Seabrook et al., 2017). Ward, Hansbrough, and Walker (2005) found that exposure to music videos containing stereotypic portrayals of gender was associated with greater endorsement of traditional gender beliefs. Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, and Fletcher's (2018) work reinforces these findings. Jerald et al. (2018) conducted a survey of 404 Black undergraduate women aged 18-27 to explore whether the consumption of media containing sexualized stereotypic representations of Black women predicted participants'

beliefs about gender and Black women. Jerald et al. (2018) measured traditional gender attitudes, the belief that women are sex objects, and endorsement of three race-specific, stereotypic schemas about Black women: Jezebel, a hyper-sexualized Black woman; the Sapphire, an overly aggressive Black woman; and the strong Black woman, a Black woman who does it all to the point of exhaustion. Jerald et al. (2018) found that exposure to music videos was associated with greater endorsement of traditional gender attitudes ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$), whereas monthly movie consumption was associated with greater endorsement of the strong Black woman ideal ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$. Other research conducted among predominantly White samples supports these results, concluding that media consumption is associated with greater endorsement of heteronormative gender beliefs (Seabrook et al., 2016, 2017; Tolman, Kim, Schooler, & Sorsoli, 2007).

Research has also reported that the media shape women's beliefs about partners and interest in relationships. Taylor (2012) explored the effects of male scarcity narratives on White adolescent women's partner and relationship preferences. Male scarcity narratives are a characteristic of Black Love media (e.g., Rockett, 2018). Participants were randomly assigned to a control condition, a male-abundance condition featuring a movie clip with more male suitors than eligible women, or a male-scarcity condition that featured fewer men than women. Taylor found that compared to the control condition, exposure to any romantic narrative reduced participant interest in short-term non-committed relationships. Media messages also shaped a woman's stated preference for the types of relationships and partners, with male scarcity narratives predicting a lower desire for committed relationships and partners. Other work reinforces these findings (Zubriggen, Ramsey, Jaworski, 2011). These studies suggest that consumption of male scarcity narratives may motivate women to opt out of dating entirely. These quantitative media sexual socialization studies quantitative media sexual socialization studies

demonstrate the role of the media in shaping beliefs about sex, dating, and relationships; making a compelling case for exploring Black Love media's contributions to sexual socialization.

The Current Project

Together, the literatures on demographics, descriptive singlehood, Black feminist media studies, and media sexual socialization make clear that Black women's experiences of singlehood are shaped by a unique set of structural and sociocultural forces, and that Black women's navigation and engagement with these forces shape their beliefs and experiences of sex, dating, and relationships. This research has identified problematic features of Black Love media and suggests that Black Love media have the capacity to shape Black women's processes of sexual socialization and experiences in singlehood. This work finds that the lives of single Black women are frequently misrepresented, leaving Black female viewers to surgically parse these representations, excising and taking what meets their needs and leaving behind elements of portrayals that do not resonate.

The current project extends these findings, making three contributions to this prior research by exploring how Black Love media use is related to Black women's experiences of singlehood and empirically testing the associations between exposure to Black Love media and Black women's sexual socialization. First, this project assesses women's perceptions of singlehood in light of the messages they perceive in Black Love media about dating, relationships, and singlehood. A few qualitative studies describe single Black women's experiences of singlehood and consider the role of the media in their lives (e.g., Harris & Hall, 1998; Tounsel, 2015). However, much has changed for Black women in the media since Harris and Hall's study. With the current project, I focus on the experiences of everyday single Black

women in Detroit, MI, USA to examine how Black Love media uses and portrayals function in their relational lives.

Second, this project statistically tests the relations between Black Love media consumption and single Black women's beliefs about singlehood and relationships. More quantitative research is needed to better understand the extent to which raced and gendered representations of Black Americans influence the life decisions of Black Americans (Ward, 2003, 2016). As made clear by critical cultural research, Black Love media contain misogynistic messages about women and relationships (Wanzo, 2011; Williams, 2010), messages that have the capacity to shape audience beliefs about sex, dating, and relationships (Ward, 2003, 2016). As of this writing, the statistical correlation between exposure to Black Love media and sexual beliefs and relationship preferences has not been tested among Black women. This project begins to fill that gap.

Finally, this project considers how age, education, and maternal status are related to Black women's experiences of singlehood I investigate the impact of these constructs in three ways. First, with respect to age, I include an older sample of women than have participated in previous studies of this topic. For example, media sexual socialization research is primarily focused on adolescents and young adults (Ward 2003, 2016), but sexuality evolves over the life course and is influenced by life events like the birth of children, marriage, divorce, and the stabilizing effect of careers (Elder, 1998; Halpern, 2010). These life milestones change a woman's relationship to herself, her body, her partners, her social roles, and her community (Trice-Black, 2010); they also expand the base of information women draw from to adapt to these changes. Based on this logic, Halpern (2010) argues that sexual socialization researchers need to focus on older adults. I answer this call by including an older sample of participants,

women ages 25-46, in both of the studies of this dissertation project. Including women 25-45 years of age allows me to consider how media use, along with personal history, sociocultural context, race, class, and gender, and access to resources work to reinforce one another and Black women's sexual maturation and experiences of singlehood (Elder, 1998; Halpren, 2010).

Second, with respect to education, this project includes women from a range of educational backgrounds, comparing the experiences of women with high school diplomas to the experiences of women with Master's degrees. In qualitative singlehood studies, education functions as a clear, quick, and important marker of class status. Descriptive singlehood research focuses primarily on two distinct classed camps of Black women divided across lines of education: poor and working-class mothers without high school or college educations (Berman et al., 2013; Stack, 1974) *or* affluent, never-married, childless singles with college degrees or more advanced degrees (Clarke, 2011; Gilchrist, 2011). Relatively little research describes singlehood *across* these classed lines. Relationship outcomes are partly a function of race and education, and by studying singlehood within specific class and educational groups, a richer picture of singlehood for those women can emerge.

Finally, with respect to maternal status, I consider the role of motherhood in shaping single Black women's relationship to the media and their sexual socialization. Surprisingly, motherhood has not been explicitly linked to media sexual socialization outcomes or explicitly engaged in the Black feminist media studies research that I was able to find, but single motherhood may be a salient demographic factor shaping Black women's relationships with the media and with men. In 2015, 39.8% of children from all racial backgrounds were born to unmarried women (Martin et al., 2018). For Black children, this proportion was 69.8% (Martin et al., 2018). Singlehood for many Black women therefore includes motherhood. Problematic ideas

of single Black motherhood can be found in political and legal contexts (Coates, 2015; Traister, 2016), but also in sociocultural spaces like Black Love media, which distinctly represent and advise single mothers (Moorman, 2016; Wanzo, 2011). For example, in the chapter "If He's Meeting the Kids After You Decide He's 'The One,' It's Too Late," from *Act Like a Lady Think Like a Man*, Harvey and Millner (2009) advise single moms to introduce their children to their potential partners early because:

> "He'll be looking… to determine what kind of mother you are, and whether he'd like to have you be the mother of his children. This is hugely important ladies, because we men recognize that some women aren't cut out to be mothers… Just as some women can't drive, just as some women can't do math, just as some women can't cook, some women aren't good at mothering. And a guy wants to see that the potential mother of his children is at least decent at it, that she can be kind, compassionate, creative, and stern" (p. 167).

This perspective on dating while parenting is arguably misogynistic and gendered, exemplifying the unique ways that single mothers are evaluated in the context of dating relationships and advised in the context of Black Love media. Because single motherhood is an undeniable feature of Black family formation, attached to a different set of experiences in dating and relationships, and separately advised and distinctly represented within Black Love media, further exploration of the role of motherhood in shaping single Black women's relationship to media messages is necessary. The overall goal of this dissertation is to provide a more nuanced and complete understanding of single Black women's relationships with Black Love media and the roles they see these media playing in their beliefs about, and experiences of, romantic relationships and singlehood.

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CHAPTER 3

Interview Study

The current chapter presents findings from a semi-structured interview study exploring how single Black women make sense of themselves and their singlehood in light of Black Love media. Black Love media contain numerous messages about partnership, offering single Black women tips and tricks for how to approach dating in the modern age. Through their representation of Black women, relationships, and men, Black Love media work to define Black women's understandings of singlehood and dating. This study answers two of the dissertation's four research questions.

RQ 1: What understandings about sex, dating, and relationships do Black women bring to and take away from Black Love media?

RQ 2: In light of the narratives presented in Black Love media, how do single Black women interpret their own experiences of being single?

In the pages that follow, I present the story of the interviews. I describe three themes that characterize participants' understandings of singlehood and the representation of single women in Black Love media. *Enrichment* describes the importance of personal growth in singlehood. *Autonomy* captures an ethos of self-reliance that underpins many women's approaches to singlehood. *Misunderstanding* describes the reductive and oversimplified view that others can have of single Black women. These three themes emerged from my reading, re-reading, and coding of the interviews and were defined based on participants described experiences.

Statements supporting each of these themes were observed throughout three domains of participants' lives, relevant to their processes of sexual socialization: participants' relationships with friends and family, specifically the messages shared to participants about single Black women; participants' understandings of themselves as single Black women; and participants' relationships with Black Love media. The results section is structured by each life domain and themes are interwoven into my analyses. I begin this chapter by describing the theoretical framework, participant recruitment strategy, data collection method, and analysis technique used for the current study. I end this chapter with a brief summary of the study's key findings and a discussion of the themes.

A Pragmatic Black Feminist Approach to Intersectional Media Research

This project unites the research paradigm of pragmatism with Black feminist and intersectional theories to form the interpretive framework for the current study. Pragmatism is driven by inquiry, requiring researchers to deploy the methods best suited to address their research questions (Cherryholmes, 1992; Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism encourages methodological dexterity, as researchers explore questions that spill into areas beyond one disciplinary approach (Cherryholmes, 1992; Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism acknowledges that inquiry occurs in context, shaped by social, historical, and political forces (Cherryholmes, 1992; Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism concedes that no single perspective tells the whole story; therefore, pragmatism encourages researchers to consider, and take as valid, the numerous perspectives they encounter in their research to build knowledge from study to study (Cherryholmes, 1992; Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism allows researchers to accommodate the varied and at times contradictory perspectives that emerge from the data, allowing these multiple truths to speak, and to speak to one another (Cherryholmes, 1992; Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism strongly encourages

researchers to have a theoretical foundation for their research praxis (Cherryholmes, 1992; Creswell, 2014). As such, I rely on Black feminist and intersectional theories.

Although closely related—intersectional theory partly traces its roots back to Black feminist theory (Crenshaw 1989, 1991)—Black feminist and intersectional theories speak to separate features of this project. In this study, Black feminist theory: (1) centers Black women and their experiences within culture, policy, and scholarship (Collins, 2009; Combahee River Collective, 1974; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984); (2) privileges the lived experiences of Black women as a form of epistemology on par with academic expertise (Lorde, 1984); (3) underscores the importance of community, collectivism, and spirituality to the experiences of Black women (Collins, 2009; Lorde, 1984; Walker, 1983); and (4) highlights the importance of nuanced multi-dimensional representations of Black women in the media (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1992).

Intersectional theory extends Black feminist theory by examining the social and political forces that uniquely structure Black women's lives along their overlapping race, class, gender, and sexual identities (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). As intersectional theory has grown more popular in social science research, numerous intersectional researchers have issued guidelines for developing and evaluating intersectional research (Alexander-Floyd, 2012; Bowleg, 2008; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Cole, 2009; Few Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Although perspectives vary from researcher to researcher, the literature has coalesced around three methodological criteria for conducting *good* intersectional social scientific research.

First, intersectional researchers must consider how their research questions, sampling approaches, data collection methods, tools for analyses, and disciplinary conventions can potentially marginalize Black women and other marginalized communities (Alexander-Floyd,

2012; Bowleg, 2008; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Cole, 2009; Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Intersectional researchers are expected to adjust their approaches to eliminate the marginalization of women of color in their research (Alexander-Floyd, 2012). Second, intersectional researchers are encouraged to conceptualize Black women's and women of color's identities holistically, moving away from additive or hierarchal models of identity construction (Alexander-Floyd, 2012; Bowleg, 2008). Third, researchers must contextualize their data (e.g., interview data or ethnographic observations) in the personal and social histories of their participants, considering the implications of structural, political, and sociocultural forces in shaping participant experiences (Bowleg, 2008; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Few, Stephens, Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Pragmatism along with Black feminist and intersectional theories forms an epistemological approach that allows me to take a holistic and nuanced view of single Black women's lives, and a methodological approach that allows me to consider the sociocultural forces that uniquely shape single Black women's experiences.

Method

Reflexivity in the Development and Execution of Qualitative Research

One of the key distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research, is the present and active role of the researcher in qualitative research and writing. Whereas quantitative scholarship conceptualizes the researcher as objective and hidden, qualitative researchers are understood as playing an active and present role in their research (Packer, 2011). Reflexivity is one way qualitative researcher account for their role in qualitative research (Berger, 2013; Wilkinson, 1988). Reflexivity is the ongoing practice of reflecting on and describing how, and ideally why, one's own biases, past experiences, and beliefs influence the execution of and conclusions offered by qualitative research (Berger, 2013; Wilkinson, 1988). Reflexivity has

ethical implications for qualitative research (Berger, 2013; Wilkinson, 1988), in that an ongoing reflexive practice allows audiences to have a clearer sense of how and why the researcher researched the conclusions that they did to distinguish between "the personal and the universal" conclusions of research (Berger, 2013, p. 220). Reflexivity has implications for feminist research (Wilkinson, 1988). It allows feminist researchers to continually monitor and make clear to their readers how and in what ways their research adheres to feminist principles (Wilkinson, 1988).

As a Black feminist researcher who frequently employs the tenants of intersectionality in my work, this is an important facet of reflexivity, one that meaningfully guides the execution of my work. It is my goal to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Black women's lives and produce research that sheds light on the lives of Black women in the most complete ways that any one method will allow. This desire is motivated by my personal experiences of dating as a single, cisgender, heterosexual Black woman in her early 30s living as a fourth generation Detroiter in the rapidly gentrifying city of my birth. My experiences informed the development, execution, and conclusions of this study. Material to my discussion of these interviews is how I arrived at this subject and why I chose to take up the questions that I did in the way that I did. I begin the method section with a brief discussion of how I arrived at this project. Throughout the method section along side details of how I gathered and analyzed my data, I intersperse reflexive statements included with the goal of clarifying how my identity influenced my approaches to this project.

I came to this project wanting to know more about how single Black women made sense of themselves and their singlehood in light of—what felt like to me—a never-ending onslaught of think pieces, television shows, movies, and advice books directed to or about single Black women. My own experiences of panicked conversations with Black women friends about their

relationships statuses, repeated gifts of advice books from family members, and my own inexplicable sense of frustration, urgency, and annoyance with my own singlehood, and the many reaction's to it, led me to this subject. In many respects, this study grew out of my own desires to explore why me and my Black female peers were subject to such anxieties about singlehood and how that single panic lead us to make decisions that seemed to be in service of relationship formation but not our own personal dreams and desires.

I conducted this project with the goal of better understanding Black women's experiences of being single, exploring the role of the media played in shaping these experiences. The interview study is not so much a study of Black Love media, which would be a worthy an important project, but rather an examination of how a "singledoom" discourse—which bemoans singlehood and demonizes single women (Tounsel, 2015)—is manifest across the various domains of single Black women's lives. I talked with my friends about being single. I read blogs about being single. I received patronizing advice from my Black male peers about how Black women need to change in order to get a man. I received guidance and advice from family about being single. Missing from these discussions were an accurate understanding of my experiences, my desires, and my personal goals. The desire to hear more stories from Black women about their singlehood led me to conduct the interviews presented in this chapter. I wanted to know if I was the only one frustrated by the never-ending critiques of single Black women that I encountered in my interpersonal relationships and the media.

Participants, Sampling, and Recruitment

Prior to data collection, I secured exempt status for the interview study from the University of Michigan Health and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). I sought participants who self-identified as cisgender, heterosexual, single, Black women

between 25 and 45 years of age, with or without a college degree. I conducted 24 interviews in all. I defined single to include Black women who are unmarried (i.e., never-married, divorced, or widowed) and not cohabiting. Single Black women in casual sexual or romantic relationships were included in this project. To define single, I expanded the U.S. census definition of single—defined as divorced, never-married, or widowed (Kreider & Ellis, 2011)—to exclude unmarried women in cohabiting relationships. I based this decision on sociological research that finds that experiences of relationships and economic and socio-emotional outcomes of cohabiting couples very closely mirror those experiences of married couples (Lundberg, Pollack, & Sheares, 2016). In keeping with other qualitative research conducted with Black American women (Tounsel, 2015), I defined Black to include women of African descent who self-identify as African, African-American, Caribbean/West Indian or Black Hispanic. I use the term Black in the current study, as opposed to African-American, to be inclusive of a range of Black ethnic identities.

I used a purposive sampling technique to identify participants (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Purposive sampling uses a predetermined set of personal or experiential characteristics to identify participants for qualitative research (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). As applied in the current study, purposive sampling ensured maximum variation of experiences and desired characteristics among participants (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). I used age and education as selection criteria, because these demographic factors influence Black women's partnership outcomes (Cherlin, 2010; Clarke, 2011). To determine the study's sample size, I was guided by similar interview studies. This study's sample of 24 participants is in keeping with comparable interview studies (e.g., Bowleg et al., 2004; Berman et al., 2015; Clarke, 2011; Means Coleman 1998; Tounsel, 2015). I sought even distribution of participants by age and education. I sought eight participants for each decade age cohort (i.e., 20s, 30s, 40s) and an even number of women with and without four-year

college degrees in each age cohort. Women without college degrees had other levels of educational attainment, including professional certificates, Associate's degrees, high school degrees, GEDs, and partially completed four-year college degrees. Table 3.1 displays the distribution of the 24 interviews by participant age and education.

For the first nine interviews, I recruited women from across my social circle. I was closer to some of these women than others. Some were perfect strangers, but all were separated from me by no more than two degrees of separation (e.g. friends of friends). During this initial stage of participant recruitment, I was concerned about having women to interview, but soon realized that sampling from within or adjacent to my social circle has implications for participant confidentiality and the experiences reported in the project. I worried that participants would tell me what I wanted to hear and I worried that participants' identities could be discovered. At this stage of the project, I paused data collection to reconfigure my recruitment strategy so as to broaden the reach of my study and create more social distance between my participants and me.

I designed a series of flyers advertising the study and hung them in hair salons, nail shops, restaurants, beauty and nursing schools, community colleges, bars, clubs, boutiques, and grocery stores. I posted study flyers to the now-defunct personals pages on Craigslist (Kennedy, 2018), and to public, singles-oriented Facebook groups with group administrator permission. Finally, I used snowball sampling among existing study participants to access additional interviewees. Snowball sampling allows for the identification of study participants through a network of existing contacts, some of whom are already known to researchers (Biernacki & Waldof, 1981). In the snowball sampling process, study informants refer members of their social network who meet the inclusion criteria of the study to the researcher (Biernacki & Waldof, 1981). Snowball sampling has been widely and effectively used to secure study participants from

smaller or more hard-to-reach populations (Biernacki & Waldof, 1981). Once an interview was over, I provided the externally recruited participants with my business cards so they could share my information with their friends, family, and co-workers. I recruited two additional participants using snow-ball sampling among the newly recruited participants of the study.

Table 3.2 presents descriptive information about each participant. All names are pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality. Of the 24 women included in this study, 17 were never-married, six were divorced, and one woman was widowed. Of the never-married women, four had cohabited. As for highest level of educational attainment, four women completed high school, one woman had a GED, one woman had a professional certificate, three women had Associate's degrees, one woman had an Associate's degree and a professional certificate, two women completed some college, seven women had Bachelor's degrees, and five women had Master's degrees. Motherhood emerged as a natural split among participants. Nearly half of participants—eleven of the 24—had children. Mothers were evenly distributed across age cohorts, with the majority of mothers—nine of the eleven—having less than a four-year college degree. An additional seven women (Nia, Shannon, Iyana, Hunter, Michelle, Khari, and Andrea) played an active role in the life of a child. These women served as godmothers, aunties, mentors, or other mothers to the children of close friends, extended family, or other members of their communities.

Study Context: Detroit, Michigan

This study was conducted in Detroit, Michigan. Detroit was selected because of its sizable and diverse Black population, citywide male/female sex ratio imbalance, a median age gap between Black men and women within the city, and because of my extensive experience living but also conducting research in and about the city (e.g. Berman et al., 2013; Dailey,

Schwartz, Binienda, Moorman, & Neale, 2006; Moorman & Harrison, 2015). The Detroit metropolitan area has the ninth largest population of Black women in the country (The Neilsen Company, 2017). Women of all races outnumber men in Detroit, but this disparity is greatest among Black Detroiters (United States Census Bureau, 2016). In 2014 there were 562,949 Black people residing in the city of Detroit, comprising 81% of the city's population. Of these Black Detroiters, 130,094 were between 25 and 44 years old—62,856 Black men and 74,238 Black women (United States Census Bureau, 2016). This constitutes a sex ratio of 84 Black men ages 25-44 for every 100 Black women in this same age range. Compounding this sex-ratio imbalance is a median age gap between men and women. The median age of men of all races within Detroit is 32.7 compared with 37.1 for women (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Men typically select partners within 5 years of their age, but frequently marry younger women (Cherlin, 2010). This age disparity and sex-ratio imbalance suggests that Black men and women in the city are not demographically matched for marriage (Cherlin, 2010).

Interview Protocol and Study Activities

I conducted interviews over 10 months beginning in June of 2016 and ending in March of 2017. Interviews averaged about two hours in length, ranging from one hour to three and a half hours for a total of approximately 48 hours of interview audio. I audiotaped all interviews. Transcription was handled by an outside firm, which I used because of concerns about the time it would take for me, working by myself, to transcribe the interview audio. I was able to secure research funds to pay for transcription justified because of the shear quantity of interview audio. I interviewed participants in a quiet, private location of their preference, including cafés, restaurants, my home, and the homes and workplaces of participants. At the end of the interview, I gave participants $20 cash as compensation for their time and to offset the costs of

transportation to and from the interview.

I designed the interview guide to explore the messages friends and family share with participants about singlehood, participants' experiences of being single, and participants' reflections on Black Love media (Appendix B). As a warm-up exercise, I asked participants to describe what they liked and disliked about living in the city of Detroit. Participants typically described structural features of the city (e.g., roads, city government, amenities), their neighborhoods, and features of their social environment. I then asked participants what being single was like in the Detroit they just described. To help participants structure their thoughts, I developed the Being Single Is… exercise (Appendix C). Participants were given one 8 1/2" x 4" laminated card stating "Being Single Is…;" 143 laminated 3" x 5" index cards with one descriptive word or phrase on each; a small stack of blank 3" x 5" index cards; and a large Black permanent marker. Participants had 10 minutes to select five to ten words that best captured their experiences of single life. If participants thought of a word or phrase to describe singlehood that was not included in the laminated cards, they were encouraged to write it down on a blank note card using the marker provided. Once a participant selected 5-10 cards, they were asked to describe how each word or phrase captured a piece of their singlehood using examples from their lives. I recorded participants' responses to this exercise for a later analysis.

Twenty-two of the 24 interviewees completed the Being Single Is… activity. I designed the Being Single Is… activity after conducting the first two interviews as a response to participant difficulties characterizing their experiences of singlehood. After much thought deliberation during the interview, the first two participants provided a series of one or two word descriptors that they then went on to describe in more detail, illustrating these descriptors with examples from their own lives. The Being Single Is… activity was designed to mirror this

approach, while accelerating participants' identification of relevant descriptors. Of study participants who completed the exercise, no interviewees' words were all positive or all negative. Participant responses ran the full gamut of descriptors included. A visual inspection of participant responses finds that among the most popular responses was freedom, frustrating, a time for me, difficult/hard, eye-opening, sexy/sexual, repetitive, new, and transforming.

To transition into a discussion of Black Love media, I asked participants to assess the representations of single Black women in the media using their Being Single Is… activity words as evaluative criteria. I asked participants to describe a representation of singlehood that accurately characterized their experiences, a representation that mischaracterized their experiences, and the features of their singlehood they felt were absent from the media. Next, I asked participants to discuss Black Love media. I gave participants a binder filled with 18 full-page, color examples of Black Love media. I included popular television shows (e.g., BET's, *Being Mary Jane*, Akil, Akil, & Union, 2013), news articles (e.g., *The Atlantic,* "Marrying Your Peer, a Tougher Prospect for Black Women," White, 2015), movies (e.g., Tyler Perry's, *Temptation*, Perry, Areu, Hall, Paseornek, & Perry, 2013), magazines (e.g., *Ebony,* "Holding On To Black Love," Mayo, 2016), and an assortment of Black Love books that included *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (Harvey & Millner, 2009), *Manology* (Gibson, Run, & Morrow, 2013), and *The Wait* (Franklin, Good, & Vandehey, 2016). Participants expressed their familiarity with the examples provided, offered some examples of their own, and shared their critiques of the relevant media. I then asked participants to imagine a book, show, movie, or other form of media they would ideally like to see that better characterized their experiences of singlehood. As a closing exercise, participants were given the opportunity to ask me questions about the study and myself. This allowed participants to address any lingering concerns and hear my initial reactions

to the interviews. Questions ranged to include my personal life and if I was single to my perspectives on the Black Love media, but coalesced around participants' interest in what the other women in the study were saying about being single.

Data Coding and Theme Development

I used thematic analysis to identify themes in the data (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). Thematic analysis is a six-step analysis approach that allows for the emergence of themes as well as the coding of a priori constructs (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). Phase one of thematic analysis requires familiarization with the data via the process of reading and re-reading the interviews. At this stage the researcher becomes acquainted with the narratives of the interviews, making small notes about recurrent ideas (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). In the current project, familiarization began alongside data collection and was done in two stages. Before transcription, I listened to all interviews, making notes as I listened. Once the interviews were transcribed, I reviewed them for accuracy. During this process, I read each transcript while listening to its corresponding audio file. As I listened and read, I removed identifying information about participants (e.g., names of children and family members, specific street names, places of employment), and corrected inaccuracies between the transcript and the interview audio. I took notes on each interview during this process.

Phase two of thematic analysis is data coding. Data coding is the process of assigning a succinct, descriptive label to a small block of text that conveys a specific idea or experience (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). Codes can be descriptive, summarizing the ideas conveyed by a block of text, or interpretative, revealing an insight of the reviewer (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). Initial codes are created and refined over numerous iterations by reviewing and applying codes across the data (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). In the current project, I coded transcripts

using NVIVO version 11.0 (QSR International, 2017). I developed codes based on a priori constructs (e.g., singlehood and the media) and recurrent ideas that emerged from the data (e.g., entrepreneurship). A recurrent idea became a code based on its saturation in the data and breadth across the sample. I drafted codes after the first round of data familiarization and revised the coded over the course of the data familiarization process. I tested codes on four interviews and revised them once again before coding resumed on the full data set. An example of the codebook, including each of the 15 codes included in analysis, is appended (Appendix D).

Phase three of thematic analysis is identifying themes. During this phase of analysis researchers explore how codes relate to one another. Themes encompass numerous codes, but speak to a unified set of ideas (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). Braun, Clarke, and Terry (2014) encourage researchers to consider the following as they develop themes: (1) the relevance of the theme to the research questions posed; (2) patterned meaning, that is, the repetition of ideas throughout the data; and (3) clarity in the overarching theme. Good themes are succinct, clearly defined, and do not overlap with other themes (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). In the current project, I identified themes throughout coding, by reading the coded passages of data and noting similarities across codes. I took extensive notes during this process, excerpting relevant quotes from the transcripts, and grouping quotes by the ideas they conveyed. Fifteen codes were considered for analyses, including a priori and emergent codes.

In phase four of analysis, the researcher reviews the themes. According to Braun, Clarke, and Terry (2014):

> This phase of TA [thematic analysis] is about two things: quality control by checking that the candidate themes are a good fit with the coded data; shaping up the theme so that they describe the full story of the relevant data (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014, p. 104).

Practically speaking, this means that researchers: (1) assess if themes are actually themes and not codes; (2) determine if there is too much or not enough data to classify a theme or code; (3) clarify the boundaries of the theme to ensure that an idea is not captured in other areas of coding; and (4) examine the coherence of the themes and the emerging narrative of the data (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). In the current project, I developed themes iteratively, developing them alongside my review of the coded data. After reading over the data captured by each code, I drafted theme summarizes to identify linkages between participant accounts and catalogue recurrent ideas in the data. I built on and revised these theme summaries throughout code review. I documented each iteration of these theme summaries in the study's audit trail (the paperwork, notes, and interview materials generated during a qualitative study). This way, I was able to track the evolution of a theme based on the data introduced from each code. Once I finished reading over the coded data, I drafted final versions of the themes based on the theme summaries and notes taken during my review of the codes. An example theme summary is appended (Appendix E).

At stage five of analysis, themes are named and defined. The goal of this phase is to create operational definitions of the themes, reflecting how they are applied to the data. I generated three themes. *Enrichment* describes the actions of personal growth in singlehood. *Autonomy* captures the ethos of self-reliance and independence. *Misunderstanding* summarizes the reductive and oversimplified view that outsiders can have of single Black women. Phase six of thematic analysis is to generate the report, hence this chapter (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014).

A Note on the Trustworthiness of this Study

Like quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers have assessments for the rigor of their research. Quantitatively, rigor is assessed through reliability, validity, replication, and

researcher objectivity (Guba, 1981; Means Coleman, 1998). In qualitative analyses, rigor is assessed through trustworthiness, which is made up of four criteria: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Guba, 1981; Means Coleman, 1998).

Credibility "ensures that the constructions offered by respondents, and ultimately represented by the researcher, are credible" (Means Coleman, 1998, p. 274). Credibility can be achieved through prolonged engagement with the data (i.e., familiarity with the data; Bowleg et al., 2004); peer debriefing (Means Coleman, 1998); progressive subjectivity (i.e., the documentation of one evolving thoughts on emerging analyses; Means Coleman, 1998); interview case reports that "summarize the major salient issues and concerns that emerged from the analysis of an initial interview" (Means Coleman, 1998, p. 275-76); member checks, during which researchers review their findings and emerging analyses with study participants who offer amendments or revisions to researcher findings (Guba, 1981); and triangulation, the confirmation of study findings from multiple sources of data (Guba, 1981; Means Coleman, 1998).

I ensured credibility in three ways. I conducted participant debriefs at the end of each interview, which allowed participants to ask me questions about the study and my emerging thoughts about the project. I achieved prolonged engagement with the data by taking more than two years to familiarize myself with the interviews. During this time I conducted, listened to, read, coded, and reread the coded data. I captured progressive subjectivity through the study's audit trail, which comprises semi-structured interview guides, codebooks, the study's field log, and all other notes from the study. These documents track the evolution of the interview project.

Transferability speaks to the specific context of each interview (Means Coleman, 1998). It is primarily achieved through thick description—a detailed description of the interview setting and events (Geertz, 2008; Means Coleman, 1998). After every interview, I made detailed notes

about the interview process and setting. Confirmability speaks to the extent to which the researcher's findings are rooted in the interview data (Means Coleman, 1998). Confirmability is achieved through triangulation, reflexivity, and the study's audit trail. All three approaches were used in the current study to ensure confirmability. To address reflexivity, I documented my evolving thoughts on this study in the field log, making notes on how my identity may have impacted my analyses. Additionally, I state my positionality in relation to the study in an earlier reflexive statement, and offer a first person narration of how and why I conducted the study in the way that I did throughout the method section.

Related to confirmability is dependability, which tasks researchers with maintaining detailed notes on the study process (Means Coleman, 1998). Where confirmability tracks the researcher's evolving interpretations of the data, dependability tracks the evolving research process. Dependability was achieved through the study's audit trail.

Results

The 24 Black women participating in this study described singlehood as a nuanced and multifaceted stage of life. Participants described weathering and rejoicing in the emotional, professional, and interpersonal ups and downs of singlehood. Advice from friends and family shaped single Black women's thinking about their lives. Black Love media, with their drama and sexism, do a poor job of accurately capturing the complexity of Black women's singlehood. I identified three themes that characterize participants' experiences across these different facets of their lives. *Enrichment* describes actions of growth and skill-building that single Black women take up for the purpose of self-improvement. *Autonomy* summarizes an ethos of self-reliance, independence, resilience, and self-governance that underpins many Black women's approaches to singlehood. *Misunderstanding* describes the oversimplified view that friends, family, and the

media have of Black women's singlehood. This theme captures the ways single Black women are mischaracterized, maligned, and misunderstood. Themes overlap and intertwine. They reinforce and contradict each other across the study, but together these themes offer new insights into Black women's experiences of singlehood, relationships with media, and processes of sexual socialization. The following section addresses the study's three themes as they emerged within two different types of messages shared to single Black women by their friends, family, and would be romantic partners. The first message takes a positive view of singlehood, advising growth and personal discovery. The second message takes a skeptical view of singlehood and constructs single women as deficient because of their relationship status.

