

California State University, San Bernardino

**CSUSB ScholarWorks**

---

Theses Digitization Project

John M. Pfau Library

---

2000

## African American males' attitudes toward marriage

Monique Townsend

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project>



Part of the [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), and the [Multicultural Psychology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Townsend, Monique, "African American males' attitudes toward marriage" (2000). *Theses Digitization Project*. 1695.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/1695>

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' ATTITUDES

TOWARD MARRIAGE

---

A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

---

by

Monique Townsend

June 2000

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' ATTITUDES  
TOWARD MARRIAGE


---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

by  
Monique Townsend  
June 2000

Approved by:

  
Dr. Morley Glick, Project Advisor,  
Department of Social Work

5-15-00  
Date

  
Dr. Rosemary McCaslin,  
Chair of Research Sequence  
Department of Social Work

## ABSTRACT

Marriage has been cited in numerous studies as enhancing the emotional, psychological, and physical well being of adults. Despite the benefits associated with marriage, African Americans have lower than average marriage rates in the United States. Approximately two-thirds of African Americans are single (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). This study presents the results from an exploratory study that measured 71 African American males' attitudes toward marriage, their ideal marriage partner, and their attitudes toward African American women. The findings indicate that overall the respondents expressed a positive attitude toward marriage, especially among the married men. However, men who were in lower socioeconomic status viewed marriage more negatively. The respondents desired their ideal mate to be educated and financially stable. The respondents also expressed positive attitudes toward African American women. Limitations of the study and social work implications are discussed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the courage and strength He has given me to complete this project.

In recognition of Anthony King, whose work with African Americans and marriage fueled my interests in this area.

I want to thank my family, my husband Durrell, and my parents, Ronnie and Vada Wright, for their words of encouragement, love, and support. Thank you, Auntie Toni, for helping me with collecting the data and giving me new ideas to explore.

I also want to thank my classmates, Christine and Tuwasha, for always being there for me when I needed a shoulder to cry on.

Thank you, Dr. Glicken, for guiding me through this whole process.

Lastly, I want to thank Sally Richter and Cheryl Epler for the wisdom they bestowed upon me throughout my academic career.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
INTRODUCTION .....	iv
Problem Statement .....	1
Literature Review .....	5
METHOD .....	14
Purpose and Design of Study .....	14
Research Hypothesis .....	14
Sampling .....	14
Data Collection and Instruments .....	15
Procedures .....	16
Protection of Human Subjects .....	17
RESULTS .....	18
Demographic Characteristics of Sample .....	18
Attitudes Toward Marriage .....	21
Characteristics of An Ideal Marriage Partner .....	22
Attitudes Toward African American Women .....	25
Analysis .....	26
DISCUSSION .....	28
Limitations of Study .....	30
Social Work Implications .....	31

APPENDIX .....	32
Appendix A: Questionnaire .....	32
Appendix B: Informed Consent .....	39
Appendix C: Debriefing Statement .....	40
REFERENCES .....	41

## LIST OF TABLES

- Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample: Age, Occupation, Religion, Education Level, Income Range, Marital Status, Dating Preference, and Who the Raised the Respondent (page 18).
- Table 2. Responses Concerning Attitudes Toward Marriage and Percent Distribution (page 21).
- Table 3. Responses Concerning Characteristics Of An Ideal Marriage Partner and Percent Distribution (page 23).
- Table 4. Responses Concerning Attitudes About African American Women and Percent Distribution (page 25).
- Table 5. Analysis of Statements Concerning Marriage and Demographic Variables (page 27).



## INTRODUCTION

### Problem Statement

In the United States, patterns of family formation have undergone a number of noteworthy changes. During the previous two decades, the divorce rate has nearly tripled, and the percentage of children living in single-parent homes has doubled (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). More specifically among these new changes is the decline in marriage rates which are associated with: 1) higher rates of out-of-wedlock births, 2) an increase in single female-headed households, and 3) a larger percentage of children living in poverty (Cazenave & Smith, 1990). Although these changes have been pervasive throughout American society, they have been displayed more sharply among the African American population (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).

Over the past 25 years, marriage rates among African Americans have declined dramatically (Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1995). In 1970, less than 25% of African American men had never married (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995). By 1994, the percent of never-married men had increased to 42.4% (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995). However, fifty years prior, African American men and women were far more likely to have

married by the age of twenty-four (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). In today's modern society only one-quarter of black women and less than 1 out of every 8 black men are married by their early twenties (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).

According to King (1999) declining marriage rates among African American men have had a tremendous impact on the quality of life of African American families, especially children.

Moreover, studies suggest that African American men do not marry because social and economic conditions are not conducive to making such a commitment (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). Subsequently, African American men and women marry later, are more likely to divorce, and far more likely to live alone (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).

