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Ideal Dating and Sexual Partners for Low-Income Heterosexual African American Adolescents

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IDEAL DATING AND SEXUAL PARTNERS FOR LOW-INCOME HETEROSEXUAL AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

A Thesis
Presented in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Degree of
Master of Arts

BY
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AUGUST, 2012

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VITA

The author was born in Gary, Indiana, February 5, 1984. He graduated from Emerson School for the Visual and Performing Arts in 2002 and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with a Certificate in African American Studies from Princeton University in 2006.


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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The majority of research that examines the dating and sexual partnering behaviors of African American adolescents relates to risks associated with these behaviors. Prior research has predominantly focused on the relationship between these adolescents’ dating or sexual behaviors and risks of intimate partner violence (c.f. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2008; Raiford, Wingood, & Diclemente, 2007; Sullivan, Erwin, Helms, Masho, & Farrell, 2008; Temple & Freeman, 2011), unplanned pregnancy (c.f. Bouris et al., 2010; Furman, 2002; Suellentrop & Flanigan, 2006), or the transmission of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs; c.f. Ford & Lepkowski, 2004; Nebbitt, Lombe, Sanders-Phillips, & Stokes, 2010).

This focus is arguably too narrow. However, the risks that have been elucidated in the extant literature indicate a need for a more thorough understanding of these partnering relationships. More specifically, in order to better combat these risks, it is necessary to understand the nuances of these relationships.

In order to move toward a better understanding of the dating and sexual relationships of African American adolescents, the present study will examine a subset of that population by exploring the ideal characteristics of dating and sexual partners reported by low-income heterosexual African American adolescents. The population to be studied is necessarily specific here given the ways that socioeconomic status (SES) and sexual orientation may affect these preferences. Therefore, while greater analysis of the dating and sexual
relationships of higher SES African Americans as well as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and other queer adolescents warrant study, this paper will not attempt to represent their experiences.

Before approaching the complexities of particular adolescent dating and sexual partnering behaviors, it is necessary to understand sexuality and dating among adolescents more generally. Accordingly, this chapter will first examine adolescent sexuality broadly, then explore increasingly more specific aspects including the facilitators of adolescent dating and sexual behavior and the pervasiveness of adolescent dating and sexual behavior. In order to better hone in on the population of interest, this chapter will then examine dating, sex, and partner selection specifically in the context of African American adolescents. The chapter will conclude with the research questions to be investigated and theoretical framework through which they will be examined.

**Dating and Sexual Behaviors among Adolescents**

Adolescence is a stage of human development after childhood marked by substantial progress in the formation of identity—knowing who one is and how he/she fits into society (Erikson, 1963). Adolescence has been divided into three stages, each developmentally more mature and complex than the last: early adolescence (10-13 years old), middle adolescence (14-17 years old), and late adolescence or emerging adulthood (18 through the early twenties). Adolescence has been characterized as beginning with biological changes followed by changes driven by culture and society. It has been argued that these factors impact identity.

---

1 The stratification of adolescence into age categories is not universally accepted as some developmental psychologists dispute the particular ages attached to the stages of adolescence described here (Levinson, 1978).
formation more than biology as adolescents move through the stages of adolescence (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006).

One of the major identity formation tasks of adolescence is learning to manage burgeoning sexuality (Furman, 2002), as manifested in both dating and sexual relationships. Adolescent dating relationships are characterized by mutually acknowledged voluntary interactions, expressions of affection, and potentially current or anticipated sexual behavior (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Furman & Shomaker, 2008; Taradash, Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Costa, 2001). While similar to adult relationships, these interactions may be shorter lived or less serious (Miller et al., 1997; Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006). This does not, however, mean that they are less important than adult dating and sexual relationships. Adolescent dating and sexual relationships are prevalent, normative, and developmentally valuable for transition into adulthood (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003; Corsaro & Elder, 1990; Sharp, Coatsworth, Darling, Cumsille, & Ranierrri, 2007). The majority of adolescents report having been involved or wanting to have been involved in one of these relationships (Carver et al., 2003), and adolescent romantic relationships are useful in the development and cultivation of many skills utilized in adult interpersonal contact, including empathy, sensitivity, independence, interdependence, and compromise (Collins, 2003; Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004; Furman, 2002; Furman & Simon, 2008). Thus, the mutually acknowledged and voluntary components of adolescent romantic relationships are necessarily important to these relationships functioning as a part of normative development.
Facilitators of Dating and Sex in Adolescence

As stated, the transition into adolescence can be understood as being catalyzed by biology and nurtured by culture and society (Smetana et al., 2006). Accordingly, adolescent facilitators of dating and sexual partnering are also catalyzed by biology, and then molded by ecological factors.

Changes in hormones are accompanied by the rapid maturation of sexual organs (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002; Halpern, 2003; McClintock & Herdt, 1996; Zimmer-Gimbeck & Helfand, 2008). In a parallel process, the childhood social context which is rooted primarily in familial interaction (Maccoby, 1998) transforms into the adolescent social context where peer relationships begin to constitute the primary social space wherein cultural routines are practiced and modified (Corsaro & Elder, 1990; Sharp et al., 2007). In addition, there are changes in the sex makeup of the adolescent’s peer network (Richards, Crowe, Larson, & Swarr, 1998; Thorne, 1986), changes in what adolescents expect from those with whom they have relationships (Connolly et al., 2004; Erikson, 1982; Florsheim, 2003; Furman & Wehner, 1997), and changes in the social value of being romantically involved (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002; Romig & Bakken, 1992).

Hormone Changes and Sexual Maturity

The onset of puberty has long been implicated as a catalyst for increased interest in romantic and sexual interaction (Biro & Dorn, 2006; Boxer, Levinson, & Peterson, 1989; DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002; Zimmer-Gimbeck & Helfand, 2008). However, puberty is marked by two processes, gonadarche and
andrenarche, and researchers have been fairly unclear about which aspect is responsible for this increased interest.

Gonadarche refers to the development of the gonads, with increases in testosterone in males and estrogen in females (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). These changes facilitate increased penile erection for boys and the growth of breasts and lubrication of the vagina for girls (McClintock & Herdt, 1996; Zimmer-Gimbeck & Helfand, 2008). A number of studies have related earlier gonadarche to earlier sexual debut (Cavanagh, 2004; Zimmer-Gimbeck & Helfand, 2008). Other research contends, however, that andrenarche, the increase in adrenaline that precedes puberty (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009), is more predictive of sexual interest and awareness, as reports of sexual interest often precede the onset of gonadarche (Halpern, 2003; McClintock & Herdt, 1996).

Given the lack of clarity in the literature, it is perhaps the case that both play necessary parts in facilitating the onset of dating and sexual relationships in adolescence, with andrenarche facilitating the onset of dating and sexual interest and gonadarche facilitating the ability to engage in sexual behaviors. Further, some research implicates pubertal onset (including both andrenarche and gonadarche) as more predictive of male sexual debut than female sexual debut, arguing social variables delay female sexual debut more than male sexual debut (Halpern et al., 1994; Udry, 1988; Udry & Billy, 1987).

**Increased Importance of Peer Relationships**

While adolescents’ bodies are starting to change, their social environments are also in transition. During childhood, socialization primarily takes place in the
family context (Maccoby, 1998). Parents expose children to archetypes for appropriate relationships and provide social knowledge regarding appropriate and inappropriate interpersonal behaviors as well (Corsaro & Elder, 1990; Maccoby, 1998; Nomaguchi, 2008). Some of the information conferred is easily understood by the child, but other information is too complex. More specifically, some of the relationships that are modeled by adults (e.g. dyadic romantic partnerships) do not exist in childhood, or, if they do, they exist in much simplified form. The complexity of adult relationships and social behaviors has been described as troubling and confusing for many young children (Corsaro & Elder, 1990).

However, adolescent peer relationships offer an opportunity to practice many of these socialized behaviors and relationship dynamics in order to better understand their utility (Romig & Bakken, 1992; Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006). In addition, these relationships offer a context wherein information that adults have conferred can be adapted for use in this peer context. As such, the interpersonal relationships cultivated by adolescents are similar to those they have witnessed between adults, but modified for the adolescent’s practical use (Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006).

This appropriation and adaptation process is useful in that it allows adolescents to prepare themselves for the transition into adulthood. There are many skills required for adulthood that are less necessary earlier in life, but adolescent peer relationships offer an opportunity to cultivate these skills, such as autonomy, mutuality, and learning how to negotiate both physical and emotional intimacy (Kuttler et al., 1999; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006).
Similarly, romantic relationships (whether dating, sexual, or a combination of both) allow adolescents to further practice these behaviors and interactions (Furman & Simon, 2008).

This increased time with peers also facilitates dating and sexual partnerships given that peers may act as agents in the acquisition of an adolescent’s dating or sexual partner (Harper, Gannon, Watson, Catania, & Dolcini, 2004). Peers may assist in the initial contact with an ideal dating or sexual partner by initiating conversation on behalf of the adolescent, or peers may acquire information about the prospective partner in order to prepare the adolescent before he/she approaches the person (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Davies & Windle, 2000; Harper et al., 2004). Given the increasing role of friends as confidants, peers may also provide advice should an adolescent have questions about how to initiate or sustain a dating or sexual relationship (Anderson & Leaper, 1998; Cavanagh, 2004; Nomaguchi, 2008).

**Changes in Sex Makeup of Peer Networks**

In childhood, particularly in the 2-3 years that precede the onset of adolescence, the majority of a child’s peers are of the same sex (Furman, 2002; Thorne, 1993) and a cross-sex taboo exists, such that opposite-sex peers are often treated in an antagonistic manner or ignored altogether (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002). However, it has been argued that the physiological changes which occur in early adolescence facilitate an increased general interest in the other sex which leads to more complex mixed-sex relationships (Richards et al., 1998). As such, changes in the sex makeup of adolescent peer networks facilitates dating and
sexual partnering by increasing the amount of time that males and females spend in close proximity.

Prior to the pubertal changes of early adolescence, same-sex friendship groups are preferable, given marked differences in friendship style across sexes. Males’ friendships are characterized by larger, diverse groupings that are activity-oriented (i.e. a primary impetus for the relationship is a shared interest in a particular activity), while friendships among females are characterized by smaller, sometimes dyadic, relationships based on intimacy and disclosure (Thorne, 1986).

After pubertal changes, mixed-sex relationships become increasingly more normative as more children engage in them (Corsaro & Elder, 1990; Richards et al., 1998). Adolescents report feeling more attractive and important in the company of opposite-sex peers, feelings that precipitate the transition from platonic mixed-sex relationships to more intimate pairings in the form of group dating (Richards et al., 1998). As youths move from early to middle adolescence, group dating is replaced by romantic dyads that are independent of the group (Furman, 2002). This shift is facilitated by increased opportunities to interact with opposite-sex partners with less adult supervision (e.g. parties with attendees of both sexes, group dates). This allows participation in dating and sexual behaviors that may have been otherwise just desired, given the recent physiological and social development having taken place (Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2005).

Last, the number of other-sex-persons in one’s peer network is directly related to the likelihood of being involved in a dating or sexual relationship, as adolescents in peer networks with larger number of opposite-sex persons have been found to
be more likely than other adolescents to be involved in a dating relationship the following year (Connolly et al., 1998).

**Changes in Relationship Expectations**

While peer friendship, dating, and sexual relationships offer an opportunity to cultivate necessary skills, the acquisition of these skills is related to new and changing relationship expectations as well. Childhood relationships with parents have a power differential which does not allow the sort of autonomy and/or mutuality that many adolescents begin to desire (Connolly & Johnson, 1996; Connolly et al., 2004; Erikson, 1982; Florsheim, 2003). This power difference often is reflected in adolescent reports of parents as less accepting and relationships with parents as obligatory and/or coercive (Youniss & Smaller, 1985; Furman & Shomaker, 2008). However, these relationships with peers (whether platonic or romantic) are seen as more egalitarian in that each participant is seen as being equal in status and power (Hartup, 1989). This more egalitarian relationship allows adolescents to engage in mutual intimacy, characterized by shared understanding, greater amounts of self-disclosure, sharing of advice, and the opportunity to gain greater self-knowledge through mutual reflection (Corsaro & Elder, 1990). Perhaps it is this difference that accounts for reports of increasing attachment to friends and romantic partners during adolescence, as marked by the desire for proximity and the expectation of unconditional acceptance (Furman & Wehner, 1997).

While both platonic and romantic relationships allow adolescents to satisfy some of their newly emerging needs, some are unique to romantic
relationships. For example, the desire for emotional intimacy may be met through platonic friendships. However, physical intimacy is necessarily related to a relationship that is more than platonic and more mature forms of emotional intimacy are cultivated in a more romantic relationship as well (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987). Adolescence is marked by increases in the desire for both of these forms of intimacy (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Romig & Bakken, 1992) and this is reflected in the increasing value of romantic relationships as adolescents mature (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). By the time adolescents reach high school, they report spending more time with romantic partners than parents, siblings, or friends (Lauresen & Williams, 1997; Reis, Lin, Bennett, & Nezlek, 1993; Reis & Youniss, 2004). The percentages of youth reporting greater time with romantic partners than other persons increases with age, growing in tandem with the number of youth reporting being involved in a romantic relationship (Carver et al., 2003).

Given that a framework exists for platonic peer relationships due to their existence in childhood, it is understandable that more time may be necessary for learning about dating and sexual relationships. It has been argued that learning to negotiate the physical and emotional intimacy of dating and sexual relationships is one of the more challenging aspects of adolescence (Collins & Sroufe, 1999). Accordingly, the desire for increased time with romantic partners may be related both to the novelty of the experience and the time necessary for learning to navigate new forms of intimacy.

**Social Value of Dating and Sexual Relationships**
In addition to, and perhaps as a result of, changing expectations in relationships, physiological maturation, and newfound interest in mixed-sex pairings, there is also a social value attached to dating and sexual relationships (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002; Romig & Bakken, 1992). Engaging in dating and sexual behaviors with persons of the other sex is reflective of espousing traditional heterosexual sex norms of desire that are often reinforced by adolescents’ peer groups. In addition, other sex normative behaviors may begin to manifest alongside the inception of dating and sexual relationships, and these behaviors may also be encouraged by peers. For example, many adolescent females exhibit nurturing behaviors with male partners (Sharp et al., 2007).

Meanwhile, the pursuit of sexual partners may be encouraged by adolescent male peer norms around espousing sexual prowess and a focus on sexual activity as a topic of conversation (Harper et al, 2004). In addition to particular gendered behaviors that are encouraged by peers, the autonomy cultivated by both sexes given their increased dating and sexual activity is encouraged by peers who are beginning to practice it as well (Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Taradas et al., 2001).

Just as there is social value given to dating in adolescence, there is also social value given to sexual behavior. The social reinforcement of sexual behaviors in adolescence is often demonstrated in the literature examining peer pressure as a negative correlate of virginity. Adolescents who report greater pressure from peers related to sex report earlier sexual debut as well as greater positive ideas about teenage sex (Laflin, Wang, & Barry, 2008; Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000). Additionally, adolescent virgins report a higher
level of pressure from peers to engage in sexual behavior than do non-virgins, further demonstrating the social normativity of adolescent sexual behavior (Laflin, Wang, & Barry, 2008). However, the manifestation of this sexual behavior may differ, with intercourse potentially being accompanied by or replaced wholly by non-penetrative sexual behaviors. This may be related to the idea that, while sexual intercourse is encouraged as a milestone, sexual behavior in general is encouraged by peers and larger societal norms (Woody, Russel, D’Souza, & Woody, 2000).

**Adolescent Dating Demographics**

The reported prevalence of dating relationships among adolescents ranges across studies. Some offer percentages as low as 34% (Carver et al., 2003) while others argue that three quarters of adolescents are or have been involved in romantic relationships at least once in their lifetimes (Bouchey & Furman, 2003). Despite this inconsistency, it has been found that the majority of adolescents indicate that they would like to be involved in a romantic relationship and, by late adolescence, most have experienced an exclusive heterosexual romantic relationship (Carver et al., 2003; Furman & Hand, 2006). It must be stated though that, analogous to adult romantic relationships, exclusive partnering is not the only form that adolescent relationships take. They may also take the form of casual dating, marked by fluid attachment to partners, or something more akin to a close friendship where emotional intimacy is understood, even if physical intimacy does not take place (La Voie et al., 1998). Therefore adolescent romantic relationships are both prevalent and varied.
In terms of when adolescents begin to date, there is a great deal of similarity across both sex and ethnicity. According to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (UNC Carolina Population Center, 2010), females’ first romantic relationship occurs at 16.48 years and males’ first romantic relationship occurs at 14.96, a statistically nonsignificant difference. There is also similarity in the age of dating onset across ethnic groups, with Whites, African Americans, Latinos/as, and Asian Americans reporting an average age of approximately 15 when they began dating (UNC Carolina Population Center, 2010).

Despite average onset of dating being 15 years old across demographic factors, teenagers as young as 13 years old report having been involved in what they describe as “special relationships” with members of the other sex (Carver et al., 2003). While these relationships were not necessarily described as dating relationships, they were described as closer than platonic peer ties. Among 13-year-olds, 37% of males and 34% of females reported having been in such a relationship in the previous 18 months. Among 14-year-olds, 45% of males and 34% of females reported having been in a relationship in the same time period. Whereas males reported more involvement in relationships for these two age groups, there is a marked increase in reported dating by females for 15-year-olds. Among this group, 49% of males and 56% of females reported having been in a special relationship in the previous 18 months (Carver et al., 2003).

**Adolescent Sexual Behavior Demographics**
While some research has identified and examined circumstances where adolescent sexual behavior occurs outside of a romantic context (Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2004), a majority of the research has found that dating is the primary site of sexual activity for adolescents, potentially due to its ensuring consistent access to an ideal sexual partner (Kaestle & Halpern, 2007; Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2000; Miller & Moore, 1990). Due to this nesting, the literature on adolescent sexual partnering is often necessarily related to romantic partnering. However, given the gravity of consequences related to sexual partnering (e.g. pregnancy, STI infection, sexual violence), there is a substantial literature which examines sexual behavior without respect to romantic relationships.

Biannually, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducts a survey of health-risk behaviors among adolescents through the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Using a national sample (47 states in the 2009 YRBSS, the most recently available data) of high school students, they collect data on behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and STIs; HIV infection; unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical inactivity. These data are often used to assess the effectiveness of interventions and track trends in health behaviors.

The CDC’s 2009 YRBSS reports a recent downward trend in adolescent sexual intercourse and sexual risk behaviors (Kann, O’Malley Olsen, McManus, Kinchen, Chyen, Harris, & Wechsler, 2011). Over the last 20 years, there has
been an 8% decrease in adolescents reporting having ever engaged in sexual intercourse and a 6% decrease in adolescents reporting having had four or more sexual partners. Similarly, there has been a 15% increase in their reported condom use. Despite these positive shifts in the data, the current figures still show that many youth are engaging in sexual behavior. The 2009 YRBSS reports that 46% of adolescents in grades 9-12 had ever engaged in sexual intercourse. Among females, 45.7% had participated in sexual intercourse, and 46.1% of males had done so. Overall, the prevalence of having ever had sexual intercourse was higher among African American (65.2%) than White (42.0%) students; higher among African American female (58.3%) than White female (44.7%) students; and higher among African American male (72.1%) than White male (39.6%) students. This racial difference is consistent with previous research, which has found greater sexual activity among African American adolescents and greatest sexual activity indicated for African American males (Ku, Sonenstein, & Pleck, 1993; Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2005).

Nationwide, 34.2% of students had had sexual intercourse with at least one person during the 3 months before the survey (i.e., they were currently sexually active; Kann et al., 2011). Again, consistent with previous findings in the literature (Ku et al., 1993; Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2005; Upchurch, Aneshensel, Succi, & Levy-Storms, 1999), the prevalence of being currently sexually active was significantly higher among African American (47.7%) than White (32.0%) and Latino (34.6%) students; higher among African American female (45.0%) than White female (35.4%) and Latina (34.1%) students; and
higher among African American male (50.3%) than White male (28.9%) and Latino male (35.0%) students.