Friends' and Families' Views of Single Black Women

Advice about singlehood and unsolicited comments about single Black women were consistent features of participants' experiences. Contained in this advice and these unsolicited comments are two recurrent messages about single Black women. The first message advises growth and independence in singlehood and characterizes single Black women as hardworking, competent, and self-sufficient. Reflecting the themes of *Enrichment* and *Autonomy*, this message was typically conveyed as a form of advice by close friends or older relatives. The second message constructs single Black women as deficient, incomplete beings whose sexuality, character, and womanhood are questioned. This message is an example of the theme *Misunderstanding.* Participants largely attributed statements like these to skeptical would-be partners and more distant relatives. These two messages shape participants' thinking about singlehood and evaluations of their own experiences as single Black women.

Advising growth. Parents, friends, and close family members were found to be the most common sources for interpersonal advice for participants. Every participant in this study

described receiving advice from a close friend or family member. Although their advice ranged in its content, these close contacts were generally described as being supportive of Black women's singlehood, as we will see later in this section. Susan, a 27-year-old artist and creative working in Detroit's restaurant scene, provides one example. Susan was born and raised in Detroit. She earned a Bachelor's degree in visual arts from a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. She has no kids. At the time of our interview, she was bouncing from apartment to apartment, because she had just ended her cohabiting relationship. She moved out when she found out her live-in boyfriend of four years was cheating on her. Susan has a bubbly personality that did not seem to be dampened by her current circumstances. At the time of our interview, Susan was staying at an iconic Detroit high-rise apartment building. Our conversation went on for well over two hours, and well into our interview, I asked her about the advice that her friends and family have given her during this very uncertain period of her life.

> My friends have just been like focus on your work. Focus on being better and smarter. Use your potential. Use what you have and move away. …So that's been the advice, just don't worry about where you're at now. Fuck these dudes. It's not about them. They're not really in the big picture. Focus on your work, which is what my mom told me when I was eight but… [Laughing] (Susan).

Susan's friends and family advocated for her personal growth. In general, close friends and family promoted education, travel, property ownership, skill building, emotional resiliency, financial savvy, and independence to single Black women. Participants were advised to delay relationships. Men are secondary. Some women reported that entrepreneurship and business were most frequently highlighted. For others, travel and mobility were key, but contained in all of the growth-oriented messages participants reported was the consistent advice to grow in

oneself before entering into a relationship. Tracey, a 36-year-old participant and mother of three, offers some additional insight.

Tracey has a 15-year-old son, a 4-year-old son, and a 2-year-old daughter. Although not from Detroit, Tracey has lived in the city off and on for her adult life. Tracey is a high school graduate who works as a housekeeper at a social service agency that assists victims of domestic abuse. She has her own history with violence. Tracey's youngest son died in a fire, intentionally set by her sister's ex-boyfriend. Wanting to date other men, Tracey's sister ended her casual relationship with the ex-boyfriend. The ex responded by burning down Tracey's sister's house with Tracey's son inside. Tracey has a history of sexual abuse: she was violated as a young child and teenager by an uncle who had preyed on three generations of her family. These were understandably traumatic experiences for Tracey, who views dating and relationships through the lens of these experiences. She frequently expressed concern about her physical safety when dating and spoke at length about protecting her living children from harm. She has ended relationships with men because she did not like how they were treating her son. She hesitates to bring new men into her life. She wants to wait until her 2-year-old daughter is older. Tracey loves having a daughter and wants to teach her everything about life that she has had to learn the hard way. Tracey is especially concerned about her daughter's future with men, and that is on display in the advice she will eventually give her daughter about being a single Black woman:

> I would want her to stay in school until she graduates from college before she even tries to date guys. And then…when she gets out of college, then she can start looking for a date because she'll own all of her stuff. I would like for her to own her own home so she won't have to depend on no man for nothing. Own. Ownership. I will teach her

> ownership, how to buy things that's worth keeping. …So, I'm a teach her that. Stay in school. Be educated. Always be educated, stay in school, and be a lady (Tracey).

There are two features of growth messages that speak to broader themes in the interviews exemplified by Tracey's comment. The first concerns ownership—ownership over property and oneself. For Tracey, and many other women in this study, home ownership was equivalent to independence from men and control over one's environment. Tracey suggested that property ownership, and the financial independence that homeownership implies, would be protective factors for her daughter as she enters relationships, an assumption supported by past research that finds poverty increases the likelihood that a woman will experience intimate partner violence (The World Health Organization, 2012). Shannon builds on Tracey's words, offering another perspective, suggesting that ownership is not just simply for physical safety, but also the security of emotional resilience.

Shannon, a 31-year-old writer, described receiving advice about men and singlehood from her grandparents similar to the advice Tracey would give her young daughter. Shannon was a transplant from the Mid-Atlantic South and moved to Detroit for work at a small non-profit organization. At the time of our interview she had lived in Detroit just over a year. She earned a Master's degree, had no kids of her own, but served as a mentor to a younger woman and her toddler daughter. She has never been married or cohabited, but has been in a committed relationship. Shannon talked about the various pieces of advice shared with her from her grandparents, who played an active role in her early life. Her grandfather would tell her things like, "Don't you run behind them nan-strand boys, just keep getting your education" (Shannon). Shannon's grandparents advised her to establish financial security and get prepared emotionally for the possibility of a life alone.

> My grandfather is notoriously terrible with money. Terrible. So my grandmother ran the finances. And she was like, "don't ever rely on a man for nothing." [Coming from] a home of divorce made me very resilient…not to say I'm like the type of woman that's like, "I don't need a man." No, no, no, no. I will love to get married and have a dual income, but in the event that doesn't happen I will be okay (Shannon).

Like Susan and Tracey, Shannon was advised to develop concrete skills and hit tangible benchmarks for achievement such as financial independence and education. But Shannon's grandparents also instilled a sense of resiliency and independence into her, values for how to live life as a single Black woman. Mobility and growth were the overarching values instilled in Susan by friends and family. In contrast, Tracey wanted to pass on to her daughter the importance of independence and property ownership. All three women as well as many other interviewees were encouraged to view singlehood as a time to establish independence, resilience, and self-reliance, traits that prepare women for a life partnered or alone.

The second notable feature of growth messages is their framing of singlehood as a developmental stage. Tracey was not the only participant to make this comparison. Zora, a 27-year-old musician and non-profit worker, made a similar comparison in her interview. Zora is a college graduate with no kids. She is the second oldest daughter of a very large family. Zora plays an active role in her church. At the time of our interview, Zora was about to move into a small apartment where she will be living alone for the first time in her life. Zora was reflective and had been asking herself many of the questions I posed to her in our interview. She views singlehood this way:

> I just don't think that marriage is quite as much of a—at least in our 20s—like not as much of a push as it used to be. And so with that off of our minds, we're just focusing on

> other stuff. The period of singleness oftentimes seems longer. And it's—it appears to be, at least. Like, we look at our parents to—like at least for my parents and a lot of their friends, it was like college, maybe a year and then married. Or like college—married right out of college or whatever. It's just like that's what you did and you start your like life with another person, right? I feel like, in my 20s, I felt like I started independent life, and I've been learning it as an independent person (Zora).

For Tracey, Zora, and many other women in the study, singlehood was described as a period of time during which a woman is to hone her skills and work towards personal goals—a time to learn about and fully become herself. Marking a related trend, the *New York Times* recently published an article discussing delays in marriage among Millennials entitled, "Put a Ring on It? Millennial Couples Are in No Hurry" (Rabin, 2018). Noted sociologist Andrew Cherlin attributes the delay of marriage, in part, to a reconceptualization of partnership. He was quoted in the article as saying, "Marriage used to be the first step into adulthood. Now it is often the last" (Rabin, 2018, p. 1). Characterized as a capstone event, marriage is used to signal accomplishments and readiness for adult life (Rabin, 2018). Shifts in the social significance of marriage signal shifts in the meaning of singlehood. Cherlin is later quoted in the article saying, "For many couples, marriage is something you do when you have the whole rest of your personal life in order" (Rabin, 2018, p. 1). Zora and Tracey make similar points in their statements. If marriage is a last step in adulthood, then singlehood is now the first, and it is a time that should be used productively.

Additionally, Susan offers a glimpse into what this new definition of singlehood means to participants. Susan and I were continuing our discussion of her ex-partner. He has a new girlfriend, a college woman ten years his junior. Susan had a long drunken conversation with the

new girlfriend one night at a party. In their conversation, the new girlfriend described wanting to drop out of school. Susan had this advice for her:

> But like school, that's like the first thing you do for yourself… school is the first thing that you do that's self-motivating, that if you complete that, you really give a fuck about yourself and where you're going. And if you just do that one thing, then you set up a pattern for being your best self in life. If you don't want to do school, learn how to fly a fucking airplane. Do something for yourself first before you like fall in love and get lost in someone else (Susan).

To these women, singlehood is an opportunity to find one's purpose and establish one's adulthood in that purpose. Interviewees believed it was important to establish a pattern of personal growth and development in singlehood, because of the possibility of losing oneself in a relationship. While Zora's, Susan's, and Tracey's comments and Rabin's (2018) article all focus on women in their 20s, we will later see that the process of growth is not bounded by age. Women in their 40s have a similar experience of singlehood; suggesting that changes in partnership are not just features of age, or solely the products of shifts in marriage, but also changes in how broader U.S. society makes sense of singlehood.

A skeptical view of single Black women. In addition to the advice to grow and learn in singlehood, participants described receiving unwanted comments and questions about being single. Black women reported being questioned about their sexuality and womanhood, with the assumption being that because these women were single, they were either closeted lesbians or had some unseen deficiency. Claire offers an example of such comments. At the time of our interview, Claire was 44-years-old and the mother of two adult children, a 21-year-old son and 26-year-old daughter. She earned a Master's degree and worked as an administrative assistant at

a local university. She was a Southern transplant who moved north from Alabama at age 18 to be with her father and sister. Claire is divorced. She ended her on-paper marriage after not having contact with her husband for the last 17 years of their 19-year marriage. When I asked why it took so long to get divorced, Claire was blasé, saying, "I think I felt like I wasn't married at that point. You know, it didn't even cross my mind that I was married and this [a divorce] is something that I need."

Claire was absolute in her love of singlehood. She wore a fake diamond engagement ring on her left ring finger to intentionally discourage male attention. On the whole, Claire's descriptions of singlehood were positive, but when we talked about men and their perceptions of her as a single Black woman, the tone of the conversation changed. She described some of the critiques old boyfriends and family members made about her in the past:

> Okay, it's the old maid, "Oh, you think you don't need a man," or, "You're just a bitter lady," or "Maybe you don't like men," or "Why don't you want to be married?" It's like, it's almost like people just think something is wrong or broken with you. I'm whole. I'm good. I'm good. Yeah, not missing any toes or anything. I'm in my right mind. I'm okay. So, um, yeah, that kind of stuff can be frustrating. You know, because I get tired of—I don't like it when my cousins ask me, "You married yet?" Because they do, they think that something's wrong with me (Claire).

Built into this second set of messages about single Black women is the fundamental assumption of these women's deficiency. This is not a new idea (Omolade, 1986), but rather a persistent one. In these messages, marriage and dating are the implied priority. Claire is frustrated with allegations of bitterness and having to constantly assert that she is whole. Her claims of happiness were viewed with skepticism. Messages skeptical of singlehood are not

always conveyed with malice or intentional judgment; often, messages skeptical of singlehood coalesce around a deficit-based interpretation of single Black women. Many participants found these ideas to be gendered, out of sync with the current realities of dating and relationships, and reductive.

Iyana was 33-years-old at the time of our interview. She earned a Master's degree in marketing. She works as a mid-level executive for a major corporation. Although she has no kids of her own, she is the mentor and older play cousin to tween and teenage girls in her friend and family circles. Iyana has an effervescent personality. She is bright, cheerful, and inviting. Like many other women in the study, Iyana has faced questions about her sexuality and womanhood because she is single. "I have relatives who are like, 'are you gay?' As if I'm single because I'm gay" (Iyana). These days Iyana is under increased scrutiny from her family. Her younger cousins have started having babies and are making plans to marry:

> I have younger cousins who now have babies. Even if they're not married, they have a baby. And so there's like, oh, I know that this person wasn't single at some point because they have a child. You know what I mean? So I think that it's always like the issue of – the question of family. Like how they perceive your singleness, you know? I had a bunch of aunts, my dad has four sisters, and they were all together. And I was holding a baby. And somebody was like, "Let me get a picture of this because we don't know if we'll ever see – do you know how to hold a baby?" And I'm like, "Excuse me? Like I'm single, but I know how to hold a baby" (Iyana).

Single women, particularly those without children, face questions about their competence in womanhood. As Iyana stated, men and babies provide tangible evidence of one's competence in the domains of family and reproduction, legitimizing womanhood. These ideas about

singlehood can be traced back to the cult of true womanhood and respectability politics. The cult of true womanhood is a gender ideology emerging in the early 19th century that defined proper roles and relations for middle-class women in society (Dickerson, 1988). Within this ideology, women are measured by their domestic competence, submissiveness to God, and sexual purity (Dickerson, 1988). Good women, *pure* women, were defined through their partnership to men and roles as mothers to children, evidence of their service to God (Dickerson, 1988).

Black women have historically been excluded from "the cult" due to racist ideas that view Black women as fundamentally incapable of achieving these ideals because of their race (Dickerson, 1988). For Black women, ideas about pure womanhood are manifest in the form of respectability politics, which traces its roots to the Baptist Club movement of the early 20th century (Higginbotham, 1993). Emerging as a response to anti-Black racism that dominated U.S. society in the early 1900s, respectability politics began as a form of self-definition, a way to recast how Black women were represented in society (Higginbotham, 1993). Respectability politics advised decorum, chastity, and hard work (Higginbotham, 1993). Marriage was viewed as a respectable institution. Motherhood was respectable and vital social role. Singlehood and its proximity to profligacy, vice, and moral decrepitude was imbued with the taint of ill repute.

For the Black women of this study, comments suggesting that their singlehood makes them less than a full woman reflects both sides of these 19th and 20th century values. The cult-of-womanhood ideal is built into contemporary notions of marriage and, by proxy, singlehood (Dickerson, 1988). Single Black women, regardless of their historical exclusion from "the cult," are being evaluated by standards of the cult of true womanhood because of their singlehood. By the standards of respectability politics, Black women have to strive for something better than single status. Black women who choose not to answer the calls of marriage and motherhood are

questioned and vulnerable to charges of disreputability. Iyana made clear that statements critical of her singlehood did not just emanate from family, but from dates, as well.

> I've dated a lot of guys who are like, you're this, this, and this, so why are you single? Like a what's wrong with you kind of thing. You're damaged goods if you're single. Well, motherfucker, you're single too. So what's your damage? How long have these eggs been sitting in the carton in the back of the refrigerator. I think it's just like nobody questions men and their singleness, right? Like I have an older cousin who, you know, he's a couple of years older. He has a different girl every family function. So there – there's a rotation, but like there's nothing serious. And even if he didn't, my brother doesn't bring his girlfriends around necessarily. But like there's no question of his singleness, you know. Nobody is like, "Is [male cousin] gay? Is [brother] gay?" because they don't come with girlfriends. You know, but like I'm the one (Iyana).

Setting aside the hypocrisy of a single man criticizing a single woman he is dating for being single, these messages are sexist both in content and application. Based on participant accounts, single men are not evaluated by the same criteria as single women. Although this study cannot definitively answer the question of what criteria single men are evaluated by, these data do show that single Black women feel they are evaluated differently from men. By participants' observations, single Black men are not considered failed men simply because they are not husbands or fathers. Single Black men are also not dismissed for claiming that they are whole and happy. Singlehood for men is not evidence that they are damaged goods, as it can be for Black women.

The growth and skeptical messages described above offer two distinct perspectives on single Black womanhood. An example of the themes of *Enrichment* and *Autonomy*, the first

message advises personal growth, hard work, and accomplishment in singlehood. Growth messages construct singlehood as a developmental stage, a time to work on oneself before entering a relationship. Participants were taught the values of resilience, self-sufficiency, ownership, and education. Singlehood becomes an opportunity to live out these values and provides women with the space to discover themselves. Delays in marriage contribute to a redefinition of singlehood, characterized by the hard work of becoming oneself. The second, skeptical message about singlehood viewed single Black women as deficient *because* of their singlehood. An example of the theme *Misunderstanding*, single Black women have their sexuality and womanhood questioned. This message is sexist in its content and application, communicating its own values about singlehood and defining a Black woman's (inferior) value by the absence of children, a husband, and happiness. Cognizant of outsiders' expectations and their own personal goals, participants wrestle with these two perspectives as they live out their singlehood. Ultimately, Black women define singlehood for themselves, but do so fully aware of the negative way they are perceived by others observing their singlehood.

Participant Experiences of Singlehood

Whether they realize it or not, the single Black women of this study are on the cusp of a new era. Singlehood is evolving. Single Black women are breaking away from old norms, and in the process, founding a new world. Like previous generations of conquerors stepping out into the great beyond, they have fears. They are confused. They experience sadness. But for the participants of this study, singlehood affords freedom. While being single is not a part of the life plan for many participants, singlehood provides time to prepare for the next stages of life. Reflecting two of the study's core themes—*Enrichment* and *Autonomy*—in the new singlehood, participants are able to live out a self-defined version of singlehood reflective of their values.

The *Misunderstanding* enters when participants describe the complications that living out this new singlehood can cause in their personal lives.

Freedom. Freedom for many participants means freedom to explore one's world. Brittany offers one example. Brittany was 26-years-old at the time of our interview. She had a high school degree and earned some credits towards a Bachelor's degree. She had no kids. Brittany was a loan officer for a large bank. Brittany got engaged when she was 20. She married at 23 and divorced six months later. While she was fond of her ex-husband, who was her best friend, she knew she did not love him when they married. "I guess we got so hyped up and caught up in the attention it [getting married] was bringing on us. … We started to believe it [the hype]…" (Brittany). Overlooking her feelings and thinking that love would come, she married. She was not happy and did not want to have children under those conditions. They divorced. He has since remarried. She has not, but Brittany still wants a family.

Brittany does not like being single and at one point in our interview compared being single, and her struggles with it, to having dyslexia. After her divorce, Brittany was depressed, disappointed, and unsure about what to do next. She relied on God for strength and guidance as she navigated the choppy waters of singlehood post-divorce. Brittany is deeply religious and her Christian values were evident across the interview. After completing her Being Single Is… exercise she and I were talking through her experiences. One facet of singlehood that Brittany and the other participants of this study appreciate is the ability to do what they want, when they want, without interference:

> Freedom. You definitely have a lot of freedom. You don't have to answer to nobody. You don't have to worry about, "Babe, I gonna go out today with my friends. I'm not gonna be back here." You can do what you want. Freedom. I love freedom. I do love it. I love

> freedom…The most I can say is the freedom moment for me was getting up one day and just getting in the car and going to Chicago by myself…everything's taken care of. I have some money. I'm paid. Bills are taken care of. Let's just go up to Chicago…I'm gone. Be back on Monday…The freedom to do what you want to do. Just move and just do you, have fun, cruise. Yeah, so that's freedom for me (Brittany).

Being single is the freedom to be light, mobile, and explore one's world. Brittany's comments also suggest that singlehood affords women opportunities for financial freedom, in addition to mobility and extra time. As her comments demonstrated, Brittany can plan and spend her finances as she pleases. Cindy offers another perspective on the importance of financial freedom. She describes how financial freedom facilitates her personal growth and helps her to achieve her goals.

At the time of our interview, Cindy was a 38-year-old mother of 6 children, 3 sons and 3 daughters. She had a large tattoo running up her arm that says "mother." It contained all of her children's names. She loves being a mom. After leaving high school at a young age to care for her children, Cindy went back to school to complete her GED. At the time of our interview, Cindy was working as a clerical assistant for a tax agency, a short-term position associated with tax season. Cindy has a long history with domestic violence, verbal abuse, and coercion in relationships and was living in a women's shelter at the time of our interview. Although residents of the shelter were allowed to bring their children, Cindy did not have hers with her. It was unclear where the children were. When we met, Cindy was a ball of joy. While her circumstances seemed dire, the shelter was an important step towards a new life for her and her kids. She had enough of violence and abuse, moving to the shelter to seek support as she pursued a new way forward. At the time of our interview Cindy was just enjoying her time being single.

She was not interested in dating. She found it was costly. Cindy was focused on achieving some financial goals:

> A lotta guys that I had been meeting lately just come along pulling from me. You know what I'm saying? I don't have time to buy shoes for your birthday or a shirt for Valentine's Day or whatever because that money right there could be going on my credit card bill to help me do some of the things that I wanna do, like travelling, buy a house, better car, and stuff like that (Cindy).

In singlehood, there is no one "pulling from" you financially or emotionally, no one asking for your already taxed time and attention. Dates, couple's trips, and gifts are costly. Unlike married women, who are able to avail themselves of the dual income and added financial support that can come with marriage, the single women of this study describe having to budget for casual relationships in their finances, energy, and time. Depending on the man a single woman is dating, these costs may be more than a single woman is willing to pay.

The freedoms of singlehood extend beyond the money and mobility. In singlehood, participants were able to express themselves in ways they otherwise could not with a partner. Sandra is a 43-year-old divorcée and mother of four. Sandra earned a high school diploma and is a trained carpenter. Sandra co-owns a property development firm with her cousin. At the time of our interview, Sandra worked fixing cars, renting, rehabbing and selling homes, and as a waitress for a local Coney Island restaurant—Detroit's local version of a diner. Sandra got married in her early 20s and divorced in her early 40s. Her husband ended the marriage. Although she was devastated by her divorce, it was for the best. Sandra's marriage was abusive. She describes having to wait on him hand and foot. He told her how to dress. She describes instances of verbal abuse and physical restraint: "I had my 20s tooken from me, my 30s tooken from me, almost my

40s. I had to let it go. To make me feel happy. For me to heal" (Sandra). Sandra is currently living her best life. She is taking her newfound singlehood to rediscover who she is.

Sandra's divorce brought about a new sexual awakening for her, and it is through this lens that she views her singlehood. Sandra experienced her monogamous yet sexually adventurous marriage as restrictive. It placed too many demands on her and expectations for her behavior. During our interview, Sandra described having five partners including her ex-husband. She referred to this group of men as her "team," each with his own role and duties in her life. Yes, these were sexual partners, but also friends, companions, and men she can call on when in need. She described an instance when her car broke down and she needed assistance. She called each of the men on her team until she found one available to help her. If she was still married she would have had to depend on her husband to handle the car, whether he was available or not. Sandra is fastidious about her sexual health. She gets tested quarterly and carries around a copy of her "black and whites"—her most recent STI and HIV test results—to show to new sexual partners. For Sandra, being single was a fresh start. She was freed from the gendered responsibilities that come with being a wife and the strictures that come with monogamy. Now that Sandra is in her solitude she is able to embody a fuller expression of herself:

> Okay. Yeah. Freedom. Because I don't have to get up and cook, clean, or wash clothes for a man. In a relationship, I had to. I was obligated. I had to cook, clean, wash clothes, and, before we got together, it was certain things that I did. I wore perfume. I dressed nice. When I got married, I had to change to like basically a mom... I wore long dresses and stopped making makeup and stopped wearing perfume, lashes, fingernails and all that. But now I can do those things when I get ready to. When I wake up, I don't—before it was mandatory to cook for my husband. I got up. I cooked, cleaned, now I can be

myself. I can throw my clothes around, whatever. Eat when I get ready to. I'm single (Sandra).

In singlehood Sandra was able to express a version of herself that she has not embodied since her twenties. She had to become the wife her husband wanted her to be. Dress and aesthetics can be political sites of self-expression for Black women (Craig, 2002), and as Sandra makes clear, singlehood allowed her the space to fully express who she was through her behavior and appearance. Sandra portrayed singlehood as a space free of the most explicit and intimate expressions of sexism and misogyny. These safe harbor qualities of singlehood—protection from the most explicit manifestations of sexism—extend beyond self-expression and into participants' experiences of physical safety, as well. Participants used their singlehood to distance themselves from experiences of intimate partner violence.

Ten of the 24 participants (Sarah, Violet, Belle, Sheena, Tracey, Cindy, Angela, Sandra, Claire, and Deidre) described some first-hand experience of coercion, physical or verbal abuse, and sexual harassment or assault. These experiences ranged from one-time instances of verbal abuse and attempted coercion, to sexual harassment in the workplace, rape, or battery. An additional four of the 24 participants (Andrea, Amber, Miranda, and Kandi) have been touched by violence in some way, including the untimely deaths of children, family, or friends. Violence is a common experience for the women of this sample, and many participants view singlehood as a means to manage their exposure to it.

Amber was 31-years-old at the time of our interview. She was an out-of-state transplant to Detroit. At the time of our interview she had been living in Detroit about a year. Amber is a high school graduate and mother of a young son, who carries the name of his deceased father. Amber's partner was shot and killed as part of a dispute. Amber feels ambivalent about being

single. She misses her son's father. But while Amber knows the wonderful things that can come from a loving relationship, she is not eager to jump into just any relationship. Like many of the women of this study, she is keenly aware of the risks and heartache that can come with partnership. Speaking for many women in the study, Amber highlights the safe-harbor qualities of being single saying:

> I don't have to answer nobody. I don't have to put up with all the nonsense. I don't have to do it. The fighting, the domestic violence, the name-calling. The putting down, the lying, the cheating. I don't have to deal with it (Amber).

As Cindy, Sandra, and Amber stated, singlehood minimizes exposure to risk. Of course, not every man is violent, but many of the women of this study are cognizant of the potential risks attached to relationships and see singlehood as an approach to risk management. Singlehood is the freedom to explore. Singlehood is financial freedom. Being single is freedom from the most intimate and violent expressions of misogyny. In singlehood, participants had the time and space to express themselves. But singlehood is more than just freedom, it also provides interviewees with the time and space to learn about themselves, practice skills for relationships, and prepare for the next stages of their lives.

A time to learn, prepare, and practice. Included in the Being Single Is… exercise are three related phrases to describe singlehood: A time to learn, a time to prepare, and a time to practice. Participants frequently presented these ideas together, using them to talk through the different dimensions of their growth in singlehood. Whereas most other facets of singlehood do not concern men, this feature of Black women's singlehood does, at least in part. The learning, preparing, and practicing that participants describe, characterizes their growth and self-discovery in the emotional and relational facets of their lives.

Belle was 26-years-old when we met for our interview. She is the mother of a one-year-old son. She completed high school and earned a culinary arts certificate. At the time of our interview, she worked in the kitchen of a brand-new concept restaurant reflecting the tastes of the so-called "New" Detroit. Belle had just recently ended her relationship with her son's father. He was violent and verbally abusive—yelling, shoving Belle, and punching holes into walls. She ended the relationship after a series of increasingly violent incidents. Now a single mom, an identity that Belle asserts and seeks to reclaim from the maw of stereotype, she wants a fresh start. She was thoughtful about which direction to go. Belle offers the following response to a question I posed about what she has learned about herself during her current period of singlehood:

> So I've learned that I am a much—I have much more depth than I thought. For a long time in my 20s, I thought I was shallow. I didn't think deeply enough about things. And I didn't. And so, now, I just actually take time and I can be a deeper person. I can think about things and have a good understanding about them. That's what I—that's the biggest thing that I've learned about myself. And I love coming up with ideas and creating things for people, not even myself (Belle).

One of the ideas that Belle has dreamed up in her singlehood is for a Black restaurant association. Conscious of the racism present in the staffing and management of many so-called "New" Detroit restaurants, Belle wants to host a series of classes for up-and-coming Black restaurateurs. As Belle describes them, these classes will be "for people who look like me" so that they can "learn about wine and learn about cheeses so that then we can be a part of this Detroit thing that's going on" (Belle). In singlehood, Belle is coming up with new ways to express her culinary interests, ideas that, if implemented, have the promise to uplift her

community. Singlehood is a time for self-reflection, reinvention, and creativity. Later, in a discussion about her strengths, Belle revisits the idea of learning, coupling it with practice. Of singlehood Belle says:

> Revealing because you constantly finding out stuff about yourself—you know? Or sometimes you might realize that you might be a bitch and you need to check that. Or you might realize like, I am funny. You know what I mean? I can make people laugh and smile and I like that. A time to practice, yep. Do what you want. Perfect your skills. You might be good at something (Belle).

Singlehood allows a Black woman to identify new traits and features of her personality that she may not have fully acknowledged. Singlehood is a laboratory for observation, trial, and error—a time to explore one's interests, perfect one's skills, learn about oneself, and dream up ideas for the next phase of life.

Participants also use singlehood to reflect on their actions in old relationships. Angela was 43-years-old, when we met. She had no kids and did not want them. She had never been married and never wanted to be. These were desires that Angela never had. Angela talked proudly about completing her Bachelor's degree. She completed her college degree 3 credits at a time. It took her 20 years of working and saving, working and saving, a testament to her patience and perseverance. Angela was very active in her religious community, holding a high rank in her congregation. She was not Christian. Between her responsibilities to her mother, her friends, her new relationship, work, her hobbies, and her religious community, Angela's life was full. Angela was an admitted introvert, and during our interview she spoke about the many surreal encounters she has had while dating. Men usually confused her quietness for meekness, and her need for time alone as standoffishness. Men's misunderstanding of her traits and life goals has caused

conflicts in her past relationships. Angela describes how her interests—anime, horror films, video games, and Eastern philosophies—alienate potential partners. Her disinterest in married life confuses them. But Angela is at ease in her singlehood and has little concern for what others think of her.

Angela described entering a period of self-imposed celibacy—a spiritually informed period of abstinence from sex and relationships—after a string of bad relationships. Although it is a core tenet of Angela's faith, she does not practice celibacy consistently. She uses celibacy, and the time away from men that it provides her, to reflect on past relationships. She looks for patterns in the types of men she dates. She identifies features of her own behavior she would like to change in future relationships. Celibacy allows her to reflect on who she is in relationships with the goal of improving her behavior for the future.

> Celibacy is just—that was just something I did after the three Hoteps… I said, "What if it's me? What if it's me?" So I was like, "Okay, let's do this internal journey." Like, what if it's me? And I was in seminary at the time, so I was like, I'm a just finish seminary and get a good job, finish school, and then I'll worry about romance later. Just do me. So it was kind of a personal decision (Angela).

A Hotep is a Black man who is "loudly, conspicuously, and obnoxiously pro-black, but anti-progress" (Young, 2016). Hoteps have the reputation of being sexist and anti-gay, adhering to rigid and gendered constructions of men and women's roles in Black communities (Young, 2016). Angela describes Hoteps, saying:

> …They're hungry for knowledge about being Black and about Black history—and I get that. And they kinda jump in it with both feet without doing proper investigation. So it's a lot of assumptions about African cu[lture]. I see a lot of untested and ungrounded

assumptions about African culture in regards to—especially in regards to gender relations and LGBT people (Angela).

After three of these relationships it is understandable why Angela would want a break from dating and relationships. The "internal journey" that Angela went on during her celibacy allowed her to identify what she was contributing to these unsatisfying relationships. Angela lives out a period of singlehood reminiscent of the growth messages I described earlier in the chapter. In addition to finishing seminary, getting a good job, and working on school, Angela was able to use her singlehood to explore who she was and what she was attracting in the world. Singlehood affords participants the time and space for growth and learning. This process can take place on many levels and occur in many different contexts, simultaneously. Angela's account also demonstrates how singlehood, and the growth that takes place within it, can occur at any age, further suggesting that singlehood, separate and apart from age, functions as its own period of development.

Like Belle and Angela, Cindy uses her singlehood to learn about herself and to learn about relationships. Cindy and I discussed whether she thought she was good at being single. By her own estimation, Cindy does not think she is good at it. She spends too much money. Cindy is working to pay down her credit card debt and build her credit score. She knows she should be saving more, but Cindy was too busy spoiling herself. She describes splurges at Dollar Tree and Burlington Coat Factory and lunches out by herself. I asked her what she thought was motivating this period of self-indulgence:

> Um—because I think, right now, to be honest, I am falling in love with me. I'm learning who I am as a person. My worth is growing and just knowing that it doesn't really take anybody to complete me. I'm getting to know who I am. And I'm still weaning out what

don't belong in my life as a person, so that when I do meet somebody, I'm able to give them a better me (Cindy).