Most social scientists attribute declining marriage rates among this population to social and economic factors such as a high sex-ratio imbalance and the economic instability of African American men (Hill, 1993). The sex ratio imbalance suggest that the number of Black men to Black women is low, therefore Black men who are considered marriage material have room to "play" because they have more viable alternatives readily available to them which

deter their decision to marry (King, 1999). The economic theory suggests that Black men are less attractive as potential husbands and therefore are less confident about their ability to support a family and choose not to marry (Taylor et al., 1997). Also, according to Gibbs (1988) the decline in marriage rates among African American men can be attributed to the lack of financial resources required to support a family. The difficulties African American males' encounter fulfilling the provider role has rendered them less attractive marital partners, which in turn has weakened their willingness and ability to marry (Dickson, 1993). However, in the past, African American men were more than willing to marry in spite of their economic circumstances (King, 1999). In 1917, the overwhelming majority of African American men were married despite blatant segregation and discrimination in our American economy (King, 1999).

Moreover, decreasing marriage rates pose a negative impact on African American men as well. Numerous research studies have found that married individuals in general, and married males in particular, tend to be happier and healthier than single persons (King, 1999). According to Gibbs (1988) over the last decade, African American men

have experienced a general decline in their overall quality of life compared to other ethnic and racial groups.

Furthermore, several scholars have claimed interpersonal conflict between African American men and women as contributing to the unwillingness of Black men to marry (Cazenave & Smith, 1990, Dickson, 1993, Staples & Johnson-Boulin, 1993). The key difference between Black and non-Black marriage patterns lie in the nature of the male-female relationship and how that affects the marriage exchange (Taylor et al., 1997). In today's society there seems to be longstanding myths and stereotypes about Black men and Black women that could be contributing to the way in which interpersonal relationships are formed and maintained. Some of these myths may include the following:

- 1) Black men are lazy.
- 2) Black men are not responsible.
- 3) Black women are too aggressive.
- 4) Black women don't know how to treat Black men.

Despite these stereotypes associated with the attitudes and behaviors of Black men and women, "the essence of Black family and community life has been a positive, constructive and even heroic experience" (Marable, 1986 p. 67).

Furthermore, there is also evidence to suggest that some African American men find marriage and fatherhood

satisfying. According to Broman (1988) older age, being married, and parenting a minor child were associated with higher ratings of family satisfaction. Another study conducted by the National Survey of Black Americans (1988) revealed that on the whole, African American husbands and fathers rate their performance on spousal and parental roles favorably and reported being very satisfied with their family life.

In conclusion, declining marriage rates have a negative affect on African American men, women and children. Therefore there is an urgent need to understand why African American men are less likely to marry in our society given the negative affects not being married has on this population. Utilizing a post-positivist paradigm, this research proposal is a small attempt to understand some of the attitudes that Black men in particular have about marriage, relationships, and of Black women.

### Literature Review

In today's modern society the institution of marriage and family has faced considerable changes within the last several decades. Compared with previous generations, Americans marry later, are far more likely to divorce, and are more likely than ever to raise children in single-

parent homes (James & Tucker, 1996). Henceforth, greater proportions of people are remaining single.

Although our democratic society affords individuals the choice to marry or to stay single, the decision to marry remains a preferred lifestyle within Western societies. Marriage also has been cited in past research as having advantages over remaining single. According to King (1999) marriage is unique and important for several reasons: 1) marital relationships bind men and women together in a legal, reciprocal, and meaningful relationship that same-gender friendships and non-marital relationships are unable to replicate. 2) Marriage is a legally sanctioned relationship between adult men and women that provides them with perhaps the most social and economic benefits. 3) Marital relationships are directly responsible for the development of complicated webs of associations, interactions, and reciprocal obligations that benefit spouses, their families, and local communities. 4) Marital relationships provide boys and girls with the opportunity to learn how to develop intimate, mutually respectful, and supportive relationships. Coombs (1991) found that married individuals tend to be happier, healthier, and less stressed than single individuals,

2

especially among men. Whereas separated and divorced individuals are less satisfied with their lives than married individuals (Broman, 1988).

However, African Americans are the largest group of single individuals in America (Davis & Emerson, 1997). According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1994), approximately two thirds of African Americans are single. African Americans also have lower-than-average-marriage rates and higher-than-average divorce rates (Fosset & Kiecolt, 1993). Why is there such a large proportion of single African Americans in this country? Past research has cited two main reasons that have contributed to the changes in African American family formation: 1) sex-ratio imbalance, and 2) male economic viability (James & Tucker, 1996). In 1990, there were only 88 males for every 100 females (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). Furthermore, the large percentage of men who are unemployed, underemployed, imprisoned, and/or suffering from drug abuse or mental illness have contributed to the shortage of marriageable African American men (King, 1999). Henceforth, with this low ratio of available men to women, researchers believe that as many as 25% of African American women will never marry (Davis & Emerson, 1997).

Currently, African American men are said to be in a socioeconomic crisis. African American men are confronting increased risk of death by violent crime, more contact with the judicial system, imprisonment, decreased opportunities for education advancement, and unemployment (Bethea, 1995). Restricted prospects for gainful employment make it difficult for African American men to assume the traditional responsibility of husbands and fathers (South, 1993). In May 1997, the unemployment rate for African American males was 8.2% compared to 3% for white males (Dixon, 1998). However, it is well documented that historical and current discrimination contribute to higher levels of unemployment among African American men (Dixon, 1998).