The 2009 YRBS reports that 13.8% of students had had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their lifetime. Overall, the prevalence of having had sexual intercourse with four or more persons was higher among male (16.2%) than female (11.2%) students, and this difference was particularly salient in African American adolescents—39.4% of African American male adolescents as compared to 18% of African American female adolescents. In addition, the prevalence of having had sexual intercourse with four or more persons was higher among African American adolescents (28.6%) than both Latino (14.2%) and White (10.5%) adolescents. This was replicated in each sex, with higher prevalence among African American females (18.0%) than both White (10.0%) and Latina (10.4%) adolescents; and higher prevalence among African American male adolescents (39.4%) than their Latino (18.0%) and White (11.0%) counterparts.

**Dating and Sex in African American Adolescents**

While there are data on the sexual and dating behaviors of African American youth and epidemiological data which describe the potential negative outcomes associated with these behaviors, few studies have focused specifically on the normative processes of African American adolescent romantic partnering. As stated earlier, the majority of work has been dedicated to analysis of risk factors associated with STI transmission, pregnancy, and intimate partner violence (c.f. Bouris et al., 2010; Furman, 2002; National Center for Injury
Prevention and Control, 2006; Nebbitt et al., 2010; Raiford, Wingood, & Diclemente, 2007; Suellentrop & Flanigan, 2006; Temple & Freeman, 2011). Work which has sought to analyze normative processes has tended to compare the behaviors of African American youth to White populations (c.f. Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; Cavanagh, 2004; Crissey, 2005; Hansen, 1977); this however does not allow for a meaningful understanding of how particular partnering behaviors may be specific to this population and thus normative despite difference from the majority.

In a seminal study of African American adolescent dating behaviors and ideologies, Harper et al. (2004) examined African American adolescents’ concepts of dating and how friends impact the formation and maintenance of these concepts. In line with research examining adolescent dating in general (Carver et al., 2003), African American adolescents defined dating partners as “special”, indicated by their deserving more time and loyalty than other acquaintances and sexual partners. While these adolescents were not specific about what criteria were used to evaluate this “special” quality, the notion of these partners as “special” was reported for both males and females. However, the function of these partners and the aims of these relationships differed across sexes.

Female respondents in this study demonstrated what Harper et al. (2004) described as a “gradual-dyadic relational orientation” wherein a gradual evolution into a dyadic partnership was favored. This orientation had implications for the way that partners were conceptualized. These adolescent females described their
male partners in terms of their interpersonal value, their role as potential social supports and their potential to make them happy. Males, however, demonstrated an “immediate-egocentric pleasure orientation” wherein an immediacy of sexual interaction was favored. These males often described partners in terms of their utility for sexual gratification and their willingness to work hard to see the male’s emotional and physical needs fulfilled.

There was even a difference demonstrated in how females and males described sexual relationships. Female respondents often described sexual relationships in relational terms (e.g. “we did it”) while male respondents focused on the conquest aspect of sexual relationships, noting who they had been able to have sex with and what they received from her (e.g. “getting some ass”).

Close friends were found to play a critical role in African American dating and sexual partnering, often serving as the persons with whom the adolescent works to conceptualize dating and sexual partnering (Harper et al, 2004). While it is understood that peers play a critical role in the socialization and norm formation of adolescents in general (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008; Steinberg & Monahan, 2007), it has been found that these relationships may be more important to African American adolescents, potentially due to the communal ideology of African American culture (Ogbu, 2004) and the stresses of being a minority in a society that feels racist and/or otherwise oppressive (Prilleltensky, 2003). These friendship relationships are a space wherein adolescents build consensus about what is normative in dating and sexual relationships, a finding which likely extends to ideas about normative qualities to value in a partner. Additionally,
peers’ roles as conduits to dating, potentially introducing the adolescent to a new partner or otherwise facilitate the meeting of a new partner, further allows peers to influence concepts of what is a normatively appropriate object of attraction.

This analysis of African American dating and sexual dynamics offers a more nuanced understanding than previous research which has favored comparisons of African American behaviors to a norm of White behaviors (c.f. Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2005; Hansen, 1977). While the finding that African American adolescents report physical characteristics as more important than personality characteristics more often than White counterparts may be interesting (Hansen, 1977), it does not necessarily offer much explanation for such a difference nor does it present the African American preference as potentially normative. This becomes more confusing when considered in concert with research that finds no pattern of preferences for African American adolescents in terms of their preferences for physical characteristics over personality characteristics (Hansen & Hicks, 1980). This inconsistency further demonstrates the necessity of a more thorough examination of the phenomenon is illuminated.

One avenue of elucidating this nuance is through understanding the role of culture. For example, differences in norms related to marriage have been argued to be related to the sorts of dating relationships that are cultivated by African American adolescents (Crissey, 2005). Expectations of marriage in early adulthood has been found to be related to more serious relationships during adolescence while expectations of marriage later in life has been related to more
ephemeral dating and sexual partnerships during this time (Brown, Feirig, & Furman, 1999; East, 1998). While this phenomenon exists across ethnic groups, it has been shown across multiple studies that African American adolescents report a desire to marry at later ages than peers of other racial/cultural groups (East, 1998; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1987). In addition to desiring marriage at later ages, African American youth also report perceiving a lower likelihood of marriage compared to White peers, and this perception of marital possibility has been linked to the quality of adolescent dating and sexual relationships (Crissey, 2005).

Though researchers have begun to explore more thoroughly dating and sexual relationships among African American adolescents, there is still significant room for study. There is particular space for research which examines the nuances of this phenomenon in the absence of pathology and with respect to the ecological factors which are pertinent.

**Partner Selection**

Dating and sexual relationships, generally, is a broad topic, so the present analysis will target a specific aspect of this phenomenon in order to give sufficient attention to detail. Partner selection is an area which has been given some attention and, given its necessary effect on dating and relationships more generally, it is a valuable area for further study.

While it is understood that individual preferences play a role in partner selection, significant trends have been found in how dating and sexual partners are selected. Given the relative homogeneity of settings that adolescents inhabit
(e.g., schools and neighborhoods), it is often the case that partners selected are demographically similar with respect to race and ethnicity (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990), religion (Glenn, 1982), and education (Schoen & Wooldredge, 1989). In addition, adolescents also report preferences for partners who are similar to themselves in terms of academic achievement, popularity, and attractiveness (Sassler, 2010). The latter similarities may be related to maintenance of these characteristics in the respondent adolescents, as it has also been found that behavioral characteristics of adolescents’ dating and sexual partners may be adopted by the respondent adolescent over the course of the relationship (Giordano, Phelps, Manning, & Longmore, 2008). For example, a partner with deviant criminal behaviors may encourage the adolescent to engage in similar behavior. Similarly, an academically-motivated dating partner would be likely to encourage strong academic performance.

While the spaces that adolescents frequent lead to a high level of dating similar persons, it differs from how such environmental homogeneity affects adults. For example, respondents in middle adolescence and emerging adulthood are more likely than others to express interest in or experience with interracial dating (Joyner & Kao, 2005). This difference may be related to the formative nature of this developmental period in conjunction with the availability of potential partners of other races. More specifically, adults may have formed their concepts of ideal romantic partners in a racially and/or ethnically homogeneous setting at a time when prevailing societal values may have discouraged interracial partnering. This may be in contrast to current adolescents and emerging adults
who may have formed their concepts of ideal romantic partners in a similarly homogeneous setting but without the presence of values that discourage interracial partnering.

Research has consistently demonstrated differences in partner selection related to sex, finding that males place higher value on physical attractiveness while females place more emphasis on factors like age, employment status, and earning potential (Bauermeister, Zimmerman, Caldwell, Xue, & Gee, 2010; Bauermeister, Zimmerman, Gee, Caldwell, & Xue, 2009; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005; South, 1991). One paradigm which has been often used to conceptualize these gendered aspects of heterosexual partner selection of dating and sexual partners is exchange theory (Edwards, 1969). Exchange theory argues that mate selection is predicated upon males exchanging their socioeconomic resources for the sexual and domestic services of female partners. Accordingly, the male focus on physicality is reflective of his desire for female sexual potential and the female focus on age and employment are reflective of her desire for financial stability.

**African American Adolescent Partner Selection**

While there are many factors which affect the characteristics that adolescents value in dating and sexual partners, African American adolescents may have norms that differ from other adolescents with regard to some characteristics (e.g. body type, racial features of a partner). In addition, African American adolescents may have to consider some characteristics that are not relevant for other adolescents (e.g. skin color, hair texture). Given these
differences, it is necessary to analyze the particulars of African American adolescent partner selection with these elements in mind.

**Body Type**

The shape and size of the female body preferred by African American adolescents may differ from what is preferred by other adolescents due to different body type norms for African Americans in general. While there has not been much research which specifically examines African American adolescent males’ assessments of female body types (c.f. Freedman, Carter, Sbrocco, & Gray, 2004; Glasser, Robnett, & Feliciano, 2009), there is a wealth of research which examines the differences in acceptable body types for African American adolescent females versus their White counterparts as communicated to them by others. While White females consistently report that being overweight or even being in the upper range of normal weight is unacceptable (Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Faibisch, Ohlson, & Adamiak, 1999; Parker et al., 1995; Yates, Edman, & Aruguette, 2004), African American adolescent females have been more likely to report a positive self-image and positive feedback at higher weights (Granberg, Simons, & Simons, 2009; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 1999). This may be related to the degree to which each group subscribes to the dominant beauty ideal which identifies health and beauty as a physique slimmer than the norm (Grant et al., 1999). This is not to say, however, that African American culture does not value female thinness. It is instead an assertion that, while thinness has been demonstrated to be valued as attractive, a heavier weight is not necessarily viewed
as negatively among African Americans as it might be for Whites (Wingood et al., 2002).

In addition to the research which examines general conceptions of body type for African American adolescents, there is also research that examines partner selection among African American adults. In examining the preferences of adult African American males, research has shown that African American men are more attracted to heavier female figures than White men on average (Freedman et al., 2004; Glasser, Robnett, & Feliciano, 2009), generally express disinterest in underweight female figures, and prefer lower waist-to-hip ratios\(^2\) (Freedman et al., 2004). This combination of findings reflects an acceptance of women with higher weight, but still with relatively small waists as compared to their hips and buttocks. Though the majority of research related to ideal body types for African American adolescents focuses on ideal female body type, it has also been found that African American females find African American males with higher than average weights to be acceptable partners (Jones, Fries, & Danish, 2007).

While these findings echo that which is described in the more general body type literature relating to African American adolescents, it must also be stated that research has indicated that socioeconomic status may moderate notions of appropriate and attractive female body types (Stephens & Few, 2007). More specifically, African Americans of lower socioeconomic status favor higher

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\(^{2}\) Waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) is a quantification of body type/shape calculated by dividing the circumference of the waist at its most narrow point by the circumference of the hips at their widest point (Singh, 1993).
weighted body types more often than did African Americans of higher socioeconomic status.

**Racial Features**

Racial features (i.e. phenotypic features generally assumed to be related to one’s race, like nose and lip shape) are also a factor which African American adolescents may consider in selecting a dating or sexual partner. While aspects of this may also be considered by adolescents of other ethnic groups, the preferences (or the hierarchies of preferences) that exist among African Americans may differ from other groups (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992).

In a study of men’s preferences for racial facial features, Watson (2010) presented White and African American men with faces made of composites of varying proportions of White and African American features. The study found that White men reported the strongest preference for composite faces made of 100% White features. Similarly, African American men reported the strongest preference for composite faces made of 100% African American features. However, patterns differed somewhat after that. White men rated composites with 75% White, 50% White, and 25% White features as more attractive than composite faces with 100% African American features. African American men rated 100% White faces as more attractive than the 75% African American, 50% African American, and 25% African American faces (Watson, 2010).

Unfortunately, the study was not specific about which racial features were represented in the composites and therefore one cannot be sure how different racial features (e.g. nose shape, lip size, etc.) may have factored differently. This
may be related to other findings which indicate that African American men are more amenable to interracial dating than White men and African American women (Batson, Quian, & Lichter, 2006; Sassler, 2010).

The demonstrated attractiveness of Eurocentric features may also be related to evaluation of features that carry a racial connotation. More specifically, this openness to interracial partnering may have a relationship to particular values ascribed to particular skin colors and hair.

**Skin color.** Given the range of potential tones that African American skin may be, there are many potential skin color preferences that African American adolescents could have. Despite the myriad possibilities, there has historically been a trend toward preferring lighter skinned partners and otherwise conferring positive qualities to those with lighter skin (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Hughes & Hertel, 1990). While this could be compared to preferences related to paleness versus level of tan in White adolescents, there are some salient differences between the two phenomena. First, tan can be manipulated through exposure to the sun while the lightness of African American skin is not so easily manipulated. While avoidance of the sun may act as a safeguard against becoming darker, it will not make a darker skinned African American lighter. Secondly, there is a level of status conferred to lighter skin among African Americans that is different from the aesthetic capital derived from being tanned. Light skin is often not only understood as more attractive, but also connotes virtue, merit, intelligence, and prestige (Hill, 2002; Hill, 2002a; Hughes & Hertel, 1990) as opposed to notions of

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3 While there is an option of skin bleaching which may lighten the skin of African Americans, this phenomenon exists primarily in African and Afro-Caribbean contexts (Charles, 2003; Lewis, Robkin, Gaska, & Njoki, 2011).
criminality and disadvantage for darker skin (Dasgupta et al., 1999; Maddox & Gray, 2002). While this is in line with ideas held by many cultures across the globe which have conflated darker skin with the labor class and lighter skin with the aristocracy (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Hunter, 2002; Jefferson & Stake, 2009), this phenomenon is not necessarily as salient with other ethnic groups in the modern United States (Averhart & Bigler, 1997; Hoschschild & Weaver, 2007; Hunter, 2002).

Generally, the literature examining skin color preferences in African Americans has focused on the aesthetic currency afforded lighter skinned African Americans (cf. Hanger, 1997; Robinson & Ward, 1995). In examining this, the research has found time and again that African American men report finding lighter skin more attractive than darker skin when selecting African American female partners for dating and marital relationships (Robinson & Ward, 1995; Ross, 1997). This pattern was not replicated among African American females in their selection of African American male partners (Collins, 2005; Hill, 2002). Accordingly, it has been posited that evaluations of African American women’s attractiveness is affected more by skin color than is the perceived attractiveness of African American men. This difference is believed to be related to lighter skin (often referred to as “fair” skin) having been conceptualized as a feminine characteristic (Hill, 2002).

The salience and relevance of skin color as a factor in partner selection has been found to be stronger in racially homogenous contexts than in racially mixed spaces (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005), potentially indicating that
intra-group differences are less salient in the presence of inter-group difference. However, it has also been shown that skin color is treated with greater importance by persons in lower socioeconomic groups (Thompson & Keith, 2001), which are often more racially homogenous as well. Thus, it is unclear if racial homogeneity, lower socioeconomic status, or an interaction is underlying greater attention to skin color in partner selection.

In contrast to the majority of work which focuses on the heightened value of lighter skin, there is also a body of work which has found that darker skin may be favored in partner selection when “racial authenticity” is a valued characteristic. Those operating under this paradigm, one where “authentic” Blackness is demonstrated through darker skin color, may perceive a person with lighter skin as being racially impure and therefore less attractive as an ideal dating or sexual partner (Hall, 1992; Stephens & Few, 2007). Embracing what could be described as a “Black is beautiful” notion, this population often ascribes attributes of “realness”, beauty, and racial loyalty/solidarity to darker skinned African Americans (Wade, 1996).

Given the negative connotations potentially attached to both lighter and darker skin colors, a medium skin color is preferred by some. Given that it does not carry the negative perceptions of racial impurity held by those who espouse an “authentic” phenotypic Blackness nor the perceptions of being ugly or lowly that are attached to darker skin, it may function as a skin tone which is palatable across ideologies (Hall, 1992).
Hair. Both the texture and style of African Americans’ hair may have implications for their desirability. Value attached to hair texture often functions in tandem with that which is attached to skin color. Because many lighter skinned African Americans have straighter hair due to some degree of White ancestry, the status afforded to persons with lighter skin color is often also afforded to persons with what has been described as “good hair” (Hunter, 1999; Hunter, 2002; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). This “good hair” is best described as straight or wavy hair and is often juxtaposed with “bad hair” which is tightly curled and kinky (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). For African American women, there is often the additional qualifier of hair length. Therefore, “good hair” for an African American female is often understood to be long in addition to straight or wavy. While shorter cuts may have become increasingly more acceptable over time, historically short hair has been viewed as unattractive and/or unfeminine (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). In contexts where Eurocentric norms of beauty are valued, this hair texture is valued while kinkier hair is seen as ugly or unkempt (Hall, 1992; Wade, 1996). As such, there is a pressure upon African American women to utilize chemical treatments to straighten their hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; White, 2010). Relatedly, some African American females may wear wigs or utilize hair extensions in order to have hair of a texture, length, and style that is palatable to potential partners (Lester, 2010). In contexts where Eurocentric norms of beauty are eschewed, straighter hair is regarded as inauthentic and unattractive while kinkier hair is valued. In these contexts, chemical straightening or the use of wigs or weave could be read as more problematic than natural hair.

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4 Natural hair refers to hair that has not been treated chemically. It may be kinky or straight (Byrd
which is straight, as it could be read as a purposeful attempt to match the 
Eurocentric beauty norm (White, 2010).

The relationship between hair texture and beauty affects African American 
females more than males though, given that many African American boys begin 
to wear their hair cut very short at an early age (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). 
Therefore they are subject to less evaluation based on the texture of their hair. 
However, the hair styles of both African American males and females have the 
potential to moderate their desirability. While some African American boys begin 
to wear their hair cut very short, there are some African American men who 
choose to wear their hair curly (whether naturally or through a chemical process), 
braided, or long and straight (Stallings, 2010). Collectively, these hair styles for 
African American men have been met both with positive and negative response. 
Some have described these hair styles as feminine and indicative of 
homosexuality (Welsing, 1991) while others have offered them as normative 
expressions of creativity and a desire to explore alternative masculinities (Ashe, 
2010; Stallings, 2010). Alternate masculinities are also embodied in dreadlocks 
(matted coils of hair) worn by some African American men. Given their roots in 
Jamaican Rastafarian tradition, dreadlocks are reflective of a form of masculinity 
that is different from that which has been cultivated among many African 
Americans (Ashe, 2010; Stallings, 2010). Therefore, for some, they represent an 
acceptable expression of masculinity, though they may carry negative stereotypes 
about poor hygiene or cleanliness (Ashe, 2010). While dreadlocks do serve to 
represent a form of masculinity, they have also been adopted by many African 

& Tharp, 2001).
American females (Cadogan, 2010). For both males and females, they have been associated with a certain Afrocentrism that carries a particular valence depending on one’s attitudes toward Afrocentrism (Cadogan, 2010; Stallings, 2010). Bald heads among African American males and females may similarly convey messages about particular identities which varying valence depending upon the audience. For example, bald heads may be viewed positively for males, but the associated masculinity that renders them attractive can be read negatively for a woman (Stallings, 2010). Given the value ascribed to women having hair, a bald woman may be viewed as unfeminine or as indicative of a lesbian identity.

Given the variety of potential presentations and the potential associations which can be made to the hair of African Americans, this serves as an area that must be considered in any attempt to understand partner preferences. Particularly given the ways that one’s partner may color what others think of one’s self (Sassler, 2010), the messages coded in particular hair presentations may be of particular importance to African American adolescents.