Cindy is essentially describing a love affair with herself. Like Angela and Belle, Cindy uses her singlehood to become the woman she wants to be. There is something extremely touching and very profound about the idea of a woman using her singlehood to date herself. It was one of the most explicit shows of self-love in the study, but this period of time also served a larger purpose. Singlehood more broadly includes working on yourself and your approach to relationships. Black Love media heavily stress this idea to Black women, and I discuss this feature of the media and Black women's reactions to it later in the chapter. For Belle, Angela, and Cindy, reflecting on one's place in relationships requires self-awareness and willingness to develop skills—the winnowing out of what does not belong. For some participants this reflection involves learning communication and patience. For others it means working to establish better boundaries with men. For still others, the preparation for relationships requires a shift in one's mindset, exploring patterns of thinking that contribute to maladaptive behaviors and outcomes. In singlehood, Cindy appears to be practicing giving to herself the love she wants and expects from partners. For the participants of this study, singlehood provides Black women with the space to learn about themselves, practice new skills in relationships, and prepare for the next stages of life. But for all of the promise that singlehood holds, being single is also disruptive. Being single requires these Black women to redesign their approaches to life. Being single is usually not part of the plan.

Not part of the plan. One of the drawbacks of the growth message that I described earlier in this chapter is the inevitability with which it treats men and relationships. This message assumes that from an early age, men will be trying to distract a woman from her purpose.

Therefore, Black women must erect boundaries around romantic relationships. Contact with men should be limited. Only after a Black woman completes school, establishes her career, buys her home, and travels the world can she begin to fully explore romantic relationships. This is a lot of pressure to place on one person, be they the single woman or her would-be partner. For a subset of women in this study, the framing of relationships as inevitable wrongly sets the expectation that men will always come.

Regardless of how they feel about being single or their level of comfort in singlehood, the majority of participants did not expect to spend their adult lives alone. Whether it is because of divorce, the death of a spouse, or never getting married, being single was not part of their plan. Many participants started their adulthood with the expectation that if they followed a certain path—or just aged enough—their singlehood would eventually end in marriage, hopefully one that would last for life. Illustrating the theme of *Misunderstanding*, singlehood is a change of plans. With that change comes the grieving of lost dreams, a shift in one's approach to family formation, and shifts in larger society that remake single Black women's roles in their communities.

Khari is 40 years old. She completed a Master's degree and works as the director of a small non-profit organization serving Detroit's youth. Although she has no kids of her own, she has numerous mentees that she knows through work and from around her community. Khari did not like being single and seemed to have internalized it as a personal slight. She described a long depression she entered in her late 20s because of her singlehood. At 28, she realized for the first time that she could be single for life. She was in this depressive funk for about two years before she sought the help of a therapist who suggested she needed further treatment. Khari was referred to specialist. There must have been a miscommunication, because when Khari investigated the

facility where she had been referred, she realized she had been recommended for medication to treat her depression. Khari thought she was being sent to a spa for a day of relaxation and talk therapy. Khari skipped out of the appointment. Disappointed, angry, and scared, Khari decided to "get her shit together" and move on from her depression, realizing how others saw her. Her lasting discomfort and depression with being single comes out in her interview.

Khari and I began our interview with a discussion of her hopes and fears for the city of Detroit. Whereas she saw a lot of promise in the future of the city, she was also concerned about gentrification, the increasing alienation of Black people from political power, and a growing disconnect between Black men and women. I asked Khari what it is like to be single in the Detroit she had just described:

> Man, listen. [Laughing]. It is almost—it is almost um—I don't even have the words to describe it. I will say less than hopeful. Very sad. I will tell you, I was raised in a two-parent household. My parents still live in the same house that they raised my brother in and they're happily married 46 years later. It was actually—it was never a question in my mind, never a question in my mind that I would be 40 and still single. I just kind of figure it was some things…will naturally happen…While I was very successful and had high profile jobs it was also very important for me to have a family. A lot of women get caught up in marriage. I wanted a family. So when I would see these [married] women kind of driving around with their fly clothes on and their expensive car, and I'm a single Black woman, that kind of frustrated me right? Because it's not really what I wanted (Khari).

Marriage and partnership are a different kind of life goal. Unlike earning a degree or starting a business, which a person can more or less embark upon alone, marriage requires the

coordination of two adults, each with their own priorities, goals, and interests. Marriage requires an available, interested, and willing partner. If for whatever reason this person does not come into a woman's life, or the relationship does not work out, the marriage goal is threatened. For many of the marriage-oriented women of this study, singleness is a hard pill to swallow, not just because they are unable to access their goals, but because they are frustrated that there is not a clear solution to their singlehood. Participants did what they were supposed to and yet, no husband. Khari wanted a family. She wanted to have her children in marriage, with a husband there to head her family. She was grieving the loss of a social role, a lifestyle, and the social prominence that come with a two-income, middle-class Black household. She was forced to confront her fear of singlehood, a fear that has been with her for over a decade. Singlehood required interviewees to reimagine themselves and their life goals and change their approach to life going forward. This process varies. For some like Khari, it is a painful process with many hard truths to swallow. For others like Sandra, the 43-year-old participant in the midst of a sexual reawakening, singlehood is an expansion of their world. In either case, singlehood forces women to rethink what they knew to be true about their lives and make important decisions about how to move forward.

Michelle was 38-years-old at the time of our interview. She earned a Bachelor's degree. She had no kids but mentored numerous young men and women in her community. She worked as a construction site manager and at the time of our interview, was supervising a high-profile infrastructure project in the city. Michelle enjoyed being single. She liked the newness, the flexibility, and the freedom that singlehood offers. Michelle was a woman who seemed happy and comfortable in her life, but I was curious to know if she had to make any tradeoffs in her singlehood. I asked her to talk about something she has had to give up in being single that she

believes she would otherwise have as a married woman.

> I think that probably one of the things that I worry about—because I definitely do want children—is that, have I lost my window. I recently had an appointment with my gynecologist. She suggested I started thinking about freezing my eggs if I wanted to [have children], and then told me, had I froze my eggs at 30, I would be much better off than almost 40. And so I think when you start going for your exams when you're a little bit older, you start—that causes you to sort of reflect on the life decisions that you've made…And so I think it made me think, but it also made me a little angry…It's so cost-prohibitive to be able to do. So if you are not fortunate enough to have really good insurance, if you're not fortunate enough to have—to be bringing in like close to six figures it's definitely—it can seem like something that's an impossibility to do. But at the same time, it also kind of makes you think about the alternatives. Because it's like we have so many of our kids, in particular, who are in the foster care system. And so like what does that look like? What does maybe having him fertilize somebody else's egg that you carry look like?… If you're unable to have kids… I am a firm believer in mentoring (Michelle).

As both Khari and Michelle have highlighted, single Black women have to rethink their approach to family and children. Singlehood forces Black women who want children but do not currently have them to adopt new approaches to family formation. Khari and Michelle are both mentors to high-school and college-age kids but have taken different approaches to managing their fertility. Khari is still grappling with the loss of the family she had envisioned for herself and stated repeatedly in her interview that she was uncomfortable with egg freezing or having a child alone. Michelle, on the other hand, is debating freezing her eggs, adoption, and fostering as

alternatives to the two-parent family she had initially envisioned for herself. Whereas there is no right way to manage one's fertility, being single frequently requires Black women to rethink their plans for family and take proactive and creative steps towards the outcomes they want. Single moms have to be similarly adaptable. As Belle, our friend from earlier, reminds us, "I'm not a single mom by choice. I'm a single mom by the circumstances and the situation. I didn't—we [single moms] didn't go into this trying to be single" (Belle).

In the United States, the majority of Black children are born to unmarried women (Clarke, 2011). This includes births to older single mothers using IVF and sperm donors, as well as births to younger single mothers whose relationships just did not work out. Averil Clarke, a sociologist focusing on fertility and family formation, interviewed 58 college-degreed single Black women to explore how *inequalities of love*—lower rates of partnership among Black women attributed to race and gender inequality—impacted their fertility outcomes (Clarke, 2011). For Clarke's participants without children, the potential loss of their fertility was devastating, but many were uncomfortable with alternatives like single parenting or adoption because of the potentially disreputable (e.g., sex outside of marriage) and unsafe (e.g., unprotected sex) behaviors they require. For Clarke's participants with kids, not being able to raise their children in the family units they envisioned was equally devastating. Both camps of women were forced to shift their life expectations and forge new paths forward. As Khari, Michelle, and Belle make clear, singlehood introduces complications into participants' plans for fertility and mothering; requiring single Black women to be adaptable in their approaches to family and to be resilient as they process the many emotions that come with the loss of a long-held dream.

In addition to the disruptions that singlehood can cause to women personally, many of the

participants in this study saw singlehood as a larger social disruption, evidence of social change. Through singlehood, Black women are redefining what it means to be community leaders, mothers, and professionals; changes that have ripple effects throughout broader U.S. society. At the time of our interview, Hunter was 36-years-old. She was born and raised in Detroit. Hunter earned a Bachelor's degree and worked as a media professional in the city. Hunter had no children of her own but she served as a mother figure to her best friend's daughter and auntie to another friend's young sons. Hunter considers herself to be "the quintessential single girl in Detroit." She has "not been in a committed relationship in my adult life." Hunter was insightful. She had a lot of experience being single. "I've done a lot of dating. Long-term dating with no sign of commitment. Short-term dating with no sign of commitment. People who I loved, genuinely, people who I loved, they married other people who I still have to hang out with" (Hunter). She was intimately acquainted with singlehood's pros and cons.

At this point in our interview we were talking about the role that money played in marriage for previous generations of women. Like many other participants in the study, Hunter has friends and relatives who are skeptical of her singlehood and her security in it. Hunter has great aunts who worry about her because she is single. These are women who never drove, never held jobs, and were in many ways dependent on their husbands for their survival. Hunter's words came in response to her great aunts' advice to marry.

> I don't need to marry somebody because of money. I mean that extra money would be nice. I would love extra money, but my La Croix is still gonna fall in that refrigerator, married or not. So that changes things. And so that means it also changes how people see Black women. And for Black men—I would love to have this conversation with them, but with some men who can really have this conversation about what this point means for

> them. Because, as they are looking at us and seeing us move in spaces we've never been able to move before, and seeing us move our lives without them, and that's true [for] fathers, brothers, sons, all of those things, right? This idea that there is no ownership of Black women. For a long time, everybody owned Black women. Black men owned us. White folks owned us. Everybody owned us but us. And so, now, we're at this time where we own us, lock, stock, and barrel. No one can tell me where to go, how to go, and where to get—and when I have to get there. And there is something really refreshing, and, also, really scary because that means that there is a shift in the ground. And there will be cracks. That's what happens (Hunter).

Later on in our interview Hunter reinforces this idea that singlehood is a space wherein Black women define themselves. She equates Black women's singlehood to the women's liberation movement, saying:

> White women had the women's movement. They had that. That was theirs. We participated, but that was theirs. I feel like this space [singlehood] right now for Black women is another space of liberation and it does not include Black men in the way that they have been used to it including them… They are not at this table (Hunter).

Single Black women are entering new spaces and breaking new ground, which ultimately forces Black men and broader society to revise their views of single Black women. No longer do Black men or White folks get to shape how Black women move through the world. The institution of singlehood requires a new path forward for Black men and women, a recalibration of gender roles in Black communities, and ultimately a reimagining of Black masculinity. Today's generation of single Black women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s are being recognized in society in ways that previous generations of single Black women have not been. This is a tough

pill to swallow for all involved, single Black women included. Change is scary, and these shifts are remaking the ground upon which Black communities stand. As Hunter said, "there will be cracks," but single Black women have broken their mold and that rupture is tearing down the social norms dependent upon it.

Exemplifying the theme of *Autonomy*, being single is freedom to explore one's world and freedom from the responsibilities of partnership. Singlehood is economic freedom, the opportunity to plan and spend one's finances as one chooses. Singlehood is freedom from the most explicit and violent articulations of sexism and misogyny. Singlehood is a safe harbor. Being single is a time to learn about oneself, prepare for the next stages of one's life, and practice new skills. An example of the theme of *Enrichment*, this process is multi-layered and multi-dimensional. The process of singlehood is not bounded by age. In singlehood, Black women have to reimagine their lives and come to terms with lost dreams. Being single requires adaptability. Being single is not part of the plan. *Misunderstanding* can be seen in the many changes that Black women and society are making to accommodate singlehood. Singlehood is not a part of the plan and neither are the social shifts singlehood is bringing about.

As this study has demonstrated thus far, singlehood is a complex and nuanced phase of life. This complexity is frequently oversimplified and misconstrued in the media (Charleston, 2014; Wanzo, 2011). In the final section of this chapter, I describe single Black women's reactions to Black Love media. I explore how participants would intervene upon their representation to have Black Love media better reflect their experiences as single Black women.

Black Love Media

Rather than using media as the yardstick against which I measure Black women, which numerous scholars have identified as an enduring problem for Black women both in society and

research (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1992), this study uses Black women's experiences as a metric to assess the media. So far I have examined the messages Black women say they receive about singlehood. I have explored Black women's self-described experiences of singlehood. This background provides a more nuanced context in which to situate participants' reactions to Black Love media. Participants conclude that Black Love media have potential—they see bright spots in the media—yet at the same time, interviewees believe that Black Love media lack credibility, because of their reliance on untrustworthy spokespeople and imbalanced focus on Black women. Participants also stated that Black Love media could do a better job of reflecting single Black women's experiences, perhaps by downplaying the drama and focusing on stories of personal growth, entrepreneurship, and sisterhood. The themes of *Autonomy* and *Enrichment* can be seen in participants' positive evaluations of Black Love media and their interventions into the representation of single Black women. *Misunderstanding* can be seen in participants' critiques of Black Love media's hyper-focus on dramatic and stereotypic representations of single Black women.

Bright spots in Black Love media. Participants celebrated two facets of Black Love media: (1) the presence of single Black women media moguls who use their platforms to uplift Black women; and (2) growing pockets of representation that more accurately reflect every-day experiences of singlehood among Black women. Participants pointed to women like Oprah Winfrey, Issa Rae, Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer, and Iyanla Vanzant as positive examples of single Black women in the media. Participants praised these women's work on screen, but also their personal stories of hard work, entrepreneurship, and growth.

Sheena was 33-year-old at the time of our interview. Sheena earned an Associate's degree and certificate in medical billing, but was working in the kitchen of one of Detroit's

celebrated new restaurants when we spoke. Sheena is a kitchen-table entrepreneur. She has a passion for food and eventually wants to start her own business, a takeout restaurant and catering service. Sheena had three children, two daughters and a son, all of whom are in their teens. Sheena is divorced. Her marriage ended because of violence. Her ex-husband was 6'5" and over 300lbs. Sheena was about 5"10' and 180lbs. Arguments between Sheena and her ex-husband frequently escalated, with Sheena doling out most of the hits, scratches, and slaps and her husband grabbing her violently to make her stop. Their relationship was not salvageable. When she described her experiences of singlehood, Sheena would intersperse examples of women in the media who she thought were doing a terrible job of representing single Black women. She thought the entirety of VH1's *Love and Hip Hop* (Hull, McLaughlin, Scott-Young, & Springman, 2011) franchise was a particularly bad portrayal of single Black women. Since it was clear who she thought was doing a poor job of representing single Black women, I asked Sheena to provide an example of someone in the media who she thought was doing it right:

> I think Taraji does a good job. Because she was single for a long time and, like, she's relatively young. She's attractive. She's successful, and she don't get caught up in a whole bunch of hoopla. Like, you don't see her taking a whole bunch of stupid pictures or getting caught up in a whole bunch of bullshit or messing with somebody and being sloppy, like, she a lady about hers. Like, I'm sure she do whatever she doing, but you don't never hear about it. And I feel like that's good because don't nobody really need to be in your business. [Laughter] (Sheena).

Participants praised media personalities who embodied their values. Sheena values discretion and praises it in Henson. Henson avoids drama and works hard, which speaks to Sheena's determined nature and no-nonsense work ethic. Participants valued traits like honesty, integrity,

perseverance, sisterhood, entrepreneurship, discretion, and decorum and liked media personalities who modeled these values.

Participants appreciate single Black women in the media who use their media presence for the betterment of other Black women. At the time of our interview Starlet was 38-years-old. She earned a high school diploma and was a few credits shy of finishing college. By day she works as a K-12 educator. By night she was a singer and entertainer. Starlet is interested in entrepreneurship. It is one of her core values. She revisited the idea repeatedly over our interview. She wanted to start a media company and is contemplating the type of content she would like to feature. Starlet had a dream of using her media platform to support young Black women and girls as they come of age consuming increasingly sexualized content. Starlet pointed to Oprah Winfrey as an example of the type of media professional she would like to be. Beyond Oprah's business mind and global influence, Starlet responds to how Winfrey uses her media platform to support her audience:

> Oprah. Just her whole idea of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneur, the platform she created, Own Network. It's like own. I own this. You know?... This is mines. And then I can make the rules, and I set the standards, or I could set the stage of what I want. So, she has the platform. She's interviewed people from Prince Charming to Tom Cruise. I like the fact that she has a platform that many people wanted to be a part of, and be on, and that means—that means a lot. The fact that she's a multi-billionaire. She came from nothing. And she never gave up. That's what I want. I want a major platform…You give people a chance to—a platform to express—give them the freedom to express what they're going through, what they want in life, and what happened to them (Starlet).

To Starlet, Winfrey models entrepreneurship. She is a self-made billionaire who, through hard work and perseverance, has earned what she has. Winfrey's billion-dollar media empire features everyday people and a space for them to share their stories. From Starlet's perspective, Winfrey has not only enriched herself, she created a space of expression for her audience in the process. Participants wanted to see Black women who leveraged their power and privilege for the benefit of all Black women, not just themselves. Additionally, participants wanted to see authenticity from single Black women in the media, defined by participants as consistency between a celebrity's personal and public life. Sheena and Starlet both speak to this in their comments, but neither as colorfully as Kandi.

Kandi was 45-years-old at the time of our interview. She was widowed. Her husband was diagnosed with cancer in 2011 and after living with the disease for two years, passed away. They were married for 18 years. Kandi was a college graduate and at the time of our interview she worked part-time at a beauty salon to supplement some retirement income. Kandi was struggling with her newfound singlehood. Her marriage was great. If her husband were still living, they would still be married. A lot has changed in courtship since Kandi was last single. Before Kandi was married, she ran the streets. Both of her parents dealt drugs and her father was a pimp. She described herself as having a lot of "knowledge of the game," and used that knowledge—plus her swagger and sex appeal—to get what she wanted in her 20s. But that was her 20s.

An aspiring reality television star, Kandi contacted me thinking I was hosting auditions for a Detroit franchise of VH1's *Love and Hip Hop* (Hull, McLaughlin, Scott-Young, & Springman, 2011). Once I clarified that I was conducting an interview study, she agreed to meet. She wanted to share her experiences. Kandi lived through violence, the struggles of parenting, a happy marriage, and the deaths of her husband and son. This life experience, and her interest in

the media shone through in her critiques of singlehood, the advice she shared with her 24- and 26-year-old daughters, and her evaluations of Black Love media. Kandi is skeptical of most Black Love celebrities, she thinks they are fake, but has respect for Iyanla Vanzant, who she calls Ivana:

> I'm gonna tell you the best one of all. Ivana… Coming from her past, she outshine everybody… She came from an abusive marriage and she divorced. And she just had nothing after that… She rebuilt herself. She's the best of everybody… Don't nobody have her beat because that's a strong black woman… I think she did a couple of things with single women… She stresses on independence, not depending on a man. You know, independence, loving yourself first before you even get in a relationship with somebody else. That's very positive. You know, just all positive things, loving yourself, taking care of yourself, not putting a man before yourself. Put yourself first… She's the epiphany of how a single woman [can] get it together, and she got her shit together. She set up her own platform up, and look at her. She's making money. And I know that bastard that she divorced, I know he's sick. And her son's right by her side (Kandi).

Iyanla Vanzant is the host of OWN's *Iyanla, Fix My Life* (Sinclair & Harrison, 2012), a reality television show that follows Vanzant as she conducts therapeutic interventions on everyone from noted public Black figures to ex-felons. Vanzant's programming ranges from the heartwarming to the sensational. She has explored the impact of stereotypes on Black women, conducted interventions with families in crisis, and hosted numerous town hall meetings to support healing and love between Black men and women. Vanzant frequently shares her personal story in her work. She talks openly about her experiences of childhood sexual abuse, teen pregnancy, the death of her daughter, her divorce, her public feud with Oprah Winfrey, and the

personal work she has had to do to recover from these challenges (Vanzant, 1998). Kandi likes the work Vanzant has done with single women and the message of self-reliance she shares in her work. Kandi likes that Vanzant uses *Fix My Life* (Sinclair & Harrison, 2012) to share her life lessons while keeping her family close (her son is a production assistant on the show) and turning a profit for herself in the process. Participants in the study are heartened by the professionalism, authenticity, and uplifting spirit of single Black women in the media. These positive traits complement the more nuanced portrayals of single Black women's lives increasingly featured in Black Love media.

Agentic portrayals. Interviewees also celebrated portrayals of agentic sexuality among single Black women in Black Love media. Participants wanted to see examples of single Black women pursuing sexual relationships on their own terms. Participants described the importance of situating representations of single Black women's sexual encounters in the context of romantic relationships, work, and larger social obligations. Participants saw portrayals of agentic sexuality as redefining Black women's sexuality apart from the stereotyped extremes of asexuality and hyper-sexuality. Many interviewees saw agentic displays of sexuality as a gateway into talking about more complex facets of contemporary singlehood. Interviewees acknowledge that these are not universal features of Black Love media, but value that agentic portrayals of Black women's sexuality allow them to discuss previously unacknowledged facets of their lives. Miranda offers an example.

Miranda is 29-years-old during our interview. She had a seven-year-old daughter. Miranda finished high school and was working on her Bachelor's degree when she got pregnant. She finished up as much coursework as she could while waiting for the baby but needed to leave school and find work once her daughter was born. At the time of our interview, Miranda lived in

her family's home with her mother, younger brother, and daughter. She was technically employed as a home health aid but was not currently working. Her manager had been cutting her shifts without explanation. Miranda is a kitchen-table entrepreneur. To make extra money, she braids hair on the side. Miranda wants to go back to school but is still trying to figure out what to do. She understandably wants to have a plan before she starts paying for classes again, but years have passed and she is worried about the lost time.

Miranda is incredibly expressive and funny. Miranda described her singlehood as: sexual, ever-changing, eye-opening, freeing, a time to practice, dumb, "something I'm bad at," unpredictable, universal, full of possibility, frustrating, emotionally draining, scary, and a time to set boundaries. She almost embodied each of these descriptors when talking through her numerous experiences with love, sex, relationships, motherhood, career, education, and family. She wanted to know more about herself and relationships. Miranda talked about her desires to learn better partner communication, how to establish boundaries in relationships, and how to safely and discreetly act on her sexual curiosity. I asked her who she thought was doing a good job representing each of the facets of singlehood she described:

> Whoever wrote just *Being Mary Jane*. I didn't even wanna watch it because it was so, like, dead spot on! I was like, "Damn. I been Mary Jane before." A thousand times. Like, sleeping with somebody and they have a whole relationship that you're oblivious to… So that definitely displayed a lot of my experiences, because I definitely can say that (Miranda).

BET's *Being Mary Jane* (Akil, Akil, & Union, 2013) was frequently cited as a more accurate example of singlehood among Black women. The show follows the life of Mary Jane Paul, an up-and-coming newscaster for a fictional cable news network based in Atlanta, Georgia.

Mary Jane is 38-years-old. She has no kids. She has never been married. She is a college graduate. The show chronicles the ups and downs of Mary Jane's love life, family relationships, and close friendships. Over the course of the series, Mary Jane has a relationship with a married man, maintains an on-again-off-again relationship with her ex-fiancé, steals a man's sperm and tries to inseminate herself with it, masturbates, receives oral sex, has numerous casual sexual relationships, dates a White man, and explores fertility treatments, all while balancing her responsibilities to work, friends, and family. Participants felt that while dramatic, *Being Mary Jane* (Akil, Akil, & Union, 2013) and other shows like it (e.g. HBO's *Insecure*, Becky et al., 2016), did a good job of touching upon once rarely discussed facets of single Black women's lives.

In *Being Mary Jane* (Akil, Akil, & Union, 2013), sex is frequently used as an entry point for larger conversations about relationship dynamics between Black men and women. Khari, our 40-year-old friend from earlier, is not a fan of Mary Jane's promiscuity, but sees value in the conversations about singlehood it fosters:

> I mean, *Being Mary Jane*, I struggle with *Being Mary Jane*. Originally, I think they've done a better job of kinda rounding her out, right? She was very, she was—you know—very promiscuous in the beginning, which I thought that was pretty uncool. But at the same time, the conflicts, though, that she kind of experienced—the wanting to be loved, the bad choices. I think that was a fair representation. And even like now, they're showing her in a relationship and what it kinda looked like. She kinda fell into it, by having a one-night stand…but it just so happened that he wanted to kinda take a chance on her, right? And so, I think even showing her with her struggles it was a fair representation (Khari).

Mary Jane's sexuality allows for conversations about the emotions and insecurities that surround casual sexual encounters and the relationships that can come from them. For Khari, sex is a device to uncover larger issues in Mary Jane's life. The "bad choices" and "wanting to be loved" that underpin Mary Jane's sex life show a side of singlehood that goes beyond sexual objectification and into the emotional lives of Black women.

Like Miranda and Khari, Hunter feels the portrayals of *Being Mary Jane* tell a once untold story of single Black women's lives. Hunter says:

> I remember the first time, when that Mary Jane movie came out, and I sat there like, "Did—is somebody putting my life on TV?" Like, "What the fuck is happening?" Like, "Wait, we get to really talk about [this], openly" (Hunter).

To stress the impact of *Being Mary Jane* (Akil, Akil, & Union, 2013), Hunter goes on to share a story about two conversations she had with friends about masturbation. The first conversation happened when Hunter was in high school. She was talking with some church friends. Curious, Hunter asked her friends for their opinions on self-pleasure. Her friends described masturbation as something dirty and improper, something that only bad girls did. Hunter was embarrassed for asking, and in our interview described that conversation as a shaming one. Later in college, Hunter had a similar discussion with a new group of college friends. This time self-pleasure was celebrated and normalized. That conversation shifted Hunter's thinking about herself and allowed her to begin integrating her sexuality into her identity. The second conversation helped to lift her shame. She equates watching *Being Mary Jane* (Akil, Akil, & Union, 2013) for the first time to that second conversation about masturbation. Talking about Mary Jane's expressive sexuality, Hunter continues by saying, "We didn't get to be those people. We didn't get to be sexual. We didn't get to celebrate being sexual. If you were sexual, you were a slut."

Historically, middle-class Black women have not had the luxury of expressive sexuality. Respectability politics codified the role of chaste behavior as a marker of middle-class values for Black women (Higginbotham, 1993). Designed to contribute to a political movement for racial equality, respectability politics ultimately sought to protect Black women (Higginbotham, 1993). It did so, however, not by seeking to subvert systems of White dominance but rather by privileging these systems, encouraging Black women to adopt the behaviors of middle-class White women as a form of protection from criticisms of Black inferiority and threats to their bodily integrity (Higginbotham, 1993). Sexual repression became a tool for respectability, evidence of one's middle-class values (Higginbotham, 1993).

For Hunter, Miranda, Khari, and other women in this study, *Being Mary Jane* (Akil, Akil, & Union, 2013) and similar programs (e.g., HBO's *Insecure*, Becky et al., 2016) signal a new era in the public discussion of the sexual and emotional lives of single Black women. While dramatic, Mary Jane has a sex life, one that she has chosen for herself, and it is acted out in the broader context of work, family, and personal life. Participants viewed this agentic and contextualized approach to the representation of single Black women's sexuality as a welcome change in Black women's representation, which has historically been defined through the extremes of asexuality and hyper-sexuality (Collins, 2009; Higginbotham, 1993).

Participants responded positively to the increasingly authentic and agentic portrayals of single women in Black Love media. Whether these women are entrepreneurs using their media platforms to uplift Black women or are fictional representations that showcase once overlooked corners of Black women lives, these portrayals were viewed as an expansion in single Black women's representation. But as sunny skies eventually give way to grey days, participants' positive evaluations eventually gave way to criticism of Black Love media.

Dating advice lacks credibility. Black Love media have a credibility problem. Participants felt the so-called dating advice featured in these media cannot be trusted because it is sexist. I asked participants to react to three popular examples of Black Love advice media: *Act Like a Lady Think Like a Man* (Harvey & Millner, 2009); *Manology* (Gibson, Run, & Morrow, 2013); and *The Wait* (Franklin, Good, & Vandehey, 2016). According to their covers, each of these books is a *New York Times* bestseller. Participants questioned the advice offered by these so-called relationship experts. Kandi, the 45-year-old widow described earlier, did not mince words when sharing her opinions of Steve Harvey and his capacity to give Black women advice: "I think Steve Harvey's an asshole. I don't like Steve Harvey. I'm sorry… You ain't got game yourself. You've been married three times" (Kandi). For Kandi and many other participants, Harvey's lack of success in his own relationships invalidates his position as an advice guru. Recall Kandi's earlier praise for Iyanla Vanzant, rooted in Vanzant's rags-to-riches comeback. Just as participants want to see authenticity among Black women media professionals, they want cohesion between the advice that celebrities share and their personal lives.

Further invalidating the advice of Black Love media is its bent towards sexist and stereotypic content. Summarizing the views of many of the participants in this study, Hunter describes Black Love advice books as "sexist on every possible level" and sees these media as "dumbing men down to these beings who can't see past sex." When it comes to their portrayals of women, Black Love media do no better. Take this statement from Belle, who critiques the representation of single Black women in Black Love advice media: "They always bring up this thing about submission. Like always. It's always this thing about being too aggressive, and it's always this thing about being too much, whatever that means to people. You're too much of a man" (Belle). The hyper-sexual Black man and overly aggressive, mannish Black woman are

stereotypes of Black Americans commonly featured in the media (Collins, 2009). Participants want advice that rejects caricatures of who they are. Instead, participants favor more nuanced perspectives on Black men, women, and relationships, looking to people like themselves for this advice.

Zora, the 27-year-old musician and non-profit worker described earlier, offers some insight. At the time of our interview, Zora was on the cusp of something new, but had trouble articulating what that something was. Zora was implementing new boundaries with friends and learning whose advice to trust. Summarizing the views of many participants, Zora describes who she would most likely trust if looking to the media for advice about relationships. She begins her comments with what makes Black Love media authors like Steve Harvey untrustworthy:

> You don't understand my experience. Nothing in the world could ever… make me think you know what my struggle is like. You can maybe give me some insight, as far as what the other half thinks or whatever, but like I said, I don't think I need that, necessarily… So I think as far—it would be a Black woman—who is also not gonna restrict me to what popular belief or even what she thinks a Black woman should be like. Because my mom did not raise me to think like Black women do this and Black women are this. Like you are a woman who is Black. Be proud of both of those things… So I would need to be able to trust that this person isn't going to just expect me to do the Black shoulds, and would respect my womanness, my independence, my Blackness, all of those things. I would consider advice from a White woman whose independence I could trust. Or, of course, a Hispanic woman also, obviously, or maybe an Asian woman, we'll see, maybe… I'll say other cultures, yes, but I would need to be able to trust their independence and their intelligence. Um, a Black woman, I'd be just quicker to trust her experience (Zora).

Autonomy and self-definition in singlehood are of critical importance to Zora and the other Black women in this study. Accordingly, participants look to other single Black women for advice that will help them live out these values in singlehood. Zora takes an intersectional view of her identity and looks for advice authors who will understand and respect her race and gender identity. Male experts can be suspect because of sexism, and women of other races may not share or understand many of the same experiences as Black women. Like Belle, Zora rejects ideas of submission, and looks to advice authors who can respect her independence. Zora looks for experts who will not restrict her to the *Black Should*s—Zora's term for the conventional path to marriage that includes a Black husband, a silver Mercedes, perm-straightened hair, a large house in the suburbs, and three kids by age 30. Zora, like many of the women in this study, wants advice from someone she can trust. Participants see through dating charlatans peddling stereotypes, looking past these untrustworthy media figures to find authentic Black women whose judgment they can trust.

Brittany, the 26-year-old divorced loan closer, offers another example. She struggled with being single. While she enjoyed the freedom it allows, she would like to start a family. Brittany was a Christian, devout in her faith. Like Zora, Brittany looks to Black women like her for guidance in her singlehood. Brittany looks to Heather Lindsey—a pastor, television personality, author, and YouTube celebrity—for support:

> BRITTANY: Yes! I love her. She's actually married now, but just—you know—her story of being single and her being content in that season was definitely uplifting for me… So I watch her every month, her live episodes, still to this day. You know what I mean? Her stories are not always about being single, but just being connected to someone who knows the struggle, who knew the pain. You know what I mean? Yeah.

JDM: What kind of messages does she put out? Like what's a message that she put out recently that you really felt, "Yes, thank you. That's what I needed to hear today."

BRITTANY: I would say the one for Valentine's Day. Knowing that Valentine's Day is also a single awareness day. Basically, meaning as in just because you're single does not mean that you're broken. You're not damaged goods. Okay. Be happy and rejoice for your friends who found love. You know what I mean? Because one day, they're gonna rejoice and be happy for you. Like the Bible says the first shall be last and the last shall be first. So if God saved the best for last, oh, you best believe the one he got for me, he gonna be bad than a mug. I'll be last. [Laughter].