Exactly how has the decline in family formation (getting married and raising children) affected the African American population? Contrary to popular belief, declining rates of marriage among African Americans appears to have adverse consequences for this particular population. According to South (1993) racial differences in poverty among women and children are attributed largely to differences in family structure, especially the inordinate prevalence of female-headed households among African



American women (Eggebeen & Lichter, 1991). Although these differences have their roots in racial discrimination and inequality, South (1993) indicates the key source to this issue lies in the racial differences in female marriage rates. Moreover, declining marriage rates among African American women are without a doubt linked to rising out of wedlock births, single-parent, female headed families, and child poverty (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). According to Thompson-Seaborn and Ensmunger (1989) long-term, single parenting causes chronic stress among poor African American women. Furthermore, single female-headed households has been one of the most dramatic socioeconomic changes taken place within American families, especially among African Americans. In the United States White women constitute 19.5% of single female-headed homes, whereas Black women make up 57.5% and Hispanics 29.8% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). Specifically among Black children only 33.1% live with both parents compared to 75.9% of White children and 66.3% of Hispanic children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996b). Furthermore, according to Sweet and Bumpass (1987) African American children raised in single female-headed households are three times more likely to be impoverished than children raised by two-

parent families. Since 1970, the major source of growth experienced by Black women was due to the increase in the number of never married women (McLanahan & Casper, 1995).

Therefore, the increase in the proportions of births to unmarried Black women has been particularly dramatic. In 1994, 25% of births to White women and 70% to Black women were to unmarried mothers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). According to Taylor (et al., 1997) the increase in out-of-wedlock births is partially due to the decline in the propensity of couples to marry before the birth of a child. In our society today, attitudes about sex and marriage have become far more liberal than in the past. This new acceptance of premarital sex, cohabiting, and waiting until later in life to get married has placed a large proportion of society at risk for having a child out-of-wedlock. Increases in out-of-wedlock births have directly contributed to the high rate of female-headed households (Taylor et al., 1997).

Furthermore, the increasing poverty rates among African American children have placed them at greater risk for various social problems as well. According to Taylor (et al., 1997) poor African American children face higher rates of teenage pregnancy, poor

academic performance, juvenile delinquency, and criminal victimization. Furthermore, in 1995, 16.2% of all White children lived in families that had below poverty incomes compared to 41.9% of Black children and 40% of Hispanic children (Taylor et al., 1997). Research has shown that poverty among White children maybe a short-term occurrence, whereas Black children have a high likelihood of living in chronic poverty (Duncan & Rogers, 1988). According to Taylor (et al., 1997) the high incidence of poverty among Black children is due to a variety of factors including the lower earnings of Black men relative to White men and the higher rates of female-headed households among African Americans. A child's living arrangements has been linked to the rates of childhood poverty. It has been found that about half of the growth in child poverty during the 1980's can be attributed to changing family structure (Eggeban & Lichter, 1991).

Furthermore, the decline in marriage rates can also be attributed to socialization. As mentioned earlier, being single is more acceptable now than in the past. Between 1969 and 1985 the percentage of Americans who felt premarital sex was wrong dropped from 68% to 39% (Gallup Report, 1987). Also, among African American males,

attitudes towards sex, relationships and marriage have been and are considered more liberal than their female counterparts (King, 1999).

Therefore, it is of importance to study the attitudes among African Americans, men in particular, regarding marriage since not being married appears to have multiple consequences for this population in the long run. As South (1993) points out, studies pertaining to marital decline and sex-ratio imbalance almost always stresses the racial differences among women, but few examine the implications for men.

In particular, what has past research said about African American males' attitudes toward marriage? According to Anderson (1990) poor, young Black women embrace middle-class norms regarding marriage and family. However, young Black men express greater reluctance to marriage. Although African American men gain more financially from marriage than Caucasian men, African American men perceive a wife and child as a greater economic burden (Anderson, 1989). Furthermore, past research has indicated that African American men retreat from marriage because of its destructive influence on ties to friends and associates (Anderson, 1989). Another

perspective on the African American males' reluctance to marry is that it puts constraints on their personal freedom because women are thought of as having control over the male's personal life (Anderson, 1989). The cultural myth that African American women are too domineering and "wear the pants in the relationship" maybe a perception contributing to the fear men have about loosing their personal freedom. Therefore, being involved in a marital relationship is viewed as a sign of weakness for men.

Lastly, it is said that gender imbalances plays a part in the reluctance of African American males' desire to marry. Racial differences in sex ratios imply that, relative to their White counterparts, unmarried Black men have available to them greater numbers of potential sexual partners (Taylor et. al, 1990). This implies that African American men are using the sex ratio imbalance to their advantage. The numerous alternatives make it unnecessary to commit to a stable relationship, despite past research that has shown increased sexual relations as a benefit of marriage (South, 1992).