**A Theoretical Framework: Postmodernist Black Feminism**

Because analyses of the nuances of African American partnering, particularly among adolescents, are sparse in the psychology literature, a framework for such an analysis here required borrowing from other disciplines. The complexities of African American partnering have been investigated more thoroughly in the African American studies literature (Collins, 2005; hooks, 2001; hooks, 2004). One paradigm utilized therein is particularly applicable when trying to understand and contextualize the particular characteristics African American
adolescents identify as ideal for their dating and sexual partners: postmodernist Black feminism.

Given the multifaceted nature of this framework, it is useful to explicate the relevance of each aspect of it independently. Feminism is a framework which seeks to analyze social roles and lived experiences by understanding the role of oppression, sexism, and patriarchy (hooks, 2000). The feminist frameworks that underlie postmodernist Black feminism can be utilized to understand how sex roles are constructed and performed by the adolescents who are selecting partners.

Understanding the African American context of these relationships allows one to better consider how sex roles may be racialized or contingent upon certain race-related experiences and phenomena. In this way, the use of postmodernist Black feminism allows an analysis that is informed by the ecological and historical context of the adolescents, some of which may be acting upon them without their knowledge (Kitwana, 2002; Lorde, 2007). For example, the way that particular physical or personality characteristics are valued may be the result of conditions that exist in particular African American communities or may be informed by particular histories related to the African American experience. For example, there exist a number of sexual scripts specific to African American females (Stephens & Few, 2007) and an even greater number of stereotyped gender identities that have long been distributed to African Americans through mass media (West, 1994). Among these are the Diva, Gold Digger, Baby Mama, the Black Buck, and the Uncle Tom. While each draws on aspects of African American identities, they are reductionist in their simplicity and, accordingly,
invite reductionist understandings of African American persons. For example, the Baby Mama is a construction of African American female identity where a female’s being is reduced to her role as the mother of a man’s child (Stephens & Few, 2007). She is not a textured individual, but instead her existence is defined with respect to an unnamed male. The Black Buck and Uncle Tom archetypes also traffic in sexual stereotype. The Black Buck is sexually insatiable (often craving the sexual attention of White women) while the Uncle Tom is a cowardly, impotent African American man who primarily serves the interest of White people (West, 2000). Given the widespread availability of these archetypes in mass media, they may inform the particular norms of beauty and behavior that shape the partner preferences of African American adolescents. The existence of these archetypes does not necessarily mean that all adolescents will internalize them as offered, so the present analysis will also take into account counter-narratives to racist and sexist ideologies which have informed notions of attractiveness and value. More specifically, it is possible that being confronted with simplistic and often negative characterizations of African Americans may cause an adolescent to give more attention to fuller, more nuanced characterizations of African Americans. This sort of behavior would allow these youths to develop different narratives about African American attractiveness which may inform their partner preferences.

Last, postmodernism is an attempt to understand the world while considering the social constructedness of many phenomena that are otherwise treated as concrete (hooks, 2000). This moves away from an understanding of
African American romantic and sexual dynamics as “deviant” juxtaposed to the normalcy of White romantic and sexual dynamics (Collins, 2005). By conceptualizing these dynamics as social constructs affected by multiple social forces, one can understand differences between groups without necessarily applying pathology to that which differs from the established mainstream.

The combination of aforementioned factors produces a lens through which the partner preferences espoused by respondent youth can be understood while taking into account the roles of patriarchy and racism in determining appropriate gender behavior (hooks, 2000; Collins, 2005). This will allow for an analysis that is sensitive to ecological factors and therefore limits the application of pathology in the presence of mere difference. In addition, the use of a lens that is cognizant of the contextual factors which impact adolescent partner preferences allows a broadening and updating of exchange theory’s understanding of this population.

**Rationale**

Dating and sexual relationships have been established as normative parts of adolescent development (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003; Corsaro & Elder, 1990; Sharp et al., 2007). Alongside physiological changes which facilitate the desire for sexual pairing, there are a number of changes in an adolescent’s social context which facilitate access to dating and sexual relationships (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002; Halpern, 2003; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). Adolescents begin to spend more time with peers rather than family, peer networks begin to become mixed-sex, and social pressure to be involved in a dating or sexual relationship begins to mount (Corsaro & Elder, 1990; Richards et
al., 1998; Romig & Bakken, 1992; Sharp et al., 2007). Much like platonic peer relationships, dating and sexual relationships become a site where cultural routines are learned and practiced (Maccoby, 1998; Corsaro & Elder, 1990). However, dating and sexual relationships offer the opportunity to cultivate some skills which may not be applicable in friendship relationships. For example, adolescents begin to develop a sense of autonomy and mutuality in platonic peer relationships, but they begin to learn to navigate physical and emotional intimacy through dating and sexual relationships (Furman & Simon, 2008; Kuttler et al., 1999; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006).

Given the necessity of these skills as an adolescent moves into adulthood, dating and sexual relationships are not only normative, but also purposeful. In addition to being normative and developmentally useful, dating and sexual behavior are prevalent. The majority of adolescents report either having been involved in a romantic relationship or having wanting to be involved in such a relationship by late adolescence (Bouchey & Furman, 2003; Carver et al., 2003; Furman & Hand, 2006). Though the number of youth who report having sex has decreased over the last 20 years, nearly half of adolescents report having engaged in sexual behavior (Kann et al., 2011). Additionally, the age of sexual debut has decreased as well (Kann et al., 2011). Given the normativity, purpose, and prevalence of adolescent dating and sexual relationships, a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon is warranted.

The majority of work which examines dating and sexual relationships among adolescents focuses on White adolescents. While many of the findings
relevant to White adolescents hold true for ethnic minority adolescents, there are also particular nuances of the experiences of ethnic minority youth that need further inquiry and explanation. While the psychology literature has begun to examine dating and sexual partnering among African American adolescents, the focus has primarily been on associated pathologies. The research has primarily focused on how these dating and sexual relationships are related to intimate partner violence, underage pregnancy, and STI transmission (c.f. Bouris et al., 2010; Furman, 2002; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2006; Nebbitt et al., 2010; Raiford, Wingood, & Diclemente, 2007; Suellentrop & Flanagan, 2006; Temple & Freeman, 2011). This leaves substantial room for inquiry that examines that which is normative, taking into account theories meant to apply generally while also considering specific ecological factors which impact African American adolescents. This kind of inquiry potentially broadens and deepens the understandings of African American adolescent partnering.

Partner selection has been broached in the psychology literature, focusing primarily on differences between males and females with respect to their focus on physical preferences versus personality preferences (c.f. Bauermeister et al., 2010; Bauermeister et al., 2009; Edwards, 1969; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005; South, 1991). African American partner selection has also been studied a bit. However, the primary findings have been comparisons to White respondents, finding that African American adolescents focus on physical preferences to a greater degree than their White counterparts (Hansen, 1977) or differences in features found acceptable and/or attractive (Freedman et al., 2004; Glasser,
Robnett, & Feliciano, 2009). However, given that who one selects as a dating or sexual partner necessarily has an effect on the course and content of a relationship, this is an area that cannot be ignored or understudied.

A better understanding of what characteristics are valued or not valued in an ideal dating or sexual partner could inform curricula related to teaching adolescents how to form and maintain healthy relationships. In addition, the characteristics identified as ideal for dating and sexual partners may have repercussions both for the respondent youth and for their pool of potential partners. For example, youth who fall outside of the ideal characteristics endorsed by the adolescents in this study may warrant specific focus on self-esteem building if dating relationships should lead to psychosocial stress. In addition, youth who prefer partners that are necessarily unlike them may warrant self-esteem building as well. Understanding these preferences in the context of a postmodernist Black feminist analysis may serve to inform useful avenues for such self-esteem building. Particularly given the value that dyadic romantic interactions have for the self-esteem and overall reported mental well-being of adolescents (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009), growing the knowledge in this area better equips those who work to ensure their mental health and well-being.

Qualitative methods are the best tool for examining this phenomenon, because adolescent dating and sexual relationships are complex phenomena that they are best understood when adolescents are able to speak about them in their own words (Gilmore, DeLamater, & Wagstaff, 1996). Rather than imposing limits on what the youth may endorse, the openness of a qualitative research approach
allows the voices of all of the interviewed youth to be articulated. In this way, every data point is considered equally important, as it gives voice to a lived experience which cannot be discounted. This phenomenological approach will also utilize the language of the youth in order to represent the essence of their experience authentically. Given the history of marginalizing the voices of youth, African Americans, and low-income persons, an approach which respects the value of every voice is both methodologically sound and necessary.

**Research Questions**

Research Question I. What characteristics do low-income heterosexual African American adolescents (ages 15-17) identify as ideal in dating partners?

- What physical characteristics do these adolescents identify as ideal in dating partners?
- What interpersonal characteristics do these adolescents identify as ideal in dating partners?
- What other characteristics do these adolescents identify as ideal in dating partners?

Research Question II. What characteristics do low-income heterosexual African American adolescents (ages 15-17) identify as ideal in sex partners?

- What physical characteristics do these adolescents identify as ideal in sex partners?
- What interpersonal characteristics do these adolescents identify as ideal in sex partners?
• What other characteristics do these adolescents identify as ideal in sex partners?

Research Question III. How do the characteristics that low-income heterosexual African American male adolescents (ages 15-17) identify as ideal in female dating partners compare with characteristics they identify as ideal in female sex partners?

Research Question IV. How do the characteristics that low-income heterosexual African American female adolescents (ages 15-17) identify as ideal in male dating partners compare with characteristics they identify as ideal in male sex partners?

Research Question V. How do the similarities or differences in ideal dating partner and ideal sex partner characteristics compare across sexes among low-income heterosexual African American adolescents?
CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Participants for the present study were 52 African American youth (male = 32, female = 20) between the ages of 15 and 17 (mean=16) at the time of recruitment. These youth represented a subsample of adolescents who participated in a larger qualitative research study (N=82) examining gender ideologies and their relationships to dating and sex among this age group of African American youth. In order to qualify for the study, participants had to have met the following eligibility criteria: 1) identify as African American or Black, 2) be between the ages of 15 and 17 (inclusive), and 3) endorse predominant sexual behavior with persons of the other sex. The 52 youth selected for analysis in this study met those criteria, but additionally met the criteria of being sexually active, as defined by having ever had penetrative sexual intercourse with a person of the other sex.

Procedure

Recruitment

All participants were recruited from Chicago and San Francisco community-based, youth-serving agencies. In each city, two or three community-based agencies served as recruitment and interview sites. The chosen sites were located in low-income neighborhoods. The neighborhoods from which the participants were selected were comparable with respect to high rates of poverty, unemployment, school drop-outs, incarceration, and STI prevalence (City and County of San Francisco, 2006; Chicago Department of Public Health, 2006; San
Francisco Department of Public Health, 2007). In addition, African Americans account for a large proportion of heterosexually transmitted cases of HIV and STIs in both cities (Chicago Department of Public Health, 2006; San Francisco Department of Public Health, 2007). The primary differences between the areas chosen in the two cities were differing population densities of African Americans (93% in the Chicago neighborhoods and 53% in the San Francisco neighborhoods) and overall African American population size in the cities (more in Chicago than San Francisco; City and County of San Francisco, 2006). Once eligibility for the larger study was established through a screening procedure, written parental consent and youth assent were obtained.

**Interview Process**

After eligibility was established and both consent and assent were obtained, youth participated in individual, semi-structured qualitative interviews. Given the sensitive topics covered, these interviews were administered by trained, ethnic minority interviewers in a private setting. When possible, the gender of the participant and interviewer were matched. The average interview was between 90 and 120 minutes. Participants were compensated $40 for their time.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Accuracy of transcription was checked by members of the research team involved in data collection.

**Instrument**

A semi-structured interview guide was developed by the principal investigators for this study. Building on previous work which examined
adolescent dating and sexual behavior (Dolcini, Harper, Boyer, & Watson, 2002; Dolcini, Harper, & Coe, 2007; Harper et al., 2004), the interview protocol was designed to address social and ecological factors that may impact adolescent social development and sexual health. The interview included questions about youth’s ideas related to romantic and sexual relationships, romantic and sexual communication, and the sources of information that informed youth’s ideas on these subjects.

This interview protocol was tested with 18- and 19-year-old youth from the sampled communities in order to verify the appropriateness and clarity of the language used. Adjustments to the protocol were made if language was unclear or if there was culturally relevant language that was more appropriate for the target population.

The final interview instrument was approved by the respective institutional review boards for the universities with which the researchers were associated. The full interview guides are attached as Appendices A and B.

**Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis was guided by a psychological phenomenological framework (Giorgi, 1989), making use of multiple steps of deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding refers to using an existing framework to code data and inductive coding refers to allowing codes to emerge (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because the phenomenon of ideal characteristics for dating and sexual partners among low-income African American adolescents had aspects which had
been illuminated in prior literature as well as gaps in understanding, this combination allowed for a more thorough analysis of the phenomenon.

**Phenomenological Approach**

Phenomenology is one of the five schools of qualitative inquiry generally used in social and behavioral science literature, the others being narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study research (Creswell, 2007). While all five schools of qualitative inquiry aim to analyze and better understand the “what” and “how” of lived experience, phenomenology was selected for the present analysis because it specifically focused on describing what a given group of participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In doing so, phenomenological research is able to identify the universal essence of that particular phenomenon, describing both “what” it is and “how” it is experienced for the study’s participants.

In order to reduce the potential subjectivity of analysis, phenomenology relies on the Greek notion of the epoche, a suspension of presuppositions. By suspending expectations of the data based on her/his own experiences, the researcher is able to experience these phenomena “for the first time” as s/he reviews the collected data. Utilizing this approach allowed the researcher to observe the variety of ways that the phenomena was experienced or manifested without discounting those experiences or manifestations which are at odds with the researcher’s own lived experience.

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5 This is in contrast to the other approaches to qualitative research, as narrative research focuses more on the particular chronological experiences of an individual, grounded theory focuses on developing or discovering a theory from the experiences it analyzes, ethnography focuses on interpreting the experiences of a cultural group, and case study research focuses on a more in-depth analysis of a particular case or cases.
There were five steps in this study’s phenomenological analysis: content analysis, thematic analysis, coding refinement, cross-case analysis, and comparative analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the content analysis step of coding, the 52 transcripts were read and concepts related to the research questions were identified. These concepts were then used to develop a coding manual. The coding manual began with a set of a priori codes based on findings of the empirical literature. These codes included: *interpersonal characteristics, financial resources, social status, body type, skin color,* and *hair texture.* As transcripts were read, additional, emergent codes were added to the manual as appropriate. These codes are listed at length in the Results section.

This coding manual was then used in the thematic analysis step, as significant statements related to the research questions were coded and analyzed in order to better delineate precise descriptions of the emerging themes. This allowed the researcher to better identify the breadth of themes relevant to the research questions.

In the next step of coding, coding refinement, sub-themes were identified iteratively until all sub-themes had been identified. These sub-themes were used to articulate the complexity of the phenomenon. This process of continual refinement allowed for the patterns existent in the data to become clearer. Rather than only recognizing the relationships between broad themes, the researcher was able to identify more specific and idiosyncratic elements of ideal dating and sexual partner characteristics.
After developing the codebook, analyzing the themes, and refining the codes, a matrix of coded data was created in order to facilitate cross-case and cross-group analyses. All coded material was entered into a master matrix. For each code in the codebook, there was an area of the matrix including relevant passages of text. In addition, there were the respondent’s ID number, their sex, and a pseudonym to be used with representative quotes to be presented in this text. This matrix allowed the researcher to examine patterns which emerged within the male respondents and patterns which emerged within the female respondents with respect to ideal dating partners and ideal sexual partners respectively. The resultant data was used to develop aggregate descriptions of the young men’s ideal dating partner, the young women’s ideal dating partner, the young men’s ideal sexual partner, and the young women’s ideal sexual partner. These descriptions were used to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. By comparing the patterns which emerge for each sex’s respective ideal dating and sexual partners, the researcher will be able to identify patterns relevant to Research Questions 3 and 4. A comparison of the patterns existent in the answers to Research Questions 3 and 4 will answer Research Question 5.

**Credibility**

It can be argued that qualitative analysis is necessarily more subjective than quantitative analysis, given its focus on drawing units of meaning from material which must be interpreted by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, in order to ensure the credibility of the present data analysis, the following steps were taken: bracketing of experience, prolonged engagement,
peer debriefing, and negative case analysis. This credibility served as an analog to the internal validity often sought in quantitative analyses.

**Bracketing of experience.** As stated, a pivotal aspect of the phenomenological approach is the *epoche*, the suspension of one’s preexisting beliefs regarding the phenomenon. In order to do that in the most effective way, the researcher must attempt to bracket any previous experiences related to the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this bracketing is to raise consciousness of any internal biases held by the researcher in order to guarantee that any themes discovered are a valid representation of the data and not a product of the researcher’s preconceived notions. It is also an opportunity for the researcher to engage in critical self-reflection and acknowledge his/her personal reasons for pursuing the particular phenomenon under study. To that end, for the present analysis, the researcher engaged in reflection on his sociocultural background, the development of his views on race and desire, and his motivations for pursuing this line of inquiry.

The researcher is a 28 year old African American man from Gary, IN. In many ways, Gary is similar to the communities from which the youth for the present study were drawn. Gary is a predominantly African American city impacted by poverty. Accordingly, the majority of the people the researcher interacted with throughout his youth were other African American people. The bulk of his friends and family were African American people as were his potential dating and sexual partners. This consistent immersion in a low-income African American community has given the researcher the opportunity to observe dating
and sexual courtship among people similar to this study’s target population. In addition, he has both courted and been courted by others in this context for both dating and sexual relationships.

While being African American has likely impacted the researcher’s perspectives on African American adolescent partnering, his perspectives are likely also affected by being dark-skinned. As a dark-skinned African American man, the researcher experienced a diversity of responses related to his skin. Some people regarded his dark skin as a marker of authentic Blackness and, accordingly, treated him with greater respect than they did others of lighter skin tones. Similarly, there were people who considered his dark skin particularly attractive for the same reasons. In contrast, the researcher also encountered people who found dark skin to be “too Black,” comparing it to African-ness rather than African American-ness. In a similar vein, there were those who found dark skin unattractive, particularly when compared with lighter skin. Accordingly, in addition to being able to observe interactions impacted by skin tone, the researcher has also experienced a multiplicity of potential impacts of his own skin color.

The researcher left Gary, IN at age 18 to attend Princeton University in Princeton, NJ. Princeton was much more ethnically diverse than Gary had been, having persons from a variety of race and ethnicities as well as persons of varying national origins. In this context, the researcher was able to observe inter-racial dating and sexual partner selection dynamics as well as intra-racial dating and sexual partner selection dynamics. In addition, the researcher pursued a minor in
African American Studies while at Princeton, which introduced him to thinkers like Cornel West and bell hooks, who critically examined desire in terms of present and historical oppression. This experience challenged the researcher to consider what biases underlay his own beauty ideals and preferences in partners. During this process of self-analysis, the researcher examined how media imagery (including print media, television, movies, music, and music videos) presented particular beauty ideals and models of relationships which he had subsequently adopted. The researcher then began to deconstruct these models of beauty and relationships in order to embrace an approach to partner selection that was not predicated upon ideas which diminished the beauty of Black people in favor of Eurocentric features nor misogynistic reductions of women that placed the majority of their value in their sexually relevant organs (breasts, thighs, buttocks, and vagina).

The researcher was motivated to pursue the present line of inquiry because he has experienced desire and conceptualizing desire from multiple perspectives. When reading the existing literature on the partner selection of African American youth, he saw what seemed to be an absence of texture and context. There was also an insufficient amount of inquiry that focused on African Americans without necessarily comparing them to a White norm. As such, he felt that it was necessary to examine this phenomenon with more care and respect.

**Prolonged engagement.** Prolonged engagement with the phenomenon studied or the participants interviewed allows the researcher to better identify salient aspects of the situation which may color responses or the researcher’s
analysis of the responses. This allows the researcher to identify potential sources of distortion and document their potential influence. Following from prolonged engagement is persistent observation. Persistent observation refers to the in-depth pursuit of elements which are found to be salient during the prolonged engagement process. This process is two-fold: extended time in the population of interest and with the data.