While Zora values independence, intelligence, and respect for her intersectional identity, Brittany prioritizes Christian values, an understanding of the struggles of singlehood, and an uplifting message from Black Love advice media personalities. Reflecting Brittany's values, Heather Lindsey shows Brittany how to celebrate her life regardless of the circumstances. Heather Lindsey's words remind Brittany, that despite her singlehood, she still has value.

Participants are not looking for advice about how to get a man. Instead participants want guidance on how to weather the challenges of life. Iyana—the 33-year-old marketing professional—describes the problem with most Black Love advice media. She says it is too focused on how to get a man:

> But it's like be the best person you can be so you can find a man. As opposed to just like being the best person for the world, which we could probably all benefit more from than how to catch a man (Iyana).

Singlehood is more than just the absence of a husband. Singlehood is a delicate balance of personal growth, professional development, fertility management, motherhood, friendship,

family responsibilities, and happiness. Participants want guidance from women like them on how to best tackle these life challenges, not advice about how to get a man from sexist dating advice charlatans with questionable relationship histories. Along these same lines, they view Black Love media as too focused on single Black women. Black Love media overlook the role of Black men in contributing to the marital outcomes of Black Americans. Participants saw this as hypocritical, especially considering the extent to which Black Love media stress that Black women resolve their "issues" prior to entering relationships (Harvey & Millner, 2009). In these media, Black women are being tasked with emotional work that Black men are not asked to do.

Iyana had a lot more to say about the dating advice examples I showed her during the interview. Although she had never read any of these *New York Times* bestsellers, she was heavily critical of these books based on their covers, their authors, and the skimming of the books she did during our conversation. As Iyana said earlier, she is not interested in advice on how to catch a man and grew frustrated as she leafed through the books: "Nobody is writing these books for men. Like that is what also bothers me. Like all of these men are writing these books for women. But men need to take some steps back and look at themselves" (Iyana). Iyana and other participants see Black Love media's focus on women as further evidence of sexism within the genre. Recall the learning, preparing, and practicing that Black women undertake in singlehood. Participants described reflecting on past behaviors and learning new skills with the goal of being better partners in future relationships. What for many participants was a personal and self-directed process in singlehood morphs into a form of penance for single Black women in Black Love advice media. Participants are willing to work on themselves and reflect on their roles in relationships but resent the idea that they and they alone should be tasked with this work.

Like Iyana, Khari—the 40-year-old mentor and non-profit director—is troubled by the

focus of these media on Black women. Our interview was peppered with long sighs from Khari as I pulled out example after example of Black Love media. She is done with being the center of attention when it comes to singlehood. From her perspective, Black women have become a spectacle in Black Love media *because* of their singlehood. Khari highlights the broader race and gender implications of these one-sided media messages. Her words came in response to some examples of Black Love news headlines that I included in the study kit.

> I hate that we're just on blast like this. I hate that we cannot work our stuff out the way we need to—like, you don't see this about Latina women. You don't see this about Muslim wom[en]… It's us, and it's—I can't even say that it's sensationalized because sometimes I feel like there is some validity in it, but I just hate that we have to work our stuff out in front of everybody (Khari).

Historically, Black women have not been afforded the same level of personal privacy as White women in U.S. society (Gilmore, 1996). There is example after example of Black women's bodies being seized and put on display for White audiences (Craig, 2006). The public way that Black women have been forced to live out their marginalization has implications for how Black women are represented in the media (Collins, 2009; Craig, 2006; hooks, 1992). Similarly, married women have historically been afforded more privacy than their single peers (Traister, 2016). This is a function of the added respect and privacy extended to wives and mothers in the domain of their sexuality, vestiges of the cult of true womanhood (Traister, 2016). For single Black women, the nexus of their race and singlehood renders them uniquely vulnerable to public critique.

Participants are frustrated with Black women being the sole focus of Black Love media. Black women have long been criticized for their behavior, attitudes, and sexuality (Collins,

2009), and for many participants Black Love advice media act as an extension of these critiques. Participants are skeptical of Black Love media because of their disreputable spokespeople and their raced and gendered focus on single Black women. These features of Black Love media oversimplify relationship dynamics, reduce men and women to stereotypes, and treat single Black women's lives as spectacles. To be certain, there is room for growth in these media, and participants offered their ideas of how Black Love media could improve.

Interventions into Black Love media. According to Timeka Tounsel (2015), a "nimble practice" of media interpretation is a fluid and flexible media interpretation strategy that Black women employ to makes sense of their own representation in the media. A nimble practice extends to the media one chooses to consume, the representations in the media that a person identifies with, and the specific traits of a problematic character with which one engages (Tounsel, 2015). Participants determine the criteria of what media and representations they will and will not engage with, drawing on their values and preferences for guidance (Tounsel, 2015). A nimble practice of media interpretation makes many concessions on Black women's representation in the media. Black women in the media can be imperfect, problematic, and even stereotypic, but they can also be entertaining, uplifting, and informative. It is up to each individual to determine when a representation crosses into the unpalatable (Tounsel, 2015).

The participants of this study exercise a nimble practice of media interpretation. We see nimble readings in Kandi's rejection of Steve Harvey and excitement over Iyanla Vanzant, and in Khari's fraught relationship with the promiscuity of *Being Mary Jane* (Akil, Akil, & Union, 2013). This practice of nimble reading can also be observed in how Black women intervene into the media. These interventions reveal what is missing from single Black women's representation, but also uncover what Black women believe to be possible within portrayals of single Black

women. Participants want representations of single Black women that veer towards everyday experiences of Black women. Interestingly, participants do not request the elimination of representations they see as problematic. Rather, they question the absurdity of dramatic portrayals and offer their solutions for toning down sensational traits in Black celebrities. Just as Black women want better things for themselves, they want better things for their representations.

At the time of our interview, Violet was 26-year-old. She was born and raised in the city of Detroit. She earned a Bachelor's degree and worked as an educator. She had no kids. At 26, Violet saw her singlehood as a natural part of her development. She has dated, been in relationships, and now finds herself on a break from men. She was focused on work and building the confidence to approach men in social settings. She enjoyed the freedom singlehood afforded her. She frequently traveled back and forth to Chicago for weekend trips to see friends. Violet was comfortable in her singlehood, but like other participants, she worries she may miss out on marriage and children if she is *too* comfortable. While a mostly positive experience, singlehood has rendered Violet vulnerable at work. Violet describes feeling like "fair game" because "I don't have a ring on my finger." She has been set up on dates, against her stated desires; groped; made the subject of sexual comments; and called unwanted pet names from older male coworkers, bosses, and donors to the educational organization where she works. Married women in Violet's workplace did not receive this treatment. At this point in our interview, we had already spoken about the good and the bad of Black Love media. Violet and I were talking about what was missing:

> VIOLET: Normal people. Like, that's why I liked Issa Rae's show. She's normal—you know? I think that's the only one I can name of a normal person. I guess, maybe, that's it. I mean, I don't know if a story of a normal single Black woman would be TV-worthy.

JDM: Why do you think?

VIOLET: Because it-it probably wouldn't be sensa—you know—like, TV's sensationalized. I'm not sure if a normal story would be sensational. Every episode is gonna have you on the edge of your seat. So I don't how you would even portray an accurate story of women in general in the media. It's not usually a normal depiction, whether you're White or Black, you know?

Earlier in our interview Violet described Issa Rae's character in *Insecure* (Becky et al., 2016) as:

> The average chick. Not average in personhood. Average in like lifestyle, right?... She's younger, has a younger-level person's career. She's not a celebrity. She looks like a normal person... Her friendships are also kinda normal, a good mix of like, okay a little dramatic, maybe a little fake, but also some goodness in there…makin' stupid decisions… Yeah. I think that's very realistic (Violet).

Violet wants to see more normal representations of Black women who are "not average in personhood" but "average in lifestyle." She sees room for Issa Rae's *Insecure* (Becky et al., 2016) but struggles to find a place for other average portrayals in her understandings of the media. Claire, the 44-year-old office administrator, offered a solution to Violet's quandary. Claire extended Violet's desire for normal characters to the realm of factual stories:

> You gotta find real stories. *Hidden Figures*, that was an excellent movie. It was a real story. And it showed—the part that I loved, loved, loved about that was how the, um, woman who learned that computer programming by herself and went back and taught the others… She said, "You're all coming along with me." She was preparing them. It's like these are real stories and they're significant. And that was—I think that they [media makers] have a responsibility to set the tone really for what's entertaining. You can

> capture an audience with genuine stories. You know, and *Fences*, it was so basic, a basic human story… But it was told in such a genuine way that it just captured—I mean, it was really captivating. So it's like, these things exist out there. You don't have to make up stuff and be all extra. You know, you don't. There is real-life stories that are worthy of being told that really show who we are (Claire).

According to Claire and many other participants in this study, the media have a responsibility regarding how they portray single Black women. Claire sees real stories like *Hidden Figures* (Chernin et al., 2016) and *Fences* (Black, Rudin, Washington, & Washington, 2016) as positive, realistic, and responsible representations of single Black womanhood. *Hidden Figures* (Chernin et al., 2016) tells the story of Katherine Johnson, a single mother of three daughters working as a mathematician and human computer at NASA during the height of the U.S. space program in the 1960s. Johnson, played by Taraji P. Henson, works with her friends Dorothy Vaughn, the human computer and mathematician that Claire praises, played by Octavia Spencer, and Mary Jackson, a mathematician and NASA's first Black female aerospace engineer, played by Janelle Monae. These women subverted racist and sexist systems at NASA to create space for Black women in the United States' space program. This portrayal, while compelling, is not sensational. Johnson's character lived in a small single-family home with her mother. Her children all share a room. For much of the movie, we watch her and her friends do math and conduct science experiments. *Hidden Figures* (Chernin et al., 2016) is a real story, of average women—not in personhood, but in lifestyle—who used their natural math and science talents to provide for their families and communities.

Alongside more portrayals of everyday heroines, participants wanted to see different facets of already-known Black women's lives. Starlet, the 38-year-old entertainer, educator, and

entrepreneur, wanted to learn more about the professional lives of reality celebrities. Starlet was critical of—even borderline offended by—the conflict-ridden and sexualized content of reality television. She, like many others in the study, called out VH1's *Love and Hip Hop* (Hull, McLaughlin, Scott-Young, & Springman, 2011) as a particularly deplorable example. In the comments that follow, however, she focuses her attention on Bravo's *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* (Dunlop & Eskelin, 2008). Starlet's nimble reading of the cast positions them as media professionals who give in to their baser instincts for entertainment (i.e., business) purposes. Starlet begins with her critiques of the show:

> I don't like the fact that there is gossip involved. I don't like the elements of betrayal, um, I don't like the smile on your face, talk behind your back um, concept, and then oh, we're BFFs, no. I just don't like the lack of integrity that can be showcased… You could do a reality show with integrity. And it can still be interesting. I don't know why some people feel like they have to have drama to make something interesting. You can discuss various topics, and have a platform, and still be interesting. Why do you have to fight? Why are you pulling hair? Why you all throwing water at each other and ice, you know, smashing your hand [in] the camera, and you're crying, and you're losing control, and you're emotional, and you're just—it's just embarrassing. And then you try to be a businesswoman… Their boobs are out, you know, showing their crotches. It's not highlighting what an actual rich, wealthy Black woman—it's not highlighting how we can be that and just be that. Why do we have to be rich and have drama? It's like why can't we just showcase ourselves as rich Black women. Teach us how to build businesses like you guys have. Teach us how to make money like you made it. Teach us how you

guys got in the business. Um, without all of the drama involved. That's what we need to see, rich Black women that made money (Starlet).

Like Violet and Claire, Starlet wanted a less sensational picture of Black women's lives. Instead of real stories, Starlet wanted concrete advice to further her professional development and conceptions of professional Black success. Starlet clearly has an image of what a rich Black woman should be. Recall her earlier words about Oprah, whom Starlet praises for her authenticity, hard work, decorum, and willingness to assist other Black women. The water-tossing, sexualized Black businesswoman does not conform to Starlet's image of what a rich Black woman should be. Based on her comment, Starlet could be accused of trading in respectability politics. It almost goes without saying that crying, hair-pulling women with exposed breasts can be successful media professionals—hence reality television—but Starlet wanted us to look beyond the drama to the substance of these women.

Participants criticized dramatic representations of Black women at length. Brittany, the 26-year-old loan closer, sums up the views of many participants by describing Black Love media, reality television specifically, as "drama, drama, drama, drama, drama, drama." Drama is the fighting, hair pulling, and crying with prominent breasts and visible crotches that Starlet describes in her comments. Drama thrives on conflict and sex. For participants, drama conceals the best parts of single Black women in Black Love media.

Along those lines, Deidre wanted to see love and support among single Black women in the media. Deidre was 46-years-old when we spoke. She had three adult children, a son and two daughters. She earned an Associate's degree and lived in a low-income high-rise building in a rapidly developing part of Detroit. Deidre was divorced. She has had numerous live-in relationships, but at the time our interview, was single and living alone. Her last live-in

relationship ended because her partner was alcoholic. He would drive drunk, threatening her safety and the safety of others. Deidre gets lonely for male companionship, but enjoyed the time she has for work, hobbies, and travel. Deidre wanted to see more togetherness among Black women in Black Love media. From her work as a community organizer, Deidre has firsthand knowledge of the collectivist spirit that can unite Black women for a common purpose. Reacting to conflict on *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* (Dunlop & Eskelin, 2008), Deidre said:

> I think it just—a lot of it doesn't show the love that we have for each other, you know. We don't see a lotta that. You know helping one another, being more understanding, having more compassion with one another. It just shows—you know—whole bunch of crap… We can have disagreements. We still love each other. We still have compassion. We still support you, those type a things (Deidre).

Deidre wanted to see forgiveness, compassion, and explicit displays of love and support between Black women in the media. Mutual support, family, and community are important facets of single Black women's lives (Omolade, 1986). Deidre, and other women in this study, wanted to see how Black women in the media navigate conflict in healthy ways while honoring the importance of these relationships. Like Deidre, Belle—the 26-year-old chef—likes to see sisterhood and togetherness among Black women in the media. Unlike Deidre, Belle sees the disagreements of the Atlanta housewives as evidence of mutual support. Belle argued that a sisterhood exists among these women; it is just hidden under the drama:

> I think that they—not all the time, and you see it like through the show if you look. They have a sisterhood, sort of. And like even though it looks like drama sometimes, they actually talk about things that the other person's doing that bothers them…. They can

> ruffle each other's feathers, but I think that they really have a little—like, they show some sorta sisterhood (Belle).

Once again, drama clouds the representation of single women in Black Love media, this time concealing the sisterhood that exists among the Atlanta housewives. Yes, Black women can disagree, but Black women can also still love each other during conflict. Deidre, Belle, and many other women in this study wanted to pull back the layers of drama and reveal solution-driven approaches to conflict resolution. Showing sisterhood among Black women would be one welcome addition to the Black Love media landscape.

Just as participants want better for themselves, they want better for women in Black Love media. The landscape of representation is more open for Black women than it has been at any other time in recent history (Hunt, Rámon, Tran, Sargent, & Roychoudhury, 2018), and participants see room for their desired representations. Hunter, the 36-year-old media professional, best summarized this sentiment by drawing on the examples of Issa Rae's character in *Insecure* (Becky et al., 2016), Tracee Ellis Ross' character in *Black-ish* (Andersen et al., 2014), and Kerry Washington's character in *Scandal* (Beers, Rhimes, & McGuigan, 2012) as examples of the range of representation for Black women in the current media environment.

> Whether they are, are the most positive people in the world, whether they're the people you want your daughters to be, not really the question. The fact that Black women even get to be different. We don't all have to be the mom from *Good Times*, or we don't have to be Claire Huxtable… All those women were kind of the same in some ways. They were always there to support this man. Claire was there to support Heathcliff. Gina was there to support Martin. Whitley was there to support Duane. Sure, they were different,

and I learned a lot of things from them. And I grew in a lot of ways, but they were there as supporting characters (Hunter).

Contemporary representations of Black women embody a range of representations that previous generations of Black women in the media were not able to embody. Black women no longer have to be wives and mothers. Black women are no longer just supporting characters for Black male leads. And Black women no longer have to be dramatic, hypersexual, or steeped in conflict in order to entertain their audiences. Reflecting the themes of *Autonomy* and *Enrichment,* participants like that Black Love media show agentic displays of single Black women's sexuality, authentic media personalities who use their life's lessons to uplift their audiences, and discussions of once unacknowledged facets of being single. Still, there is obvious room for improvement. On the whole, Black Love media suffer from a lack of credibility. Reflecting the theme of *Misunderstanding*, these media are too focused on single Black women and their role in relationships, overlooking men's roles and responsibilities. Black Love media convey inauthentic dating advice offered by charlatans who rely on sexist content that stereotypes Black women and men. Participants want real stories, representations that show mutual support between Black women and highlight the professional aspects of their lives. Participants are ready for an expansion of their representation into the nuanced, multifaceted, and compelling new world of the average, authentic, and everyday single Black woman.

Discussion of the Study Themes

The current interview study offers new insight into Black women's experiences of singlehood and interpretations of Black Love media. In chapter five, I offer a broader discussion of the implications of this study for media sexual socialization research and scholarly understandings of single Black women's relationships with the media. For now, I synthesize the

key findings of this chapter and summarize the three overarching themes structuring my analysis. This study makes numerous contributions to study of single Black women's Black Love media use. This project identified two important messages directed to single Black women about singlehood. The first message, shared to participants by close friends and family, advises growth in singlehood. Friends and family conceptualize singlehood as a developmental stage wherein a single woman is to learn about herself, learn from past relationships, and acquire new skills. Interviewees described living out a version of singlehood in-line with growth messages. The second message, shared to participants by distant family and would-be romantic partners, takes a skeptical view of single Black women's lives. The skeptical message characterized single women as incompetent in the domains of womanhood and family. Skeptical messages were gendered in content and application, interviewees felt uniquely vulnerable to critiques of their happiness and life satisfaction observing that single men were excluded from such critiques.

Participants' descriptions of singlehood offered new insight into the lives of single Black women. Participants described their singlehood as a space of freedom. Specifically, participants saw singlehood as the freedom to travel and explore (mobility), the freedom to plan and spend their finances autonomously (financial freedom), and freedom from sexism and misogyny, manifest in participants' lives as the freedom of self-expression and safety from intimate partner violence. Singlehood was not part of the plan, requiring single Black women to modify their life goals and adjust their approaches to fertility and child rearing.

Situated within the broader context of interviewees' experiences of singlehood and the messages they received about singlehood, I examined participants' interpretations of Black Love media. Participants' valued many features of Black Love media including media moguls like Oprah Winfrey and Iyanla Vanzant who used media platforms for the betterment of Black

women, and agentic sexual portrayals like those found in BET's *Being Mary Jane* (Akil, Akil, & Union, 2013) that explore the depth and nuance of Black women's sexuality in the broader context of their lives. Black Love media were also seen as problematic in that they too narrowly focused on dating and relationship advice and too heavily focused on the marital outcomes of Black women. Black Love celebrities like Steve Harvey were viewed as lacking credibility because of inconsistencies between their public message and their personal histories. Participants wanted authenticity from Black Love media's personas. Participants also wanted to eliminate drama from Black Love media. Instead, participants wanted to see more stories about everyday Black heroines, a greater focus on professional advice, and a greater focus on the sisterhood between Black women.

Uniting the different facets of the current study are three overarching themes that capture the varied dimensions of single Black women's experiences and relationships to Black Love media. *Enrichment* describes the importance of growth, skill building, and self-improvement. *Enrichment* can be seen in the growth messages shared to participants from close friends and family, participants' constructions of singlehood as a time to learn/prepare/practice, and participants' desires to see more professional advice in Black Love media. From an early age, participants describe hearing messages that characterized singlehood as an opportunity for personal growth and development. Self-improvement messages frame singlehood as a time for a Black woman to learn about herself and prepare for the next stage of life. Participants do this through attending school, developing business plans, and working on their social and emotional growth. Singlehood is a time to practice life skills that will make one successful going forward. Participants described establishing and maintaining boundaries in interpersonal relationships, working on their communication skills, and developing practical skills like budgeting.

Participants want to see more stories of *Enrichment*, focusing on the professional lives of already-known Black women in the media. *Enrichment* can be seen in Black Love media through authentic portrayals of media professionals who have worked hard to overcome personal hardships like childhood sexual abuse, the death of loved ones, and discrimination in business to establish their careers.

Autonomy is an ethos of self-reliance that compliments the actions of *Enrichment*. *Autonomy* comprises participants' values that facilitate growth in singlehood. The spirit of self-reliance plays an important part of growth messages. Close friends and family stress the importance of self-reliance, emotional resilience, and financial independence. Participants live out *Autonomy* in singlehood through their understanding of their singlehood as freedom. In singlehood, participants are free from the strictures of misogyny and threats of intimate partner violence. In singlehood participants are able to pursue adventure, professional development, and relationship structures that best suit their needs and desires. In participants' critiques of Black Love media, *Autonomy* can be observed in the spirit of uplift, professional development, and sisterhood that participants crave from their representation in the media.

Misunderstanding describes the oversimplified view that friends, family, the media, and even single Black women have of singlehood. Distant family and would-be partners see single Black women as incomplete because of their singlehood. Single Black woman have their sexuality and womanhood questioned. Would-be male partners and distant cousins alike suggested that single Black women had hidden problems and lacked skills around children and in relationships. In singlehood, Black women are left to confront their own *Misunderstandings* of life as single women. Very few participants see their singlehood as part of their life's plan and are left to make peace with life's disappointments; forcing participants to recalibrate their

approaches to motherhood and fertility, reimagine the place of romantic relationships in their lives, and create a more prominent place for themselves in society. Participants see the shifting ground of partnership and singlehood as remaking gender relations between Black men and women. The *Misunderstanding* continues in Black Love media. Single Black women are represented as dramatic, hypersexual, overly aggressive, domestic tyrants. Participants resist these representations, embracing a more expansive view of Black women in the media, a view that focuses on real stories of average single Black women.

This study describes Black women's singlehood and relationship to Black Love media in situ, highlighting how Black women's self-described experiences of singlehood chafe against popular understandings of single Black women. What remains unclear from the interview study, however, is the impact of consuming Black Love media—how single Black women are shaped by the *Misunderstanding* of their singlehood. The survey study presented in chapter four explores the relationship between Black Love media exposure and relationship attitudes and behaviors. Black Love media prioritize relationships, peddle sexism, and construct Black women as two-dimensional stereotypes. In the survey portion of this dissertation, I examine how single Black women's Black Love media consumption is related to their beliefs about gender roles, relationships, Black men, and—of course—singlehood.

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Table 3.1

Distribution of the 24 Semi-Structured Interviews by Participants' Age, Educational Attainment, and Maternal Status.

	> 4-Year College Degree		< 4-Year College Degree	
Age	Mom	Childless	Mom	Childless
20s	0	4	3	1
30s	0	4	4	1
40s	2	2	2	1

Note. Degree refers to a 4-year college degree. Women currently working on a 4-year college degree are classified as having less than a 4-year college degree.

Table 3.2

Descriptive Characteristics of the 24 Interview Study Participants Ordered by Age, Youngest to Oldest.

Name	Age	Highest Degree Earned	Children	Relationship History	Employment
Sarah	25	High school	3 Girls	Cohabited	Unemployed, odd jobs
Belle	26	Certificate	1 Boy	Cohabited	Professional cook
Brittany	26	High school, some college	--	Divorced (1 ex-husband)	Loan officer for large bank
Violet	26	Bachelor's	--	Never married or cohabited	Educator
Susan	27	Bachelor's	--	Cohabited	Restaurant manager, hostess
Zora	27	Bachelor's	--	Never married or cohabited	Community development specialist
Nia	28	Master's	--	Cohabited	Director of community center
Miranda	29	Associate's	1 Girl	Never married or cohabited	Home health aid
Amber	31	High school	1 Boy	Never married or cohabited	Unemployed, odd jobs
Shannon	31	Master's	--	Never married or cohabited	Non-profit worker
Iyana	33	Master's	--	Never married or cohabited	Corporate marketing professional
Sheena	33	Associate's, certificate	2 Girls, 1 Boy	Divorced	Waitress, professional cook
Hunter	36	Bachelor's	--	Never married or cohabited	Media professional
Tracey	36	High school	1 Girl, 2 Boys (1 deceased)	Never married or cohabited	Housekeeper
Cindy	38	GED	3 Girls, 3 Boys	Divorced, cohabited	Secretary at a tax-agency
Michelle	38	Bachelor's	--	Never married or cohabited	Construction site manager
Starlet	38	High school, some college	--	Never married or cohabited	Teacher, performer
Khari	40	Master's	--	Never married or cohabited	Community organizer
Angela	43	Bachelor's	--	Never married or cohabited	Office worker, religious leader
Sandra	43	High school	2 Girls, 2 Boys	Divorced	Waitress, home renovations, odd jobs
Andrea	44	Associate's	--	Never married or cohabited	Program manager for major hospital
Claire	44	Master's	1 Girl, 1 Boy	Divorced	Administrative assistant
Kandi	45	Bachelor's	2 Girls, 1 Boy (deceased)	Widowed	Hairdresser
Deidre	46	Associate's	2 Girls, 1 Boy	Divorced	Community organizer

Note. All names are pseudonyms. All participants self identified as single. Characteristics describe each participant at the time of interview. Highest degree earned refers to the highest level of education attained by the participant. Relationship history describes past relationships. Employment reflects participant employment status at the time of the interview.

CHAPTER 4

Survey Study

Whereas the interview study explores Black women's processes of media sexual socialization through their self-described experiences of singlehood and understandings of Black Love media, the survey study was designed to statistically test associations between single Black women's Black Love media consumption, presumption of the influence of Black Love media on others, and their partner, relationship, and singlehood beliefs. Two research questions guide the survey study:

RQ 3: How does Black Love media consumption relate to single Black women's beliefs about partners, relationships, and singlehood as well as their tolerance for risk in relationships?

RQ 4: How do age, education, and maternal status influence Black Love media's associations to single Black women's relationship, partner, and singlehood beliefs?

To answer these research questions, I posed hypotheses based on the previously reviewed literature in chapter two and the theory I describe below. Hypotheses were tested in data collected from a national, cross-sectional survey of 506 unmarried, cisgender, heterosexual Black women ages 25-45. The current chapter presents the study's hypotheses, respondent recruitment and data collection procedure, the survey measures, my statistical analysis approach, the study results, and a brief discussion of the study findings.

Study Goals and Hypotheses

As discussed in chapter two, Black Love media contain salient messages about dating relationships that quantitative media sexual socialization research suggests, are associated with gendered beliefs about partners and relationships (Rodenhizer & Edwards, 2017; Ward, 2003, 2016). This work has found that greater quantities of media use, consumption of genres that feature gendered scripts for relationships, and sexually explicit content contribute to these outcomes (Erickson & Dal Cin, 2018; Rodenhizer & Edwards, 2017; Seabrook et al., 2016). Because Black Love media feature misogynistic messages about sex, dating, and relationships, as well as gendered portrayals of Black men and women's roles in relationships, it is likely that Black Love media have the capacity to shape their consumers' beliefs about partners, relationships, and by extension, singlehood. Accordingly, the first goal of the survey study was to more thoroughly explore the relationship between Black Love media consumption, beliefs about Black Love media, and single Black women's partner, relationship, and singlehood beliefs.

Like other media sexual socialization research concerned with the media's influence on partner and relationship beliefs (Seabrook et al., 2017; Ward, 2003, 2016), I draw on cultivation and social cognitive theories in my study. Cultivation theory posits that those who spend more time consuming media are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and recurrent messages in the media they consume (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Social cognitive theory posits that learning, particularly about social roles and relationships, is a dynamic and contextualized process driven by acting and interacting with different features of one's social environment (Bandura, 2002). Applied together, these theories describe how media function to shape their users' beliefs about dating and relationships. In the current study, I focus on five different partner and relationship beliefs: the unavailability of Black male partners, measured through three normative beliefs about the availability of Black men as romantic

partners; antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, which measures the endorsement of gendered roles in Black men's and women's relationships; endorsement of the heterosexual script, which measures agreement with heteronormative gender beliefs about relationships; and two "deal breakers" in relationships measures, which assess a woman's willingness to end a relationship due to violence, coercion, or verbal abuse.

The inclusion of these specific partner and relationship beliefs was informed by the interview study, the media sexual socialization literature reviewed in chapter two, and Black Love media's messages about relationships. Inclusion of the unavailability of Black men measure was justified based on the interviews and messages contained in Black Love media. As you read in chapter three, participants described a wide and varied range of experiences in singlehood. Although not extensively discussed in chapter three, one common concern about dating and partnership concerned the perceived unavailability of male partners. Khari most clearly speaks to this concern starting on page 97 of chapter three in her discussion of how singlehood was not part of her life plans. Khari described herself as being "less than hopeful" about her prospects for a mate. In her discussion of partner availability, Khari shyly implies that closeted Black men who have sex with men are one reason why she is unable to find a partner. Such a sentiment is discriminatory, and unfortunately reflects a larger discourse about the unavailability of Black men observed in popular media over the past 30 years.

In his first major motion picture film *She's Gotta Have It* (Lee, 1986), Spike Lee chronicles the life and sexual adventures of Nola Darling, a 20-something Black woman living in a bygone era Brooklyn, New York. She is an artist, sexually expressive, and involved with three men during the film. After a Thanksgiving meal where Nola invited all three of her lovers to dinner, Nola and one of her partners take a nap. In a dream sequence, we see three disgruntled Black women who we later learn are the partners of the men with whom Nola is sexually

involved. In the dream sequence the women enter Nola's bedroom where is peacefully napping and begin to discuss how they want to destroy Nola Darling for seducing their men. During their collective rant, one of the women says: "The decent Black men are all taken, the rest are in prison or homos" (Lee, 1986). The idea that there are supposedly no good Black men "left" because of jail or same sex attraction can be observed in more contemporary media as well. One notable example is Wolfers, Leonhardt, and Queally's (2015) article for the *New York Times* entitled "1.5 Million Missing Black Men." In their article Wolfers, Leonhardt, and Queally (2015) offer a multifaceted statistical analysis of how mass incarceration has impacted the numbers of Black men in U.S. communities, arguing that because of mass incarceration U.S. streets are missing 1.5 million Black men. The unavailability of Black men measure is my attempt to assess if messages about Black male unavailability present in the media are associated with participants' beliefs about the availability of male partners.

Ward and Cole's (in Avery, 2016) Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships Scale, was included to assess respondents' endorsement of stereotypic race and gender beliefs about Black men and women's roles in relationships. The inclusion of this scale was in part motivated by Black Love media's messages and in part motivated by quantitative research that has effectively used the measure to assess Black women's beliefs about Black men and women's roles in relationships (Avery, 2016). Similarly, I included the Heterosexual Script Scale (Seabrook et al., 2016) as a more general assessment of gender beliefs in relationships. Inclusion of this validated measure was motivated by media sexual socialization research that finds that greater media consumption is associated with a greater endorsement of hegemonically gendered roles in relationships (Seabrook et al., 2016; Ward, 2003, 2016).

Finally, in attempt to assess tolerance for violence and coercion in relationships, I developed the deal breakers measures by adapting Hudson and McIntosh's (1981) Assessment of

Spouse Abuse Scale. The deal breakers measure was operationalized to measure the extent to which a single woman views violence, coercion, or verbal abuse as grounds to end a hypothetical romantic relationship. The inclusion of this measure was motivated by messages contained in Black Love media, specifically the differential set of expectations for men and for women about infidelity. These messages are on display in Gibson, Run, and Vandahey's (2013) *Manology*. In their chapter entitled "The MAN-ogamy MAN-nifesto" Gibson describe for their readers the different messages that men and women receive around sex and relationships. The high point of Gibson's discussion can be read in the sub-section "Justifiable Infidelity" wherein Gibson describes the following scenario:

> It's not an exaggeration to say that a man deprived of sex will feel so justified in cheating that when he finally does get caught he'll tell himself it wasn't the cheating itself that hurt his woman. It was only the getting caught. After all, how could she expect him to do anything else *but* step out? She isn't going down on him anymore. She also isn't keeping sexy sexy in the bedroom anymore [*sic*]. In his mind, she isn't taking care of her body anymore, or putting any effort into appearing sexy to him anymore. He interprets her attitude as a tacit invitation for him to start moving around and cheating. How could she claim to be hurt by his cheating? That's like someone who doesn't take their dog out for a walk claiming they're disappointed when Spike eventually pees on the rug. That's what dogs do when they don't go outside, right? (Gibson, Run, & Morrow, 2013, p. 212-213, original emphasis preserved).