## METHOD

### Purpose and Design of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes African American males have toward marriage, their ideal spouse, and about African American women in general. Utilizing a post-positivist paradigm, this research explored small trends or associations among the perceptions that African American men have on these issues.

### Research Hypothesis

- 1) Considering the disproportionate amounts of single, female-headed households among African American women, men reared in two-parent households will have more positive attitudes toward marriage than men reared in single, female-headed households.
- 2) Taking into consideration the unemployment and underemployment rates among African American men, men in low socioeconomic status will find marriage less desirable and have more negative attitudes toward marriage than men in higher socioeconomic status.

### Sampling

A non-probability, convenience sample was taken from 71 African American male participants. A convenience

sample was best suited for obtaining this sample size because of time restrictions.

#### Data Collection and Instruments

This convenience sample of African American males was solicited at barber shops, a college university, and various other public places to participate in this voluntary study regarding their attitudes about marriage. Participants were given a 40 item questionnaire consisting of statements concerning marriage, perceptions of the respondent's ideal marriage partner, and perceptions the respondents has about African American women. The statements were taken from a study conducted by King (1999) (see appendix A). These statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) undecided, (4) agree and (5) strongly agree. Also, ten demographic variables were included in the survey. The respondent's age, occupation, religious preference, years of education, marital status, number of dependent children, racial preference of spouse, and adults who raised respondent were elicited through fixed choice items (see questionnaire in Appendix A). These statements attempt to measure five dimensions of African American male attitudes toward marriage: a) the extent to which respondents value

marriage in general, b) respondents' perceptions of the impact marriage has on an individual's personal development or maturity, c) the relative importance of marriage, d) respondents' perceptions of their friends', acquaintances', and family members' commitment to marriage, and e) whether respondents felt marriage is as advantageous now as it was in the past. This current body of research will attempt to replicate his study using a population of African American men.

### Procedures

A non-probability convenience sample was obtained for this post-positivist research study. The data was gathered by soliciting African American males to complete the attitude questionnaire.

### Protection of Human Subjects

The confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were protected by not requiring respondents to sign the consent form or place their name on any part of the questionnaire. Respondents consented to participating in the study by simply placing a check mark and date on the consent form. Respondents received a copy of the consent form and the debriefing statement. Respondents were also given refreshments for their participation. After data



were inputted into the computer for statistical analysis  
the data was destroyed.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample: Age, Occupation, Religion, Education Level, Income Range, Marital Status, Dating Preference, and Who Raised the Respondent

AGE		EDUCATION LEVEL (yrs)		INCOME RANGE	
Mdn	30.0	Mdn	14.0	\$30,000-\$45,000	
M	31.49	M	13.71	\$30,000-\$45,000	
SD	9.33	SD	3.30	2.4	

OCCUPATION	n	%	RELIGION	n	%
Student	16	22.5%	Baptist	24	33.8%
Blue Collar	27	38%	Christian	11	15.5%
White Collar	25	35.2%	Other	30	42.3%
Self-Employed	1	1.4%	No Pref.	3	4.2%

MARITAL STATUS	n	%	DATING PREF.	n	%
Married	25	35.21%	African Am.	51	71.8%
Never Married	46	64.79%	Caucasian	6	8.5%
			Asian	1	1.4%
			Hispanic	5	7%

MARITAL PREF.	n	%	RAISED BY	n	%
African Am.	22	31%	Mom	25	35.2%
Caucasian	1	1.4%	Dad	3	4.2%
Asian	1	1.4%	Mom and Dad	38	53.5%
Hispanic	1	1.4%	Grandparents	1	1.4%
No Pref.	40	56.3%	Other	2	2.8%

\*Responses included in the "Other" category of religion include: Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Holiness, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal, and Muslim.

The results of this study are from the responses of 71 African American male participants. Their ages ranged from 18 to 73 years. The average age of the participants was 31 years old.

Of the respondents forty-six (65%) reported being single, with hopes of getting married within the next three years. Twenty-five participants (35%) reported being married an average of three years.

Fifty-three of the participants (75%) were employed. Two of the participants did not respond to this question. There was almost an equal number of participants who worked both in professional employment (35.2%) and blue collar employment (38%). Sixteen participants (22.5%) responded as being students. One participant reported being self-employed (1.4%). The average income range for this sample was from \$30,000 to \$45,000 a year.

Educational levels reported by the participants included equal percentages for both high school graduates (19.7%) and a two year college education (19.7%). Twelve participants reported having completed four years of college (16.9%).

The majority of the participants (33.8%) indicated they were Baptist. Eleven participants (15.5%) were

Christian. Three participants (4.2%) indicated they had no religious preference while the remaining 30 participants affiliated themselves with various other religious preferences. Three participants chose not to answer this question.

More than half of the participants (N=38) reported being raised by both their mother and father (53.5%). Twenty-five participants reported being raised by their mother (35.2%).