As part of the data collection process, the researcher spent extended amounts of time in the communities from which the data was collected. During the process of coding and analysis, the researcher read the entirety of the interview transcripts in order to orient himself with the language and style used by the respondents in their discussion of dating and sexual partnering. In addition, this allowed the researcher to identify aspects of the phenomenon that may not have been immediately apparent before exposure to the transcribed material. This ensured that codes were informed not only by the material present in a particular interview, but that they were informed by a more thorough understanding of the respondent group being analyzed. Given phenomenology’s focus on shared aspects of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994), understanding the group more broadly was a necessary step in analysis.

**Peer debriefing.** Peer debriefing, presentation of codes and coded material to professional peers, is an oft used strategy to ensure that the researcher’s interpretation of the data is not biased by the particularities of his/her experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to minimize such bias in the present analysis, the researcher presented his coding of transcribed material to members
of his research team. They were asked to confirm the fit of the codes to the presented material and to ensure that the researcher’s interpretation of the data was logical. In order to increase the objectivity of the process, persons familiar and unfamiliar with the studied phenomenon were utilized. Therefore, both research team members affiliated with the present study and unaffiliated research team members were asked to participate in peer debriefing.

In addition, the researcher hired an undergraduate research assistant to read and code the 52 transcripts. The researcher met with her on a weekly basis to discuss codes and the fit of coded material.

**Negative case analysis.** Given that phenomena are complex, negative case analysis allowed the researcher to consider alternative explanations for patterns in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Negative case analysis is the consideration of cases and instances that do not fit the larger pattern manifest in the data. By exploring the differences presented by these data, the researcher could find that an explanation alternative to the researcher’s initial conclusions better explained the phenomena generally or that there might have been multiple presentations of the phenomena. This would allow the researcher to develop a more nuanced description of ideal characteristics of dating and sexual partners for the respondent group.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The results below illustrate the diversity of characteristics identified by study participants as ideal characteristics of their potential dating partners and sexual partners. In order to respond to the present study’s research questions specifically and methodically, this section will detail characteristics of ideal dating partners first and then characteristics of ideal sexual partners. Subsequently, comparisons will be made.

Within the domains of ideal dating partner and ideal sexual partner characteristics respectively, salient themes which emerged from the data are presented accompanied by one or more illustrative quotes. Several quotes contain the letter “R” at the beginning of a statement to denote that it is the respondent speaking, or a letter “I” at the beginning of a statement to denote that it is the interviewer speaking. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

Ideal Dating Partner Characteristics

For the purposes of the present analysis, characteristics of ideal dating partners were defined as any characteristics that respondents identify as important in their selection of a partner for a dating relationship. These dating relationships may vary in length and seriousness, but they are identifiable as dating relationships given that they are intended to be ongoing and consist of more than sexual activity. When examining the characteristics that respondents identified as ideal in a dating partner, eight primary areas emerged: physical characteristics,
self-presentation characteristics, interpersonal characteristics, intrapersonal characteristics, financial resources, age, preferred race, and celebrity similarity.

These themes and their sub-themes are presented in Table 1.

**Physical Characteristics**

Physical characteristics included any characteristics which described aspects of the potential dating partner’s physical appearance. Five sub-themes of physical characteristics were revealed during the coding process: *general attractiveness*, *body type*, *facial features*, *skin tone*, and *hair*.

For some youth, when asked to describe what an ideal dating partner would look like, they were unable to be specific in their description. Instead, they preferred to be more general. These youth would often define their ideal dating partner as “pretty,” “handsome,” or “fine”. While this could have been a non-specific reference to facial beauty, this was not necessarily clear across cases. As such, these more global descriptions of attractiveness were coded separately. In contrast to youth who may have been more descriptive in general regarding their ideal partners, many of these responses came from youth who were more concise generally. For example, Julia, a 15 year old young woman from Chicago, described her ideal dating partner as follows:

> I don’t really have a particular type as long as you’re nice looking, handsome, with a nice, nice personality.

In describing the attractiveness of an ideal dating partner, Samuel, a 16 year old young man from San Francisco, was not specific about the characteristics of that attractiveness, but as specific about why her being attractive is important.

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6 “Fine” here is defined as “very attractive” rather than the more traditional definition of “okay.”
### Table 1. Ideal Dating Partner Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Theme</th>
<th>Secondary Theme</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>General Attractiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Body Type</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facial Features</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skin Tone</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-presentation Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>Hair Style</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hygiene</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dress</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal Characteristics</strong></td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrating Respect</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shared Interests</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extroversion</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mutuality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Decorum</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>&quot;Bad Boy&quot; Persona</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intrapersonal Characteristics</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Self-Respect</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ambition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Familial Focus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Orientation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Religious Orientation</td>
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<td><strong>Financial Resources</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Preferred Race</strong></td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Celebrity Similarity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
[An ideal dating partner has] got to be attractive, got to be able to take her around and stuff. You can’t be walking around with a monster.

Body type characteristics described preferences in an ideal dating partner’s height, weight, height/weight proportion, and development of sexually relevant parts (e.g. characteristics of the partner’s breasts, penis, vagina, or buttocks). Some youth were general in their description of preferred body type, describing ideal partners as having “a nice body” or “a good body,” while other youth were more specific. Shannon, a 16 year old young woman from Chicago, offered a very precise picture of her ideal partner, including specific reference to his height as well as elements of general attractiveness and facial features.

I: What would your ideal dating partner look like?
R: Kind of tall, built, I like that style personally. Built, sexy teeth, nice skin, muscles, not, muscles like toned, like muscular butt. I don’t like boys with flat butts, that sounds weird, but…or big ones, but muscular, shapely, calves…you ain’t got to have a six pack or nothing like that, but you could have the outline of it. Stuff like that. You know.

Avery, a 15 year old young man from San Francisco, was similarly specific in describing the body type of his ideal dating partner.

R: She’d be thick.
I: Alright, tell me what you mean by that.
R: She’s got to have some meat on her bones, you know. Double DD bra size. She’s got nice thighs. Clear looking feet. Don’t matter if she’s light skinned or dark. That don’t matter. Have nice, long hair. Straight teeth. Breath smell good. Nice eyes. I ain’t picky, but that’s what I see.

Taking a somewhat different approach to answering the question, Steven, a 17 year old young man from Chicago, did not articulate particular body type characteristics that he would want, but was able to articulate what he did not want.

I: What would [an ideal dating partner] look like?
R: I’m not really picky but no big girls, not to be funny, and I don’t know, she’d just be like – I want like a normal girl.
Facial feature characteristics described preferences in an ideal dating partner’s face, including the size or shape of the nose, eyes, forehead, or lips. This area also captured preferences in skin clarity (e.g. the presence of acne or not). These descriptions were often couched in a more global description of an ideal partner’s attractiveness, as evidenced in Latrice’s description of her “dream boy.”

I: And what would he look like?
R: Just a dream boy?
I: Yeah.
R: I don’t know. Light skinned, probably, some nice pretty green eyes.
(Latrice, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

Similar to Latrice’s description, many of the young men also focused on eyes when describing particular aspects of the face, though they were not specific about color. This is illustrated by a quote from Samson, a 17 year old young man from Chicago.

The best girl I imagine, she’d probably be, like, long hair, red bone, pretty eyes, always in heels because I don’t like girls in gym shoes. They’re ghetto. I say she have on some high heels or something like that, take her to a restaurant or something like that.

As has been evidenced in the representative quotes used for illustrating previous codes, skin tone characteristics have been included in a number of the more specific descriptions of an ideal dating partner. These skin tone characteristic preferences were diverse, with some youth preferring partners who were light-skinned or dark-skinned specifically and others expressing no preference in skin tone. Michael, a 16 year old young man from Chicago, described a multiplicity of potential skin tones which would be attractive to him.
While offering a fairly specific physical description of her ideal dating partner, Lisa, a 17 year old young woman from San Francisco, described a preference for her ideal dating partner’s skin tone, which differed from the skin tone of her current dating partner.

I: Okay. And what would [an ideal dating partner] look like?
R: I’m not gonna say tall, dark, and handsome. I’m gonna just say – I don’t know. He would be pretty, like – I don’t know. A pretty boy. Like I want him tall, light-skinned, probably – no, my boyfriend’s dark-skinned. Yeah. Tall. Light-skinned. Nice mouth. Got some nice type of hair.

Frederick, a 15 year old young man from San Francisco, described his preference for a partner’s skin tone in relation to his own skin tone.

I: Okay. What would she look like?
R: Probably would be my color, dark skinned in color.

Hair characteristics described both aspects of hair texture as well as length. Texture preferences refer specifically to the straightness, curliness, or kinkiness of an ideal dating partner’s hair while length, a more straightforward concept, just describes whether the partner’s hair is long or short. Very few respondents made specific reference to hair texture specifically, but many young men were specific in their preference for long hair in an ideal dating partner.

She gotta have long hair, a nice shape, and she gotta be like sweet and nice, kind and stuff, no drama. (James, 16 year old male, Chicago)

I: Like, the best possible girlfriend you could imagine, what would she be like?
R: Thick. Thick booty. Nice – nice little body. Nice petite body and long hair. (Howard, 17 year old male, Chicago)
One young man was more nuanced in his description of hair preference.

*R*: For one, she ain’t gotta have long hair, but she can’t be bald headed; or a short cut, that’s fine, but she just can’t be bald headed. (Avery, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

Female respondents were more apt to reference hair length more peripherally through hair style, but that will be addressed more specifically as an area of how an ideal dating partner presents him/herself.

**Self-presentation Characteristics**

While similar to descriptions of an ideal partner’s physical body, self-presentation characteristics were more related to features that an ideal partner could manipulate, including how he/she was adorned or styled. In addition to hair style characteristics, two other sub-themes emerged from this area: hygiene, and dress.

Hair style characteristics described how an ideal partner presents his/her hair. This includes factors such as artificial hair color, and the particular style in which the hair is presented (e.g. a crew cut, bangs, braids, or dread locks). Many young men responded that they wanted an ideal dating partner to have her hair “done,” but they were not specific about how the hair should be styled. Young women did, however, reference styling.

*I*: What does handsome mean to you?
*R*: Handsome is – I like boys with muscles. Tall – if he’s shorter than me *[Laughs]*. Like clean cut hair or, if you have long hair, it’s braided and not just all over your head. (Asia, 15 year old female, Chicago)

*R*: I want him to be chocolate brown, hair ponytail or some dreads or something. (Shannon, 16 year old female, Chicago)
Hygiene characteristics described aspects of an ideal partner’s cleanliness, including the visible cleanliness of his/her clothes, shoes, or body as well as odors that may result from poor self-care. Some youth described cleanliness broadly, stating that they want a dating partner who “is clean” or “takes care of themselves.” However, there were youth who were more specific.

*R:* I don’t have a face for my ideal man because I’m shallow, but not like you got to be the freshest boy, you got to be super clean because I remember a few boys that wasn’t really that clean but I really liked them. (Shannon, 16 year old female, Chicago)

*R:* Shoes; she gotta always got good shoes on because that’s what my mom, she taught me to look at a girl’s shoes and feet and make sure that’s all clean. If it ain’t clean, then you shouldn’t be talking to her. (Avery, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

Further, multiple youth stated that brushed teeth and fresh breath were prerequisites for an ideal dating partner.

Dress characteristics described characteristics related to an ideal partner’s choices of clothing. This includes both the style of the clothes and also the potential cost of the clothes. A repeated theme throughout descriptions of an ideal dating partner’s dress was that they had to “dress nice” or “be fresh.”

*I:* What would your ideal girlfriend be like?
*R:* Someone that be fresh and look good.
*I:* All right. When you say fresh, tell me what you mean by that.
*R:* Well, their clothes and their shoes and their hair and stuff.
*I:* Okay. So clothes, shoes and hair is fresh, right? It’s new?
*R:* Yeah. (Aaron, 16 year old male, Chicago)

*R:* The best girl I imagine, she’d probably be, like, long hair, red bone, pretty eyes, always in heels because I don’t like girls in gym shoes. They’re ghetto. I say she have on some high heels or something like that, take her to a restaurant or something like that. (Donald, 17 year old male, Chicago)

**Interpersonal Characteristics**
In addition to the physical and presentation features that respondents described, they also described a diversity of interpersonal characteristics which they desired or expressly did not desire in an ideal dating partner. Interpersonal characteristics included any characteristics which described aspects of an ideal dating partner’s personality, interaction with people, and behavior. A wide range of sub-themes emerged from the respondents’ description of an ideal dating partner’s interpersonal characteristics: general niceness, care, demonstrating respect, communication skills, honesty, shared interests, fun-seeking, extroversion, mutuality, decorum, a “bad boy” persona, and sexual openness.

Many respondents, when asked what their ideal dating partners’ personalities would be like, replied that they wanted a partner who was “nice” or “sweet.” These responses were categorized as general niceness as the specific characteristics of this niceness were not defined.

I don’t really have a particular type as long as you’re nice looking, handsome, with a nice, nice personality. (Julia, 15 year old female, Chicago)

She gotta be like sweet and nice, kind and stuff. (Luke, 16 year old male, Chicago)

Another characteristic respondents described as important in an ideal dating partner was their ability to demonstrate care. For some youth, this was made clear though the partner’s attentiveness. Steven, a 17 year old young man from Chicago, focused on his ideal girlfriend’s willingness to check on his well-being, promote his feeling good, and demonstrate an investment in his life more broadly.
I: What would your ideal girlfriend be like, that is someone you are in love with and maybe having sex with?
R: Hmmm, I see it as, well, maybe a person who calls me and sees how I’m doing, talks to me, comes see me, you know, not afraid to come out of her pocket sometimes, is nice to the family, wanting to meet the family, knows what to say to me to make me feel right, things like that.

Other youth focused on particular tasks that could be done to demonstrate care.

I: Okay, all right, what kind of person would she be like?
R: She would be the kind of person like that would do things for you like they cook for you, clean for you, like you’ll be – like basically like that. (Rashaad, 16 year old male, Chicago)

And he would spoil me. Just like give me anything I want. (Courtney, 16 year old female, Chicago)

The topic of respect was mentioned by most respondents. They described a diversity of potential ways that an ideal dating partner could demonstrate such respect. These included simple descriptions of “being polite,” but also included more specific descriptions of behaviors to be enacted or avoided in order to indicate respect. Among these behaviors were avoiding acts which might embarrass the respondent, avoiding acts of violence (e.g. hitting the respondent), speaking nicely to the respondent, and showing an investment in the cares and concerns of the respondent. One young man described how an actively negative response to what he said would not be taken as disrespectful, but a dismissal of what he is saying would be more problematic.

If she's like, "Shut up," or something like that. That's not the harshest thing but like if you trying to say something to her and she be like, "I don't care," or something like that, that'd be disrespectful. (Shawn, 17 year old male, San Francisco)
Another young man focused on his aversion to potential partners who might threaten him or otherwise verbally show him disrespect, given that he would not act in such a manner toward them.

I won’t like a girl that’ll talk crazy to me like she’ll do this and she’ll do that, but I like a girl that will talk with respect, ‘cause I feel that if I do come at a girl and I find a girl that I really like, I’m gonna talk to her with as much respect that I could. And I’d like for her to do the same to me. (Rashaad, 16 year old male, Chicago)

Chris, a 17 year old young man from San Francisco, drew a clear relationship between respect and fidelity.

I: And what are some of the things a girlfriend might do to show you disrespect?
R: Disrespect?
I: Yeah.
R: I don't know, letting dudes touch her and stuff. I don’t know, probably.
I: Okay.
R: Like being with other dudes.
I: Like being with them how?
R: Just like talking to them while I'm there or something. Like if I'm around she talking to other dudes, that's disrespectful.

The concept of the gentleman was used by some of the female respondents. While some were general in their reference to an ideal dating partner being a gentleman, one young woman offered specific details of what would constitute such a gentleman.

I: So if you could close your eyes and think about the ideal boyfriend, someone you are in love with and you may be having sex with, what would he be like? Ideal.
R: The total gentleman. Like always open doors for me, helping me put on my jacket. I’m not saying a softie. Like you got that mmm, to you that thug, not, thug. That rough side, but not like call me a bitch and a ho and come here bitch and grab me by my hair, no, you can’t ever do that, period. I don’t care where I be at. At home, in the house, on the couch, in the park, you got to be the perfect gentleman, helping me put on my stuff. I’m not saying be my pedestal, my walk dog or my chauffer or whatever. I want you to treat me with respect. (Shannon, 16 year old female, Chicago)
Last, while many of the youth focused on the necessity of an ideal dating partner showing respect to them, some youth also described respect more broadly, including respect for elders or friends.

While communication was broached to an extent in respondent’s discussion of a desire to be respected by an ideal dating partner, an ideal dating partner’s ability to communicate was also described independent of its relationship to demonstrating respect. Many described an ideal dating partner as “a good listener” or someone with whom they could discuss any topic.

My perfect boyfriend would be someone who you could talk to, like talk to about anything. You all got that bond to where you all could talk about anything whether it’s going to hurt each other’s feelings because you keeping it real with the person. (Monique, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

[My ideal dating partner would be] someone that you can trust and that’s gonna always be there for you, someone you can confide in and know that you can go to that person, that they’ll listen to your problems and give you advice. (Julia, 16 year old female, Chicago)

This role of an ideal dating partner as a confidant was mentioned by many of the respondents. Accordingly, the partner needed not only be a good listener, but also an active one who could meaningfully respond. The ability to engage in thoughtful dialogue was highlighted in a quote from Michael, a 16 year old young man from Chicago.

[My ideal girlfriend would be] someone I can talk to and relate to deeply, and…we could have long conversations, like three hours and don’t feel like a second. You know. Someone I can really connect with.
Michael’s response demonstrates that it is not only the ideal dating partner’s availability for conversation that is important, but also the quality of that conversation.

In describing important aspects of interacting with an ideal dating partner, the role of honesty was mentioned by many youth.

I: So what would your ideal boyfriend be like? So that’s someone you are going out with, feel romantic about and maybe having sex with.
R: My ideal boyfriend would have to be honest. I would have to be able to trust him. (Britney, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

While some youth desired a dating partner who was honest with them in these general terms, there was a subset of youth who were particularly focused on honesty as related to fidelity, both romantic and sexual.

I: Okay. All right. So now, I want you to describe to me, Tiffany, your ideal boyfriend, your perfect boyfriend. Describe him for me.
R: Faithful. I mean I don’t think it’s too much to ask for, I just want to keep it real and be faithful. (Tiffany, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

For some of these youth, sexual fidelity was relevant due to an idea that having too much sexual experience was unattractive. Other youth, however, related excessive sexual experience with greater risk of STI transmission. One youth reported a combination of these two in her response.

I: Would you expect [an ideal dating partner] to have sex only with you?
R: Um-hum.
I: And why is that important to you?
R: Because I wouldn’t want, if I’m your girlfriend, you don’t need to have sex with anybody else. You’re my boyfriend, so I can have sex with you and I’m your girlfriend and you can have sex with me.
I: Okay, so just have sex with each other and nobody else?
R: Um-hum.
I: Well, what do you think about guys who have lots of sex partners besides their girlfriend.
R: They nasty.
I: Why is that?
R: They shouldn’t be just having sex with all those people. That’s not cute.
I: Okay, it’s not cute and?
R: That’s not attractive, like if I knew you was having sex with all these girls, I wouldn’t want to be with you.
I: ‘Cause what does that say about him?
R: That he’s nasty and that everybody done had him. (Britney, 16 year old male, San Francisco)

While a majority of the statements that specifically described the necessity of honesty and fidelity were given by female respondents, male respondents also described their particular rationales for desiring fidelity as evidenced by a quote from Kevin.