Gibson makes clear that sexual infidelity is justified on the part of a male partner under certain conditions. He does not make the same allowances for women in his book. The deal breakers measure is my attempt to explore the impact of this larger mindset in relationships. Is it just cheating that female partners are supposed to tolerate or are there other forms of problematic

behavior that are allowed for in heterosexual relationships? As Gibson's position is arguably coercive and the World Health Organization (2018) defines risks to sexual health as forms of violence, coercion, and discrimination in romantic relationships, I wanted to explore if consumption of media that contain coercive messages about relationships would be associated with greater acceptance of other forms risks to sexual health (e.g. violence, coercion, and discrimination). Based on cultivation and social cognitive theories and previous media sexual socialization research I hypothesized:

H1: Black Love media consumption will be positively associated with beliefs about the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, and endorsement of the heterosexual script; and greater tolerance for violence and coercion in relationships.

The second goal of this study was to explore the associations between the presumed influence of Black Love media and single Black women's relationship and partnership beliefs. I rely on Gunther and Storey's (2003) influence of presumed influence model, which describes how a person's beliefs about the influence of the media—as opposed to their consumption of media—shape their beliefs and behaviors. In order for a presumed-influence effect to be observed, two conditions must be satisfied: the individual must (a) "perceive some effect of a message on others and then (b) react to perception" (Gunther & Storey, 2003, p. 199). To illustrate the effect, the authors provide the following examples: "…a mother, concerned about the influence of violent cartoons on her children, unplugs the television set. A politician, believing that news reports about health care fraud will galvanize public opinion, calls for public hearings" (Gunther & Storey, 2003, p. 200). The inclusion of a presumed influence measure in the current study allows me to begin the process of answering the question, does a single Black

woman concerned that other single women are using Black Love media to more effectively meet partners and date, adopt new approaches to dating and partnership?

Originally applied in health communication intervention research to evaluate the impact of a persuasive health campaign in Nepal (Gunther & Storey, 2003), this theory has since been applied in a breadth of research, studying the impact of stereotyped gender portrayals in advertising directed to women (Åkestam, 2017), perceptions of the portrayal of mental illness in popular television programming (Hoffner & Cohen, 2014), and the influence of pro-drinking messages on drinking intentions and normative beliefs about peers among rural Thai teenagers (Ho, Poorisat, Neo, Detenber, 2014). In all of these studies, and in keeping with the original articulation of the theory, presumed influence was a more robust predictor of belief and behavioral outcomes than direct exposure to the media. Based on Gunther and Storey's (2003) influence of presumed influence model and this prior research, I hypothesized:

H2: Perceived influence of Black Love media on Black men and women will be positively associated with beliefs about the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, and endorsement of the heterosexual script; and greater tolerance for violence and coercion in relationships.

A third goal of the survey study was to explore Black Love media's relations with single Black women's singlehood beliefs. I was unable to identify quantitative research exploring the association between media consumption and singlehood beliefs, but found qualitative work conducted with single women reports that pressure from friends and family to have romantic relationships (Carter, 2017; Henry, 2011), unmet intrinsic drives for relationships (Blakemore, Lawton, & Vartanian, 2005), and experiences of single stigma shape single Black women's experiences and beliefs about singlehood (Byrne & Carr, 2005). As these factors relate to the

media, media sexual socialization research suggests that romantic scripts, like those seen in romantic comedies and dramas, would be one likely contributor to beliefs about singlehood (Hefner & Wilson, 2013).

One area for new growth in sexual socialization research is to test the associations between a woman's media consumption and her beliefs about singlehood, an extension of media sexual socialization research examining partner and relationship beliefs (Ward, 2003, 2016). To break new ground in this literature, I explore if and to what extent Black Love media consumption and the presumed influence of Black Love media are associated with single Black women's singlehood beliefs. I include three measures of singlehood beliefs in the current study: drive for marriage, which measures a woman's intrinsic drive to marry; perceived pressure for romantic relationships, which measures the external pressure that a woman feels to have and maintain a relationship; and reported experiences of single stigma.

Like the previously described assessments of relationship and partner beliefs, the selection of singlehood measures was informed by the interview study. Because there is limited research examining the association between beliefs about singlehood and the media, I looked to interview participants' accounts for guidance. Nearly every participant in the interview study described wanting to be married at some point in their life, constructing singlehood as not part of their life plans. Participants described having to adjust the expectations they had of their own lives because of extended periods of singlehood. Although participants' expectations of their lives shifted, many participants' desires for marriage did not dissipate. The tension between their logical embrace of single life and deeply rooted desires for marriage was a great source of anxiety and sadness for some participants. Accordingly, I included Blakemore, Lawton, and Vartanian's (2005) Drive for Marriage Scale to capture participants' own desires to be married. By including this measure it was my intention to explore if desires for marriage were at all

associated with Black Love media consumption, a genre replete with gendered messages advocating for marital relationships.

Additionally, I included an assessment of participants' perceived pressure to enter romantic relationships. I assessed pressure to enter into romantic relationships from peers, family members, and the media, two of the three critical domains of sexual socialization that emerged from the interview study. The relationship pressure measure was developed as a response to interviewees' described feelings of pressure to enter into romantic relationships. Skeptical messages of singlehood conveyed to them by friends and families as well as other recurrent messages about dating and relationships contained in Black Love media were described as sources of such pressure. These features of single Black women's sexual socialization also contributed to my decision to include the Single Stigma Scale. Interviewees described being made to feel as if something were wrong with them because they were single. These messages triggered, shame, frustration, and anger in participants. By including the single stigma measure, it was my attempt to capture the extent which participants felt stigmatized because of their singlehood. As I did for the relationship beliefs measures, I draw on social cognitive and cultivation theories to guide my inquiry, predicting that:

H3: Black Love media consumption and the presumed influence of Black Love media will be positively associated with a greater drive for marriage, pressure for relationships, and single stigma.

The final goal of the survey study is to explore the role that motherhood plays in shaping the relations between Black Love media, the presumed influence of Black Love media, and the study's outcome measures. Age and education have been consistently considered in media sexual socialization research (e.g., Avery, 2016; Stanton, Jerald, Ward, & Avery, 2017; Ward, 2003, 2016). In line with this prior work, I include these demographic characteristics as covariates in

my analyses. Motherhood, on the other hand, has not been explicitly linked to media sexual socialization outcomes. I was unable to find research exploring the role single motherhood plays in shaping the relations between media use and relationship or partner beliefs. But as I explained in chapter two, single motherhood has the potential to be a salient demographic factor moderating the associations between media consumption and relationship beliefs for Black women. Single motherhood is an undeniable feature of Black family formation (Martin et al., 2015), is attached to a different set of experiences in dating and relationships (Clarke, 2011; Omolade, 1986; Stack, 1976), and is separately advised and distinctly represented within Black Love media (e.g., Harvey & Millner, 2009). Further exploration of the role of motherhood in shaping single Black women's beliefs about partners and relationships is warranted. Research question four guides this set of analyses. To answer research question four and assess the extent to which motherhood moderates study outcomes, I include motherhood as a moderator in my analyses.

Procedure and Measures

This study was granted exempt status from the University of Michigan Health and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board prior to data collection (Appendix F). The Qualtrics online survey firm was used for participant recruitment and data collection. Qualtrics survey firm was used, as opposed to collecting my own data, due to time and cost limitations. Qualtrics secures survey respondents from nationally available survey panels. Researchers specify their populations of interest and Qualtrics surveys participants who meet these criteria. In the current study, participants were identified based on their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, and relationship status. This sampling approach yielded a national convenience sample of 506 U.S. respondents who self-identified as heterosexual, cisgender, Black women, ages 25-45. Participants completed the survey, comprised of 207 total questions, in exchange for an incentive

of their choice from Qualtrics. The survey took approximately 25 minutes to complete. As an introduction to the study and to secure respondents' affirmative consent to participate, respondents' were asked to read a brief description of the study and explanation of their rights as participants' in research. Once affirmative consent was secured from participants, respondents were asked to report information about their media use; relationship, partner, and singlehood beliefs; selected information about their relationship history; and other demographic information (Appendix G). For detailed descriptive information about participants please see table 4.1.

Media Predictor Variables

Weekly media consumption. Respondents were asked about their weekly consumption of television, Black Love television, social media, books, Black Love books, magazines, and movies. Overall, ten media use questions were posed to participants; seven addressed overall media use, three addressed Black Love media use. Black Love media were defined for participants as they were in the interview study as "content produced for Black audiences that explores and advises the sexual and romantic relationships between Black men and women. Black Love media include television programs, movies, social media accounts, and relationship and dating advice books." Media were measured in two ways: in weekly hours for television, Black Love television, and social media; and in monthly units for books, Black Love books, movies, and magazines. To assess television, Black Love television, and social media use, participants were asked: "How many hours a day do you watch/use [television, Black Love television, or social media]?" Black Love television and overall television were assessed for live TV, On Demand programming, streaming services like Hulu, and DVDs. Social media was assessed for sites and apps like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Participants used a slider to indicate the number of hours of television, Black Love television, and social media they consume on a typical weekday and weekend day. Response options ranged from 0 to 12 hours,

capped to eliminate extreme responses. For analysis, a weekly media use score was calculated for each medium by multiplying typical weekday use by five, typical weekend day use by two, and summing these two products.

For books, Black Love books, magazines, and movies, respondents were asked: "How many [books, Black Love books, magazines, or movies] do you watch/read in a typical month?" Books and Black Love books include "physical books, audio books, and books read on a phone, tablet, kindle, or an e-reader. Include books you buy, borrow, or check out from a library." Magazines include "physical magazines, those read via the Internet or through apps, and magazines read on tablets, computers, e-readers, and phones. Include magazines you buy, borrow, or read in public places like a beauty salon or doctor's office." Movies include "movies in theaters, on television, on demand, or through streaming services like iTunes, Netflix or Hulu." Response options ranged from 0 to 20 or more units a month, capped to eliminate extreme responses. For analysis these measures were transformed from categorical to ordinal measures scaled 0-20. From these monthly data, weekly totals were calculated for each medium by dividing participants' monthly responses by 4. Four media consumption variables assessing respondents' quantity of overall and Black Love television and book consumption were used in analyses.

Presumed influence of Black Love media. In line with Gunther and Storey's (2003) influence of presumed influence model, participants were asked to state the percentage of Black men and women (separately) they felt relied on Black Love media to guide their partner choices and approaches to dating and relationships. Gunther and Storey (2003) endorse population assessments are an accepted approach to measuring presumed influence. Participants were given the following prompt: "The following questions ask you to think about the influence Black Love media have on other single Black women and men. These questions are about what single Black

women/men do and believe because of Black Love media. What percent of single Black women/men…" Eight questions dealt with the presumed influence of Black Love media on single Black women and eight dealt with single Black men. Instead of asking about the influence of books and television separately, Black Love media are conceptualized generally in this measure. Sample items include: "Pick romantic partners based on characteristics approved of by Black Love media?" and "apply the dating 'tips and tricks' presented in Black Love media?" Responses were measured with a slider ranging from 0% to 100%. For analysis, two composite measures were calculated by taking the average of the presumed influence items for men (α = .94) and women (α = .95) separately.

Relationship and Partner Beliefs

Beliefs about the unavailability of Black men. To assess participants' beliefs about the unavailability of Black men, respondents were asked to "please estimate the percent of Black Americans that do the following. If you're not sure, give your best guess. About what percent of…" Three normative beliefs about Black men were assessed. Respondents estimated the percentage of Black men who are currently in prison or jail, gay, and married to non-Black women. Responses were measured with a slider and options ranged from 0% to 100%, increasing by increments of 0.1%. Items were assessed individually in analysis. For analysis a composite variable was calculated by taking the mean of these three measures (α = .76).

Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships. Ward and Cole's (in Avery, 2016) 12-item Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships Scale was used to assess respondents' beliefs about raced gender roles in relationships. Although developed separately, this scale closely resembles West and Rose's (2000) Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships Scale, which features many similar items. Participants were prompted with the statement: "Please identify the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about romantic

relationships between Black men and women." Examples include: "Too many Black men date and marry outside the race" and "It's a Black woman's job to make her man feel like a king." Respondents used a Likert-type scale to state the extent to which they agreed with each statement. Possible responses included: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) disagree a little, (4) agree a little, (5) agree, and (6) strongly agree. A higher score indicates a more antagonistic view of Black relationships. For analysis, a composite measure was calculated by taking the mean of all items in the scale ($\alpha = .81$).

Heterosexual script. The Seabrook et al. (2016) Heterosexual Script Scale was used to assess beliefs about courtship roles and norms for women and men. Respondents were prompted with the following statement: "Please identify the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about men's and women's roles in relationships." Examples include: "In the dating game, men frequently compete with each other for partners, and women try to lure or catch partners," and "The best way for a woman to attract a boyfriend (e.g., partner) is to use her body and her looks." Respondents used a Likert-type scale to state the extent to which they agreed with each statement. Possible responses included: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) disagree a little, (4) agree a little, (5) agree, and (6) strongly agree. A higher score indicates greater endorsement of the heterosexual script. For analysis, a composite measure was calculated by taking the mean of all items in the scale ($\alpha = .88$).

Deal breakers in long-term relationships. Hudson and McIntosh's (1981) Assessment of Spouse Abuse Scale was adapted to explore the extent to which a single woman views violence, coercion, or verbal abuse as grounds to end a hypothetical romantic relationship. Participants were given the following prompt: "These questions measure your deal breakers in committed, long-term relationships like live-in partnerships or marriage. A deal breaker is a quality or trait so undesirable that you would end the relationship if your partner possessed that

quality or trait. There are no right or wrong answers. Everyone's deal breakers are different. Imagine you are in a long-term committed relationship like a live-in partnership or marriage. Would it be a deal breaker in your relationship if your partner…" Hudson and McIntosh's (1981) original scale contains 30 items such as: "became abusive when he drank or used drugs," "told me I was ugly and unattractive," and "belittled me intellectually." Two additional items were developed to capture the role of sexual risk in relationships. These items include "cheated on you," and "gave you an STI or STD." Potential response options included: Yes (1), Maybe (2), and No (3). For analysis, a single, composite deal-breakers measure was calculated by taking the mean of all 32 items ($\alpha = .98$).

Violent deal breakers in long-term relationships. To focus on the role of physical violence in relationships, a composite measure was created from a subset of the most violent behaviors included in the scale described above. Eight of the 32 items were included. Example items include: "made you perform sex acts that you do not enjoy or like" and "beat you so badly you must seek medical help". A composite measure was created for analysis by calculating the mean of the eight items in the subscale ($\alpha = .97$).

Singlehood Beliefs

Relationship pressure. The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATA-Q 4; Schaefer et al., 2015) was used as a structural template to construct items measuring Black women's reported experiences of pressure to be in a romantic relationship. Three sources of pressure were considered: family, peers, and media. Fifteen total questions were posed, five questions for family, peers, and the media, each. Respondents were told to, "Please read the following items carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. This first set of questions are about your FAMILY (e.g., parents, brothers, sisters, or other relatives). The next set of questions are about your PEERS (e.g., close friends,

coworkers, and other social contacts). The final set of questions are about the MEDIA. Consider all of the media you consume like television, magazines, the Internet, movies, billboards, and advertisements." Example items include: "I feel pressure from my peers/family/media to fall in love" and "I feel pressure from my peers/family/media to get married." Possible responses included: (1) definitely disagree, (2) mostly disagree, (3) neither disagree nor agree, (4) mostly agree, (5) definitely agree. A higher score indicates more pressure to be in a romantic relationship. For analysis, an overall composite measure was calculated by taking the mean of all items in the scale ($\alpha = .91$).

Drive for marriage. Blakemore, Lawton, and Vartanian's (2005) Drive to Marry Scale was used to assess participants' intrinsic drive for marriage. Participants were instructed to "Please identify the extent to which you agree with the following statements." Five items are included in this scale. Example items include: "I can't wait to get married (or married again)," "I feel I will have achieved a major life goal when I get married," and the reverse-coded item "Getting married is not one of my top priorities." Possible responses include: (1) strongly disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) neither disagree nor agree, (4) somewhat agree, (5) strongly agree. A higher score indicates a greater drive for marriage. Prior to analyses the reverse-coded item was reversed, and a composite measure was calculated by taking the average of the five items ($\alpha = .83$).

Single stigma. The Mental Health Stigma Scale (King et al., 2011) was used as a structural template to generate items assessing the extent to which respondents felt stigmatized because they were single. Participants were given the following prompt: "Below is a series of statements about being single. Please identify the extent to which you agree with the following statements." Twenty-six of the original 28 items were adapted and included in the modified single stigma scale. Two questions, one relating to medication and the other relating to

psychological treatment, were omitted because there was not a comparable analog for singlehood. Example items include: “I have been discriminated against because of being single,” “I worry about telling people I am single,” and reverse-coded items like “People have been understanding of my being single.” Possible responses include: (1) strongly disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) neither disagree nor agree, (4) somewhat agree, (5) strongly agree. A higher score indicates a greater experience of single stigma. Prior to analyses all reverse-coded items were reversed, and a composite measure was created by taking the mean of all items in the scale ($\alpha = .87$).

Moderator and Covariates

Motherhood. Respondents reported their maternal status and number of children through a categorical, single response variable. In answer to the questions “How many children do you currently have? Do not include a current pregnancy," participants indicated if and how many children they had by choosing one of 6 options ranging from 0 - no children to 5 or more children. The variable was dichotomized for analysis, to represent mothers (1) and childless women (0). Motherhood was entered as a predictor variable and as an interaction term combined with the media predictor variables of the study.

Age. Age was assessed via a single categorical variable. Participants selected one of 34 responses from a drop-down menu. Response options include all ordinal numbers 18-49 inclusive, and the categories under 18 and 50 or older. Respondents, who were not between the ages of 25-45 inclusive, were exited from the survey once they entered their age. Only women 25-45 years of age were eligible to participate. This variable was transformed from a categorical variable to an ordinal measure, scaled 25-45 inclusive, for analysis.

Education. Respondent education was assessed with the following prompt: “Please select the highest level of education you have completed.” There were 10 potential response

options, assessed categorically from 1-10: none, grade school, some high school, high school, certificate program (e.g., HVAC training), Associate's degree, some 4-year college, 4-year college Master's degree (e.g., MBA, MPH), or Doctoral degree (e.g. MD, JD, PhD).

Religiosity. Three questions were used to assess religiosity: formal worship service attendance, religious activity participation, and frequency of prayer. Questions were taken from the organizational religiosity subscale of the National Survey of American Life (NSAL, Taylor, Chatters, & Jackson, 2007). Frequency of worship service attendance was assessed through a single-response, categorical variable. Participants were asked: "How frequently do you attend regular religious service (e.g., Sunday church service etc.)?" Possible responses include: (5) attend nearly every day; (4) attend at least once a week; (3) A few times a month; (2) A few times a year; (1) Never attended services (except for weddings and funerals). Participation in other religious activities was assessed through a categorical, single-response variable. Participants were asked: "Besides regular service, how often do you take part in other activities at your church (e.g., bible study, etc.)." Possible responses include: (5) attend nearly every day; (4) attend at least once a week; (3) A few times a month; (2) A few times a year; (1) Never attended services (except for weddings and funerals). Frequency of prayer was assessed through the question: "How often do you pray?" Possible responses include: (5) nearly every day; (4) at least once a week; (3) A few times a month; (2) A few times a year; (1) Never. For analyses, the three measures were combined to create an overall measure of religiosity ($\alpha = .73$).

Descriptive Characteristics

Gender. Responding to the prompt "Please select your gender," participants indicated if they identified as female, male, or other; only participants who identified as female could participate.

Race. Only respondents who claimed a Black/African American identity were included in this study. Respondents were asked "What is your race? Please check all that apply." Using a checkbox matrix, respondents selected their racial composition from the following categories: Black/African American, White/Caucasian, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Arab/Middle Eastern, or other, with a text entry response box.

Ethnicity. Respondent ethnicity was assessed using a checkbox matrix. Respondents were asked, "What is your ethnicity? Please check all that apply." Response options include: African, African-American, Biracial/Multiracial, Caribbean, Hispanic or Latino, or other, including a space for text entry.

Employment. Participants were given the following prompt: "What is your employment status?" There were seven possible responses: employed for wages, full time; employed for wages, part time; self-employed; stay-at-home parent; student; on disability; and unemployed.

Income. In answer to the question, "Considering all sources, what is your annual income before taxes?" participants indicated whether their income fell into one of 12 categories: $10,000 or less; $10,001 - $20,000; $20,001 - $40,000; $40,001 - $60,000; $60,001 - $80,000; $80,001 - $100,000; $100,001 - $120,000; $120,001 - $140,000; $140,001 - $160,000; $160,001 - $180,000; $180,001 - $200,000; and $200,001 or more.

Heterosexual orientation. To assess heterosexual orientation, the following yes/no question was asked: "do you identify as heterosexual (straight)?"

Sexuality. In addition to an assessment of heterosexual orientation, participants were asked, "Whom do you find sexually attractive?" Potential response options included: men exclusively, mostly men and sometimes women, men and women equally, mostly women and sometimes men, women exclusively, and other with a response box.

Currently pregnant. Respondents indicated if they were currently pregnant by answering the yes/no question, “Are you currently pregnant?"

Marital history. Two questions were posed to assess respondents’ marital history. First, in response to the question, "What is your current marital status?" participants indicated via a single-response, categorical variable if they were: single, never married; divorced; widowed; separated, but still married; unmarried but cohabiting with a romantic partner; and married. Second, participants were asked the yes/no question, “Have you ever been married?”

Ever cohabited. To assess if participants have ever had a cohabiting relationship with a romantic partner, participants were asked: “Have you ever lived with (cohabited) a romantic partner?" Possible responses included yes or no.

Engaged to be married. To assess if participants were engaged at the time of the survey, respondents were asked the yes/no question, “Are you currently engaged to be married?"

Romantically involved. A categorical, single response variable was used to assess a respondent’s current number of dating relationships. Participants were asked, “How many people are you currently romantically involved with? Include casual and committed relationships, e.g., dating, seeing, hanging out with, or 'talking to.' Include relationships with women as well as men.” There were six possible response options ranging from “0 not currently romantically involved” to “5 or more.” For analysis, the measure was transformed from a categorical variable to an ordinal measure scaled 0-5.

Current sexual partners. Sexual activity and number of sexual partners was assessed through one categorical, single-response question: “How many sexual partners do you currently have? Include relationships with women as well as men.” Participants indicated their current number of sexual partners. There were eleven possible response options ranging from “0 - not

currently sexually active" to "10 or more partners." For analysis, the measure was transformed from a categorical variable to an ordinal measure scaled 0-10.

Past experience of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. To assess respondents' past experiences of violence and sexual assault in romantic relationships, two questions were asked: "Have you ever experienced dating violence, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or any other form of physical violence in the context of a romantic or sexual relationship?" and "Have you ever experienced sexual assault, date rape, or any other form of sexual violence or non-consensual sex in the context of a romantic or sexual relationship?" For both questions, possible responses were yes (1), no (0), or prefer not to answer (missing).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 24 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, 2017). Included in analyses are four media predictor variables, eight criterion variables, two media covariates, four demographic covariates, and four zero-centered interaction terms. Prior to analysis, each variable was inspected to examine its characteristics, distribution, and skew. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each measure to assess the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values and reliability statistics for each scale. Zero-order correlations were calculated among the study's key variables. To assess if significant mean differences existed across the study's key variables by participants' motherhood status, I conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA). Motherhood was entered as an independent sorting variable in these analyses, coded 0 = childless, 1 = mother.

Hypothesis Testing

A series of hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted, predicting the relationship, partner, and singlehood beliefs from the media predictor variables, motherhood, and the interaction of motherhood and the media predictor variables. Zero-centered interaction terms

were calculated for each media predictor variable and motherhood status. Four interaction terms were created for motherhood by Black Love book and television consumption, and presumed media influence of Black Love media on women and men measures.

The first set of regression analyses explored the relations between Black Love television and book consumption, motherhood, and the study's relationship and partner beliefs measures. Analyses were conducted separately for television and books. Age, education, and religiosity were entered as covariates into the first block of the regression models. Depending on the Black Love media predictor variable, either overall television or book consumption was entered as a covariate into the second step of analyses. Motherhood, weekly Black Love television or book consumption, and the interaction of motherhood and Black Love television or book consumption were entered into the final block of the model.

Next, I conducted hierarchical regression analyses for the presumed influence models. Analyses were conducted separately for men and women. Like the Black Love media analyses, age, education, and religiosity were entered in the first step of the models. Motherhood, the presumed influence of Black Love media on men or women, and the interaction of motherhood and the presumed influence of Black Love media on men or women was entered into the final step of the model. Overall media use was omitted as a covariate from the presumed influence models.

The final set of analyses explored the relations between respondents' singlehood beliefs, motherhood, Black Love media consumption, and the presumed influence of Black Love media. These analyses replicate the previous two sets of Black Love media and presumed influence analyses, substituting the relationship and partner beliefs measures for the singlehood beliefs. When significant interaction terms were found, further analyses were conducted to deconstruct the interactions. When deconstructing an interaction term, motherhood was used as a filtering

variable to split analyses between mothers and women without children. Hierarchal regression analyses were rerun omitting motherhood and the interaction term from analysis. All other measures in the model remained the same.

Survey Results

Table 4.1 displays selected descriptive characteristics for the full sample. On average, respondents are just over 33 years old, with the equivalent of 2 years of post-graduate education. Nearly 60% of respondents indicated that they are mothers. Respondents indicated that they consume over 40 hours of television and social media each week; about 2 magazines a month; between 3 and 4 books a month; and approximately 7 movies a month. Just over 30 of participants' 40 hours of weekly television consumption were reported to be Black Love content. Respondents consumed approximately one Black Love book a month. Just under half of respondents are employed full time. Unemployed women and part-time workers make up the next largest employment groups in the sample. On average, participants earn between $20,000 and $40,000 annually. The majority of women in the sample have never married, but half of respondents reported a past cohabiting relationship. Two-thirds of respondents indicated that they are in some kind of romantic or sexual relationship. Just over half of the sample has experienced some form of physical or sexual abuse in the context of a romantic relationship. This figure is higher than the national, lifetime average for Black women; nearly 44% of all Black women will experience some form of IPV in their lifetimes (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014).

An ANOVA analysis was conducted to explore significant differences between mothers and childless women on the study's key variables. Significant mean differences ($p < .05$ by ANOVA) were found for six variables: age, education, beliefs about the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, endorsement of the heterosexual script, and relationship pressure. Compared to women without children, mothers were older ($M = 33.86$, SD

= 6.01), less educated (*M* = 5.69, *SD* = 1.72), believe there are fewer Black men available for romantic partnership (*M* = 55.55, *SD* = 17.80), report greater endorsement of antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships (*M* = 3.74, *SD* = 0.82) and the heterosexual script (*M* = 3.57, *SD* = 0.74), and feel less pressure for romantic relationships (*M* = 2.35, *SD* = 0.89). Childless women are younger (*M* = 31.90, *SD* = 6.01), have more education (*M* = 6.55, *SD* = 1.94), believe there are more Black men available for romantic partnership (*M* = 49.09, *SD* = 20.15), and hold lower endorsements of antagonistic beliefs about Black men (*M* = 3.48, *SD* = 0.88) and the heterosexual script (*M* = 3.48, *SD* = 0.86), but feel more pressure for romantic relationships (*M* = 2.64, *SD* = 0.87) than mothers.

Table 4.2 displays the means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values, reliability statistics for each of the calculated scales, and zero-order correlations for the study's key variables. Participants presumed that nearly 50% of Black women and just over 40% of Black men use Black Love media to inform their approaches to dating and relationships. For the unavailability of Black male partners measure, respondents estimated that over 50% of Black men are unavailable as partners. Means for the antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and heterosexual script measures fell toward the middle of the scale, with respondents indicating slight agreement with sentiments expressed in both measures. Respondents were more likely to indicate that the most violent forms of risk were deal-breakers in their relationships, compared to the full (violent and nonviolent) deal-breakers scale. Means for perceived pressure for romantic relationships and experiences of single stigma are below the mid-point of the scale, with participants expressing slight disagreement with the sentiments of these scales. Participants expressed a slight drive for marriage.

The zero-order correlations reveal a consistent pattern of association between the Black Love and presumed influence media predictors, and the relationship, partner, and singlehood

belief measures (Table 4.2). Black Love television and book use are both significantly positively associated with the presumed influence of Black Love media for men and women, unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, and endorsement of the heterosexual script measures. Both Black Love media measures are significantly negatively correlated with the deal breakers in relationships measures, indicating that the more Black Love media participants consume, the less likely they are to indicate that violence, coercion, or verbal abuse in a romantic relationship are grounds to end the relationship. Both Black Love media measures are positively associated with single stigma, but only Black Love television is positively associated with a drive for marriage. Black Love book consumption is positively associated with pressure for relationships.

The presumed influence of Black Love media on men and women are both positively associated with the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, and endorsement of the heterosexual script measures. No significant associations were found between the presumed influence of Black Love media measures and the deal breakers in relationships measures. Presumed influence of Black Love media for men and women are significantly positively correlated with pressure for romantic relationships, drive for marriage, and single stigma.

Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, endorsement of the heterosexual script, and beliefs about the unavailability of Black men are all positively correlated with each other. All three measures are negatively correlated with deal breakers in relationships measures. Pressure for relationships, drive for marriage, and single stigma are all positively correlated with each other. Single stigma emerged as one of the more robust correlates of the study. Single stigma is significantly positively associated with Black Love media consumption, the presumed influence of Black Love media, the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black

relationships, endorsement of the heterosexual script, drive for marriage, and pressure for romantic relationships measures, and significantly inversely correlated with the deal breakers measures.

The covariates and moderating variables have a less consistent pattern of association. Of these measures, education was the most consistent correlate. Education is inversely correlated with the Black Love media variables and presumed influence for women, indicating that the lower a respondent's education level, the more Black Love media they consume and the greater they believe the influence of Black Love media to be on Black women. Education was positively correlated with the deal breakers, suggesting that the lower a respondent's education level, the less likely she was to indicate that violence, coercion, and verbal abuse are grounds to end a relationship; and relationship pressure, suggesting the higher a respondent's education, the more pressure she feels from friends, family, and the media to be in a romantic relationship. Motherhood is positively correlated with Black Love media use, presumed influence, drive for marriage, and single stigma, and inversely correlated with the deal breakers measures. Age is significantly negatively associated with book and Black Love book consumption, the presumed influence of Black Love media on women, drive for marriage, and relationship pressure, suggesting that younger women read fewer books, are less likely to view Black Love media as influential over Black women, have a lower desire for marriage, and feel less pressure to enter relationships.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis one states: Black Love media consumption will be positively associated with beliefs about the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, and endorsement of the heterosexual script; and greater tolerance for violence and coercion in relationships. Table 4.3 displays the standardized regression coefficients for the hierarchical

linear regressions predicting partner and relationship beliefs from Black Love television and book consumption. None of the interaction terms in either the Black Love television or book models are significant, but Black Love television consumption is significantly positively associated with the unavailability of Black men and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships. Black Love television is significantly negatively associated with both deal breakers measures, suggesting that the more Black Love television a Black woman consumes, the less likely she is to indicate that violence, coercion, and verbal abuse are grounds to end a relationship. No significant associations were found between Black Love television consumption and endorsement of the heterosexual script. Black Love book consumption is significantly associated with greater antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and endorsement of the heterosexual script, and negatively associated with both of the deal breakers measures. Black Love book consumption is not associated with beliefs about the unavailability of Black men.

In both the Black Love television and book models, motherhood was associated with the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, and endorsement of the heterosexual script. In regression analyses, no significant associations were found between motherhood and the deal breakers measures. This outcome is reinforced by findings from the ANOVA, wherein no significant mean differences were observed between mothers and childless women on both deal breakers measures. Because Black Love television exposure is associated with the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, and both deal breakers measures, but not endorsement of the heterosexual script; and Black Love books predicted all of the relationship and partner beliefs except for the unavailability of Black men, hypothesis one was partially supported.

Hypothesis two states: Perceived influence of Black Love media will be positively associated with beliefs about the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black

relationships, and endorsement of the heterosexual script, and negatively associated with deal breakers in relationships. Table 4.4 reports the standardized regression coefficients for the hierarchical linear regressions predicting partner and relationship beliefs from the presumed influence of Black Love media on Black women and men. Analyses revealed that the interaction of presumed influence of Black Love media on women and motherhood is significantly positively associated with antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and endorsement of the heterosexual script. I present the decomposition of these interaction terms later in the chapter. As a predictor variable, presumed influence of Black Love media on women is significantly positively associated with greater perceived unavailability of Black men. Interestingly, the presumed influence of Black Love media on women is positively associated with the physical violence deal breakers measure but not the overall deal breakers measure. This suggests that the more Black women a respondent believes to be influenced by Black Love media, the less likely she is to indicate that violence is grounds to end a romantic relationship.