Fifty-one of the male participants reported dating African American women (71.8%). Six indicated they date Caucasian women (8.5%), five date Hispanic women (7%), and one reported dating an Asian woman (1.4%). Eight of the participants (11.3%) did not answer this question.

However, the vast majority of the participants indicated that they had no particular racial preference for the person they must marry (56.3%). Twenty-two of the participants stated that their spouse must be an African American woman (31%). One participant indicated he must marry a Caucasian woman (1.4%), while another indicated he must marry a Hispanic women (1.4%).

## Attitudes Toward Marriage

Table 2 presents the responses to the nine statements concerning attitudes toward marriage.

Table 2

Responses Concerning Attitudes Toward Marriage and Percent Distribution  
(N=71)

Statements	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %
1. Everyone should want to get married.	18	23	20	25	14
2. Marriage helps individuals mature.	21	44	14	13	6
3. A successful career is as satisfying as successful marriage.	17	25	18	24	16
4. A successful career should be more important than a successful marriage.	9	7	13	44	27
5. Being married stifles individual growth.	6	10	9	51	25
6. A successful marriage should be more important than a successful career.	18	28	16	28	10
7. The people I know, are less committed to marriage than in the past.	17	44	16	17	7
8. There are fewer advantages to marriage now than there were in the past.	4	23	24	35	14
9. The people I know are more committed to marriage now than in the past.	4	9	18	52	17

\*Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Although the respondents felt marriage wasn't for everyone, they did feel being married helps people mature and doesn't stifle individual growth. They also felt that a successful career is as satisfying as a successful marriage, but a career was not more important than one's marriage. Even though they felt that marriage has more advantages now than in the past, they still felt people today are less committed to marriage now than in the past.

#### Characteristics Of An Ideal Marriage Partner

Table 3 presents the responses to the ten statements concerning the participants' ideal marriage partner (see Table 3 on the next page).

Table 3  
Responses Concerning Characteristics Of An Ideal Marriage  
Partner and Percent Distribution  
(N=71)

Statements	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %
1. My ideal marriage partner is financially stable.	18	52	10	17	3
2. My ideal marriage partner has completed her formal education.	25	45	14	14	1
3. My ideal marriage partner is African American.	30	23	17	24	7
4. Race should not be an issue when choosing an ideal marriage partner.	40	45	9	1	6
5. My ideal marriage partner is a member of a church/mosque and/or attends religious services regularly.	23	31	24	20	3
6. My ideal marriage partner always tries to keep her promises and meet her obligations.	51	45	2	1	1
7. My ideal marriage partner does not need me to build her self-esteem.	34	35	7	18	3
8. My ideal marriage partner does not place a high priority on sex.	7	27	21	31	13
9. My marriage partner is monogamous.	66	20	9	4	1
10. It bothers me to see interracial relationships.	1	3	6	38	52

\*Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

The majority of the respondents (52%) felt their ideal marriage partner should be financially stable and completed their formal education (45%). Thirty percent of the participants (N=21) felt their spouse should be African American, while forty-five percent (N=32) stated race should not be an issue when selecting a mate. Thirty-one percent (N=22) wanted their ideal partner to have a religious background. More than half (51%) (N=36) felt their ideal spouse should keep their promises and be a responsible individual. Thirty-four percent (N=24) felt their marriage partner should not depend on them to help build their self-esteem. The respondents felt sex has a high priority within a relationship (31%) (N=22) and their mate should be faithful as well (66%) (N=47). The majority of the respondents stated they are not bothered by interracial relationships (52%) (N=37). Overall, the respondents desired their ideal mate to make \$31,000-\$50,000 a year. The respondents also indicated integrity, compatibility, and physical looks as the three most important characteristics they look for in selecting a mate (not necessarily in that order).



## Attitudes Toward African American Women

Table 4 presents the responses to the eight statements regarding African American women.

Table 4  
Responses Concerning Attitudes About African American Women  
and Percent Distribution  
(N=71)

Statements	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %
1. Black women are more financially responsible than other women.	4	13	35	35	13
2. Black women are too ambitious.	3	4	27	52	14
2. Black women are more loving and sensitive than other women.	9	17	37	27	11
4. Black women are sexually aggressive.	7	24	30	34	6
5. Black women will stick with you through thick and thin.	14	27	34	21	4
6. Most Black women don't respect Black men.	6	11	24	41	18
7. Black women are always putting Black men down.	9	23	21	34	14
8. Black women try to dominate Black men in relationships.	16	24	25	21	14

\*Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

The respondents felt African American women are not more financially responsible than other women. Fifty-two

percent disagreed with the statement that Black women are too ambitious. The respondents were undecided in determining whether Black women are more loving and sensitive than other women and being committed to their relationships (34%). They also felt Black women were not sexually aggressive (34%). The respondents felt Black women respect Black men (41%) and view Black men positively (34%). However, the respondents were undecided in determining whether or not Black women try to dominate Black men in relationships (25%).

### Analysis

After the data were collected, frequency distributions and chi-square analysis were conducted to explore interpretive associations between the participants responses and the demographic variables.