I: So if you have a girlfriend, would you expect her to have sex only with you?
R: Yes.
I: And why’s that important?
R: Because if I’m your boyfriend, then you shouldn’t be having – if you didn’t want me to be your boyfriend, then you should have said that. Because if we’re having sex, and then we get in a committed relationship and you have sex with somebody else, then we ain’t in no committed relationship. (Kevin, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

Another characteristic of an ideal dating partner desired by many youth was sharing similar interests. Youth seemed to describe this as something which made the relationship more substantial. One young man described the sharing of interests as related to a relationship being beyond a primarily sexual pairing.

Cause like y’all could be connected on a different level. Not just sex. You could be talking to where she connects with you. She likes some of the same things that you like. (Kevin, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

Another respondent framed the sharing of interests as something that enabled shared activities in addition to shared conversational material.

I: So now I want you to think about your ideal boyfriend; tell me about him.
R: I think he’d be like me, and I think he’d take me out, and we’d do stuff together. We’d go to church together and stuff like that. (Nia, 16 year old female, Chicago)

In contrast, one young woman expressed an interest in a partner who was necessarily not like her.

I: What would your ideal boyfriend be like? That’s someone you’re in love with and maybe having sex with.
R: Someone who is nothing like me. Because I would want somebody who – not saying I want somebody to change my whole life. I want somebody to, like cause the way I think like I have an open mind but I still have a closed mind. It’s open but there’s still some things that I’m not open about and I want somebody to show me you can be open with whole bunch of different things and still, I don’t know, I don’t know how to put it. It’s just like someone to show you different roads through the forest. (Tracy, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

A number of youth described an interest in an ideal dating partner who was fun. Generally, this was indicated by an ideal partner being able to make the respondent laugh or otherwise demonstrate a sense of humor.

I: What kind of person would [an ideal dating partner] be?
R: Just like a funny – just someone that like to have fun. (Chris, 17 year old male, San Francisco)

Further, a partner might be fun if he/she was interested in fun activities, like attending movies, roller skating, or just hanging out. Interestingly, the majority of respondents who indicated fun as a preferred characteristic in their ideal dating partner were non-specific about what activities in which this partner would need to be interested.

I: Okay. What would be a good personality?
R: She like to have fun. Like, they like to do things that are fun. They like to have fun and – basically have fun. (Kenneth, 16 year old male, San Francisco)

I: What would your ideal girlfriend be like? That is someone you are in love with and you may be having sex with. What would she be like?
R: She’d be cool, like she’d be fun to hang around, maybe doing stuff together, all that stuff. (Jamaal, 16 year old male, San Francisco)

For some youth, the ability to have/be fun was a necessary criterion for an ideal dating partner. One youth, who had described at length her desire for an older partner, felt it necessary to clarify that he could be older, but not so old that it inhibited his ability to be fun.

I don’t want him to be 80 and stuff ‘cause he gonna die soon. But I want him to be old enough to still go out and have fun, to laugh with him. (Tiffany, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

Possibly related to the desire for a partner who was fun was the desire for a partner who was extroverted. Some youth referred to an ideal dating partner as outgoing, though they were not specific as to what that meant. One young man, however, described more clearly the activities in which an outgoing partner would be interested.

I mean, I like a nice mellow type of girl who likes to go out, likes to go to movies. Likes to roller skate. Just likes to kick it. (Michael, 16 year old male, Chicago)

A caveat that seemed to appear when describing extroverted partners was an observance of decorum (i.e. demonstrating appropriate behavior in a given setting). To this end, many youth were explicit in describing that they did not want a partner who was “ghetto.” This was generally described as related to speaking loudly or being inappropriate in public spaces. In describing his aversion to a “ghetto” potential dating partner, Samson, a 17 year old young man from Chicago, highlights the use of an aggressive tone while ordering food at a restaurant.
I’d say her personality would be, like, sweet or gentle, more like the way a
girl – like, not ghetto. Like, if we go to a restaurant, if she’s ghetto, like,
instead of saying, “Hey, can I get this, please?” She’s like, “Hey. Let me
get that, Joe”.7

For this young man, a softer approach would be more appropriate, and, as such, a
young woman who was more aggressive would not fit his ideal.

Another important aspect of an ideal dating partner highlighted by youth
in this study was mutuality. They desired a partner who was willing to input as
much as they were, therefore maintaining a level of balance in the relationship.
Interestingly enough, this characteristic was only mentioned specifically by
female respondents.

I: So what would your ideal boyfriend be like?
R: Like he have to like me how I like him so I know that the feeling
mutual so I don’t be like, like feeling insecure, you know like oh, I wonder
if he like me like I like him. Like you know, you have to be on the same
page as me. (Britney, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

I: Describe him for me, your ideal boyfriend.
R: If they buy you stuff and you buy them stuff, they get your hair, you get
their hair cut. They meet your mom, you meet their mom. They meet your
brothers and sisters, they meet your brothers and sisters like being the
family and like basically like a close friend, like a real close friend, but
having sex too. (Monique, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

Another characteristic described only by female respondents, perhaps
obviously, was the “bad boy” persona. This bad boy identity was multi-faceted,
encompassing aspects of his behavior toward the respondent, ways he might
choose to present himself, and more internal factors like a general toughness. One
young woman described the “bad boy” in particular detail.

I: So if you could just make a wish and your ideal boyfriend could pop up
in this room. Tell me about him. What would he be like?

7 “Joe” is a slang term used in the Chicago area to address someone whose name one does not
know.
R: Well, he’d be a bad boy, but sweet to me. And he would spoil me. Just like give me anything I want. And he’d intimidate people I guess.
R: Well, aggressive. I’m not going to say controlling, because I want him to think like he’s in control, but then I’m not going to let him take advantage of me. I know how far to go. Tattoos. I want him to drive, because I don’t like walking.
I: Okay. So to drive.
R: And that’s about it.
I: And you said intimidate other people. What do you mean by that?
R: Like not intimidate people, but don’t let nobody run over him. Like tough. That’s about it. (Courtney, 16 year old female, Chicago)

A final interpersonal characteristic described by youth in the study was an ideal dating partner’s openness to sexual interaction. This characteristic was defined by the potential partner’s willingness to engage in sexual activity as well as their willingness to refrain. For one young man, this was the first answer he offered when asked to describe an ideal dating partner.

I: So tell me about your ideal or perfect girlfriend. What would she be like?
R: Have sex when I feel like it. (Kevin, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

While his focus was on a partner’s sexual availability, a number of youth were more interested in an ideal dating partner who was able to moderate their sexual desire and/or availability.

I: What would your ideal girlfriend be like? That is someone who you’re in love with and you might be having sex with.
R: Like a girl that is probably not so easy to give in to have sex with you. (Luke, 16 year old male, Chicago)

She’s got to have the right mindset. You can’t be out there in the streets every day acting like one of them little girls that’s just so thirsty to have sex and wanna have a baby and stuff. I don’t want no girl like that. (Naim, 16 year old male, Chicago)
For these young men, an ideal dating partner would not have (or express, if they do have) excessive desire to engage in sexual activity. While these young men focused on the potential partner’s desire, Julia, a 15 year old young woman from Chicago, was more focused on an ideal dating partner’s ability to respect her decisions about sexual activity.

Like if you tell that person, “Look, I wanna wait to have sex” they’re gonna stand by that decision with you no matter what, or if you and that person were sexually involved and you were like, “Okay, I wanna take a break from it ‘cause it’s affecting me in other ways” then that person, that boy understands where you’re coming from. A person that’s responsible, that’s very considerate of my feelings and willing to respect me and my wishes and my body.

For Julia, an ideal dating partner, no matter their sexual history, would be able to moderate his sexual desire, based on his respect for her. In contrast, the young men did not offer explicit rationales for why a young woman should or should not act upon particular sexual desires.

**Intrapersonal Characteristics**

In addition to the variety of interpersonal characteristics youth described as ideal in an ideal dating partner, there were also a number of intrapersonal characteristics they found valuable. These characteristics referred to aspects of the potential partner that were occurring within the person, including motivations and states of being that were self-focused rather than necessarily tied to interacting with others. Eight sub-themes emerged from the broad category of intrapersonal characteristics: *independence, self-respect, ambition, familial focus, intelligence, educational orientation*, and *religious orientation*. 
Independence was generally described as an ideal dating partner’s ability to support him or herself without the assistance of the respondent. This was both in reference to not relying on the respondent for financial support but also being able to function socially in the absence of the respondent.

*I:* What would your ideal girlfriend be like?
*R:* Nice personality, person know how to carry herself and take care of herself. (Hakeem, 17 year old male, Chicago)

Social independence was often referred to as “giving space.” For example, Shannon, a 16 year old young woman from Chicago, stated that her ideal boyfriend would spend a lot of time with her, but still “give [her] space” and “do his own thing.”

Another intrapersonal characteristic described as ideal in an ideal dating partner was self-respect. Self-respect was often defined in terms of requiring a level of respect from others as well as practicing behaviors which demonstrated a focus on self-care and maintenance. One young man managed to describe both of these aspects cogently in his description of an ideal dating girlfriend.

She would have respect for herself. She would be celibate, because that’s what I am. She would not associate with somebody that call her a bitch and she would – she would be like, like a smart girl like – not making stupid decisions and stuff like – like telling a boy to you know just get in, don’t put on a condom and stuff at all. (Eliot, 16 year old male, Chicago)

For this young man, a partner who respected herself would have respect for her body by not allowing a young man to put her at risk for sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy and respect for her being more generally by not allowing others to speak to her in a manner that was not indicative of respect.
Another valued characteristic in an ideal dating partner was ambition. Ambition was characterized by a desire for growth or promotion in life as demonstrated by planning for the future and/or enacting such plans. This was often referred to simply as “doing something with [oneself].”

I: All right. What kind of person would she be like?
R: She got something going for herself, like is she in school or she got a job. (Howard, 17 year old male, Chicago)

I: so what would your ideal boyfriend be like? So that’s someone you are in love with and maybe having sex with.
R: He’s respectful, cute, in school, um, doing something with his life, have goals for his self. (Jessica, 15 year old female, San Francisco)

A focus on family was described by some youth as an important characteristic of an ideal dating partner. This was generally described as demonstrating respect for the potential partner’s own family and/or respect for and interest in the respondent’s family. Shannon, a 16 year old female from Chicago, said it was necessary that her ideal dating partner “love his family and got respect for everybody in his family.”

Intelligence was another intrapersonal characteristic described by youth in the study. In general, any respondent who made reference to intelligence stated that they would want their partner to be smart. However, many youth placed parameters on how smart an ideal dating partner would be.

I: What would your ideal girlfriend be like?
R: Wow. Like her personality?
I: Yeah.
R: She has to be smart, not hecka smart where she want to correct everything I say or do, but be smart. (Samuel, 16 year old male, San Francisco)
They don’t have to be real smart like a genius, but smart, like going to school, doing something with their life. (Asia, 15 year old female, Chicago)

In addition to intelligence, educational orientation was also described as important to many youth. Educational orientation described an ideal partner’s educational ambitions, attainment, or status. Many youth reported that their ideal dating partner should be in school, particularly if the ideal partner was described as of an age less than 18 years old. This was generally described rather succinctly with a statement akin to “It’s important that he/she’s going to school.” However, some youth were more specific. For example, Tracy gave this explanation for why her ideal dating partner should be in school.

There isn’t no reason why you shouldn’t have a education. There’s this quote that says you can’t be smarter than the man who can’t read books if you don’t read books. (Tracy, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

Another young woman focused on the necessity of education as a backup plan, even if her ideal dating partner’s preferred career path isn’t one that requires formal education.

I mean everybody has their own idea of school. But if his career – I mean if he got a good career going, I wouldn’t be like, “Well, you need to go to school.” Like if we’re young, and he’s like, “You know I don’t want to go to school. I’m trying to be a music producer or something,” I’ll be like, “Well, you know what? I think you should still go take some classes. Because you know if that doesn’t work out, you have a backup plan. You’re not going to work at McDonald’s for the rest of your life. You’re gonna have something.” You know? (Monique, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

James, a 16 year old young man from Chicago, also addressed the utility of education as a backup plan.

I think she should go to school ‘cause what if we go down that road and then we end up breaking up? What if we go down that road and I wanna
break up but I know I can’t break up ‘cause I know she ain’t gonna have a backup plan?

In this case, James conceptualizes an ideal dating partner’s lack of education as a constraint upon him. He cannot in good conscience leave a partner who lacks education, because she would be unlikely to support herself, in his opinion.

Michael, however, did not seem to consider the potential of a breakup when describing his feelings regarding his ideal dating partner pursuing an education.

I: Okay. Would it be important for her to be going to school or to want that?
R: Yeah. But I mean, I’m not going to knock her, I mean if she doesn’t. If I’m bringing in money and everything’s cool, then you know, I’ll be alright, that’s good. (Michael, 16 year old male, Chicago)

Another area that youth discussed was an ideal dating partner’s religious orientation. Religious orientation characteristics described an ideal partner’s spirituality, activity in a religious organization, or religious affiliation. This was marked by church attendance and/or other spiritual practices. There were a range of responses to whether religious orientation was important with some youth having no opinion, some finding religious participation of great importance, and others considering the decision to participate in a religion to be exclusively the business of the other person. Lisa, a 17 year old young woman from San Francisco, reported that, while religion was important to her, it was not necessarily a mandate for her ideal dating partner.

I mean it’s his opinion, if he want to go to church. I’m not gonna make him – like – “Oh. Well, I go to church Sunday. You got to come too.” If he wants to go, yeah, you’re all welcome to go.
One young man reported a similar feeling; however, he noted the necessity of respect for his religious practice, even if the potential dating partner were not religious.

I: Would it be important for her to be religious or to go to church?
R: Not really, but it would, though. Like I don’t want her talking about my religion. Like she – oh, you go to church? Okay. If you’re going to do that, then I’m probably not going to like you.
I: Okay. But instead, you want her to be how?
R: She don’t have to be religious, but she don’t – it really, I don’t know. I don’t know.
I: Okay.
R: I don’t know that question.
I: But she just doesn’t have to be like disrespecting your church.
R: Yeah. There you go. Disrespecting my church. (Kevin, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

In contrast, Michael stated that his partner’s religiosity was of import to him.

I have a religious background. My granddad, when I was little, he had me go to church like every single Sunday. So most definitely I have a religious background, and I say you know, maybe as long as she kind of believes in that, you know. (Michael, 16 year old male, Chicago)

Financial Resources

In describing an ideal dating partner, youth were specifically asked about the necessity of a partner having a job. In responding to this question though, youth often described the necessity of having money as more important than necessarily having a job. Accordingly, financial resource characteristics described an ideal partner’s ability to maintain him/herself and the means through which the potential partner could do so. Akin to his beliefs about the non-necessity of an ideal dating partner pursuing an education, Michael did not think his ideal dating partner would need a job if he was able to support the two of them financially.

If I’m bringing in a lot of money and working hard, and if I can provide for me and her, then she doesn’t necessarily have to have a job. As long as
she’s taking care of business at the house. Washing dishes. Cleaning up. You know. (Michael, 16 year old male, Chicago)

Most youth, however, did not endorse a desire to financially support their ideal dating partner. An ideal dating partner having their own financial resources was generally preferred. However, some young women found it necessary to clarify the source of their ideal dating partner’s financial resources.

I want to get somebody, either a lawyer, a doctor, somebody doing something with themselves other than hustling and selling weed instead of somebody saying, “Oh baby, I can make this much money.” I mean you can do a side job but you gotta have a real job too. (Tiffany, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

While an ideal partner might be able to have financial resources from “hustling” or selling illegal drugs, Tiffany is clear that she would prefer a young man who is able to earn his money (primarily) through legal means.

Age

All participants in the present study were asked to state how old their ideal dating partner would be. In answering this question, some answered in relation to their own ages while others simply described a fixed point. For those who described their ideal dating partner’s age as a fixed point, the difference between that age and the respondent’s age was calculated. Responses are presented in Figure 1.
In general, the majority of respondents preferred a partner who was between their age and two years older. None explicitly stated that they wanted a partner who was younger than them and a select few stated that they preferred a partner who was 3 or more years older than them. Among them were some responses that signaled an interest in an adult partner, if at all possible, despite the age difference.

**Figure 1.** How old would your ideal dating partner be?

I: And how old would he be, this perfect boyfriend?
R: Hopefully like 30. [laughs] Nah. Like they’d be over 20.
I: Over 20, okay.
R: That’s a perfect boyfriend but –
I: Yeah, the perfect one.
R: The perfect one is over 20.
I: Okay, over 20.
R: So they – it’s – I mean that’s the most common. Some teenagers hell nah I’m not messing with no teenagers. (Tiffany, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

I: How old will she be?
R: Probably like 25, 26. (Wade, 17 year old male, San Francisco)
Michael, a 16 year old young man from Chicago, was open to a range of ages, stating that she could be “any age, as long as she’s not over forty.”

**Preferred Race or Ethnicity**

In describing their ideal dating partners, some youth were specific in describing the partner’s race or ethnicity. The majority reported no particular preference, but some were specific. One young woman, Tiffany, described her disinterest in a Black potential dating partner due to ideas she had about their particular interpersonal qualities.

I just don't like – I don't know. Like 'cause so many Black dudes aren’t – I mean some Black dudes are faithful but they're older in age and they got their player card removed. Maybe, when it comes to it, I don't think I'll be married to one though. I don’t think I'd get married to one. I mean you got all these mixed dudes. That's what I want, a mix one probably Black and something, Black and Asian, Asian Black, you know Spanish and Black, whatever. But I mean, technically, I don't really want no Black dude. I mean it's nice to have one that – I really want to go outside my family, outside my race. And that's what I want to do, just to try something else. (Tiffany, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

Frederick, a 15 year old young man from San Francisco, described his ideal dating partner succinctly: “Cool, Black. That’s it.” While the majority of preferences stated referred to broad racial categories like Asian, Black, or White, one young man expressed a specific ethnic interest.

*I:* What would she look like?
*R:* Sometimes it don’t matter on the look, the looks don’t matter. But I always wanted an Eritrean girlfriend.
*I:* Eritrean?
*R:* Yeah. (Charles, 17 year old male, Chicago)

**Celebrity Similarity**

In addition to descriptions of specific features, a number of respondents, both male and female, described their ideal partner as looking like a particular
celebrity. In some cases, the respondent would describe which aspects of the celebrity constituted ideal characteristics. In that case, their descriptions were coded as indicating those characteristics. However, in the absence of such clarification, they were classified more broadly as celebrity similarity. For example, Dorian, a 15 year old young man from San Francisco, described his ideal girlfriend as being like Beyoncé or Tyra Banks and Latrice, a 17 year old female from San Francisco, described her ideal boyfriend as someone who looked like R&B singer Trey Songz or rapper Plies.

**Ideal Sexual Partner Characteristics**

For the present analysis, characteristics of ideal sexual partners were defined as any characteristics that respondents identified as important in their selection of a partner for a predominantly sexual relationship. These sexual relationships are relationships where the primary purpose is for the parties to engage in vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse. They are differentiated from dating relationships in that their primary purpose is as described. When examining the characteristics that respondents identified as ideal in a sexual partner, the eight broad themes of ideal dating partner characteristics emerged again: physical characteristics, self-presentation characteristics, interpersonal characteristics, intrapersonal characteristics, financial resources, age, preferred race, and celebrity similarity. These themes and their sub-themes are presented in Table 2 with X’s indicating whether the sub-themes were described as relevant for male and/or female respondents.
Table 2. Ideal Sexual Partner Characteristics

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Phsyical Characteristics

Akin to the physical characteristics described as indicative of an ideal dating partner, five sub-themes emerged from the ideal physical characteristics of an ideal sexual partner: general attractiveness, body type, facial features, skin tone, and hair.

Many youth used statements of general attractiveness to describe their ideal sexual partners. Many described this partner as cute or handsome. One young man, when asked to describe his ideal sexual partner, appeared to have no better description of her physicality than these more general descriptors.