In the men's presumed influence models, the presumed influence of Black Love media on men is significantly positively associated with the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, and endorsement of the heterosexual script. Presumed influence is not associated with the deal breakers measures in the men's models. In both the women's and men's presumed influence models, motherhood is positively associated with the perceived unavailability of Black men. Because the interaction of presumed influence and motherhood in the women's model are associated with antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and endorsement of the heterosexual script; the presumed influence predictor variable in the women's model is associated with the unavailability of Black men; the presumed influence predictor variable in the men's model is positively associated with the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, endorsement of the heterosexual

script; yet neither of the presumed influence predictors nor interaction of presumed influence and motherhood are associated with the overall deal breakers in relationships measure, hypothesis two was partially supported.

Hypothesis three states: Black Love media consumption and the presumed influence of Black Love media on men and women will be positively associated with greater pressure for relationships, drive for marriage, and single stigma. Table 4.5 presents the standardized regression coefficients from hierarchical regression analyses predicting respondents' singlehood beliefs from their Black Love media consumption. Both Black love television and book consumption are significantly positively associated with single stigma. No other significant associations were found. Table 4.6 presents the standardized regression coefficients from hierarchical regression analyses predicting the singlehood beliefs from the presumed influence of Black Love media. In both the men's and women's models, presumed influence was significantly positively associated with relationship pressure, drive for marriage, and single stigma. Motherhood is significantly positively associated with drive for marriage in both the men's and women's presumed influence models. None of the interaction terms are significant. Because presumed influence is a robust predictor of singlehood beliefs, but Black Love book and television consumption is only associated with single stigma, hypothesis three was partially supported.

To decompose the significant associations found between the interaction of the presumed influence of Black Love media on women and motherhood and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and endorsement of the heterosexual script, two additional hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Table 4.7 displays the standardized regression coefficients from these analyses. Positive associations were found for the presumed influence of Black Love media on women and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships for both mothers and women without

children. Among women without children, however, the contribution of the presumed influence of Black Love media on women to the association was considerably greater. The ΔR^2 between the first and second blocks of the models illustrates this point succinctly. For mothers, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, meaning approximately 2% of the variance in the observed outcome was explained by presumed influence. For women without children, $\Delta R^2 = .14$, indicating that the presumed influence of Black Love media on women accounts for 14% of the observed association. For the heterosexual script models, a significant positive association was found for women without children. For mothers, no association between presumed influence of Black Love media on women and the heterosexual script was observed. These findings suggest that presumed influence is a more salient predictor of childless women's relationship and partner beliefs than it is for mothers.

Brief Discussion

I offer an extended discussion of the study's findings in chapter 5, but for now I offer a brief discussion of the study's outcomes. This study is a first step in exploring the relations between Black Love media and single Black women's relationship, partner, and singlehood beliefs. This study makes numerous novel contributions to the study of media sexual socialization. First, confirming hypothesis one, this study establishes an association between Black Love media consumption and beliefs about relationships and partners. Notably, Black Love book and television consumption yielded different associations to the relationship and partner beliefs. Both books and television were associated with: greater antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships; both deal breakers measures, which suggest more tolerance for violence in relationships; and greater reported single stigma. Black Love television use was associated with beliefs about the unavailability of Black men, although Black Love books were not. Black Love book consumption was associated with endorsement of the heterosexual script, although Black Love television was not. I attribute these differences between Black Love book

and television consumption to unique features of medium, differences in messaging, and differences in participant engagement with books and television. I chapter five I describe these differences in more detail, using support from the interview study to explain these discrepancies.

Second, partially confirming hypothesis two, this study establishes associations between the influence of presumed influence and relationship, partner, and singlehood beliefs. These findings demonstrate the utility of assessing beliefs about others' media use to media sexual socialization research. Although the mechanisms underpinning theses associations are unclear from the current study, the interview study provides some insight into the role of presumed influence in single Black women's processes of sexual socialization. I discuss the implications of this finding at length in chapter five. Third, partially confirming hypothesis three, this study demonstrates the viability of singlehood beliefs to media sexual socialization research. Although no significant associations were observed between Black Love media and drive for marriage and relationship pressure, single stigma was consistently found to be consistently associated with the study's media predictor variables. For the presumed influence of Black Love media analyses, drive for marriage, relationship pressure, and single stigma were associated with presumed influence for both men and women.

Finally, this project suggests that motherhood is a salient factor in shaping the relations between Black Love media and single women's relationship, partner, and singlehood beliefs. Motherhood by itself is a significant predictor of many of the relationship, partner, and singlehood beliefs, and the interaction of the presumed influence of Black Love media for women and motherhood is associated with a more antagonistic view of Black relationships and greater endorsement of the heterosexual script. I make sense of these findings through the lens of a life-course perspective on sexual socialization (Halpern, 2010), which argues that major events like the birth of a child contribute to a woman's evolving beliefs about sex, dating, and

partnership. For most women, motherhood is the product of past relationship and family formation experience, which may explain why motherhood significantly predicts the relationship, partner, and singlehood beliefs separately from media use. More work will be needed to better characterize the contribution of motherhood to single Black women's processes of sexual socialization. Overall, this study makes clear that Black Love media consumption and the presumed influence of Black Love media are associated with problematic beliefs about partners and relationships among single Black women. Further work will be needed to better characterize Black Love media's contribution to sexual socialization outcomes. This study, however, is a first step in the process.

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Table 4.1

Selected Descriptive Characteristics for Full Sample of Black Women (N=506)

Characteristics	*N*	*%*	*M*	*SD*	*Min.*	*Max.*
Age			33.02	5.91	25.00	45.00
Race and ethnicity						
African American	459	90.71				
African	24	4.74				
Bi/Multiracial	27	5.33				
Caribbean	26	5.13				
Latina	7	1.38				
Other	7	1.38				
Education			6.06	1.86	1.00	10.00
< High school	18	3.55				
High school	145	28.65				
Associate's/Certificate	119	23.51				
Some 4-year college	79	15.61				
Bachelor's	90	17.78				
Master's	46	9.09				
Doctorate	5	0.98				
Employment						
Full time	248	49.01				
Part time	68	13.43				
Self-employed	28	5.53				
Stay-at-home parent	24	4.74				
Student	25	4.94				
On disability	27	5.33				
Unemployed	81	16.00				
Income			2.78	1.16	1.00	12.00
Weekly Black Love media use						
Black Love television			31.66	22.60	0.00	84.00
Black Love books			0.25	0.55	0.00	5.00
Overall weekly media use						
Television			40.23	20.92	0.00	84.00
Social Media			41.63	24.80	0.00	84.00
Movies			1.70	1.45	0.00	5.00
Books			0.61	0.89	0.00	5.00
Magazines			0.47	0.54	0.00	5.00
Relationship history						
Never married, never cohabited	188	37.15				
Never married, cohabited	253	50.00				
Divorced	51	10.07				
Widowed	8	1.58				
Current Relationships						
Not dating, not sexually active	191	37.74				
Dating and sexually active	248	49.01				
Dating, not sexually active	37	7.31				
Not dating, but sexually active	23	4.54				
Engaged to be married	47	9.28				
Average dating partners			1.40	0.86	1.00	5.00
Average sexual partners			1.33	0.92	1.00	5.00
Sexuality						
Men exclusively	409	73.03				
Mostly men, some women	78	15.41				
Men and women equally	13	2.56				
Mostly women, some men	2	0.03				
Other	3	0.05				
Motherhood						
Mothers	292	57.70				

Currently pregnant	11	2.17				
Average number of children			2.05	1.09	1.00	5.00
Violence and sexual assault						
IPV only	32	6.32				
SA only	102	20.15				
IPV and SA	96	18.97				
Neither IPV nor SA	250	49.40				

Note. IPV = intimate partner violence. SA = sexual assault. % indicates the percentage of total sample that reported a given characteristic. Percentages may not add to 100. Age entered as a continuous variable, measured 25 - 45 years. Income measured as a categorical variable 1 = $10,000 or less, 2 = $10,001 - $20,000, 3 = 20,001 - $40,000. Overall television and social media use entered as a continuous variable in hours. Books, movies, and magazines entered as a continuous variable, in units a week. Average number of dating partners, sexual partners, and children were calculated from women with partners/children only.

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Correlations of Media Use and Relationship Variables, and Study Covariates (N=506)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
M	31.66	0.25	40.23	0.61	49.77	41.52	52.83	3.63	3.50	2.57	2.67	2.47	3.29	2.29	33.02	6.06	0.58	3.55
SD	22.60	0.55	20.92	0.89	22.08	22.08	19.06	0.85	0.85	0.57	0.63	0.89	1.04	0.59	5.91	1.86	0.49	1.30
Minimum	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	25.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Maximum	84.00	5.00	84.00	5.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	6.00	6.00	3.00	3.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	45.00	12.00	1.00	6.00
α	--	--	--	--	0.95	0.94	0.76	0.81	0.88	0.98	0.97	0.91	0.83	0.87	--	--	--	0.73
1. Black Love television	--	**.31**	**.54**	.04	**.28**	**.36**	**.31**	**.20**	**.12**	**-.24**	**-.25**	.04	**.11**	**.16**	-.04	**-.36**	.06	**.17**
2. Black Love books		--	**.10**	**.30**	**.16**	**.18**	**.11**	**.19**	**.20**	**-.24**	**-.25**	**.11**	.09	**.17**	**-.13**	**-.23**	.08	**.19**
3. Television			--	-.03	**.18**	**.18**	**.19**	**.14**	**.16**	-.09	**-.09**	.00	.08	.07	.06	**-.16**	-.04	-.04
4. Books				--	**.12**	**.15**	.05	.02	.00	.00	-.01	**.09**	-.06	.09	**-.13**	-.03	-.05	.00
5. Presumed influence, women					--	**.67**	**.31**	**.27**	**.18**	.03	.07	**.24**	**.17**	**.11**	**-.10**	-.07	.02	.08
6. Presumed influence, men						--	**.36**	**.26**	**.20**	-.07	-.06	**.20**	**.12**	**.27**	-.05	**-.19**	.03	**.10**
7. Unavailability of Black men							--	**.34**	**.27**	**-.10**	**-.13**	-.02	.00	**.12**	.06	**-.27**	**.17**	.06
8. Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships								--	**.62**	**-.12**	-.09	**.17**	**.19**	**.24**	-.04	**-.13**	**.15**	.03
9. Endorsement of heterosexual script									--	-.05	-.02	**.30**	**.17**	**.36**	-.04	**-.12**	**.10**	-.04
10. Deal breakers, full scale										--	**.94**	.01	.00	**-.15**	.08	**.24**	-.06	**-.15**
11. Deal breakers, physical violence											--	-.03	.00	**-.20**	.06	**.25**	-.03	**-.16**
12. Relationship pressure												--	**.27**	**.56**	**-.19**	**.15**	**-.16**	.08
13. Drive for marriage													--	**.22**	**-.20**	-.03	.04	**.10**
14. Single stigma														--	-.04	-.07	-.08	**.10**
15. Age															--	**.11**	**.16**	.03
16. Education																--	**-.23**	.04
17. Motherhood																	--	.03
18. Religiosity																		--

Note. All significant correlations are bolded, $p < .05$. Overall and Black Love television entered in hours as a continuous variable. Overall and Black Love book consumption entered as a continuous variable as units a week. Normative beliefs and presumed influence entered as continuous variables, scaled 0-100%. Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and the heterosexual script, scaled 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = disagree a little, 6 = strongly agree. Deal-breakers entered continuous variables, measured 1 = No, 2 = Maybe, 3 = Yes. Relationship pressure entered as a continuous variable, measured 1 = definitely disagree, 3 = neither agree nor

disagree, 5 = definitely agree. Drive for marriage and single stigma entered as a continuous variables, measured 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = certificate program, strongly agree. Age entered as an ordinal variable, 25-45 years. Education measured as a categorical variable, 5 = high school, 6 = associate degree, 7 = some college. Motherhood entered as a dichotomous variable 0 = not moms, 1 = moms. Religiosity composite variable composed of prayer, service, and other event attendance, 1 = never, 3 = a few times a year, 6 = nearly everyday.

Table 4.3

*Adjusted Betas from Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses Predicting Relationship and Partner Beliefs from Single Black Women's Black Love Media Consumption, Motherhood, and the Interaction of Black Love Media Consumption and Motherhood and (*N = *456)*

Survey measures	BLTV		BLB	
	Δ R^2	β	Δ R^2	β
Unavailability of Black men				
Step 1: Covariates	.08**		.09**	
Age		.05		.08
Education		-.16**		-.25**
Religiosity		.02		.05
Step 2: Overall media	.02**	.04	.00	.06
Step 3: Predictors	.05**		.02*	
Black Love predictor		.22**		.05
Motherhood		.10*		.11*
Black Love predictor x motherhood		-.07		-.06
Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships				
Step 1: Covariates	.01		.02*	
Age		-.05		-.04
Education		-.01		-.07
Religiosity		-.03		-.04
Step 2: Overall media	.01*	.02	.00	-.04
Step 3: Predictors	.03**		.04**	
Black Love predictor		.18*		.22**
Motherhood		.11*		.11**
Black Love predictor x motherhood		-.04		-.09
Endorsement of heterosexual script				
Step 1: Covariates	.01		.02*	
Age		-.07		-.03
Education		-.03		-.06
Religiosity		-.07		-.10*
Step 2: Overall media	.02*	.11	.00	-.06
Step 2: Predictors	.01		.04**	
Black Love predictor		.04		.22**
Motherhood		.10*		.10*
Black Love predictor x motherhood		-.03		-.10
Deal breakers, full scale				
Step 1: Covariates	.08**		.09**	
Age		.06		.04
Education		.18**		.20**
Religiosity		-.11*		-.13**
Step 2: Overall media	.00	.04	.00	.06
Step 3: Predictors	.02		.03**	
Black Love predictor		-.15*		-.17**
Motherhood		-.01		.01
Black Love predictor x motherhood		.04		-.01
Deal breakers, physical violence				
Step 1: Covariates	.09**		.10**	
Age		.04		.03
Education		.20**		.22**
Religiosity		-.12*		-.13**
Step 2: Overall media	.00	.03	.00	.06
Step 3: Predictors	.02*		.03**	
Black Love predictor		-.18**		-.20*
Motherhood		.01		.03
Black Love predictor x motherhood		.03		-.01

Note. BLTV = weekly quantity of Black Love television consumption. BLB = weekly quantity of Black Love book consumption. Age, education, and religiosity entered as covariates into the first step of the model. Overall weekly television or book consumption, in concordance with the predictor variables, entered in the second step of the model. Quantity of Black Love media entered as predictor variables into the third step of the model. Total R^2 reported for each block of the regression model. Media use entered as a continuous variable measured in hours, assessed 0.00-84.00 hours. Motherhood entered as a dichotomous variable 0 = no children, 1 = children. Normative beliefs about Black men entered as a continuous variable, assessed 0-100%. Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and heterosexual script entered as a continuous variable, entered 1.00-6.00. Deal-breakers and deal-breakers extreme entered as continuous variables, assessed 1 = Yes, 2 = Maybe, 3 = No. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$.

Table 4.4

*Adjusted Betas from Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses Predicting Single Black Women's Partner and Relationship Beliefs from Presumed Influence, Motherhood, and the Interaction of Presumed Influence and Motherhood (*N = *456)*

Survey measures	PI WOMEN		PI MEN	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Unavailability of Black men				
Step 1: Covariates	.09**		.09**	
Age		.10*		.07
Education		-.24**		-.21**
Religiosity		.05		.04
Step 2: Predictors	.11**		.11**	
Presumed Influence		.31**		.32**
Motherhood		.10*		.10*
PI by Motherhood		-.06		-.05
Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships				
Step 1: Covariates	.01		.01	
Age		-.05		-.07
Education		-.05		-.02
Religiosity		-.03		-.02
Step 2: Predictors	.10**		.07**	
Presumed Influence		.24**		.23**
Motherhood		.16**		.14*
PI by Motherhood		-.11**		-.07
Endorsement of Heterosexual script				
Step 1: Covariates	.02*		.02	
Age		-.06		-.07
Education		-.07		-.04
Religiosity		-.09		-.09
Step 2: Predictors	.06**		.05**	
Presumed Influence		.16**		.18**
Motherhood		.13**		.11*
PI by Motherhood		-.13**		-.09
Deal breakers, full scale				
Step 1: Covariates	.08**		.07**	
Age		.06		.06
Education		.23**		.21**
Religiosity		-.13*		-.12*
Step 2: Predictors	.01		.01	
Presumed Influence		.07		-.02
Motherhood		-.02		-.03
PI by Motherhood		-.05		.07
Deal breakers, physical violence				
Step 1: Covariates	.09**		.08**	
Age		.05		.04
Education		.25**		.24**
Religiosity		-.15**		-.14**
Step 2: Predictors	.01		.00	
Presumed Influence		.09*		-.01
Motherhood		.00		.00
PI by Motherhood		.00		.01

Note. PI WOMEN = presumed of influence of Black Love media on Black women. PI MEN = presumed of influence of Black Love media on Black men. Age, education, and religiosity were entered as covariates into the first step of the model. Presumed influence of Black Love media, motherhood, and the interaction of presumed influence of Black Love media and motherhood entered as predictor variables into the second step of the model. Motherhood entered as a

dichotomous variable 0 = no children, 1 = children. Presumed of Influence of Black Love for women and men and normative beliefs about Black men entered as continuous variables, assessed 0-100%. Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and heterosexual script entered as a continuous variable, entered 1.00-6.00. Deal-breakers and deal-breakers extreme entered as continuous variables, assessed 1 = Yes, 2 = Maybe, 3 = No. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$.

Table 4.5

*Adjusted Betas from Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses Predicting Singlehood Beliefs from Single Black Women's Black Love Media Consumption, Motherhood, and the Interaction of Motherhood and Black Love Media (*N = *456)*

Survey measures	BLTV		BLB	
	Δ R^2	β	Δ R^2	β
Relationship pressure				
Step 1: Covariates	.06**		.06**	
Age		-.17**		-.17**
Education		.19**		.14**
Religiosity		.04		.07
Step 2: Overall media	.00	-.03	.00	.04
Step 3: Predictors	.02*		.01	
Black Love predictor		.12		.08
Motherhood		-.09		-.10
Black Love predictor x motherhood		.15		.01
Drive for marriage				
Step 1: Covariates	.05**		.06**	
Age		-.23**		-.24**
Education		.06		.01
Religiosity		.09*		.10*
Step 2: Overall media	.01*	.07	.01*	-.11*
Step 3: Predictors	.01		.01	
Black Love predictor		.08		-.07
Motherhood		.07		.04
Black Love predictor x motherhood		-.01		.16
Single stigma				
Step 1: Covariates	.01		.02	
Age		.00		.01
Education		-.04		-.08
Religiosity		.07		.06
Step 2: Overall media	.01	-.01	.01	.04
Step 3: Predictors	.03**		.02*	
Black Love predictor		.15*		.16*
Motherhood		-.09		-.09
Black Love predictor x motherhood		.08		-.05

Note. BLTV = weekly quantity of Black Love television consumption. BLB = weekly quantity of Black Love book consumption. Age, education, and religiosity entered as covariates into the first step of the model. Overall weekly television or book consumption, in concordance with the predictor variables, entered in the second step of the model. Quantity of Black Love media entered as predictor variables into the third step of the model. Total R^2 reported for each block of the regression model. Media use entered as a continuous variable measured in hours, assessed 0.00-84.00 hours. Motherhood entered as a dichotomous variable 0 = no children, 1 = children. Relationship pressure, measured 1.00 = definitely disagree, 3.00 = neither agree nor disagree, 5.00 = definitely agree. Drive for marriage and single stigma 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$.

Table 4.6

*Adjusted Betas from Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses Predicting Relationship Pressure, Drive for Marriage, and Single Stigma from Presumed Influence, Motherhood, and the Interaction of Presumed Influence and Motherhood (*N *= 437)*

Survey measures	PI WOMEN		PI MEN	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Relationship pressure				
Step 1: Covariates	.08**		.07**	
Age		-.20**		-.19**
Education		.17**		.20**
Religiosity		.04		.03
Step 2: Predictors	.06**		.05**	
Presumed Influence		.22**		.22**
Motherhood		-.08		-.08
PI by Motherhood		-.07		-.01
Drive for marriage				
Step 1: Covariates	.05**		.06**	
Age		-.23**		-.23**
Education		.05		.06
Religiosity		.08		.10*
Step 2: Predictors	.03**		.02*	
Presumed Influence		.15**		.11*
Motherhood		.10*		.12*
PI by Motherhood		.00		.00
Single stigma				
Step 1: Covariates	.02		.01	
Age		-.04		-.02
Education		-.10		-.04
Religiosity		.07		.06
Step 2: Predictors	.01		.07**	
Presumed Influence		.10*		.26**
Motherhood		-.07		-.06
PI by Motherhood		.02		-.02

Note. PI WOMEN = presumed of influence of Black Love media on Black women. PI MEN = presumed of influence of Black Love media on Black men. Age, education, and religiosity were entered as covariates into the first step of the model. Presumed influence of Black Love media, motherhood, and the interaction of presumed influence of Black Love media and motherhood entered as predictor variables into the second step of the model. Motherhood entered as a dichotomous variable 0 = no children, 1 = children. Presumed of Influence of Black Love for women and men entered as continuous variables, assessed 0-100%. Relationship pressure, measured 1.00 = definitely disagree, 3.00 = neither agree nor disagree, 5.00 = definitely agree. Drive for marriage and single stigma 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$.

Table 4.7

Adjusted Betas Predicting Single Black Women's Endorsement of Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships and the Heterosexual Script from the Presumed Influence of Black Love Media on Women for Mothers (N =246) and Women without Children (N = 181)

Survey measures	Moms		Childless	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships				
Step 1: Covariates	.02		.01	
Age		-.02		-.09
Education		-.10		.02
Religiosity		-.07		.02
Step 2: PI Women	.02*	.16*	.14**	.38**
Endorsement of Heterosexual Script				
Step 1: Covariates	.03*		.01	
Age		-.07		-.04
Education		-.07		-.05
Religiosity		-.14*		-.04
Step 2: PI Women	.00	.05	.09**	.31**

Note. PI WOMEN = presumed of influence of Black Love media on Black women. Age, education, and religiosity were entered as covariates into the first step of the model. Presumed influence of Black Love media entered as predictor variables into the second step of the model. Motherhood used as a dichotomous filtering variable 0 = no children, 1 = children. Presumed of Influence of Black Love media for women entered as continuous variables, assessed 0-100%. Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and heterosexual script entered as continuous variables, entered 1.00-6.00. ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusion

The interview and survey studies reported here illuminate the complex nature of single Black women's relationships with their representation in Black Love media. In this final chapter, I discuss the implications of the interview and survey studies for scholarly understanding of single Black women, their processes of sexual socialization, and their relationships with Black Love media. I begin this chapter by answering the study's research questions. Next, I discuss the project's findings by placing the interview and survey studies in conversation with one another. I describe the theoretical, sampling, and measurement concerns highlighted by these studies. I describe the studies' limitations and offer recommendations for new scholarly directions. I close the chapter with a conclusion summarizing the overarching findings the dissertation project.

Answers to the Dissertation's Research Questions

This study was designed to answer four research questions. The first and second research questions were posed to guide the interview study. Research question one asks: What understandings about sex, dating, and relationships do single Black women bring to and take away from Black Love media? This question assesses how participants use their values and experiences to evaluate the media. I use Tounsel's (2015) nimble readings framework to make sense of participants' understandings of their representation in the media. Recall that a practice of nimble readings is a flexible and fluid media interpretation strategy that describes how Black women use their values and past experiences to make meaning of their representation in the

media (Tounsel, 2015). I was able to identify three factors shaping participants' values in relation to the media. First, participants drew on the messages shared with them by friends, family, and would-be romantic partners about their singlehood. Close friends and family stressed the importance of education, personal growth, entrepreneurship, travel, and ownership over oneself and one's property. Participants were encouraged to delay relationships in order to accommodate these life experiences. Another message shared to participants from distant relatives and would-be partners takes a deficit-oriented view of Black women's singlehood. Here, single women have their sexuality and competency in womanhood questioned. Singlehood, from this skeptical perspective, is evidence of a woman's deficiency; this is an idea that participants roundly reject. Indeed, participants reject man-focused portrayals designed to help single Black women find husbands. Reflecting their views on singlehood, participants stressed their desires to see more relevant advice media, designed to assist them in their processes of personal growth.

Second, reinforcing Tounsel's nimble readings framework (2015), I also found that participants drew on their religious, spiritual, and communal practices to make sense of Black Love media. Tounsel's (2015) initial articulation of a nimble readings framework stresses the importance of religious practices and spirituality in shaping Black women's meaning-making of their representation in the media. An example from the current study can be seen in chapter three when Brittany spoke about how her religious beliefs and practices informed her perspective on singlehood and Black Love media. Brittany exemplified how a shared religious background between her and her favorite media personality, Heather Lindsey, made seeking guidance from Lindsey an easier process. Shared values between media consumers and media personalities instill a sense of trustworthiness in the messages presented in the media.

Third, participants wanted to see representations of Black women whose experiences of singlehood matched their own. Participants rejected dramatic, conflict-ridden, and extreme

portrayals of single Black women. For participants, singlehood is an agentic space of personal growth. Singlehood afforded participants freedom to be themselves and the time to learn and practice important skills that will prepare them for the next stages of life, but required adaptability in one's approaches to family formation. Participants described their desire to see "real stories" of "normal women" wrestling with life's challenges. Participants highlighted the importance of agentic sexual portrayals in the media, preferring contextualized portrayals of sex and relationships that avoid the extremes of hyper- and asexuality. The interview study suggests that participants are guided by messages from their friends and family, personally held religious and communal values, and past experiences of singlehood.

Research question two asks: In light of the narratives presented in Black Love media, how do single Black women interpret their own experiences of being single? This question explores how Black Love media contribute to Black women's attitudes towards their singlehood. Black Love media offered hope to their consumers through uplifting perspectives about single Black women. Positive messages about singlehood helped to transform interviewees' thinking about themselves and singlehood. In chapter three, Brittany spoke about the influence that Heather Lindsey—a pastor, advice author, and Christian lifestyle expert—has had on her view of herself in singlehood. Heather Lindsey's YouTube channel exposed Brittany to a view of singlehood she had not previously encountered. Lindsey's YouTube content encouraged Brittany to think positively about being single, act constructively in her singlehood, and has normalized her "season" of singleness. Hunter, Miranda, Violet, and Claire also describe the normalizing power of Black Love media. Participants identified with agentic portrayals of Black women's singlehood, celebrating the fact that these representations honestly depict previously unacknowledged facets of their singlehood. In representations like *Being Mary Jane* (Akil, Akil, & Union, 2013) and *Insecure* (Becky et al., 2016), single Black women are able to see

themselves, a feature of these media that helped participants to see that they were not alone in their experiences.

Black Love media were also described as having negative implications for Black women's attitudes towards singlehood. Participants resented Black Love media's hyper-focus on single Black women. Iyana and Khari described their anger and discomfort with Black Love media's focus on single Black women's low rates of marriage, spun in the media as evidence of single Black women's deficiencies. Black Love media set single Black women apart in ways that make participants uncomfortable, exacerbating participants' feelings of resentment, sadness, and frustration with singlehood. The interview study suggests that Black Love media have the capacity to shape single Black women's attitudes towards singlehood.

Research question three was posed to guide the survey, it asks: How does Black Love media consumption relate to single Black women's beliefs about partners, relationships, and singlehood as well as their tolerance for risk in relationships? The survey study establishes an association between greater Black Love television and book consumption and more adverse sexual socialization outcomes. Greater Black Love television and book consumption were both associated with more antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships; less indication that acts of violence or aggression are deal breakers for a romantic relationships; and more reported experiences of single stigma. Greater Black Love television consumption was associated with greater beliefs in the unavailability of Black men. Greater Black Love book consumption was associated with greater endorsement of the heterosexual script. Neither Black Love book nor television consumption was associated with relationship pressure or drive for marriage.

Respondents' beliefs about others' Black Love media use, measured as the presumed influence of Black Love media on other single Black men and women, were also correlated with sexual socialization outcomes. Presumed influence was measured for men and women

separately. Greater belief in the presumed influence of Black Love media on men and on women were both associated with more perceived pressure for romantic relationships, a greater drive for marriage, and more reported single stigma. Greater belief in the presumed influence of Black Love media on men and on women were both associated with a more antagonistic view of Black relationships and greater endorsement of the heterosexual script. These associations were moderated by motherhood in presumed influence of Black Love media on women models, with childless women being the primary drivers of these associations.

Research question four is addressed by both studies, but was posed to guide the survey, it asks: How do age, education, and maternal status influence singlehood for Black women? Age, education, and motherhood are addressed differently in the interview and survey studies. In the interview study, age, education, and motherhood were used to define the distribution of the study's sample and emerged as larger themes that characterized singlehood. In the survey study, age and education were entered as covariates in regression models and motherhood was entered as a moderator. Together, these studies provide different information about the roles of age, education, and motherhood in shaping study outcomes.

In the interview study, education emerged as a key theme. Education was characterized as a means by which single Black women are able to transform themselves and their life circumstances for their personal betterment. Participants conceptualized education broadly, considering formal education as well as the acquisition of other important technical, professional, and interpersonal skills. Age and education also marked some heavy lines of division in the interview study around motherhood and fertility. Eleven of 24 women were mothers. Nine of the 11 mothers had less than a four-year college degree. Only two mothers had a college degree or higher. Both of these mothers were in their 40s with adult children. College-educated, childless women were not absent from the lives of children. Instead they served as aunts, mentors, other

mothers, and godmothers to children and teens in their communities. Childlessness and motherhood had implications for Black women's approaches to family formation. Single mothers described their concerns about not being able to provide their children with the families they had envisioned for them, while childless women frequently described having to sort through a range of parenting and reproductive options ranging from mentorship, to fostering and adoption, to egg freezing and fertility treatments.

In the survey study, age, education, and motherhood were associated with their own unique sexual socialization outcomes. Beginning with age, in both sets of Black Love media consumption and presumed-influence regression models, younger women were found to exhibit a greater drive for marriage and report feeling more pressure to enter romantic relationships. As for education, in both sets of Black Love media consumption and presumed-influence models, lower levels of education were associated with a higher estimate of the unavailability of Black men. Greater levels of education were associated with more reported pressure for romantic relationships and less tolerance for aggression and violence in romantic relationships.

Turning to motherhood, in both sets of Black Love media and presumed-influence models, motherhood predicted a higher estimate of the unavailability of Black men, greater antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, and greater endorsement of the heterosexual script. As stated above, motherhood moderated the associations between the presumed influence of Black Love media on women, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and the heterosexual script. Childless women exhibited the most robust correlations between Black Love media and these beliefs. In both sets of presumed influence models, motherhood was associated with a greater drive for marriage.

Study Implications

Together, the interview and survey studies make numerous contributions to the study of media sexual socialization and Black feminist media studies. In the current section, I explore the implications of the current project for scholarly understandings of single Black women, their media use, and their processes of sexual socialization, focusing on Black Love media, singlehood, and participant sampling. Throughout this section I offer recommendations for expanding this research.

Project implications for Black Love media research. The novel findings reported in this dissertation have implications for the study of Black Love media and suggest new directions for media sexual socialization research. Specifically, there are two findings about Black Love media that warrant further discussion. First, in the survey, I found that although Black Love television and book consumption exhibited similar patterns of association with the sexual socialization outcomes, in regression analyses, books and television were associated with different gender, partner, and relationship belief outcomes. Black love television, not book consumption, was associated with estimates of the unavailability of Black men. Black Love book, not television, consumption was associated with the heterosexual script. This outcome could be shaped by any number of factors including differences in Black Love television and book content, differing attitudes towards the media, different audience composition, and/or varied media use practices by medium (Ward, 2003, 2016). Although the survey study sheds no further light on these outcomes, the interview study offers insight on how to interpret these findings, suggesting that differences in content by medium and participants' attitudes towards Black Love media may contribute to these outcomes.

Interview participants shared their attitudes towards Black Love books and television shows, highlighting their perceived differences in Black Love book and television content in the

process. Participants stated the importance of authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness in Black Love books and television shows. Authenticity is a trait that participants used to evaluate media personalities and their performances, characterized as cohesion between a celebrity's personal life and the messages they share in the media. Credibility was used to evaluate media content and dealt with the perceived accuracy of the representation of singlehood in Black Love media. Trustworthiness, as described by participants, is the extent to which they trust Black Love media to accurately advise or represent their experiences of singlehood.

Participants described Black Love books as sexist, viewing these books as untrustworthy sources for advice because they contained misogynist content that overstates the importance of men and reinforces gendered roles in relationships. Participants felt Black Love books were not credible because they overlooked other important facets of their lives, like work and family. Participants felt Black Love authors lacked authenticity, pointing to their personal failures in relationships as evidence. When describing Black Love television, participants' critiques focused on representation. Black Love television was just too dramatic for most participants. Interviewees viewed the glass-throwing, argumentative, and backbiting representations of single Black women as inauthentic portrayals of single Black women. Participants wanted to learn about Black Love media celebrities' professional accomplishments. Participants wanted the women of Black Love television to be women they can emulate, examples of professional and personal success.