Utilizing qualitative measures this current body of research proposed two hypothesis: 1) Men reared in two-parent households would have more positive attitudes toward marriage than men reared in single, female headed households.

2) Men in low socioeconomic status will find marriage less desirable and have more negative attitudes toward marriage than men in higher socioeconomic status.

The analysis revealed one significant finding (see Table 5).

Table 5  
Analysis of Statements Concerning Marriage and Demographic Variables (N=71)

Demographic Variables	Statement	p
Income Range	The people I know are less committed to marriage now than in the past.	.004
Married Men (n=25)	Being married stifles individual growth.	.016
	The people I know are less committed to marriage now than in the past.	.002

The second hypothesis was found to be significant,  $p < .004$ . This means that men in lower socioeconomic status found marriage less desirable and therefore had more negative attitudes toward marriage than higher socioeconomic status males (see Table 5). The married participants also had a positive view of marriage. On average the married respondents disagreed with the statement that marriage stifles individual growth. However, they did feel people are less committed to marriage now versus in the past (see Table 5).

## DISCUSSION

The decline in marriage rates and family formation among African American men has a tremendous impact on the quality of life of African American families, especially children. Past research has demonstrated how the decline in marriage among African Americans is associated with increased out-of-wedlock births, increased single female-headed households, and a disproportionately larger percent of African American children living in chronic poverty. The purpose of this study was to explore some of the possible attitudes African American men have about marriage given the disproportionately low marriage rates among African Americans in this country. There is an urgent need to understand this phenomenon given the negative affects it has on the survival of the African American community.

This current body of research explored the perceptions of 71 African American males pertaining to their attitudes about marriage, characteristics of their ideal marriage partner, and their attitudes about African American women. The findings revealed that overall married men had positive attitudes toward marriage. The respondents desired to have marriage partners that are financially stable, educated,

and possess certain qualities such as: physical beauty, integrity and compatibility.

However, the analysis revealed that men in lower socioeconomic status (for this study less than \$30,000 per year) had a negative view concerning marriage. This implies some validity to past empirical research which cite economic viability as a variable in the decline in marriage rates among African American men. Although we as a society have made great technological advancements over the past ten years, many individuals view marriage and raising children as an economic hardship. This maybe especially true for African American men who are represented among high rates of unemployment and underemployment.

Moreover, the respondents had a positive view of African American women. Fifty-one out of the seventy-one participants (71%) reported dating an African American women. However, only 31% stated they must marry an African American women. When the respondents were asked about the racial preference of the women they must marry 56.3% stated they had no racial preference. It appears the decline in the stigma associated with interracial relationships has afforded African American men with a wider variety of marital selection. Unfortunately, if a African American

women only chooses to marry an African American man this puts her at a greater disadvantage of getting married.

Past research has already stated that as many as 25% of African American women will never marry (Davis & Emerson, 1997). In the past, social scientists have attributed the decline in marriage rates of African Americans to a high sex-ratio imbalance and the economic instability of African American men. Now it appears racial freedom in mate selection may play a significant part in the low marriage rates among this population. Henceforth, does interpersonal conflict among African American men and women exist and does it play apart in the low marriage rates? This area of study needs to be further explored.

#### Limitations of Study

There are several limitations to this research study. A post-positivistic paradigm can only discuss small trends or weak associations. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be used to make broad generalizations about African American males' attitudes toward marriage. The small sample of 71 participants were not randomly selected. However, if the research is replicated enough times by several researchers, this might give us some compelling information

about the perceptions that African American men have about marriage.

#### Social Work Implications

Furthermore, obtaining this knowledge base into the attitudes of African American males regarding marriage may assist professionals in ascertaining tools to assist this population in other treatment areas such as family and marital therapy. This knowledge concerning low marriage rates among the African American population can also assist social scientists in solving some social problems, such as, the large proportion of single female-headed households and stereotypes among African Americans. Also, social scientists can help educate society on family formation and family dynamics in order to help build stronger communities. Most importantly, understanding family formation and interpersonal relationships among African Americans can help professionals not to pass judgment without understanding the deeper issues involving this population.

## APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

### AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE RELATIONSHIP SURVEY

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS: Below are several statements regarding attitudes towards marriage, relationships, and African American women. Please read each statement carefully. Record your answer by circling the number of your response or by filling in the blank. Your responses will remain anonymous. After completing the questionnaire, place it in the envelope, seal it and return it to a member of our research team.

Please read the following statements and circle the response that best supports your beliefs.