I: Right, so now I want you to think about your ideal or perfect sex partner, describe her for me.
R: I don’t know, she got to be cute. She got to be sexy. (Chris, 17 year old male, San Francisco)

This was echoed by other respondents who simply answered “beautiful” or “handsome” as one-word replies when asked to describe their ideal sexual partner.

In describing the body type of an ideal sexual partner, some youth were more explicit than others in what constituted an ideal type. Many utilized a generic descriptor of the body, such as “a nice body” without much clarification. However, some youth were more apt to clarify what “nice” meant.

I: So tell me what your idea is of the ideal guys is that you want to have sex with.
R: He got to have a nice body. He can’t be fat because I don’t want no big old person on top of me. That’s it. (Britney, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

R: Okay. I think he have a nice body.
I: So he’ll have a nice body…And what’s a nice body to you?
R: In shape.
I: In shape – okay. So muscles?
R: Yes.
While “nice body” was a typical response from both male and female respondents, “thick” was often used by young men in describing their ideal sexual partners’ bodies. One female respondent described her ideal sexual partner as having “a thick body,” but she did not clarify what that thickness constituted.

However, young men clarified what they meant by “thick.”

She’s going to be thick. She’s going to have big breasts, a big booty. (Avery, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

Some young men were even more explicit about their desires in terms of the bodies of their potential partners.

I: So now, I’m asking you about your ideal sex partner. Tell me what she would be like.
R: She got her some cream. She got some buns. She got to be smooth. She got to be cute. That’s it.
I: You say she has to have some cream?
R: Yeah.
I: Meaning money or meaning what?
R: Some snaps. Some nice pussy.
I: And then you said buns? Is that what you said?
R: Um-hum.
I: I don’t want to assume what you mean by that. Tell me what you mean.
R: What do I mean by buns?
I: Yeah. Booty?
R: Some booty. (Frederick, 15 year old male, San Francisco)
Males were not the only respondents to describe more directly their expectations in terms of sexually relevant organs. One female respondent was particularly clear in describing her idea of the ideal male form.

*R*: He not hecka small.
*I*: His penis?
*R*: Yeah, his penis is not hecka small like he don’t hurt me like if he do, he going to go slow like he know what to do like if I hurt, you know, I go, go hard on me like he go we both got to get it to where once he get in we gonna be cool and when I want to stop, he gonna stop and if want to stop, I’m gonna stop. You know. (Monique, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

A final aspect of body type was height. Specifically, female respondents paid particular attention to height when describing an ideal sexual partner as well. While many of these descriptions simply requested that he be “tall,” a frequent refrain of those who were more specific was that an ideal sexual partner needed to be over six feet tall.

In addition to body type, respondents also addressed desired characteristics of an ideal sexual partner’s face. The majority of youth stated simply that they wanted a partner with a “pretty” or “handsome” face. In these cases, the specific criteria which determined “pretty” or “handsome” was not clarified. In addition, these responses were often fairly succinct and direct.

*I*: Now I need for you to describe for me your ideal or perfect sex partner. What would she be like?
*R*: Cute face. (Jordan, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

*I*: And what would [your ideal sexual partner] look like?
*R*: Handsome. (Courtney, 16 year old female, Chicago)

The rare exceptions where specific facial features were mentioned were with regard to teeth and facial hair. These were often couched in more thorough descriptions of an ideal sexual partner.
I: Okay. Well now I’m going to ask you to imagine what your ideal or perfect sex partner might be like. Tell me what your idea is of the ideal guy that you’d want to have sex with.

R: Muscular. Nice, pretty teeth. Light skin and not too dark. Keeps himself up. Has a good job. Respectable. And have a car. And if he has kids, it would not hurt to know. And respectable to his mom. (Cassandra, 15 year old female, San Francisco)

I: A little chin hair and a mustache too?
R: Yeah, a little bit. (Jessica, 15 year old female, San Francisco)

Interestingly enough, nearly all references to particular facial features were from female respondents with only one male respondent specifically stating a desire for a partner with “nice eyes.”

Similar to their descriptions of ideal dating partners, many respondents referenced skin tone as very relevant to the attractiveness of an ideal sexual partner. Both male and female respondents made particular reference to skin tone, but there was an interesting divide across the sexes. The young men who referenced skin tone all stated that an ideal sexual partner would be light-skinned while the young women who referenced skin tone stated that an ideal sexual partner would be dark-skinned.

I: What would she look like?
R: She would be light-skinned, long-hair. (Simon, 16 year old male, Chicago)

Thick, light-skin, long hair, pretty face. That’s it. (Hakeem, 17 year old male, Chicago)

She gotta be light-skinned, long hair. (Wade, 17 year old male, San Francisco)

I: So tell me about [your ideal sex partner]. What would he look like?
R: Well, he would have dreads, not too long, but they like short, dark skinned with a thick body, dressed well, keep his body odor clean, smell good. (Jessica, 15 year old female, San Francisco)
Well when I think of a handsome guy I picture someone that’s dark-skinned and tall with dreads. (Julia, 15 year old female, Chicago)

It is also interesting that descriptions of skin tone were universally attached to descriptions of hair as well. As represented in the previously referenced quotes, long hair was a requisite characteristic of an ideal female sexual partner, who would also ideally be light-skinned, and dreads (coded as a preferred hair style) was a preferred quality in a male sexual partner, who would ideally be dark-skinned. It must be stated, however, that not all references to hair were necessarily attached to descriptions of skin tone. There were young men who referenced a desire for a sexual partner with long hair without stating her skin tone.

**Self-presentation Characteristics**

In addition to characteristics of an ideal sexual partner’s body, respondents identified characteristics of how these partners could present themselves in order to better clarify what could constitute an ideal sexual partner. In the area of presentation characteristics, four sub-themes emerged: *hair style, hygiene, dress*, and *piercings*.

While young men were vocal about a preference for a sexual partner with long hair, they did not describe a desired hair style. Hair style was an area only addressed explicitly by female respondents. In particular, as demonstrated by the quotes from Jessica and Julia earlier, many young women expressed an interest in a sexual partner with dreads. One young woman, however, described an interest in a sexual partner with cornrows.

*I:* And what would he look like?
R: Not a dream boy.
I: Someone who was just your ideal perfect sex partner.
R: A little taller than me with cornrows. (Latrice, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

As it related to hygiene, some youth were general in their description of a partner’s hygiene, stating that they should be “clean.” While this could have been a reference to being disease-free, the youth would clarify that this was a reference to general hygienic cleanliness.

She gotta be clean, keep her hygiene up. (Dante, 16 year old male, San Francisco)

In addition to this more general description of good hygiene, some youth described the behaviors an ideal sexual partner would do to maintain this good hygiene or the desired outcome of this good hygiene. Jessica’s earlier quote illustrates the desired outcomes while a quote from Kevin makes explicit reference to his desire for a partner who showers regularly.

I: So tell me about, I want you to picture though, XXXX, for me your ideal sex partner, describe him for me. What would he look like.
R: Well, he would have dreads, not too long, but they like short, dark skinned with a thick body, dressed well, keep his body odor clean, smell good. (Jessica, 15 year old female, San Francisco)

I: So now I’d like you to describe your ideal or perfect sex partner. So what would she be like?
I: What do you mean by clean?
R: Take showers. (Kevin, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

The dress of an ideal sexual partner was referenced, though rarely. In general, references to dress were limited to a generic “dresses well,” though a select few youth made explicit reference to aspects of dress. One young woman
described the labels her ideal sexual partner would wear while another described what he wouldn’t wear.

I: What would you want him to be wearing?
R: I don’t know. Basically Ed Hardy, Hollister, Juice, 7 Jeans. Basically everything. Polos. (Latrice, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

Like I like dating the boys that is different. Like he doesn’t do everything everybody else does. He doesn’t wear like – like dress like everybody else. (Monique, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

The final characteristic of presentation described by a respondent was piercings. While only one youth made specific reference to it, he described in detail how it could enhance the sexual attractiveness of an ideal sexual partner.

For a sex partner, a tongue ring would be nice, like piercings, like her tongue, like her bellybutton and like the more they turn me on like this, these just add to it. (Dante, 16 year old male, San Francisco)

**Interpersonal Characteristics**

In addition to the physical and presentation characteristics respondents identified as ideal in an ideal sexual partner, youth identified interpersonal characteristics that they desired in an ideal sexual partner. As before, these characteristics included any characteristics which described aspects of an ideal sexual partner’s personality, interaction with people, and behavior. While some of the themes were directly relevant to the sexual act, others were more relevant to non-sexual aspects of the relationship. Accordingly, there was a wide range sub-themes emerged: general niceness, care, demonstrating respect, honesty, discretion, loyalty, being fun, being “down-to-earth,” not being annoying, communication skills, extroversion, sexual openness, ability to be a good parent, and no interpersonal characteristics.
When describing how an ideal sexual partner would behave, many respondents stated that the person would be “nice.” While there were many fewer such responses with regard to an ideal sexual partner versus an ideal dating partner, there were still some youth who described this general niceness as a characteristic of an ideal sexual partner. For example, Dante, a 16 year old young man from San Francisco, stated that “she gotta be nice all around.”

Other youth were more specific in describing the desired attributes of an ideal sexual partner. Some youth focused on the potential partner’s ability and willingness to demonstrate care. For some youth, it was important that the potential sexual partner cared about them.

*I:* This time I want you to imagine your ideal sex partner. So this is the idea, your idea of the ideal guy who you would want to have sex with.  
*R:* Someone who actually cares and not just who’s doing it just to be doing it; like you don’t even know this person; like someone who really cares.  
(Asia, 15 year old female, Chicago)

There were other youth, however, who desired a sexual partner whose care extended more broadly. In describing this care, some youth were general but some were more explicit about what constituted a demonstration of care.

*I:* All right. What kind of person would she be like?  
*R:* Caring person. (Hakeem, 17 year old male, Chicago)

*I:* Okay. What kind of personality?  
*R:* Like a nice person. Like don’t like to do wrong or be mean to people.  
(Kenneth, 16 year old male, San Francisco)

Another important characteristic of an ideal sexual partner identified by the youth was their ability and or willingness to demonstrate respect. This respect took many forms, some related to general niceness and some more specific to the way an ideal partner would interact with the youth.
He would be uh, hmm, yeah, he would be respectful and nice. (Britney, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

I would want my perfect sex partner to respect like my opinions. Like if he wants to have sex and then I feel like no, I want to wait, I want him to say okay and don’t go have sex with somebody else like actually wait for me. (Brianna, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

While these descriptions of respect are relatively clear, even if the former is vague, they stand in contrast to the desire for a respectful partner described by Eliot, a 16 year old young man from Chicago.

I: What kind of person would she be like?
R: A respectful person like, a good girlfriend versus you know a slutty girlfriend.

How the good versus slutty girlfriend dichotomy is related to his ideal sexual partner being respectful is somewhat unclear. It may be that Eliot is referencing fidelity as a marker of respectful behavior, but that conclusion cannot be confidently drawn based on the statements offered.

A partner who is fun was also preferred by the youth. This fun quality was defined in multiple ways. One way that it was characterized was broadly as not being boring.

[My ideal sexual partner] gotta be fun, too. [She] can’t be boring. (Wade, 17 year old male, San Francisco)

Another way that a partner could be fun was characterized by their sense of humor. If an opposite sex peer was able to make them laugh, they were a more palatable potential sexual partner.

He know how to make me laugh. (Monique, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

I: And what kind of person would she be like?
R: I don't know, just a funny, down-to-earth person. (Chris, 17 year old male, San Francisco)

Humor, while tied to a partner’s ability to be fun, was paired here with the notion of a partner being “down-to-earth.” As such, it indicates that humor serves as a means of making a partner seem more practical and accessible. It would have been interesting if respondents had been explicit about what constituted not being down-to-earth. This would have allowed for a better understanding of what did and did not constitute practicality in a sexual partner.

While honesty seemed to be defined broadly in terms of an ideal dating partner, there seemed to be a much more specific description of honesty as it related to an ideal sexual partner. It was defined as a quality unto itself, separate from fidelity. Shannon, a 16 year old young woman from Chicago, defined honesty both in terms of an ideal sexual partner’s ability to be open with her as well as himself.

I: What kind of person would he be?
R: He’d be an honest person. He'd be genuine to his self and genuine with me. I’m not too picky. Well, I’m picky, but there just some things that you just got to be. Like from an idea, you just got to be honest. You got to be genuine. You got to be sincere. You got to be real. You got to be, you got to keep it 100 percent real. 150 percent real. Nothing less and nothing more. I don’t expect for you to give me money. I don’t expect for you to wife me up and say you love me and all that, but I expect you to keep it real, ’cause that’s what I’m going to do so that’s my ideal.

For Shannon, honesty was far more important than other factors of the relationship. In fact, honesty reads as paramount, even when compared to the prospect of financial gain (“I don’t expect for you to give me money”) or more substantial romantic engagement (“I don’t expect for you to wife me up and say you love me”).
In the description of an ideal dating partner, loyalty and fidelity were enmeshed with honesty. However, the descriptions of loyalty espoused in reference to an ideal sexual partner seem broader and more textured in their focus. While still qualitatively connected to honesty, these descriptions of loyalty are more connected to a notion of commitment and methods of honoring that commitment.

I: Alright, so tell me what is your idea of the ideal girl that you would want to have sex with.
R: She’s going to be committed. (Avery, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

Someone that I just want to fuck me only, like she just want to fuck me and only me and she – I don’t know, I don’t know how to put it in words. (Dante, 16 year old male, San Francisco)

I: Now I want you to describe your perfect sex partner. What’s he like?
R: Cool, outgoing, truthful, tell me stuff, tell me the truth, always have my back no matter what. (Latrice, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

Somewhat related to honesty and commitment was the idea that an ideal sexual partner would be discreet. The details of the sexual behaviors that occurred within the relationship would be kept between the participants rather than being shared with others. This sentiment was expressed solely by female respondents. No young men made mention of a requirement of discretion.

Someone who just keeps their business to themselves instead of go telling everybody, “I just had sex with this girl.” (Asia, 15 year old female, Chicago)

I: And what kind of person would he be like?
R: Quiet. Like don’t run his mouth and don’t brag. (Courtney, 16 year old female, Chicago)

Another area described only by female respondents was the necessity of communication skills. While such skills were desired by both young men and
young women when selecting a dating partner, this quality was not one that young men mentioned when interviewed. The young women who made mention of communication skills couched the desire in a more global description of the young man as a sensible partner.

He got a good head on his shoulders. He smart. He know how to talk. When we get into it, he know how to like if I got an attitude he know how to stop my attitude. I could still might have an attitude and once I see he get an attitude, I started being cool with him, where if he knew I got an attitude, he would be cool with me so we could be happy again. (Monique, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

In this case, the young man’s communication skills serve as a protective factor against needless arguments, given that he will have sufficient acumen to navigate otherwise conflictual interactions.

While young men did not make mention of discretion or communication skills, they did state a desire for an extroverted partner. The responses were not specific as to what sort of activities in which they wanted their ideal sexual partner to be involved or interested. Instead, the responses tended to be a generic statement of interest in an outgoing person.

Another characteristic described explicitly by male respondents, but not female respondents, was a desire that a partner “not be annoying.” The specific elements of this potential annoyance were not articulated. Instead, the mandate that she not be annoying was thrown in generally in a description of an ideal sexual partner, like Kevin’s description that follows.

I: And what kind of person would she be like, Kevin? Would she be respectful? Honest?
R: Honest and respectful. Yeah. Not disrespectful, lies or annoying.
(Kevin, 15 year old male, San Francisco)
An ideal partner’s sexuality, broadly defined, was a quality identified by both male and female respondents as important in selecting an ideal sexual partner. This broad sexuality included how passionate the potential partner was as well as their sexual availability and sexual skill. Much like “thick” was a shared vernacular among many young men in describing the body type of their ideal sexual partner, “freaky” was used by many young men in reference to the sexual skill and/or approach of an ideal sexual partner.

I: What would she be like?
R: Hmm. A freak. She gotta be a good freak. She gotta be the kind of freaky girl I want to go with. (Howard, 17 year old male, Chicago)

I: What kind of person would she be like?
R: Nice, but freaky, but everybody can’t tell. The only people that did it with her would know. (Adam, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

R: She’s going to be freaky. But she’s still going to be the same like I said before. You know, she’s going to be nice, polite, and all that, but when the time comes down, she’s going to be freaky. (Avery, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

While the young men were vague and relied primarily on the term “freak” to convey the sexual characteristics of their ideal sexual partners, young women described the sexual characteristics of their ideal sexual partners more explicitly.

He erotic, exotic. He just know everything of a woman’s body. How to touch it, how to rub it or whatever. Know what to do, when to do it, how to do it. Everything, just ain’t acting like the girls supposed to do all the work cause like the boys like that. Like they just lazy. Like, they just don’t want to do nothing. Like they want to be touched all the time, they don’t want to touch. They don’t want to give the touch. They want to be, that’s the problem. That’s the main problem. (Shannon, 16 year old female, Chicago)

Another interpersonal characteristic described by youth was whether an ideal sexual partner had the potential to be a good parent. The line of questions
that specifically asked respondents about their ideal sexual partners asked explicitly whether an ideal sexual partner would have the qualities of a good parent. The responses are presented in Figure 2.

![Figure 2](image-url)

**Figure 2.** Would it be important for your sexual partner to be a good parent?

In general, respondents did prefer a sexual partner who would be a good parent. The majority of these respondents answered a succinct “yes” or “yes, he/she would,” but some youth were more descriptive in their responses. Britney expressed the conditionality of its importance before affirming that it would be important for her sexual partner to have the qualities of a good father.

*I:* And would it be important for him to be the kind of person or is a good dad?
*R:* It depends on if I’m planning on having children with him.
*I:* Okay, so this is your ideal sex partner, ideal one.
*R:* Oh, okay, yeah. It would be important for him to be a good dad. It would be important for him to be able to take care of himself, me and a child. (Britney, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

Though most respondents did report desiring a sexual partner who would be a good parent, one female respondent indicated that she was not sure if an ideal
sexual partner’s ability to be a good parent was relevant and three young men explicitly stated that it was not an important quality.

In contrast to the youth who described myriad interpersonal characteristics they would prefer in an ideal sexual partner, some youth said directly that such characteristics were irrelevant in conceptualizing an ideal sexual partner.

I: Okay, and then what kind of person would she be like? Would she be respectful, honest? What would be important for you?
R: But then you said a sex partner.
I: Yeah, right. I want you to think about your sex partner.
R: Yeah, sex partner you don't really care about that stuff, like honest and stuff like that.
I: Okay, so that's not important, any of those aren't important.
R: Yeah, because you said sex partner. But if you was like in a relationship then it would be different.
I: Got it, okay.
R: Yeah.
I: So those things wouldn't be important, honest, respectful?
R: Honest –
I: No, okay.
R: Well, respectful, yeah, respectful, you got to have respect. But honest like – when you say honest, you mean like stealing and stuff like that?
I: It could be anything.
R: Because you could wake up and your stuff would be gone. So, of course, she'd have to be honest, yeah.
I: Got it.
R: I guess that does matter.
I: Okay, and then when you say that she's got to be respectful, is she respecting you in a certain way, the sex partner?
R: She's got to be respectful in all ways.
I: Okay. So that part is important for the sex partner?
R: Yeah. (Shawn, 17 year old male, San Francisco)

While Shawn initially described interpersonal characteristics as irrelevant, he began to change his response as he considered more carefully what it meant to be involved in a relationship, even if it was primarily sexual in nature. For Shawn, it just required some additional thought to see the value in interpersonal
characteristics. There were other youth, however, who were not as open to the potential relevance of interpersonal characteristics.

I: What kind of person would she be?
R: It don’t matter. (Aaron, 16 year old male, Chicago)

I mean, it’s just like a one-night stand. Nothing matters. It’s just that night. As long as she’s thick and has long hair. (Michael, 16 year old male, Chicago)

For these young men, the specificity of the sexual relationship seemed to preclude the consideration of other qualities. As long as the potential partner was willing to participate in the sexual act, other factors were deemed irrelevant.