Turning back to the survey's findings, the differing associations between Black Love book and television consumption and respondents' partner and relationship beliefs may be moderated by survey respondents' attitudes towards Black media, which differed in the interview study by medium. Prior quantitative media research has considered trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility as moderators of media processes and effects (Hall, 2009). For example, Hall's

(2009) survey study of 240 Midwestern undergraduates explored how viewer perceptions of authenticity in reality television programming shaped their involvement with program content, enjoyment of programming, and stated learning from the media. Hall operationalized authenticity in four ways: cast eccentricity, representativeness, candidness, and producer manipulations. Hall (2009) found that these different features of reality television shaped study outcomes. Authenticity measures moderated the relations between reality television consumption and program involvement, program enjoyment, and the degree to which viewers reported learning from the media. Representations perceived as being more authentic exhibited the most robust associations between media consumption and study outcomes. It is my view that the associations observed in the current study may be moderated by respondent appraisals of the Black Love media—respondents' beliefs about the trustworthiness, credibility, and authenticity of Black Love media. Researchers studying Black Love media should consider including measures of trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility as moderators in their studies.

The second noteworthy Black Love media finding concerns the role of participants' beliefs about others' Black Love media use. In the survey, beliefs about others' media use were assessed through measures of presumed influence, operationalized as the percentage of other single Black men and women who rely Black Love media for guidance in dating and relationships (Gunther & Storey, 2003). Presumed influence describes how a person's beliefs about the influence of the media, as opposed to their consumption of the media, shape their beliefs and behaviors (Gunther & Storey, 2003). In analyses, greater presumed influence for both men and women was associated with more antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and greater endorsement of the heterosexual script. In the case of the presumed influence of Black Love media on women, these relations were moderated by motherhood, with childless women being the primary drivers of these associations. This is a complex finding that warrants further

discussion and speaks to the importance of considering not just gender in women's lives but also measures of important social roles closely tied to gender, like motherhood.

The most likely explanation for these outcomes is that motherhood may be masking the influence of past relationship experience on these data. Although not a universal feature of motherhood, being a mother often requires some sexual or romantic contact with a man. Based on a life-course argument of sexual socialization (Halpern, 2010), I argue that this is not simply about the number of past relationships or the years one has spent partnered, but also about one's experience with the varied social roles that can come with relationship experience. Motherhood changes a woman's relationship to her partners, her body, and her relationships (Trice-Black, 2013). Mothers may have more personal experience of relationships and similarly may perceive other single women as having comparable relationship expertise. Past experience of relationships expands the personal knowledge Black women use to navigate dating and relationships (Trice-Black, 2013), which may result in downplaying the role of the media in shaping others' behavior. Conversely, childless women may have less personal relationship experience to draw from and therefore may perceive the same level of inexperience among other single women. Childless women's beliefs about others' media use may reflect their own reliance on Black Love media for guidance in dating and relationships; hence the associations between these outcomes and respondents' *own* beliefs about dating and relationships.

Another potential explanation for the associations between presumed influence of Black Love media on women and relationship and partner beliefs may be single Black women's beliefs about each other. Childless interviewees spoke extensively on this theme in the interview study. Participants described how their childlessness was used as evidence of their deficiencies as women and caregivers. Babies, interviewees stated, provide evidence of a woman's past success in relationships. Interviewees spoke about how family and would-be dating partners assumed

some fault with childless single women. Interviewees did not speak about the extent that they perceived other single women as holding these beliefs, but there is nothing in my study to suggest that single mothers are immune to holding such beliefs about their childless peers. After all, aunts, close friends, and distant cousins may themselves be single women, and the critiques they offer may be reflective of their beliefs about single women, not their interpersonal ties to participants. Further interview research will be needed to explore the beliefs that single Black women hold about each other, but these data suggest that beliefs about other women's success in relationships are likely at play.

Caution is required in interpreting these findings. To be clear, I am not arguing that childless single women are dupes controlled by the media or that mothers despise their single peers for their childlessness. I am arguing, however, that life roles and their accompanying experiences have the capacity to shape a person's perceptions of herself, the media, and others. More research is needed to determine the exact role that the presumed influence of Black Love media plays in single Black women's processes of media sexual socialization.

A final consideration relevant to both sets of media findings pertains to participants' perceptions of Black Love media as being made for single Black women. In chapter three, Iyana made a statement about the audiences for Black Love books. We were discussing why Iyana had not read any of the best-selling Black Love books I shared with her. Speaking for many in the study, Iyana stated, "Nobody is writing these books for men… Like all of these men are writing these books for women" (Iyana). Like Iyana, many women in the interview study felt that single Black women were targeted by Black Love books with messages and content that men are not confronted with. This provides compelling insight into Black women's views of Black Love media and their audiences.

Although the current project is unable to verify Iyana's suspicions, I did look a bit deeper into the other books written by Black Love authors to investigate her claim. In *Manology* (Gibson, Run, & Morrow, 2013), Tyrese Gibson speaks to directly Iyana's beliefs about the gendered nature of Black Love books and their audiences. "I initially had planned to address men directly through *Manology*. Then I was told, by people allegedly 'in the know, ' that men don't read books like this" (Gibson, Run, Vandehey, 2013, p. 249). Reflecting this industry perspective on dating advice and women, Steve Harvey, Tyrese Gibson, and Devon Franklin have other advice books targeting male or general audiences. In *Act Like a Success, Think Like a Success: Discovering Your Gift and the Way to Life's Riches* (Harvey & Johnson, 2016), Steve Harvey coaches his readers through the process of identifying their purpose in life, persevering through life's challenges, and growing through adversity to achieve personal goals. Tyrese Gibson's *How to Get Out of Your Own Way* (Gibson, 2011) is a motivational book to help readers achieve their goals in life. Devon Franklin's *Produced by Faith: Enjoy Real Success without Losing Your True Self* (Franklin & Vandehey, 2011) takes a values-first approach to navigating business, entrepreneurship, and career. When speaking to men or mixed gender audiences, Harvey, Gibson, and Franklin focus on navigating life's challenges to identify and live out one's purpose, messages absent from their dating advice books directed to single women. My very rudimentary comparison of books by best-selling Black Love authors reinforces Iyana's hunch, suggesting that content from these books varies by intended audience, with men receiving a broader range of guidance on how to approach life. Even though the findings of the survey data suggest that Black Love content differs by medium, a content analysis is needed to systematically explore these differences. Content analyses should include other works targeting male and mixed gender audiences to assess how Black Love authors vary their content by the gender of their intended audience.

Project implications for media theory and research. In addition to having implications for understandings of Black Love media, this project has broader implications for the study of communication and scholarly understandings of media processes. Namely, the findings the from the interview study suggest that other theoretical mechanisms like two-step flow, may play a role in the diffusion of Black Love media's messages. During the interview study participants described the various decision criteria they used in dating and when evaluating potential partners. When asked if Black Love media played a role in the development of these criteria, almost every woman interviewed rejected the assertion that they were drawing on Black Love media directly for guidance on relationships. This finding was quite surprising considering that many participants would frequently invoke "tips and tricks" presented in Black Love media when describing their approaches to dating. One of the most cited examples was Harvey and Millner's 90-day rule; originally presented in *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (2009). The 90-day rule states that in new relationships, women should abstain for sex for the first 90-days of a relationship to assess if a new male partner is worthy enough for a woman's "benefits package" a.k.a. sex (Harvey & Millner, 2009). Although participants had knowledge of and applied some version of the 90-day rule in their dating relationships, many women also stated that they did not read Harvey and Millner's *Act Like a Lady Think Like a Man* Black Love media consumption, suggests that some other mechanism is underpinning the participants' access to this information.

Originally identified in political communication research, two-step flow posits that messages flow from the media to opinion or thought leaders who then disseminate the media's messages to friends, family, co-workers, and others in their communities (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2006). This hub and spoke approach to the flow of information exemplifies one of the ways that sociocultural forces (e.g. interpersonal relationships and the media) work together to facilitate the movement of information around a social network (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2006). The seamless

integration between interpersonal relationships and media messages suggests that single Black women may be subject to messages from Black Love media without seeking these media out. In Katz and Lazarsfeld's (2006) research, opinion leaders garnered respect and were seen as thought leaders or trendsetters in their communities (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2006). As this study has demonstrated, single women are bombarded with numerous messages about sex, dating, and relationships. Friends, family, and romantic partners are important sources for guidance about singlehood. The interview study suggests that Black Love media messages are transmitted through conversations with friends and family. Although the current project cannot answer this question of how two-step flow contributes to the dissemination of Black Love media messages, it does suggest an investigation two-step flow's roles in the dissemination of dating advice is warranted.

Project implications for scholarly approaches to Black women's singlehood. This dissertation project made clear that singlehood is a viable direction for media sexual socialization research. Through the interview study, this project demonstrated the complexity of singlehood for Black women. Not just the absence of a partner, singlehood was viewed as a developmental stage, a time in life during which a single woman learns about herself and develops new skills. This process is self-directed and structured by Black women's experiences of education, past relationships, travel, family, and their own singlehood. Scholars of marriage and family formation would argue that these shifts in singlehood are the product of shifts in marriage as opposed to unique features of singlehood separate from age or life stage.

For today's young adults, Millennials specifically, the meaning and role of marriage has transformed. Instead of being the first act of one's adulthood, marriage is now a capstone event, one of the last things a person does to establish their adulthood (Rabin, 2018). The emergence of marriage as a capstone life event repurposes singlehood into a period of growth and preparation

for partnership (Cherlin, 2010; Rabin, 2018). Reinforcing the literature on marriage and singlehood (Cherlin, 2010), my interview study finds that singlehood functions as a time to prepare oneself for partnership and marriage. Contradicting the literature (Cherlin, 2010; Rabin, 2018), however, I found that conceptions of singlehood were not bound by age or marital history. Widows, divorcées, and never-married Black women in their 20s, 30s and 40s described using their single life as a time to prepare for life's new challenges, not just marriage and relationships.

In order to integrate these new perspectives of singlehood into media sexual socialization research, quantitative researchers need new measures that explore singlehood as a sexual socialization outcome. Single stigma is associated with both sets of Black Love media consumption and presumed influence measures. Single stigma was positively correlated with the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, endorsement of the heterosexual script, pressure for romantic relationships, and drive for marriage. Single stigma was significantly inversely correlated with both deal-breakers measures, meaning that participants who experienced greater single stigma were more likely to put up with risks in their romantic relationships with men. The interview study offers additional guidance on how researchers might refine and strengthen measures of singlehood in quantitative media sexual socialization research.

In addition to sharing their experiences of singlehood, interview participants spoke about their attitudes toward singlehood and shared their beliefs about other single Black women. Similar assessments of beliefs and attitudes towards partners and relationships have been included in other quantitative media sexual socialization research conducted with Black women (Avery, 2016; Jerald et al., 2017; Stanton et al., 2016). Like media sexual socialization research focused on relationship and partner beliefs, beliefs about singlehood can be operationalized in a similar fashion.

I identified three potential assessments of attitudes and beliefs related to singlehood, derived from the interview study, that reflect other assessments of relationship and partner beliefs already accounted for in media sexual socialization research. As reported in the chapter three, interviewees' appraisals were rooted in agentic and relatively positive conceptualizations singlehood. Reflecting this perspective on single life, one measure of single beliefs could examine the extent to which single women view their singlehood positively. Potential items could include: "I enjoy single life," and "Being single allows me to grow as a person." Additionally, researchers could study beliefs about singlehood separate from the social benefits or barriers singlehood introduces. Like the Drive to Marry Scale (Blakemore et al., 2005), this measure would assess participants' objective beliefs about singlehood. In the original Drive to Marry Scale, participants were asked to think of marriage in the following way: "The following questions concern your views about marrying. To answer them, think about marriage itself, as much as possible without considering either its potential economic benefits or your relationship with a particular partner" (Blakemore et al., 2005, p. 329). A similar approach could be adopted for singlehood measures, which would assess participants' beliefs about singlehood as an institution.

Additionally, interview participants acknowledged holding critical beliefs about other single Black women for being single. Thompson, Witherspoon, and Speight (2004) have developed a measure to assess Black women's stereotypic beliefs about other Black women. Singlehood could be examined in a similar fashion. Participants in the interview study described holding negative views about themselves and other women because they were single. A new measure could assess participants' endorsement of a deficit-oriented view of singlehood. This measure would explore respondents' agreement with statements like: "A woman doesn't fully understand what it means to be a woman until she has a husband," or "Single women are not

competent at childcare." This measure could be applied to populations beyond Black women to assess singlehood beliefs in wider U.S. society.

In addition to expanding the approaches researchers can use to assess singlehood in media sexual socialization research, this project has implications for the interdisciplinary qualitative literature describing single Black women's lives. As I described in chapter two, there is a larger, interdisciplinary literature focused on single Black women's lives (Clarke, 2011; Omolade, 1986; Stack, 1976). This literature described how factors like class and motherhood shape Black women's experiences of singlehood. Observed in this literature is a split among studies focused on younger, low-income women with children (Berman et al., 2015), and older, more educated, and childless women (Clarke, 2011). Typically these experiences are treated separately. The current project sought to bridge this division by including a spectrum of women across age, education, and motherhood status.

Because of the diversity of the interview study's sample, I was able to identify features of singlehood that transcended age, education, and motherhood as well as other features of singlehood uniquely bounded by these factors. Regardless of a single Black woman's age, education, and maternal status, interviewees lived out a version of singlehood characterized by growth, agency, and self-discovery. This perspective of singlehood is reinforced by Black feminist theory (Omolade, 1986), but by my accounting, has thus far gone undocumented in empirical qualitative literature focused on single Black women's lives. On the other hand, participants' concerns around family formation and fertility were structured by their education, age, and past experiences in singlehood. In the interview study, the mothers were younger and less educated. Childless women tended to be older and more educated. Childless women frequently spoke about playing important, secondary roles in the lives of children. This is an

important and enduring feature of Black families (Moore, 2011), and reinforces other qualitative work examining fertility and motherhood among single Black women (Clarke, 2011).

Because of motherhood's complex relationship to singlehood, a new direction in this literature could consider the role of the media in shaping Black women's approaches to family formation and fertility. This work could be qualitative or quantitative, building on already established findings in the qualitative literature focusing on single Black women's fertility management and family formation strategies (Clarke, 2011). In these new studies, researchers could assess how quantity of media use and the consumption of salient genres like reality, advice, and romance media shape women's acceptance of family formation strategies like egg freezing or adoption. Fertility management has implications for media sexual socialization research beyond the study of Black women, as such a scale could be developed for use among general populations of single and partnered women. As media sexual socialization and singlehood research continues, work should continue to explore the role of the media in shaping single women's experiences of sexual socialization.

A broader approach to sampling in media sexual socialization research. In this final section of the discussion, I describe the implications of age, degree attainment, and motherhood in this project. Used as sampling criteria and covariates in the survey study, and emerging as themes in the interview study, these demographic factors meaningfully shaped study outcomes. I focus on two findings for this discussion. The first finding of interest concerns the emergence of singlehood as a developmental stage. One consequence of focusing on highly educated millennials is that family formation researchers have employed a view of singlehood closely tied to never-married people in their early 20s (Cherlin, 2010; Rabin, 2018). Like millennials who are delaying marriage in favor of personal growth, middle-aged divorcées, widows, and never-married women described their singlehood as a time for personal growth and development.

Within interviewees' constructions of singlehood, education is conceptualized broadly and defined to include degrees, life experience, and learning from friends, family, and the media. My project demonstrates that singlehood is its own period of growth and development separate from age, degree attainment, and relationship history.

These are novel findings made possible by studying the lives of young-adult and middle-aged Black women, with and without children, from diverse educational backgrounds. As work on this topic expands, I call for more research to better understand middle-aged and older Black women's experiences of sex, dating, relationships, and singlehood. Many other researchers are well on their way to building this literature (Avery, 2016; Jerald et al., 2017), but my study demonstrates that there is much more to learn about Black women's experiences. In line with my own recommendation, I intend to expand the current qualitative study into a larger project that includes Black women ages 50 to 80. One direction I plan to explore is the role of retirement planning in singlehood. As interviewees' children grew into adulthood or as their own fertility waned, single Black women's concerns around family formation shifted. Instead of concerns about reproduction and child rearing, participants expressed worry about retirement and reestablishing support systems as they age. This theme requires further exploration and has potential implications for the types of advice media participants turn to for guidance and support.

The second finding of interest concerns motherhood and childlessness. As I have mentioned above, I included motherhood status as a moderator of survey outcomes. Although not a consistent moderator, motherhood yielded its own pattern of association with beliefs about partners, dating, relationships, and singlehood. In regression analyses, motherhood was positively associated with beliefs about the unavailability of Black men, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, and endorsement of the heterosexual script. When motherhood moderated study outcomes, as was the case for two of the women's presumed influence models,

childlessness drove these associations. As I argued above, I attribute these outcomes to motherhood's connection to past relationship experience. This study suggests that gendered social roles related to past relationships like motherhood, and also possibly ex-wife and widow, may have their own capacity for sexual socialization based on socialization that takes place in and around the role.

In the interview study, I described how childless single women stated that they were viewed as less competent than their married peers or single women with children. Others' beliefs about single women's incompetence shaped how participants were treated and advised by their family and would-be partners, who took a skeptical view of their capacities as women and childcare providers. Interviewees identified these same ideas about childless single women in Black Love media. Other social roles like widow and ex-wife are likely attached to their own cultural and social significance for Black women separate and apart from relationship history (Barnes, 2015; Clarke, 2011), which dictates how single women are perceived and how they are treated. Based on my findings for childless women, I call for more research considering gendered social roles and their relations to media sexual socialization. To that end, the inclusion of relationship history measures like those used in the family formation literature (Taylor, Chatters, & Jackson, 2007), and the development of measures of beliefs about or experiences as ex-wives or widows will be necessary. Singlehood is not just the domain of young, White, childless, and never-married people. The middle-aged divorcées, widows, and never-married women included in this project have already meaningfully transformed scholarly understandings of singlehood and Black Love media.

Project Limitations and Conclusion

Like any project, this dissertation has some scholarly limitations. In this final section I briefly describe four limitations of the project and offer my concluding thoughts. The first

limitation of this project concerns my sampling approach in the interview study. I oversampled college-educated women. I used a purposive sampling technique, which uses a predetermined set of personal or experiential characteristics to identify participants for qualitative research (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). To unite two competing perspectives of single Black women in the family formation literature, one focused on the experiences of poor and working- class mothers (Berman et al, 2015) the other focused on college-educated childless women (Clarke, 2011), I used age and education as selection criteria (Cherlin, 2010; Clarke, 2011). Half of interviewees, 12 of 24, have a college-degree or higher. Nationally among Black women age 25 years or older, 15.7% have a Bachelor's degree, 8.1% hold a Master's degree, 0.9% have a professional degree like a law or medical degree, and 1.1% of Black women have doctorates, meaning approximately 26% of U.S. Black women have completed some form of post-secondary education (United States Census Bureau, 2018). If the interview study were representative of national levels of degree attainment among Black women, I would only have six degree-holding women in the study.

For phase two of the interview study, I plan to interview an additional 24 single Black women 50-80 years of age. Originally, I planned to extend the existing sampling frame to include an additional 12 women with college degrees. Because college degree attainment is significantly higher for younger women than it is for older women (United States Census Bureau, 2018), one way to account for the existing educational bias in the project could be to reduce the number of older college-degree-holding women in the second phase of the study. As a study of a phenomenon, however, the distribution of the current sample was appropriate, but I am mindful of how over representing college degree attainment could be distorting the conclusions of my work.

The second, third, and fourth limitations of the study concern the survey. As an early study of Black Love media, this project established associations between Black Love media

consumption and beliefs about partners and relationships. Although an important first step, a correlational study design does not allow me to establish causality between the measures included in the study. More research will be needed to determine the exact mechanisms underpinning the reported associations and the directionality of these relations. Another weakness of the survey was the use of Qualtrics for participant recruitment and data collection. Although widely used and accepted in quantitative research (Smith, Roster, Golden, & Albaum, 2016), the use of Qualtrics, and other like survey research firms, introduces concerns about how participants are recruited and how data are collected; for example, because I did not collect my own data I unable to say with certainty how participants were contacted. The choice to use Qualtrics was predicated my time and budgetary limitations. Although I am not advocating for the elimination of the use of Qualtrics, I want to make clear that this approach is not without its limitation. Like any study limitation, the use of Qualtrics or a like survey firm, should be balanced against other study constraints like time and funding.

Another weakness of the survey was its reliance on scales and measures that have not been validated. The single stigma scale, the pressure for romantic relationships scale, and the deal breakers scales were all measures I adapted from validated scales. The three scales range in their utility. The pressure for romantic relationships scale was adapted from the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATA-Q 4; Schaefer et al., 2015). Pressure for romantic relationships was not associated with the Black Love media measures or the sexual socialization outcomes. I attribute this outcome to the adaptation of the scale, not the utility of the construct.

Next, the deal-breakers scale was hard to interpret and possibly incompletely adapted, but shows some promise in analyses. It was designed to assess the extent to which women will tolerate violent or extreme behavior from their romantic partners in order to maintain a romantic

relationship. I hypothesized that the more Black Love media a woman consumes, the more violent behavior she will tolerate in order to maintain her relationship. Although the construct—personal tolerance for conflict and betrayals of trust in romantic relationships—is an important one to assess, there are other assessments of violence and abuse that might be better suited to future research on this topic. One example is Price and Byers' (1999) Attitudes Towards Male Dating Violence Scale. Included in this scale are items like: "Some girls deserve to be slapped by their boyfriends" and "it is O.K. for a guy to slap his girlfriend if she deserves it." Price and Byers' (1999) scale is validated and explores general acceptance of male violence in romantic relationships. Price and Byers' (1999) scale does not, however, assess one's *personal* tolerance for physical violence, nor does it explore a range of violent behaviors. What I liked about the deal breakers measure that I adapted was that it explored one's personal tolerance for risk and a gradation of behaviors ranging from shoving to attempted murder. Although the deal breakers scale needs more work to refine, the development of an assessment of one's personal tolerance of violence in dating relationships will be an important next step in the progression of media sexual socialization research.

Most promising is the single stigma scale, which was positively correlated with the Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships Scale (Ward & Cole, 2016 in Avery, 2016), and The Heterosexual Script Scale (Seabrook et al., 2016), emulating these scales' patterns of association with Black Love media consumption. As I described earlier, my adaptation of this scale was incomplete, and more work will be needed to refine the measure, but the single stigma scale shows promise for sexual socialization researchers.

Even with these limitations, my project makes a number of important contributions to the study of media sexual socialization. First, this project has established relations between single Black women's Black Love media consumption and their beliefs about partners, relationships,

and singlehood. This finding establishes Black Love media as an important sociocultural factor associated with Black women's sexual socialization. Second, my project establishes singlehood as a developmental stage separate and apart from age, degree attainment, and relationship history. This finding has revealed new dimensions of singlehood and demonstrated the utility of singlehood to media sexual socialization research. Third, my project reinforces the importance of diversity in sampling. By including Black women across a range of ages, social roles, and educational levels, this project was able to identify universal features of singlehood and sexual socialization.

Each of these findings is a novel contribution to the study of media sexual socialization. Based on my work, I encourage researchers to conduct more studies of Black Love media beginning with a detailed content analysis to identify and catalogue the genre's messages and explore how Black women and men define the genre. This research could be expanded to include other mediums like movies or magazines to more thorough investigation of how the impact of medium on Black Love messages. I advocate for further research exploring singlehood in sexual socialization research; single stigma and beliefs about singlehood are two fruitful directions for this work. Furthermore, I advocate for more descriptive work to explore singlehood over the life course. Aging and the decline of health that comes with aging are universal features of Black women's experiences. Future research should explore how these facets of life fit into the context of singlehood. Finally, I encourage researchers to diversify their studies, thinking across race, class, and gender, to include age and social role. As research on singlehood and Black Love media expands, more work will be needed to refine the concept of Black Love media and detail the features of singlehood. This study demonstrates that these are fruitful scholarly directions and forges a new direction in media sexual socialization research.

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2016.1142496

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Interview Study Exempt IRB



Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS) • 2800 Plymouth Rd., Building 520, Room 1170, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800 • phone (734) 936-0933 • fax (734) 998-9171 • irbhsbs@umich.edu

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To: Jessica Moorman

From:
Thad Polk

Cc:
Kristen Harrison
Jessica Moorman

Subject: Notice of Exemption for [HUM00101002]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:
Title: Fatalistic Narratives, Sexual Risks--SSI
Full Study Title (if applicable):
Study eResearch ID: HUM00101002
Date of this Notification from IRB: 12/1/2015
Date of IRB Exempt Determination: 12/1/2015
UM Federalwide Assurance: FWA00004969 (For the current FWA expiration date, please visit the UM HRPP Webpage)
OHRP IRB Registration Number(s): IRB00000246

IRB EXEMPTION STATUS:
The IRB HSBS has reviewed the study referenced above and determined that, as currently described, it is exempt from ongoing IRB review, per the following federal exemption category:

> **EXEMPTION #2 of the 45 CFR 46.101.(b):**
> Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Note that the study is considered exempt as long as any changes to the use of human subjects (including their data) remain within the scope of the exemption category above. Any proposed changes that may exceed the scope of this category, or the approval conditions of any other non-IRB reviewing committees, must be submitted as an amendment through eResearch.

Although an exemption determination eliminates the need for ongoing IRB review and approval, you still have an obligation to understand and abide by generally accepted principles of responsible and ethical

conduct of research. Examples of these principles can be found in the Belmont Report as well as in guidance from professional societies and scientific organizations.

SUBMITTING AMENDMENTS VIA eRESEARCH:
You can access the online forms for amendments in the eResearch workspace for this exempt study, referenced above.

ACCESSING EXEMPT STUDIES IN eRESEARCH:
Click the "Exempt and Not Regulated" tab in your eResearch home workspace to access this exempt study.



Thad Polk
Chair, IRB HSBS

APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Study Guide

#	SSI Question
1	"Being single is…." activity • What is good/bad, easy/hard, exciting/boring about being single?
2	What have you learned about yourself during this period of singleness? • life and work? • sex? • dating and relationships?
3	How has your experience of being single changed over your adult life?
4	How would you describe your identity? • How does your identity shape your experience of being single?
5	What are some of the messages about SBW you have encountered in your everyday life (friends, family, church, work, school) life while single?
6	What are some of the best/worst pieces of advice you have heard about being a SBW?
7	How do you think your identity influences the types of messages and advice that you hear?
8	What are some of the expectations of SBW that underpin the messages and advice that you talked about just a moment ago?
So far we've talked about what being single looks like for you. It's messy, there are contradictions; it's a nuanced experience. I want to shift gears a bit and talk about all the things your watch, read, listen to, and do online. Take a second and think about the television shows, movies, social media, magazines, books, and videogames you use…	
9	Who is doing a good job of representing your experiences of being single? • What aspects of your life does <*participant examples of media*> get right?
10	Who is doing a bad job of representing your experiences of being single? • What aspects of your life does <*participant examples of media*> get wrong?
11	What do these portrayals miss altogether?
One of the things that I am exploring with this project is Black oriented relationship media. <Pull out examples>. BORM is a genre made up of television shows, movies, news reports, dating advice books, podcasts, social media accounts, online support groups, and pornography represent and advise the sex and dating lives of Black women.	
12	Are you familiar with any of these? Which ones? • What are some others that you can think of but I didn't include here?
13	How do your experiences of being single compare to those portrayed in <*participant identified BORM*>?
Earlier we talked about messages, expectations and advice in different areas of your life. I am	

curious to know…	
14	Are the messages about SBW featured in <*participant examples of BORM*> consistent with the messages about SBW you hear in your everyday life? • How so? • What messages are unique to <*participant examples of BORM*>?
15	What about the advice about being single featured in <*participant examples of BORM*>? • What advice is unique to <*participant examples of BORM*>?
16	How are the expectations of SBW underpinning the portrayals, messages and advice presented in <*participant examples of BORM*> consistent with expectations of SBW in your everyday life? • What expectations are unique to <*participant examples of BORM*>?
17	How do the messages, expectations, and advice about SBW featured in <*participant examples of BORM*> shape your experiences of being single?
18	How do the messages, expectations, and advice about SBW featured in <*participant examples of BORM*> influence society's understandings of SBW?
Sounds like there are a lot of good and bad things about* <participant examples of BORM>*, much of which paint a particular picture about single Black women.	
19	What is it about SBW's experiences that makes them the subjects of these shows, movies, books, etc. and not single Black men? • What is the role of Black men within this genre?
20	If you could write a show/movie, have a blog, podcast, advice book, etc. that portrayed a Black woman's experiences of being single, what would that show/blog/movie etc. be about? • What portrayals of/messages about being single would you include/exclude? • What about these experiences makes them important to include/exclude?
Thank you for your time! You gave great answers. I have just three quick questions before we say goodbye.	
21	Demographic Information: age; employment; highest level of education; kids.
22	Is there anything you'd like to add that I didn't ask?
23	Do you have any questions for me?
<Give participant $20!!!>	

APPENDIX C

Being Single Is Exercise

Materials:

- 2 large laminated "Being Single Is" prompt cards.
- 143 laminated descriptive words and phrases cards.
- 2 large sharpie markers
- 20 blank index cards.

Instructions: Responding to the prompt "Being Single Is…" select 5-10 words or phrases that you feel best capture your experiences of being single. Think about the best parts of being single, the worst parts of being single, and the features of singlehood that you feel most on a day-to-day basis. If you do not see a word or a phrase in the deck of cards I've given, I can write that word or phrase on a note card and we can include it in your stack of words.