Strongly Agree(SA)    Agree(A)    Undecided(U)    Disagree(D)  
Strongly Disagree(SD)

#### ATTITUDES TOWARDS MARRIAGE

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. Everyone should want to get married.	5	4	3	2	1
2. Marriage helps individuals mature.	5	4	3	2	1
3. A successful career is as satisfying as a successful marriage.	5	4	3	2	1
4. A successful career should be more important than a successful marriage.	5	4	3	2	1



Strongly Agree(SA)    Agree(A)    Undecided(U)    Disagree(D)  
Strongly Disagree(SD)

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
5. Being married stifles individual growth.	5	4	3	2	1
6. A successful marriage should be more important than a successful career.	5	4	3	2	1
7. The people I know, are less committed to marriage now than in the past.	5	4	3	2	1
8. There are fewer advantages to marriage now than there were in the past.	5	4	3	2	1
9. The people I know are more committed to marriage now than in the past.	5	4	3	2	1

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF AN IDEAL MARRIAGE PARTNER

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
10. My ideal marriage partner is financially stable.	5	4	3	2	1

Strongly Agree(SA)    Agree(A)    Undecided(U)    Disagree(D)  
Strongly Disagree(SD)

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
11. My ideal marriage partner has completed their formal education.	5	4	3	2	1
12. My ideal marriage partner is African American.	5	4	3	2	1
13. Race should not be an issue when choosing an ideal marriage partner.	5	4	3	2	1
14. My ideal marriage partner is a member of a church/mosque and/or attends religious services.	5	4	3	2	1
15. My ideal marriage partner always tries to keep their promises and meet their obligations.	5	4	3	2	1
16. My ideal marriage partner does not need me to build their self-esteem.	5	4	3	2	1
17. My ideal marriage partner does not place a high priority on sex.	5	4	3	2	1
18. My marriage partner is monogamous.	5	4	3	2	1

Strongly Agree(SA)    Agree(A)    Undecided(U)    Disagree(D)  
Strongly Disagree(SD)

- |   | <u>SA</u> | <u>A</u> | <u>U</u> | <u>D</u> | <u>SD</u> |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 19. It bothers me to see interracial relationships.                                 | 5         | 4        | 3        | 2        | 1         |
| 20. My ideal marriage partner makes \$_____ /yr.                                    |           |          |          |          |           |
| 21. My ideal marriage partner has completed _____ years of formal education.        |           |          |          |          |           |
| 22. The three most important characteristics I look For in a potential partner are: |           |          |          |          |           |
| 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____  |           |          |          |          |           |

#### ATTITUDES ABOUT AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

Please read the following statements and circle the response that best supports your beliefs.

Strongly Agree(SA)    Agree(A)    Undecided(U)    Disagree(D)  
Strongly Disagree(SD)

- |  | <u>SA</u> | <u>A</u> | <u>U</u> | <u>D</u> | <u>SD</u> |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 23. Black women are more financially responsible than other women. | 5         | 4        | 3        | 2        | 1         |

Strongly Agree(SA)    Agree(A)    Undecided(U)    Disagree(D)  
Strongly Disagree(SD)

		<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
24.	Black women are too ambitious.	5	4	3	2	1
25.	Black women are more loving and sensitive than other women.	5	4	3	2	1
26.	Black women are sexually aggressive.	5	4	3	2	1
27.	Black women will stick with you through thick and thin.	5	4	3	2	1
28.	Most Black women don't respect Black men.	5	4	3	2	1
29.	Black women are always putting Black men down.	5	4	3	2	1
30.	Black women try to dominate Black men in relationships.	5	4	3	2	1

### DEMOGRAPHICS

The questions that follow are designed to help us develop a demographic profile of the respondents to this survey. It is important that you take the time to answer each of the following questions. Your identity will remain anonymous. Please circle the appropriate number or fill in the blank.

AGE\_\_\_\_\_

OCCUPATION\_\_\_\_\_

#### RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE

1. Baptist
2. Catholic
3. Methodist
4. Presbyterian
5. Holiness
6. Seven Day Adventist
7. A.M.E.
8. Lutheran
9. Other, please specify\_\_\_\_\_

YEARS OF EDUCATION\_\_\_\_\_

#### INCOME RANGE

1. less than \$15,000
2. \$15,000-30,000
3. \$30,000-45,000
4. \$45,000-60,000
5. \$60,000+

#### MARITAL STATUS

1. Married, for \_\_\_\_\_ years
2. Never married
3. Divorced
4. Separated
5. Widowed
6. Single, in a committed relationship
7. Single, not in a committed relationship

NUMBER OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN\_\_\_\_\_

If you are not currently married, do you plan to get married in the next

1. Year?
2. 2 years?
3. 3 years?
4. 4 years?
5. 5+ years?
6. I never plan to get married.

Most of the women I date are:

1. African American
2. Caucasian
3. Asian
4. Hispanic
5. Native American

The woman I marry must be:

1. African American
2. Caucasian
3. Asian
4. Hispanic
5. Native American
6. I have no particular preference.

I was raised by the following adults:

1. Mother
2. Father
3. Mother and Father/Step-Father
4. Grandmother and Mother
5. Grandmother
6. Grandmother and Grandfather
7. Grandfather
8. Aunt
9. Uncle
10. Aunt and Uncle
11. Other, please specify\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

This study will to examine some of the attitudes African American men may have about marriage. This study, in which you may voluntarily participate, is conducted by Monique Lang, a social work graduate student at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB) under the supervision of Dr. Morley Glicker at California State University San Bernardino. The Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino, has approved this study. The university requires that you give your consent before participating in this or any other research study.