**Intrapersonal Characteristics**

Mirroring the ideal dating partner characteristics, youth identified a number of intrapersonal characteristics they desired in an ideal sexual partner. These intrapersonal characteristics included motivations and other internal states that were not necessarily tied to interacting with others. Five sub-themes emerged from the broad category of interpersonal characteristics: *self-respect, being different, intelligence, educational orientation, and religious orientation.*

Young men described the necessity of their potential sexual partners having self-respect. While the constituent parts of self-respect were not described in detail, this self-respect was described as part of having a good personality.

I: Okay, all right, what will she look like?
R: She got to be an average girl. A girl that’s like – that’s got a good personality. That got a lot of respect for herself. (Rashaad, 16 year old male, Chicago)
It is not clear based on Rashaad’s statement why self-respect is a necessary aspect of an ideal sexual partner. Perhaps more probing would have allowed a clearer understanding of its relevance or purpose.

A characteristic described by some young women as important is their partner being “different.” Lisa has a particularly interesting description of her preference for a guy who is “different.”

*R*: I don’t want him to be like nobody but his self. Like, I like dating the boys that is different. Like he doesn’t do everything everybody else does. He doesn’t wear like – like dress like everybody else.

*I*: Uh-huh.

*R*: I want him to be different, like me. (Lisa, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

While she would like him to be different, this difference is specifically cast in contrast to “everybody else” though not in contrast to Lisa. As such, one could question whether it is difference from others that she seeks or similarity to herself.

In contrast to the way that youth described the intelligence of their ideal dating partners, youth did not place explicit parameters on how smart an ideal sexual partner could be. Instead, they simply described the desire for a smart sexual partner, broadly defined.

*I*: And what other kind of, describe him for me a little bit, is he respectful. Is he loyal?

*R*: Um-hum, he respectful, he loyal. Um, he intelligent. He got a good head on his shoulders. He smart. (Monique, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

*I*: And what would he act like? Would he be reliable? Honest?

*R*: I want him to be like honest and smart and different. (Lisa, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

In terms of the importance of an ideal sexual partner’s educational orientation, the responses from youth were mixed, with some thinking that an
education was necessary, others not finding it relevant, and others having more conditional responses, dependent upon the particular circumstances. Many of the more resolute youth answered simply like Britney and Shannon.

He’d be going to school. (Britney, 16 year old male, San Francisco)

I: Would it be important for him to go to school or want that?
R: No, it doesn’t really matter. (Shannon, 16 year old female, Chicago)

Some other youth were more conflicted about their responses. For example, Kevin began with one response and then changed his mind rather quickly thereafter.

I: And would it be important for her to be going to school, or to want to?
R: Yes, it’d be important – oh, no, not really. No. Just a sex partner. Not really. (Kevin, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

Rashaad, a 16 year old male from Chicago, seemed to have more clarity about the purpose of his partner attending school. Accordingly, he was able to offer a thorough response, describing when schooling would be a necessity.

I: Would it be important for her to either be in school or to have a job?
R: I would like the girl to be in school, then to have a job. She should finish school, then go set out looking for a job.

For Rashaad, education is a component of being able to pursue a job. He does not state specifically whether he is referring to a high school education or college though, so it is less clear what level of education is requisite for his ideal sexual partner.

The final intrapersonal characteristic that youth explored was the religious orientation of an ideal sexual partner. This religious orientation could include “being religious” defined broadly as well as attending church specifically. In general, there was a mix of responses in terms of whether religious orientation
was relevant in an ideal sexual partner. Wade, a 17 year old young man from San Francisco, described how the importance of his potential partner’s religious orientation was contingent on the seriousness of the relationship. If he and the young lady were going to pursue marriage, her religious orientation would have been more important, but it has a more marginal importance given that it is a primarily sexual relationship.

I: Would it be important for her to be religious or go to church?
R: Not really. Well, it’d be important, but it wouldn’t be as important as if she was my wife and she was –
I: All right.
R: It’d probably be important just because she’s a friend, and I’m just trying to be a good friend and tell her to – you know, my views on religion and stuff like that. But otherwise, I really couldn’t care less. (Wade, 17 year old male, San Francisco)

Among the youth who said religious orientation was not important in determining their ideal sexual partner, some clarified that it wasn’t important because it would be okay if the person were religious or not. This is in contrast to other youth who felt it unimportant because the relationship was primarily sexual.

I: Okay. Would it be important for her to be religious or go to church?
R: Nah.
I: All right. Would it be important –
R: I don’t know I would go to church but, if she don’t wanna, it’s okay. She won’t go. She wouldn’t go. I’m not going to force her just to go to church. Some people don’t like to go to church. Some people pray at home. (Clifton, 15 year old male, San Francisco)

I: Okay. Would it be important for her to be religious or go to church?
R: It really doesn’t matter. I mean, it’s just sex. (Michael, 16 year old male, Chicago)

Another subset of responses considered church attendance to be unimportant, but nonetheless did prefer a belief in a higher power in their ideal sexual partners.
I: Would it be important for her to be a religious person or to go to church?
R: Not really, just believe in God. (Steven, 17 year old male, Chicago)

Financial Resources

In describing an ideal sexual partner, youth were specifically asked about the necessity of a partner having a job. However, in responding to this question, youth often explored multiple aspects of an ideal dating partner’s financial resources. These included both legal and illegal forms of employment, the possession of a vehicle, and being able to live independently. While most youth focused on legal income, Tina, a 16 year old young woman made explicit her comfort with (and, arguably, preference for) a sexual partner who gains his income through illegal means.

I: Would he have a job, this ideal sex partner?
R: Well, yeah, but no.
I: Okay.
R: Yeah.
I: Tell me about that.
R: Like well, my boyfriend, it’s like he have a job, but he don’t. What I mean by that, like he don’t have a job in like one of these programs like. He sell weed, that’s what he do.
I: Okay.
R: That’s why I said, yes, but no.
I: But then when you think about your ideal sex partner, would you want him to kind of have that same kind of job or would you have him doing something else?
R: I would actually picture him doing – having the same job. Like that’s just – I don’t know. I’m weird. ‘Cause I wouldn’t want no like nerdy boyfriend like, I like him like thugs like. (Tina, 16 year old female, San Francisco)

For Tina, legal work is indicative of a nerdy status, and the sale of drugs is a more palatable vocation for her sexual partner. Other respondents were less specific about the kind of work they preferred a partner did.
I: Okay. What about – would he have a job?
R: Yeah. I want him to work. He needs to be something and do something with his life. Like I don’t want him to be sitting at home. If he’s 20, I sure don’t want him to be staying at home with his mama. I want him to have his own stuff, his own car, like really doing stuff with his life. Like even if it’s like somebody’s secretary or something. I want him to do something respectable. Yeah. (Lisa, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

I: Would he have a job?
R: As long as he’s got money. (Courtney, 16 year old female, Chicago)

For these respondents, financial resources were relevant, because they allowed the partner to support himself. The means was not as important. It was just essential that he be able to have or generate income. The necessity of cultivating resources necessary for independence was also echoed by the young men.

I: Will she have a job?
R: Yeah, she gotta have a job or go to school. She gotta have something going for herself. (Howard, 17 year old male, Chicago)

Would she have a job? Mmm, as long as she’s got some way to support herself. So, yes. (Steven, 17 year old male, Chicago)

Despite the primarily sexual nature of these relationships, in general, youth thought it important that the potential partner have resources with which to support him or herself. The mode of support was generally not a primary focus, but the ability to support oneself was key.

Age

Echoing the questions asked with regard to an ideal dating partner, all participants in the present study were asked to state how old their ideal sexual partner would be. Again, like with their ideal dating partners, some youth answered in relation to their own ages while others simply described a fixed point.
All responses have been calculated in terms of the respondent’s age. They are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** How old would your ideal sexual partner be?

As is demonstrated by the figure, the majority of youth stated that they would like a sexual partner between their age and two years older. Interestingly enough, no young women reported interest in a sexual partner more than 5 years older than them, though young men seemed more interested in such partners. The young men who desired a much older partner were not explicit about why. However, Lisa, a 17 year old young woman from San Francisco, stated that she wanted a partner a few years older than her and was specific about why that would be preferable.

_I_: Okay. Well, when it comes to your perfect sex partner, how old do you think he’d be?
_R_: I think a little bit older than me. Because he would be more wiser and know what he’s doing.
_I_: Okay. How many years older?
_R_: So if I’m 17, I think he would be like 19, 20.
_I_: Okay.
Because I think he’ll know what he doing more.

**Preferred Race**

Only one youth made specific reference to the preferred race of his ideal sexual partner. In describing her, Dorian, a 15 year old young man from San Francisco, said, “I think somebody like my race or something like, they can be a little bit mixed.”

**Celebrity Similarity**

As they had with regard to an ideal dating partner, some youth described their ideal sexual partner most easily by comparing them to celebrities. Trey Songz appeared again as an archetype when young women were asked to describe an ideal sexual partner.

I: And what would he look like?
R: Oh. I don't know. Who do I think is cute? Like a Trey Songz. You know who Trey Songz is?
I: Uh-huh.
R: Yeah. He’s cute. Like Trey Songz.
I: So like a Trey Songz face?
R: Uh-huh.
I: Okay.
R: And body.
I: And body?
R: Yeah. (Lisa, 17 year old female, San Francisco)

In addition, a young man described his ideal sexual partner as a younger version of R&B/pop singer Beyoncé. When asked to clarify which aspects of Beyoncé interested him, he was not able to be specific, instead just describing her as attractive overall.

I: All right so now I’m asking you what is your idea of the ideal girl that you would want to have sex with?
R: A 13-year-old Beyoncé. I mean a 16-year-old Beyoncé.
I: So what about Beyoncé did you like?
R: I don’t know she just look good. (Eliot, 16 year old male, Chicago)

**Ideal Dating Partners as Compared to Ideal Sexual Partners**

In order to answer Research Questions III and IV, it is necessary to compare the qualities of an ideal dating partner identified by each sex and compared them to the qualities each sex identified as ideal in a sexual partner. This will allow an understanding of how they may be similar and different.

**Young Men’s Ideal Dating Versus Sexual Partners**

The characteristics young men found important in selecting a dating partner did not differ greatly from the characteristics they found important when selecting sexual partners. Table 3 charts the domains relevant to both dating and sexual partners as well as those that were exclusive to one or the other.

As in shown in Table 3, the physical domains that young men considered when selecting a dating or sexual partner did not differ. It was important that both a dating and sexual partner be generally attractive. There was also congruence in terms of body type, as they desired a thick dating or sexual partner. Lighter skin tone and long hair was preferable in either a dating or sexual partner, though young men expressed more openness to a variety of skin tones in a dating partner. In terms of how a partner presented herself, both a dating and sexual partner needed to dress well and maintain good hygiene. Having styled hair was only described as important for a dating partner while having tongue or navel piercings was described as important for a sexual partner.

The interpersonal characteristics young men described as important in partner selection also had great congruence. Young men desired a dating or sexual
partner to be nice, caring, respectful, and honest. Further, either sort of partner should also be fun and outgoing. In terms of sexuality, young men described this as important in either partner, but focused more on the desire for a sexual partner to be freaky while some young men were more open to a dating partner being sexually reserved. Communication skills, avoiding “ghetto” behavior, and having shared interests were only described as relevant to a dating partner while the

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potential to be a good parent was only discussed in terms of a sexual partner. It must be noted though that the interview protocol asked about a sexual partner’s potential to be a good parent whereas it did not specifically ask about a dating partner’s potential to be a good parent. As such, that may explain the lack of congruence.

Intelligence and interest in education was described as relevant to both young men’s ideal dating and sexual partners as was demonstrating self-respect. Religious orientation was described as important by some young men and unimportant by other young men both as it related to dating and sexual partners. There were not notable differences here. Other intrapersonal characteristics like ambition, a focus on family, and independence were only explicitly described in relation to an ideal dating partner.

Young men had similar responses to the necessity of financial resources for a dating versus sexual partner. Both needed to have a means of supporting themselves financially, whether through employment or through just “having money.” There was also similarity in terms of the age groups preferred for dating and sexual partners. In general, the partner would be up to 2 years older than the young man. However, a fair number of young men expressed openness to partners more than 5 years older than them. A preference for a Black partner was demonstrated with regards to both an ideal dating and sexual partner. However, specific reference to ethnicity was only described in terms of a dating partner. Lastly, young men desired both dating and sexual partners who resembled Beyoncé and other popular music artists.

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8 This will also apply to young women’s ideal dating and sexual partners.
**Young Women’s Ideal Dating Versus Sexual Partners**

Similar to the young men, the domains relevant to the selection of young women’s dating partners often did not differ from those relevant in selecting their sexual partners. Table 4 charts the characteristics described as important in selecting both a dating and sexual partner as well as those only important in selecting one or the other.

**Table 4.** Domains of Young Women's Ideal Dating Partner Characteristics vs. Ideal Sexual Partner Characteristics

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<td>“Bad Boy” Persona</td>
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<td>Discretion</td>
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Young women desired that both a dating and sexual partner be physically attractive. This physical attractiveness was related to having a tall, muscular build as well as a handsome face. While skin tone was mentioned in both dating and sexual partners, a variety of skin tones were described as ideal for a dating partner and those young women who described a skin tone preference for sexual partner only referred to preferring darker skinned partners. Young women described both ideal dating and sexual partners as dressing well and maintaining good hygiene. Similar to the divide in skin tone, young women described a diversity of hair styles as attractive in a dating partner while only dreads were described as ideal in a sexual partner.

In both describing an ideal dating and an ideal sexual partner, young women noted a number of important interpersonal qualities. The young women desired a partner, whether for dating or sex, who was nice, caring, honest, respectful, fun, and able to communicate well. The characteristics that young women described as relevant for a dating partner but not a sexual partner were decorum (e.g. “not being ghetto”), being outgoing, able to engage in a mutually beneficial relationship, and having shared interests. In terms of a sexual partner, discretion was a very important quality as were loyalty and the potential to be a good father. Interestingly enough, an ideal dating partner was sometimes described as a “bad boy” while a sexual partner was not. This is particularly interesting given that an ideal dating partner’s sexuality being described more in terms of his ability to be more passive and an ideal sexual partner’s sexuality being described more in terms of his sexual skill. One might expect the
aggressiveness of a “bad boy” to be related to a more aggressive sexual approach, but that relationship was not espoused by the young women in the study.

While young women described both an ideal dating partner and an ideal sexual partner as smart, there were mixed responses as to whether either needed to be interested in education. Young women described their ideal dating partners as ambitious, familial, independent, and having self-respect, but none of these factors were described as relevant in selecting a sexual partner. The only intrapersonal characteristic described as important to a sexual partner but not a dating partner was a quirkiness that young women described as “being different.” There was even similarity in how important a religious orientation was for a dating versus sexual partner, with some young women finding it relevant and others being unconcerned.

In other areas, dating and sexual partners were described in quite similar fashions. Both ideal dating and sexual partners were described as having financial resources, including a job (whether legal or illegal), access to money, and/or a car. These young men were generally described as no more than 2 years older than the young woman. Despite this age cap, the young women desired dating and sexual partners who were similar to celebrities who were 10 or more years older than them. In fact, the only major domain of difference between young women’s dating and sexual partner’s was that race was not explicitly mentioned as important in selecting a sexual partner whereas it was described explicitly in terms of a dating partner.
Comparison of Young Men’s to Young Women’s Differences

In general, there was great congruence between young men’s and young women’s ideal dating and sexual partners. For both sexes, similar physical and self-presentation characteristics were considered important when selecting either partner. In addition, both sexes seemed to consider financial resources, age, and celebrity similarity in comparably between their dating and sexual partners.

Interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics are the key areas where there were differences across the sexes in terms of partner congruence. In terms of young men’s ideal partners, there were more characteristics unique to an ideal dating partner than an ideal sexual partner. The only interpersonal characteristic unique to an ideal sexual partner was her ability to be a good mother; however, this could be attributed to that question only being asked with regard to sexual partners. In contrast, young men’s ideal girlfriend uniquely needed to be able to communicate well, observe decorum, and have shared interests. In addition, this ideal girlfriend needed to be ambitious, family-oriented, and independent.

In terms of young women’s ideal partners, there were a number of interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics unique to either dating or sexual partners. An ideal boyfriend uniquely needed to be able to observe decorum, be extroverted, value mutuality in a relationship, have shared interests, and potentially be a “bad boy.” In addition, he needed to be ambitious, family-oriented, independent, and have self-respect. An ideal sexual partner for the young women was uniquely described as demonstrating discretion, loyalty, and
the qualities of a good parent. He also needed to “be different.” Finally, a preferred race was only explicitly described for an ideal dating partner.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the breadth of qualities that a sample of low-income heterosexual African American adolescents considered important when selecting a dating or sexual partner. Given the limited examination of this population in the extant sexual partnering literature, it was important to explore the diversity of potential characteristics that could be relevant in the partner selection process for these youth. Existing descriptions of African American youth’s preferences in partner have been limited in both breadth and depth. Accordingly, this study attempted to offer a more textured description of these preferences. Further, this study sought to examine how the qualities desired in a dating partner compared to the qualities desired in a sexual partner.

This chapter is organized to expand upon the preceding chapter of Results. It will begin by summarizing the ideal dating and sexual partner characteristics described by the study’s youth. Next, it will examine how salient aspects of these ideal partners fit into existing narratives about desire in the studied population. Next, this chapter will consider the implications of the study’s findings with particular respect to how they fit within the existing research literature and how they can be used to positively impact the population. After a discussion of the implications of this study, a discussion of the strengths and limitations will follow. The chapter will conclude with a consideration of directions for future study.
Major Findings

The young men and women in the study reported a broad set of qualities they would prefer in ideal dating and sexual partners. These qualities spanned eight domains: physical characteristics, characteristics of presentation, interpersonal characteristics, intrapersonal characteristics, financial resources, age, race, and similarity to celebrities. Each of these areas contained a multiplicity of preferences and perspectives. Summaries of the respective qualities of young men’s ideal partners and young women’s ideal partners follow. These summaries are a composite of the responses offered by the youth in order to present the essence of their myriad responses. After these summaries, this section will analyze salient aspects of ideal partner characteristics in the context of postmodernist Black feminist theory.

Young Men’s Ideal Dating Partner

In general, young men desired a dating partner who was an attractive young woman of their age or up to two years older. This attractiveness could be manifested through a combination of body type, particular facial features, skin tone, and/or hair. The body type espoused as attractive most often was a “thick” body type, typified by large breasts and buttocks. Some young men also clarified that a “big girl” (i.e. an overweight young woman) was necessarily not preferred. Young men desired a dating partner whose eyes were attractive (though no clarification was offered as to what constituted “pretty eyes”), whose teeth were straight, and who had “nice skin.” This niceness both referred to smoothness and skin clarity. While a diversity of skin tones were described as attractive (including
dark-skinned, caramel, and light-skinned), light skin was mentioned to a greater degree. A consistent refrain among young men was a desire for a dating partner with long hair, though some young men expressed openness to shorter hair as long as the potential partner had some hair. Young men were also concerned with the way an ideal dating partner presented herself. It was important that an ideal partner had her hair “done” (i.e. styled), though no specific styles were described as best. In addition, cleanliness was valued, both in terms of a partner’s body, her clothing, and shoes. Young men also described the importance of a partner dressing well.