Prompt: Being Single Is…

Descriptive words and phrases:

1. GREAT
2. EXCELLENT
3. TERRIBLE
4. HORRIBLE
5. EXHILARATING
6. TERRIFIC
7. TERRIFYING
8. MAGICAL
9. ISOLATING
10. INFURIATING
11. DISGUSTING
12. DEMEANING
13. UNWANTED
14. INSULTING
15. UNPREDICTABLE
16. PREDICTABLE
17. ROUTINE
18. PATHETIC

19. ABSURD
20. UNTHINKABLE
21. INTIMIDATING
22. HOPELESS
23. IMPRACTICAL
24. EASY
25. HARD
26. AWKWARD
27. PLEASING
28. SATISFYING
29. THRILLING
30. CONFUSING
31. PRACTICAL
32. BLISSFUL
33. COMFORTABLE
34. LUCKY
35. FRUSTRATING
36. LONELY
37. FREEING
38. NEW
39. BORING
40. EXCITING
41. OVERWHELMING
42. NEVER-ENDING
43. IMPOSSIBLE
44. HORRIBLE
45. AMAZING
46. AWESOME
47. REVEALING
48. ADVENTUROUS
49. UNDERWHELMING
50. DEPRESSING
51. FULL OF POSSIBILITY
52. TITILLATING
53. STUPID
54. STIGMATIZING
55. UNCOMFORTABLE
56. SENSUOUS
57. SEXY
58. SEXUAL
59. DEGRADING
60. FUN
61. NEW
62. EVER-CHANGING
63. TRANSFORMING
64. SOMETHING TO RUN FROM
65. A TIME FOR ME
66. WHAT I WANT
67. UNIVERSAL
68. ENTERTAINING
69. PLEASURABLE
70. AMUSING
71. STIMULATING
72. INTRIGUING
73. GRATIFYING
74. RELAXING
75. DISTRACTING
76. BOTHERSOME
77. OFF-PUTTING
78. DISCONCERTING
79. AMUSING
80. INTERESTING

81. DIFFICULT
82. NOT A PART OF THE PLAN
83. A WASTE OF TIME
84. A WASTE OF ENERGY
85. MEH…
86. IMPOSSIBLE
87. DO-ABLE
88. SOMETHING I'M BAD AT
89. SOMETHING I'M GOOD AT
90. SOMETHING I NEVER WANTED
91. SOMETHING I NEVER WANT TO END
92. REVILED
93. CONDENMED
94. MALIGNED
95. PITIED
96. A ROADBLOCK
97. WHAT'S BEST FOR ME
98. UNDERMINING
99. A SEASON
100. CONFIRMS THE WORST THINGS ABOUT ME
101. CONFIRMS THE BEST THINGS ABOUT ME
102. EXCITING
103. ENERGIZING
104. THE BEST PART OF MY LIFE
105. CLARITY
106. FREEDOM
107. CONFINING
108. REJUVENATING
109. REFRESHING
110. A BREATH OF
111. FRESH AIR
112. STRESSFUL
113. REVEALING
114. UNFORTUNATE
115. DUMB
116. POINTLESS
117. PROBLEMATIC
118. NOT FOR ME
119. ENCHANTING
120. FULFILLING
121. DRAINING
122. BOUNDLESS
123. REPETITIVE
124. ANNOYING
125. OBNOXIOUS
126. DISTURBING
127. EYE-OPENING
128. A TIME TO LEARN…
129. A TIME TO PREPARE…
130. A TIME TO PRACTICE…
131. DISCOURAGING
132. ENCOURAGING
133. BULL SHIT
134. BEAUTIFUL
135. PRECIOUS
136. FABULOUS
137. GLORIOUS
138. HILLARIOUS
139. FUNNY

140. PEACEFUL
141. PERFECT
142. PRODUCTIVE
143. UNUSUAL

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Codebook

CODES	NVIVO	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
ADVICE			
BAD	ADVICE – BAD	The worst advice participants have received from others.	"So—how do I say this? The people who are like, "Girl, you just need to pray for a husband. And God is like—you know, God is just—is making sure you're a virtuous woman before and just making sure you're right so you can meet your mate." And I want to be like, "So I can pray for it, but that doesn't mean I don't need to do anything. That doesn't mean I need to just like chillax." Michelle
GIVE	ADVICE – GIVE	This code summarizes the types of advice participants would give to others about being single.	Oh, um, the first thing I would tell my daughter, "Love yourself, [02:38:00] first and foremost." And my advice to her is, "Know in your core that you are the shit, regardless of what anybody says." Claire
GOOD	ADVICE – GOOD	The Best advice participants have received from others.	"Best piece of advice. Know your worth. Very simple. Know what you're worth cuz somebody's gonna come along and pay you for it—for what you're worth, and that's not necessarily money, of course. You know—um—if you don't think you're worth anything, then s-somebody'll be happy to show you, too." Angela
MEDIA	ADVICE – MEDIA	Sources of advice participants turn to in the media and the types of advice participants identify as being present in the media	"I think the best—my best advice has come from Judge Lynn Toler from Divorce Court. And she just said the 20s—your 20s are just for like sayin' no. [Laughing]." Belle
BLACK LOVE MEDIA			

BLACK WOMEN IN MEDIA	MED – REPRESENTATIO N	Various representations of the single Black women found in the media. Include the representation of women, women in relationships, women's relationships with other women. Interpretations of how Black women are portrayed in the media.	"It is—it is single handedly ruinin' not only—um—TV culture but also black culture and certainly representation of black women. I mean, the fighting, the bickering—um—the inability to—you know—talk anything out [00:55:00] and be solution driven." Khari
CODES	**NVIVO**	**DEFINITION**	**EXAMPLE**
MEDIA CREATIONS	MED – INTERVENTIONS	Media that participants would create if they had the opportunity create a show for themselves. Media that participants would create if they had the opportunity create a show for themselves; participant interventions into the representation of single Black women	"It'd probably be somethin' like the Wayans Brothers. You ever watch the Wayans Brothers Show? With Marlon and Shawn? We probably live in an apartment. It would be a little bit of Wayans Brothers mixed with Eve. I think Eve and her friends would go out from time to time, have a few drinks. They was datin' a few guys. Um—and then it would—when I got back home, me and my sister's environment. It really wouldn't be—um—involvin' too much relationships. It would just—um—probably evolve around happy times, hangin' out, celebratin', and things like that. Uh-huh." Cindy
SINGLE BLACK WOMEN			
BEING SINGLE IS	DEF – BEING SINGLE IS	Participant responses to the "Being Single Is" activity. Participants' descriptions of their experiences of being single.	"Being single is about making money, being able to like go where I want to, have what I want—you know?" Susan
OTHERS' VIEWS OF SINGLE BLACK WOMEN	DEF – OTHER VIEWS	Others' ideas about Black women. Deals with perspectives outside of the media. Friends, family, partners, etc.	"They talkin' generalize. Like my—um—brother. He has a-a white girlfriend and he's like—I was like, "Well, what made you do that?" And he's like, "She don't ask for nothin'. She don't want nothin'. She don't talk back. All y'all do is talk back. Y'all gotta have the last word. Y'all too head strong." Stuff like that, he said he don't wanna a black—a black woman." Tracey
WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER WOMEN	RELA – WOMEN	Examples of participants relationships with women. Could be sexual or romantic, but designed to explore how women's relationships with other women influence their experiences of sex and dating men.	"Yeah. I—and I think those are important. Cuz i-it's sorta—you know—women help—other women will teach you how to be—or-or help you—you know—develop bein' a woman cuz you see—you have like—you know—somethin' you're watchin', but you—you will learn that from women like you're around." Belle
MOTHERHOOD & FERTILITY			

MOTHERHOOD (Fertility)	MOTHERHOOD	Participant statements about being single moms, motherhood, wanting children, fertility treatments, statements about having children or reflections on not having children.	"Um—I would start with terrible. Like-like-like I said, I think—um—you know—my sister—like the advice of just you know um—just, "Hey, frivolously like have a [00:49:00] kid," you know? Um—with who? [Laughing]. I mean, sperm donor? Just like, "Hey, no. Like, that's not what I wanna do." Another one of my friends is like, "Listen, you need to—you know—take $15,000.00 and freeze your eggs." I'm not doin' that. You know how many kids I need to—you know—support in college? I'm not takin' $15,000.00 to freeze eggs you know?" Khari
CODES	**NVIVO**	**DEFINITION**	**EXAMPLE**
EMERGENT			
AESTHETICS	EM - AESTHETICS	Participant reflections of the role of aesthetics in their dating lives. Can be expressions of culture or the media. But the focus is on appearance.	"I feel like I should probably like get dressed up more and be more like—I feel like here the culture is more around women with like a specific look, like long hair, like your nails are always done. You're like not prissy, but like—I don't know. It's just very a little more traditional, old school. Whereas on the coast like I [00:30:00] don't paint my nails because it, um, the nail polish never really sticks. And my hair is naturally short, but that's like okay. Like on the coast like put, there are lots of people like me, so it's not like war in vain. I don't have to like alter myself too much to be perceived as like attractive there. Whereas here I feel like I have to like do a whole bunch of stuff. People are really into like the fake lashes, the long weaves, the—yeah. So it's a different, it's a different like visual culture here I would say." Shannon
AGE(ING)	EM - AGE	Explores the role of age and aging in the being single.	"At 25, I was fearless. I was fearless at 25. Um, more trustworthy at [01:25:00] 25. Um, less to think of the consequences at 25. I felt that if it happened, it happened. I had enough time to change it, knowing that tomorrow's not a problem. But at 25, live a little. 50, I'll change, or 50, it'll be slower, or it'll be different at 30." Andrea
BUSINESS	EM - BUSINESS	The role of business and professions in the lives of participants	"I rent houses. I, you know, I uh, I help fix them up and get them prepared and then uh, basically like work for myself. I work for my family member, but I also, work for myself." Sandra
LIFE PLANS	EM – LIFE	Participants describing their life plans, the ones they should have lived, or want for others to live. How life should be or how participants want life to be.	CINDY Um—about two or three things. One was that I had moved too fast. A lotta the stuff that I kinda like forced—to kinda fit and it didn't—it could've waited. To have the children. To be in a relationship. That first relationship,

MONEY	EM - MONEY	The role that finances play in being single.	“They got Social Security. Like, that’s not happenin’ for me. Maybe a little bit of Social Security. There is not pension. You know what I mean? So—um—I worry about that. Um—uh—like comin’ back from Chicago, I’m havin’ a conversation with my—you know—81-year-old aunt right? And so, she is basically livin’ in poverty. Like, she lives on Dexter and Davidson and she might be livin’ off of $1,000.00 a month. Um—and so, is that really living, right?” Khari

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Example Theme Summary

Black Love Media

Reactions to the media

- Too focused on sex/celibacy (although Starlet would disagree)
- Relies on stereotypes of Black women.
- Too focused on Black women, where are the men??? (Amber has an interesting take)
- Too Dramatic.
- Not enough real stories. (more real stories, entrepreneurship)
- More representation than ever before. (Hunter)
- Entertaining.
- Not addressing the right questions, who cares about a man, I'm trying to open a business.

In addition to these reactions to Black Love media, participants reflected on the implications of the more negative features of these media for their professional and romantic relationships. One question raised by the sociological literature dealt with the representation of single Black women and how it impacts single Black women.

Stereotypes images of Black women and their implications for treatment in relationships and the workplace

Starlet like Hunter and other women in the study, highlights the cost of these representation for her students and young women, Mariah does this as well. Sending the wrong messages. And Black women are repelled by that. It undermines out credibility professionally and romantically. Khari's comment about a "move something dress on."

> STARLET: I would say yes. Yes, I notice that uh, some of the things that I've seen on TV is being replicated with my students. You know, over excessive amount of selfies taking pictures of themselves and am I beautiful? Do I measure up? Do I add up? Uh, the long weaves, you know, uh, the conversations that I hear my students talking about. Oh girl, I gotta watch Scandal tonight. Oh, well let me DVR, I gotta watch, you know Empire, and here you are 12, 13 years old. Watching Empire? So yes, I can definitely see the transformation that has taken place. When I was 12 or 13 I was still wearing pigtails. Now, you know, they're getting their lashes and weave done, and you're 12 and [00:52:00] 13 years old with lashes on. I don't understand that. So yeah, I would say television and media definitely has been replicated it—with the people that I'm surrounded by and that I see, I would say absolutely is. Ninety-six percent.

Starlet talks in a bit more detail about her entertainment work and her love to theatre. Side note, some would call this dramatic.

STARLET: Um, I would say what brought me to entertainment was the fact that I actually did this, you know, throughout my life. Stage plays, makeup, wigs, you know, I love music. Um, I love styling. I love uh, theatrical you know, uh, productions. And so I just took what I did in elementary, middle school, and I just continued to do it. Did it in high school. From there on, it has been something I continue for me, and I love it. Um, and it's just really—it's me. It's my life. It's-it's a part of who I am. But to answer your question, it is all of those elements dancing, singing um, you know, I'm like a lion king uh, Mufasa. [Laughing] [00:59:00] You know, type person. I just love theatrics. I love costuming. I love—my life is a stage. Yeah. Um, I'm a singer. And um, anything that involves entertainment is what-what I do, so.

APPENDIX F

Survey Study IRB



Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS) • 2800 Plymouth Rd., Building 520, Room 1170, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800 • phone (734) 936-0933 • fax (734) 998-9171 • irbhsbs@umich.edu

---

To: Jessica Moorman

From:

Thad Polk

Cc:

Kristen Harrison
Jessica Moorman

Subject: Notice of Exemption for [HUM00131882]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:
Title: Fatalistic Narratives, Sexual Risks - Survey
Full Study Title (if applicable):
Study eResearch ID: HUM00131882
Date of this Notification from IRB: 6/29/2017
Date of IRB Exempt Determination: 6/29/2017
UM Federalwide Assurance: FWA00004969 (For the current FWA expiration date, please visit the UM HRPP Webpage)
OHRP IRB Registration Number(s): IRB00000246

IRB EXEMPTION STATUS:
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SUBMITTING AMENDMENTS VIA eRESEARCH:
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ACCESSING EXEMPT STUDIES IN eRESEARCH:
Click the "Exempt and Not Regulated" tab in your eResearch home workspace to access this exempt study.



Thad Polk
Chair, IRB HSBS

APPENDIX G

Survey Study Measures Packet

1. **SCREENING QUESTIONS**
   - Age
   - Race
   - Gender
   - Heterosexual
   - Current Relationship Status

2. **DEMOGRAPHICS**
   - Ethnicity
   - Level of Education
   - Employment Status
   - Annual Income
   - Excerpt of Organizational Religiosity Sub-Scale (Taylor, Chatters, & Jackson, 2007)

3. **MEDIA, BLACK LOVE MEDIA, & INFLUENCE OF PRESUMED INFLUENCE**
   - Quantity of Media Use (Harrison et al., 2017)
   - Black Love TV Programs (Ward, 2016)
   - Black Love TV Quantity (Harrison et al., 2017)
   - Black Love Books (adapted Ward, 2016)
   - Black Love Books Quantity (Harrison et al., 2017)
   - Influence of Presumed Influence of Black Love Media (adapted from Gunther & Storey, 2003)

4. **RELATIONSHIP HISTORY, DESIRES FOR MARRIAGE**
   - Relationship History
   - Conflicts in Past Relationships Scale (adapted from Hudson & McIntosh, 1981)
   - Drive to Marry (Blakemore et al., 2005)
   - Family/Friends/Media Relationship Pressures Scale (Adapted from Thompson et al., 2009)
   - Single Stigma (adapted from King et al., 2007)

5. **RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS, GENDER BELIEFS, & RELATIONSHIP NORMS**
   - Heterosexual Scripts Scale (Seabrook et al., 2016)
   - Stereotypic Beliefs about Black Women (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004)
   - Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships Scale (Cole & Ward, 2016; West & Rose, 2000)

- Black Women's Descriptive Relationship Norms Scale (e.g. Van Oosten, Peter, & Vandenbosch, 2016)

6. TOLERANCE OF IPV & SEXUAL RISK IN ONES RELATIONSHIPS

- Forgiveness of IPV in relationships (adapted from Hudson & McIntosh, 1981)

SCREENING QUESTIONS

Your Age: _____

Please select your gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Other

What is your race? (Please check all that apply).

☐ Black/African American ☐ White/Caucasian ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
☐ Hispanic/Latino ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native ☐ Arab/Middle Eastern
☐ Other _____

Please select the category that best describes your current relationship status:

☐ Single, never married ☐ Married ☐ Unmarried but cohabiting w/ a long-term romantic partner
☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐ Separated, but still married

Do you identify as heterosexual (straight)? Y/N

NOTE: Participants who are not Black/African American, female, identify as heterosexual, between 25-45 years of age, and are married or cohabiting w/ a long-term romantic partner are not eligible to take the survey.

2. DEMOGRAPHICS

1. What is your ethnicity? Please select all that apply.

☐ African ☐ African-American ☐ Caribbean/West Indian
☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native ☐ Arab/Middle Eastern ☐ Asian/ Pacific Islander
☐ Hispanic/Latino ☐ Other _____

2. Please select the highest level of education that you have completed.

☐ none
☐ some grade school
☐ some high school
☐ high school
☐ professional certificate program
☐ associates degree
☐ some 4-year college
☐ 4-year college
☐ master's degree
☐ doctoral degree (MD, JD, PhD, etc…)

3. **What is your employment status? Are you currently:**

☐ Employed for wages, full time (include salaried work)
☐ Employed for wages, part time (include salaried work)
☐ Self-employed
☐ Stay-at-home parent
☐ Student
☐ Disabled
☐ Unemployed (Out of Work)

4. **Considering all sources, what is your annual income before taxes?:**

☐ $9,999 or less	☐ $10,000-$19,999	☐ $20,000 - $39,999
☐ $40,000 - $59,999	☐ $60,000 - $79,999	☐ $80,000 - $99,999
☐ $100,000 - $119,999	☐ $120,000 - $139,999	☐ $140,000 - $159,999
☐ $160,000 - $179,999	☐ $180,000 - $199,999	☐ $200,00 or more

5. **What is your religious affiliation?**

☐ Christian ☐ Muslim ☐ Jewish ☐ Buddhist ☐ Hindu ☐ No religious affiliation

☐ Other _____

6. **How frequently do you attend regular religious service (i.e. Sunday church service etc.)?**

☐ Attend nearly everyday (5)
☐ Attend at least once a week (4)
☐ A few times a month (3)
☐ A few times a year (2)
☐ Never attended services (except for weddings and funerals) (1)

7. **Besides regular service, how often do you take part in other activities at your church (i.e. bible study, etc.)**

☐ nearly everyday (5)
☐ Attend at least once a week (4)
☐ A few times a month (3)
☐ A few times a year (2)
☐ Never attended services (except for weddings and funerals) (1)

8. **How often do you pray?**

☐ nearly everyday (5)
☐ At least once a week (4)
☐ A few times a month (3)
☐ A few times a year (2)
☐ Never (1)

3. MEDIA, BLACK LOVE MEDIA, & BELIEFS ABOUT THE MEDIA

Quantity of Media Use (Harrison et al., 2016)
1. Television

How many hours a day do you watch TV? (include Live TV, On Demand program, streaming services Hulu, Netflix)											
Typical Weekday (Mon-Fri)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
Typical Weekend (Sat & Sun)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
2. Movies											
How many hours a day do you watch movies?											
Typical Weekday (Mon-Fri)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
Typical Weekend (Sat & Sun)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
3. Magazines											
How many hours a day do you read magazines? (include subscriptions and waiting rooms)											
Typical Weekday (Mon-Fri)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
Typical Weekend (Sat & Sun)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
4. Social Media											
How many hours a day do you use social media? (include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.)											
Typical Weekday (Mon-Fri)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
Typical Weekend (Sat & Sun)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
5. Books											
How many hours a day do you spend reading books?											
Typical Weekday (Mon-Fri)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
Typical Weekend (Sat & Sun)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs

Now we'd like to ask you about the "Black Love" media you consume. Specifically we are interested in television shows and advice books that explore love, sex, dating, relationships, and marriage. These television shows, movies, social media accounts, blogs, and advice books that feature Black characters, are written or produced by Black creative teams, or explore prominent features of Black women's experiences.

Quantity of Black Love Media Use (Harrison et al., 2016)											
How much time a week do you spend watching TV shows like the ones above?											
Typical Weekday (Mon-Fri)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
Typical Weekend Day (Sat & Sun)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs

Quantity of Black Love Books (Harrison et al., 2016)											
How much time a week do you spend reading advice books like the ones above?											
Typical Weekday (Mon-Fri)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs
Typical Weekend Day (Sat & Sun)	0	15 min	30 min	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	5 hrs	6 hrs	7 hrs	8+ hrs

INFLUENCE OF PRESUMED INFLUENCE (Gunther & Storey, 2003)

The following questions ask you to think about the influence Black Love media have on other single Black women and men. For this first set of questions you will be asked about the extent to which other **single Black women** do and believe the following things because of Black Love media.	
USE: (SLIDER) Use: 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%...100%	
What percentage of single Black women:	
1.	Pick romantic partners based on characteristics approved of by Black Love media.
2.	Date according to "the rules" laid out in Black Love media.
3.	Change their appearance to conform to beauty standards presented in Black Love media.
4.	Want romantic relationships like those presented in Black Love media.
5.	Apply the dating "tips and tricks" presented in Black Love media.
6.	Look to Black Love media for guidance about romantic relationships.
7.	Change their approach to dating based on advice offered in Black Love media.
8.	Look to Black Love media for guidance about sex.
Answer the next set of questions for **single Black men**. Continue to use the slider to indicate what percentage of single Black men do and believe the following things because of Black Love media.	
What percentage of single Black men:	
1.	Pick romantic partners based on characteristics approved of by Black Love media.
2.	Date according to "the rules" laid out in Black Love media.
3.	Want partners who look like the women in Black Love media.
4.	Want romantic relationships like those presented in Black Love media.
5.	Apply the dating "tips and tricks" presented in Black Love media.
6.	Look to Black Love media for guidance about romantic relationships.
7.	Change their approach to dating based on advice offered in Black Love media.
8.	Look to Black Love media for guidance about sex.

4. RELATIONSHIP HISTORY, DESIRES FOR MARRIAGE, SINGLE STIGMA

Next we'd like to ask you about your past experience of relationships, views on marriage, and experience of being single.

RELATIONSHIP HISTORY						
1.	Have you ever been married?	Y	N			
2.	Have you ever lived (cohabited) with a romantic partner?	Y	N			
3.	Are you currently engaged to be married?	Y	N			

4. Who do you find sexually attractive?

☐ Men exclusively ☐ Mostly men and sometimes women ☐ Men and women equally

☐ Mostly women and sometimes men ☐ Women exclusively

☐ Other _____

5. How many people are you currently romantically involved with? Include casual and committed relationships e.g. dating, seeing, hanging out with, "talking to." Include relationships with women as well as men.

☐ 0 – not currently romantically involved with anyone ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 or more people

6. How many sexual partners do you currently have? Include relationships with women as well as men.

☐ 0 – not currently sexually active ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8
☐ 9 ☐ 10 or more

7. *If participants state they are not sexually active they will be asked*: **Are you celibate?** Y/N

8. How many children do you currently have? Do not include a current pregnancy.

☐ 0 – no children ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 or more children

9. Are you currently pregnant? Y/N

10. Do you want children in the future? Y/N/Don't Know

RELATIONSHIP RISK HISTORY			
In your adult life (18 years of age or older), has a romantic partner ever:			
1.	Belittled you intellectually.	Y	N
2.	Slapped you in your face or head.	Y	N
3.	Had sex with another person while in a relationship with you (cheated on you).	Y	N
4.	Punched you with his fists.	Y	N
5.	Made you perform sex acts that you did not enjoy or like.	Y	N
6.	Mocked you or called you names.	Y	N
7.	Demanded you have sex with him whether you wanted to or not.	Y	N
8.	Prevented you from seeing friends or family.	Y	N
9.	Screamed or yelled at you.	Y	N
10.	Hurt you so badly you had to seek medical attention.	Y	N
11.	Given you a sexually transmitted disease.	Y	N
12.	Forced you to have sex when you did not want to.	Y	N

DRIVE TO MARRY SCALE (Blakemore et al., 2005)							
The following questions concern your views about marrying. To answer them, think about marriage itself, as much as possible without considering either its potential economic benefits or your relationship with a particular partner.							
Use 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly							
1.	I can't wait to get married.	1	2	3	4	5	
2.	Being married will make me feel proud.	1	2	3	4	5	
3.	I feel I will have achieved a major life goal when I get married	1	2	3	4	5	
4.	Becoming engaged would be one of the most exciting things that could happen to me	1	2	3	4	5	
5.	Getting married is not one of my top priorities. (R)	1	2	3	4	5	

Pressure about Romantic Relationships Scale (Adapted from SATA-Q, Thompson et al., 2011)
Please read each of the following items carefully and indicate the number that best reflects your agreement with the statement.
Definitely Disagree = **1**; Mostly Disagree = **2**; Neither Agree Nor Disagree = **3**; Mostly Agree = **4**; Definitely Agree = **5**
Answer the following questions with relevance to your FAMILY (include parents, brothers,

sisters, relatives):					
My family encourages me to have a boyfriend (e.g. romantic partner).	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I feel pressure from my family to fall in love.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
My family encourages me to get married.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
My family pressures me to start a family.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I feel pressure from my family to stay single. (R)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Answer the following questions with relevance to your PEERS (include close friends and other social contacts):					
My peers encourage me to have a boyfriend (e.g. romantic partner).	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I feel pressure from my peers to fall in love.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I feel pressure from my peers to get married.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I feel pressure from my peers to start a family.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
My peers encourage me to stay single. (R)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Answer the following questions with relevance to the MEDIA (include television, magazines, the internet, movies, billboards, and advertisements):					
I feel pressure from the media to have a boyfriend (e.g. romantic partner).	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I feel pressure from the media to fall in love.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I feel pressure from the media to get married.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I feel pressure from the media to start a family.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I feel pressure from the media to stay single. (R)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

SINGLE STIGMA (adapted from King et al., 2007)							
Use 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly							
1.	I have been discriminated against because of being single.	1	2	3	4	5	
2.	Sometimes I feel that I am being talked down to because I am single.	1	2	3	4	5	
3.	Being single makes me a more understanding person.	1	2	3	4	5	
4.	I do not feel bad about being single.	1	2	3	4	5	
5.	I worry about telling people I am single.	1	2	3	4	5	
6.	Single people are dangerous.	1	2	3	4	5	
7.	People have been understanding of my being single.	1	2	3	4	5	
8.	I have been discriminated against by government agencies (SSI, police) because I am single.	1	2	3	4	5	
9.	Being single has made me more accepting of other people.	1	2	3	4	5	
10.	Very often I feel alone because I am single.	1	2	3	4	5	
11.	I am scared of how other people will react if they found out of my being single.	1	2	3	4	5	
12.	I would have better chances in life if I was not single.	1	2	3	4	5	
13.	I do not mind people in my community (neighborhood) knowing I'm single.	1	2	3	4	5	
14.	I would say I am single if I was applying for a job.	1	2	3	4	5	
15.	People's reactions to my being single make me keep to myself.	1	2	3	4	5	
16.	I am angry with the way people have reacted to my being single.	1	2	3	4	5	
17.	I have not had any trouble from people because I am single.	1	2	3	4	5	
18.	I have been discriminated against by health professionals because I am single.	1	2	3	4	5	
19.	People have avoided me because I am single.	1	2	3	4	5	
20.	People have insulted me because I am single.	1	2	3	4	5	
21.	Being single has made me a stronger person.	1	2	3	4	5	
22.	I do not feel embarrassed about being single.	1	2	3	4	5	

23.	I avoid telling people about my relationship status.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Being single makes me feel that life is unfair.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	I feel the need to hide being single from my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	I find it hard telling people I am single.	1	2	3	4	5

5. PRESSURE FOR RELATIONSHIPS, GENDER BELIEFS, & RELATIONSHIP NORMS

Heterosexual Script Measure Seabrook et al., (2016)

What do you think about dating and heterosexual relationships?
There are a lot of opinions about what dating is like and how relationships work between women and men. Next to each statement below, circle the letters that best represent how much you agree with each of the following statements.

SD=strongly disagree D=disagree DL=disagree a little AL=agree a little A=agree SA=strongly agree

HOW MUCH DO **YOU** AGREE THAT:

	1.	Women with a lot of "experience" should expect a bad reputation.
	2.	Most men don't want to be "just friends" with a woman.
	3.	No matter what she says, a woman isn't really happy unless she's in a relationship.
	4.	A woman should be willing to make personal sacrifices in order to satisfy her partner.
	5.	Men like to play the field and shouldn't be expected to stay with one partner for too long.
	6.	The best way for a woman to attract a boyfriend is to use her body and her looks.
	7.	In the dating game, men frequently compete with each other for partners, and women try to lure or catch partners.
	8.	Men who are able to date a lot of women (players) are considered cool.
	9.	Being with an attractive woman gives a man prestige.
	10.	It's only natural for a man to make advances on someone he finds attractive.
	11.	Men are always ready for sex.
	12.	It is natural for a man to want to admire or check out other women, even if he is dating someone.
	13.	Women should do whatever they need to (e.g., use make-up, buy attractive clothes, work out) to look good enough to attract a date/partner.
	14.	Men are more interested in physical relationships and girls are more interested in emotional relationships.
	15.	Men should be the ones to ask women out and to initiate physical contact.
	16.	A woman wants a man because she wants someone to protect her.
	17.	Women like to admire men's bodies & are attracted most to men who are muscular & handsome.
	18.	There is nothing wrong with a man being primarily interested in a woman's body.
	19.	Women are attracted most to a man with a lot of money.
	20.	Sometimes women have to do things they don't want to do to keep their partner (e.g. boyfriend) happy.
	21.	A man should always protect and defend his woman.
	22.	It is up to women to keep things from "moving too fast" sexually.

Stereotypic Beliefs about Black Women (adapted from Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004)

This scale is used to determine attitudes and beliefs. There are no right or wrong answers. Please use the following scale to complete the questions.
Use: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = undecided; 2 = disagree; and 1 = strongly disagree.

	1.	Black women are often loud and obnoxious.

	2.	Black women are all about sex.
	3.	Back women have to be strong to survive.
	4,	Black women need to nag other to get a response.
	5.	Black women will use sex to get what they want.
	6.	Men can be controlled with sex.
	7.	If given a chance, Black women will put down Black men.
	8.	Black women are often treated as sex objects.
	9.	I am often expected to take care of family members.
	10.	If I fall apart, I will be a failure.
	11.	Black women are usually angry with others.
	12.	I often put aside my own needs to help others.
	13.	I often feel ignored by others.
	14.	I find it difficult to ask others for help.
	15.	I feel guilty when I put my own needs before others.
	16.	I do not want others to know if I experience a problem.
	17.	People often expect me to take care of them.
	18.	People respond to me more if I am loud and angry.
	19.	I tell others that I am fine when I am depressed or down.
	20.	People treat me as if I am a sex object.
	21.	It is difficult for me to share problems with others.
	22.	I should not expect nurturing from others.
	23.	I am hardly ever satisfied.
	24.	Black women are out to get your man.
	25.	I often have to put someone in their place, read them, or check them.
	26.	Black women are gold-diggers (i.e. hoochies, THOTs)
	27.	I often threaten to cuss someone out.
	28.	Sex is a weapon.
	29.	I am overworked, overwhelmed, and/or underappreciated.
	30.	Black women are demanding.
	31.	I am always helping someone else.
	32.	I will let people down if I take time out for myself.
	33.	It is easy for me to tell other people my problems.
	34.	I feel guilty if I cannot help someone.

Antagonist Beliefs about Black Relationships Scale (Ward & Cole, 2016; West & Rose, 2000)		
SD=strongly disagree D=disagree DL=disagree a little AL=agree a little A=agree SA=strongly agree		
	1.	Too many Black men date and marry outside the race.
	2.	Black women have too much control and power in their families.
	3.	Many Black men, without realizing it, have helped to keep the Black woman down because of their low regard for her.
	4.	All Black men have a little “dog” in them.
	5.	Black men don’t respect Black women.
	6.	It’s a Black woman’s job to make her man feel like a king.
	7.	Even if a woman makes a lot of money at work, she still needs to let man be the “man of the house.”
	8.	If a woman doesn’t let a man know how to treat her, it’s her own fault if she gets played.
	9.	Many Black men are reluctant to date Black women because men think Black women have too much attitude.
	10.	Because there aren’t enough good Black men to go around, sometimes Black women have to expect

		to share their men.
	11.	Black men are threatened by Black women who are too successful or too smart.
	12.	It's a Black man's job to make his woman feel like a queen.

Descriptive Norms about Dating and Relationships (e.g. Van Oosten, Peter, & Vandenbosch, 2016)	
Please estimate the percent Black Americans that do the following. About what percent of:	
(SLIDER) Use: 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%...	
1.	Black women will get married in their lifetime?
2.	Black women between ages 25-45 years of age are single (i.e. unmarried)?
3.	Black women between the ages of 25-45 are single mothers?
4.	Black men in the U.S. 25-45 years of age or older are currently in prison or jail?
5.	Black men ages 25-45 are single (i.e. unmarried)?
6.	Single (unmarried) Black men 25-45 years of age are gay?
7.	Married Black men are married to women who are not Black?
8.	Black men 25-45 years of age are single fathers?
9.	Marriages between a Black man and Black woman will end in divorce?

6. RELATIONSHIP OUTCOME VARIABLES

This final set of questions is designed to measure what you would be willing to tolerate from a partner in order to preserve a committed long-term relationship like a marriage or live-in partnership. There are no right or wrong answers. Answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can.

FORGIVENESS IN RELATIONSHIPS (adapted Hudson & McIntosh, 1981)		
This questionnaire is designed to measure what actions you would be willing to forgive in order to preserve a committed long-term relationship like a marriage or live-in partnership. There are no right or wrong answers. Answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can.		
1=Very Unwilling 2= Unwilling 3= Neither willing or unwilling 4=Willing 5= Very Willing		
I WOULD BE WILLING TO STAY MARRIED TO MY HUSBAND IF:		
	1.	Belittled me.
	2.	Demanded obedience to his whims.
	3.	Became surly and angry if I told him he was drinking too much.
	4.	Made me perform sex acts that I do not enjoy or like.
	5.	Becomes very upset if dinner, housework, or laundry is not done when he thinks is should be.
	6.	Was jealous or suspicious of my friends.
	7.	Punched me with his fists.
	8.	Told me I am ugly and unattractive.
	9.	Told me I really couldn't manage or take care of myself without him.
	10.	Acted like I am his personal servant.
	11.	Insulted or shamed me in front of others.
	12.	Became very angry if I disagreed with his point of view.
	13.	Threatened me with a weapon.
	14.	Was in stingy contributing enough money to run our home.
	15.	Belittled me intellectually.
	16.	Demanded that I stay home to take care of our children.
	17.	Beat me so badly that I must seek medical help.

	18.	Felt that I should not work or go to school.
	19.	Was not a kind person.
	20.	Does not want me to socialize with my female friends.
	21.	Demanded sex whether I wanted it or not.
	22.	Screamed and yelled at me.
	23.	Slapped me around my face and head.
	24.	Became abusive when he drank (or used drugs).
	25.	Ordered me around.
	26.	Had no respect for my feelings.
	27.	Acted like a bully towards me.
	28.	Frightened me.
	29.	Treated me like I was stupid..
	30.	Acted like he would like to kill me.
	31.	Slept with another person, just once.
	32.	Slept with slept with numerous other people.
	33.	Had an ongoing sexual relationship with another person.
	34.	Had a child with another woman outside of our relationship.
	35.	Tested positive for a curable STI or STD that I did not give him.
	36.	Gave her a curable STI or STD like Gonorrhea or Chlamydia.
	37.	Gave her an incurable STD like Herpes or HIV.