This study consists of 3 sections. The first part asks that you rate 9 statements about marriage on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree. The second part consists of 2 questions relating to marriage that requires your personal opinion. Lastly, the third section pertains to certain unique characteristics about you personally. This study will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Please be assured that this study is confidential, and no identifying information will be used which may identify you. You also have the right at any point during this survey to withdraw your participation for any reason without any penalty. Your participation is voluntary.

By checking the box provided below and dating this form, acknowledge that you have been informed and understand the nature of the study and freely consent to participate. You further acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age.

I Agree to Participate in the Study\_\_\_\_\_ (check if you agree)

Today's Date Is:\_\_\_\_\_.

#### APPENDIX C: DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

This research study was conducted by Monique Lang, a social work graduate student under the supervision of Dr. Morley Glicken at California State University, San Bernardino. This research study was designed to explore some possible perceptions African American Men have about marriage. The Institutional Review Board at CSUSB has approved this study.

Please be assured that findings will be reported in group form only. No identifying information will be used which may identify you.

If any aspect of the research caused you any emotional stress, you can contact a family service agency by calling 909-980-3004 or 909-387-7053.

A brief summary of the findings and conclusions of this study will be available after June 1, 2000 and can be obtained by calling Dr. Morley Glicken at 909-880-5557.

Thank you for your time and participation in this study.



## REFERENCES

- Anderson, E. (1989). Sex codes and family life among poor inner-city youth. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 501, 59-78.
- Anderson, E. (1990). Streetwise: Race, class, and change in an urban community. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bethea, P.D. (1995). African American women and the male-female relationship dilemma: A counseling perspective. Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 23, (2) 87-96.
- Broman, C.L. (1988). Satisfaction among Blacks: The significance of marriage and parenthood. Journal of Marriage and the Family, (50) 45-51.
- Cazenave, N., & Smith, R. (1990). Gender differences in the perception of black male-female relationships and stereotypes. In H.E. Cheatham & J. B. Stewart (Eds.), Black families: Interdisciplinary perspectives (pp.149-170). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Coombs, R.H. (1991). Marital status and personal well-being: A literature review. Family Relations, (40) 97-102.
- Davis, L.E. & Emerson, S. (1997). Black dating professionals' perceptions of equity, satisfaction, power, and romantic alternatives and ideals. Journal of Black Psychology, 23, (2) 148-165.
- Dickson, L. (1993). The future of marriage and family in Black America. The Journal of Black Studies, (4) 472-491.
- Duncan, G. J. & Rogers, W. (1988). Longitudinal aspects of childhood poverty. Journal of Marriage and Family, 50, 1007-1021.

- Eggebeen, D.J. & Lichter, D.T. (1991). Race, family structure, and changing poverty among American children. American Sociological Review, 56, 801-817.
- Fosset, M.R. & Kiecolt, K.J. (1993). Mate availability and family structure among African Americans in U.S metropolitan areas. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 55, 288-302.
- Gibbs, J. (1988). Young Black and male in America: An endangered species. New York: Auburn House.
- Hill, R.B. (1993). Research on the African American family: A holistic perspective. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- James, A.D. & Tucker, M.B. (1996). Marital attitudes, perceived mate availability, and subjective well-being among partnered African American men and women. Journal of Black Psychology, 22, (1) 20-37.
- King, A.E. (1999). African American females' attitudes toward marriage. Journal of Black Studies, 29(3) 416-438.
- King, A. E. (1999). African American males' attitudes toward marriage. Journal of African American Men, 4, (1) 71-90.
- McLanahan, S. S. & Casper, Pl (1995). Growing diversity and inequality in the American family. In R. Farley (eds.), State of the union: America in the 1990's (pp.1-45). New York: Russel Sage.
- South, S.J. (1992). For love or money? Socio-demographic determinants of the expected benefits from marriage. In S.J. South & S.E. Tolnay (Eds.), The changing American family: Sociological and demographic perspectives (pp.171-194) Boulder, CO: Westview.
- South, S.J. (1993). Racial and ethnic differences in the desire to marry. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 55(2) 357-371.

- Staples, R. (1986). The Black family. (3<sup>rd</sup>. ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc.
- Staples, R. (1993) Black families at the crossroads: Challenges and prospects. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Sweet, J. A. & Bumpass, L. L. (1987). American families and households. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Taylor, R. J., Chatters, L.M., Tucker, M.B., & Lewis, E. (1990). Developments in research on Black families: A decade review. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 52, 993-1014.
- Thompson-Seaborn, M., & Ensminger, M.E. (1989). Psychological well-being among mothers with school age children: Evolving family structures. Social Forces, 67(3) 715-730.
- Tucker, M.B., & Mitchell-Kernan, C. (1995). The decline of marriage among African Americans: Causes, consequences, and policy implications. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census (1994). Statistical abstract of the United States: 1994. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.