In addition, young men described a broad range of interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics they would prefer in a dating partner. These included being nice (broadly defined), demonstrating care and respect, communicating well, and being honest. Young men also desired a dating partner who shared some of their interests, were interested in fun activities, and were outgoing. While an outgoing and fun partner was preferred, it was important also that she was not “ghetto” and was able to observe decorum. Additionally, an intelligent partner was valued, though it was important that she not be too demonstrably intelligent as this would be construed as nerdy. Most young men desired a partner who was interested in attending school, though some were less concerned with this if the young woman was more than 18 years old. In addition to desiring a young woman who was educationally oriented, young men also espoused interest in a young woman who was able to take care of herself both financially and socially in the absence of the young man. This desire for independence and ambition was echoed
IDEAL PARTNER CHARACTERISTICS FOR AF AM ADOLESCENTS

in young men’s desire for a young woman who had goals for her future. Other characteristics young men described as desirable included demonstrating self-respect and valuing her family. While most of these characteristics were endorsed broadly by the young men in the study, two areas had a more broad set of perspectives: religious orientation and sexuality. In terms of religious orientation, some young men described spiritual/religious involvement and desire as essential while others described it as somewhat important, and yet a third group had no particular opinion. In terms of sexuality, the importance of a partner’s sexuality was espoused generally by most young men, but some indicated a preference for a more sexually available partner and others stated a preference for a more sexually reserved partner.

An ideal partner’s race was not mentioned often, but the young men who did reference race and ethnicity explicitly described a partner of the same race. Last, some young men described their ideal partner as resembling particular celebrities, particularly Beyoncé.

**Young Men’s Ideal Sexual Partner**

Young men’s ideal sexual partners were often described as “cute,” “beautiful,” and “sexy.” Though a “pretty face” was often described as ideal, most young men did not offer more specificity about what would constitute such a face. Further, it was consistently reiterated that such a partner would have to be “thick,” much like the ideal dating partner. However, whereas young men focused solely on breasts and buttocks in their description of an ideal dating partner’s “thickness,” they described a “thick” sexual partner as having prominent thighs as
well. There was a consistent desire for a light skinned partner with long hair when young men were asked to describe their ideal sexual partner. For some young men, the combination of being light-skinned, having long hair, and being thick was sufficient criteria for a sexual partner with no other considerations necessary. Additionally, young men indicated that it was important that an ideal sexual partner maintained good hygiene and dressed well. Last, it was indicated that a partner with a tongue or navel piercing would be preferred.

In addition, young men identified a number of interpersonal characteristics they found preferable in an ideal sexual partner. The young men desired a partner who was down-to-earth, nice, respectful, and showed her care for the young man. It was also important that the sexual partner be honest and loyal, as demonstrated by consistently telling the truth and demonstrating a commitment to the relationship. In addition, young men desired a sexual partner who was fun and outgoing. However, some young men explicitly stated that it was important that a sexual partner be these things without being annoying. Young men also reported that they wanted a sexual partner who was “a freak,” though no young men clarified the parameters of the aforementioned freakiness. When asked if an ideal sexual partner should have the qualities of a good parent, most young men indicated that an ideal sexual partner would have the qualities of a good mom. However, a few young men did not think it was a necessary quality. In general, young men indicated that interpersonal qualities were important in the selection of a sexual partner, but a few young men explicitly stated that, in a sexual relationship, these qualities were irrelevant.
The intrapersonal characteristics young men identified as relevant in their partner selection process were self-respect, intelligence, educational orientation, and religious orientation. The desire for a partner who respected herself and was smart was reported by many young men. However, there was more diversity in their perspectives on educational and religious orientation. While some young men thought it was important for a sexual partner to be interested in or pursuing an education, others were less interested in this quality. Similarly, some young men felt that a sexual partner should be religiously oriented and active while others were less concerned with this quality.

Many young men desired a sexual partner who was working or otherwise had a means to support herself financially. They were not specific about the means, but young men did describe financial resources as a valuable quality in an ideal sexual partner. Young men, in general, described an ideal sexual partner as near their age, though some young men did express openness to older partners. Most young men did not explicitly describe the race or ethnicity of their ideal sexual partners, though a preference for African American partners could be inferred by their lack of explicit references to partners of another race or ethnicity. However, only one young man explicitly stated interest in Black and racially mixed partners. Similar to their descriptions of ideal dating partners, some young men described their ideal sexual partner as resembling particular celebrities.

**Young Women’s Ideal Dating Partner**

For young women, an ideal dating partner was an attractive young man of their age with a diversity of desired qualities. Attractiveness was often described
as having a “nice body,” which referred to a taller, more muscular frame, potentially with muscular buttocks. In terms of facial features, young women reported a preference for “pretty eyes” with some making specific reference to green eyes. No other facial features were noted. When describing a skin tone preference, young women were as apt to prefer darker skin as they were to prefer lighter skin. Young women made mention of the importance of a young man’s hair in his attractiveness, some describing a preference for braids while others described shorter cuts, a ponytail, or dread locks as attractive styling options.

Young women’s ideal dating partners were also described as clean, as exemplified through having brushed teeth and fresh breath. Similarly, their ideal dating partner would need to dress well, in clean and preferably new, fashionable apparel.

Just as did the young men, the young women described a multitude of preferences in interpersonal characteristics as well. Young women reported a desire for a partner who was “nice” or “sweet” generally, but they also spoke specifically to the desire for a partner who could and would demonstrate how much he cared for them through acts of kindness. These might include cooking a meal for her or offering a compliment. Further, these young women indicated a desire for a partner who consistently demonstrated respect for her, communicated with her, and was honest with her. This honesty included being truthful in general, but also practicing fidelity. In addition, young women desired a partner with whom they had shared interests and with whom they could have a relationship predicated upon mutuality. Similar to the responses of young men regarding their ideal dating partners, young women described a desire for a partner who could
observe decorum and “not be ghetto.” The young women also reported desiring partners who were humorous and outgoing. While the desire for a humorous or outgoing partner was embraced by many, some young women desired a “bad boy” persona that was typified by strength, toughness, and the ability to intimidate if necessary. However, even young women who desired a bad boy stated that it was important that a dating partner respect her sexual boundaries, not pushing her to do more than what she is comfortable doing.

In addition to the interpersonal characteristics the young women described as ideal, there were also intrapersonal qualities they valued. Many young women desired a partner who was able to be socially independent of her, even though he enjoyed spending time with her. It was also important that he respected himself. This was related to his independence, in that self-respect was often related to being unwilling to be a “walk dog” or “chauffer” for the young woman. Young women also described interest in a young man who had goals for his future, which was often demonstrated by working, attending school, having plans to do either of these, or having plans to do both. While not all young women required that their dating partner attend school, they did require that he do something which could generate a means of supporting himself or a family. Sometimes this included illegal means of acquiring funds (generally the sale of marijuana), but generally did not include such means. In addition to being ambitious, young women indicated that a partner should be smart, though he should not be nerdy or otherwise “too smart.” Last, some young women found particular value in a
partner who was religiously involved while there were others who were indifferent to such involvement.

While not many young women explicitly described a racial preference of partner, many made implicit reference through descriptions of skin tone and features. However, one young woman expressed explicit interest in young men who were not Black, because she had negative ideas about what Black young men were like.

Finally, a number of young women were best able to describe their ideal dating partner by comparing him to a celebrity. In particular, young women described an ideal dating partner as being similar to R&B singer Trey Songz or rapper Plies.

**Young Women’s Ideal Sexual Partner**

Young women described their ideal sexual partners as physically attractive young men near their age with myriad desirable physical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal qualities. Physical attractiveness was usually described generally as “handsome” or “sexy,” though some young women were specific about their desire for a young man who had nice teeth, facial hair, and muscles. In addition, some young women indicated that it was important that their sexual partners be tall. Further, one young woman was specific in saying that her ideal sexual partner could not have a small penis. The young women who expressed a skin tone preference desired dark-skinned sexual partners, generally with dreads. Young women also expressed the necessity of a partner smelling good and being well-groomed both in terms of his hygiene and his apparel. Some young women
even stated that he needed to have higher end apparel, like 7 Jeans.

In addition to the physical aspects of their ideal sexual partner, young women desired a partner who was communicative, caring, and respectful. These qualities would manifest through demonstrations of consideration, listening to the young woman’s desires and treating her opinions as valuable. In addition, it was important that a sexual partner be fun and/or funny. Some young women expressed a desire for a partner who was different from the norm, both in terms of style and interests. Young women also described honesty and loyalty as important. In addition, many young women desired a partner who could be discreet. It was important that the details of the sexual relationship remain between the partners rather than being shared without permission. Most young women stated that an ideal sexual partner would have the qualities of a good father, but a few stated that they did not know if that was a relevant quality in their ideal sexual partner. Young women were also explicit in saying that an ideal sexual partner would have sufficient sexual skill to satisfy them. Most young women described a preference for a partner who was intelligent and interested in education, though some were less concerned with this factor. Young women had mixed opinions on whether a young man should be religious or spiritual.

Last, some young women found it easiest to describe their ideal sexual partner if they compared him to a celebrity. As such, for some young women, their ideal sexual partner would be just like Trey Songz.

**Similarity between Dating and Sexual Partners**
In general, both young men and young women displayed congruence between what they desired in their respective dating and sexual partners. This suggests that intimate partnership in general has certain preferable qualities for these youth. In particular, it would appear that physical attractiveness will be important no matter the particular focus of a relationship as will key interpersonal and intrapersonal qualities, like being nice, fun, and caring.

However, the existence of qualities that were only relevant for one sort of partner indicates that the focus of these relationships is relevant as well. For young women, a dating partner uniquely needed to be able to observe decorum, be extroverted, and have shared interests. These all relate to the amount of time which may be spent with a dating partner that would not be spent with a sexual partner. Further, a young woman’s ideal dating partner needed to demonstrate mutuality in a relationship. This may be related to the seriousness of a dating relationship when compared to a primarily sexual relationship. Similarly, young men described a dating partner uniquely has able to communicate well, to observe decorum, and to have shared interests. These again reflect the greater emotional intimacy and potential time together characteristic of a dating relationship, but not a primarily sexual relationship.

In terms of intrapersonal characteristics, both young men and young women found the same characteristics uniquely important for a dating partner: ambition, family orientation, and independence. This again reflects the potential seriousness of a dating relationship when compared to a primarily sexual one.
In selecting a sexual partner, young women uniquely identified the importance of a partner who was discreet and loyal in addition to potentially being a good parent. The necessity of discretion and loyalty indicate that these young women are aware of the potential hurt and embarrassment that could result from a primarily sexual relationship and are seeking partners who would safeguard against such outcomes. The absence of these qualities with respect to a dating partner may indicate that the fear of these potential outcomes is greater in a primarily sexual context as compared to a dating context.

As stated earlier, it is interesting to note that the only characteristic young men described as uniquely related to a sexual partner was the ability to be a good parent, which was only asked about with regard to sexual partners. This may indicate that dating and sexual partners have essentially the same key components for young men with certain additions necessary in dating relationships while both dating and sexual partners have additional components for young women.

**Breadth of Relevant Qualities**

As is demonstrated in the summaries that begin this chapter, the youth in the present study endorsed a wide range of potentially relevant and attractive characteristics in choosing a dating or sexual partner. While previous research has not overtly denied the existence of as many factors, it has restricted the focus of study to broad generalizations and comparisons (c.f. Bauermeister et al., 2010; Bauermeister et al., 2009; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005; South, 1991). Some of these studies have compared males to females while others have compared African American and White youth. As such, the research has
suggested that youth are likely to consider different qualities when selecting a partner based on whether they are male or female, or whether they are African American or White. However, the conclusions of these analyses offer somewhat stereotyped notions of African American adolescent desire. The data would suggest that African Americans are primarily concerned with physical qualities when selecting a partner (Hansen, 1977), but further that African American young men are even more apt to be so given that males are seeking sexual access while females are seeking markers of financial stability (Edwards, 1969). While the young men in the study did evidence a greater focus on physicality than did the young women, they also referenced a wide variety of inter- and intrapersonal qualities that were relevant in their selection of a partner, particularly a dating partner. The young women in the study, however, did not seem to place a premium on qualities related to earning potential. While they did endorse an interest in a partner who was able to support himself or possibly support a family, this was not unlike young men’s desire for a partner who could be financially independent. In addition, previous research suggested that an older partner would be attractive to young women, as it was an indicator of financial stability (Bauermeister et al., 2010; Bauermeister et al., 2009; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005; South, 1991), but it was the young men instead who voiced such a desire in this study. Overall, one of the most prevalent factors in selecting a partner was that the person be nice. This was true for both young men and young women in selecting both dating and sexual partners. The desire for a partner who offered positive regard was consistently endorsed by youth, demonstrating that
interpersonal factors are very important, even if salient physicality and other factors are to be considered.

**Skin Tone, Hair, and Body Type**

When examining the physical and presentation characteristics relevant to the youth in the study, the key areas were the role of skin tone, hair, and body. In particular, there was the archetype of a light-skinned, long-haired, and “thick” young woman as an ideal dating or sexual partner for young men and the archetype of a dark-skinned young man with dreads for a young woman’s ideal sexual partner. The light-skinned and long haired woman as a beauty ideal has been demonstrated previously in research (Robinson & Ward, 1995; Ross, 1997) and has often been interrogated in the African American Studies literature through the lens of postmodernist Black feminism in particular (Collins, 2005; hooks, 2001; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Long hair, especially when described in combination with light skin, has often connoted the broader notion of “good hair” (Hunter, 1999; Hunter, 2002; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). This “good hair” is generally straight or wavy and the result of a mixed ethnic background, even if one considers him or herself Black or African American (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Aside from being considered more beautiful, light skin and “good hair” has connoted other positive qualities such as intelligence, virtue, or prestige (Hill, 2002; Hill, 2002a; Hughes & Hertel, 1990). This is not unlike how White skin and associated features have been held as the classic exemplar of beauty, virtue, intelligence, and prestige (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). As previous research found (Collins, 2005; Hill, 2002), this relationship was more demonstrable among
young men than among young women, perhaps supporting the notion that part of
the desirability of light skin is its connection to femininity.

The third ingredient to an ideal partner for many young men was
“thickness.” This desire for a partner with large breasts, thighs, and buttocks was
often accompanied by the caveat that the partner could not be overweight.

Previous research has demonstrated that African American men were more
amenable to women of higher weights and generally larger body types than their
White peers, so the definition of “overweight” in this case is one that warrants
further study. It is possible that these young men are expressing a desire for a slim
woman who also has large breasts, thighs, and buttocks, but it is also possible that
the median weight is higher than others would consider average weight and
“overweight” here is relative to that benchmark.

While “thickness” is interesting in terms of potential differences in how
these young men construe “overweight,” it also begs the question of from where
did they learn that such a body type (large breasts, buttocks, and thighs, yet not
overweight) was ideal and sufficiently prevalent that it should or could be attained
in a partner. Further, the fact that this thickness was often described as ideal in
tandem with the desire for light skin and long hair serves to indicate that there
may be a larger archetype of ideal Black femininity that is being desired rather
than simply a collection of individually desired features.

hooks (2001) argued that the modern conceptualization of the ideal Black
female body is necessarily impacted by the popular media being consumed,
including movies, music, music videos, and advertisements. For example, a
majority of the Black women who win beauty pageants, appear in ad campaigns, and are chosen for romantic lead roles in films are often light-skinned with long, straight hair (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Further, it has been argued that the popular media targeted toward African American youth and young adults often contains imagery that is reminiscent of more overtly racist and reductionist depictions and presentations of Black women from the past. In fact, rapper Nicki Minaj has been repeatedly compared Sarah Baartman, the Hottentot Venus, due to the way fascination with her large buttocks has been used as a marketing device (Hobson, 2011; Martin, 2011). In current popular media, music, associated music videos, and pornography have been particular sites for a similarly hyper-focused gaze which exclusively fixes itself upon particular sexual aspects of the Black female body. Both Collins and hooks posit that the reduction of Black women through a gaze that obsessively focuses only on their sexually relevant parts and the value of these parts to the male sexual appetite serve to erase the complexity of Black womanhood (Collins, 2005; hooks, 2000; hooks, 2001). Accordingly, a better understanding of how these young men understand their desire for a partner who is “thick” may warrant study.

Just as the young men seemed to describe a larger archetype of attractiveness, young women did as well. Similar to what has been found previously, young women desired a partner who was taller and muscular (Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005). While some young women indicated a preference for a lighter skinned dating or sexual partner, this never occurred to the

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9 Sarah Baartman was an African woman during the 19th Century who was paraded through Europe as a “freak show,” so that onlookers could marvel at the size of her buttocks (Collins, 2005).
extent that it did among young men. In fact, young women described openness to varying skin tones for a dating partner, but more often described their ideal sexual partners as dark-skinned young men with dreads. The reason these characteristics were attractive was never noted, but historically there has been an association between dark-skinned Black men and sexual virility, potentially due to the Black Buck stereotype which ascribes characteristics of a feral nature and hypersexuality to Black men (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Because the young women in the study did not specifically state that they believed dark-skinned men were more virile or sexually satisfying than lighter skinned men, this might be an area that would benefit from further inquiry and exploration.

Another interesting aspect of the young women’s ideal sexual partner description is that this did not seem to follow previous understandings of how dread locks are perceived. In previous work, dread locks had been associated with a particular, more African or Afro-Caribbean identity (Ashe, 20120; Stallings, 2010), but the young women did not note any relationship between dreadlocks and this identity. This is perhaps due to dreadlocks moving into the mainstream of African American teen culture via an increasing number of hip hop artists with dreadlocks in the absence of any connection to Rastafarianism or non-American Black identities. Accordingly, the previous negative associations with dreads related to hygiene also were not seen in the responses of this study’s youth. Just as the light-skinned, long-haired archetype of beauty that many young men embraced may have been due to media, this desire for a partner with dreadlocks may also have been a result of media.
Race and Respectability

While the majority of youth in the present study did not explicitly reference the race of their preferred dating or sexual partners, many of them implicitly referenced this characteristic though the use of terms like “light-skinned” and “dark-skinned.” Though the terms could be understood more generally, they generally have a particular, intra-racial meaning when used by African Americans (Kitwana, 2002; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). They connote gradations of African American skin tone specifically rather than describing a more inclusive skin tone description. If they were referencing the skin tone of another racial or ethnic group, there would likely be a modifier (e.g. “a dark-skinned Filipina”; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). The lack of mentions of other-raced potential dating and sexual partners is not surprising, given previous research. It has been found that, given the relative homogeneity of their predominant spaces, adolescents generally select partners who are demographically similar to them in terms of race and ethnicity (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990). Accordingly, it could have been expected that youth would respond as such. It is interesting, however, that San Francisco youth did not describe the potential of partners of other ethnicities or races as the geographic areas from where participants were recruited are more racially and ethnically heterogeneous than those utilized in Chicago.

A somewhat related phenomenon was the consistent refrain among youth that a partner could not “be ghetto.” The youth were rarely more specific than that, but those who were described partners who did not know how to dress or
speak appropriately in public spaces. As such, they invited embarrassment. This desire for respectability has been long discussed in the African American Studies literature as “respectability politics” (Collins, 2005). Respectability politics generally refers to the necessity of maintaining a respectable image in order to avoid confirming negative stereotypes related to one’s (in this case, racial) group. Traditionally, such respectability has been related to many areas including hygiene, property maintenance, manners, and sexual morality (Collins, 2005). However, for the youth in the present study, respectability seemed to be located primarily in terms of manners and decorum. Acting in a manner that was “ghetto” constituted confirming negative stereotypes about African Americans, and, accordingly, about the youth.

**The Bad Boy**

While respectability politics seemed to eliminate the option of a partner who was “ghetto,” other “street” qualities were preferred in terms of an ideal boyfriend. In describing a partner who was a “bad boy,” young women referenced his ability to intimidate, his having tattoos, and his potential involvement in illegal industries (e.g. the sale of marijuana). While the eschewal of a “ghetto” partner in combination with the desire for a “bad boy” may seem counterintuitive, Black masculinity in a lower income space has been understood in such a way that the toughness and “street” acumen embodied by “bad boys” is of great value (Collins, 2005; Kitwana, 2002). Given the limited economic opportunities available, the adoption of a persona that eschews even attempting to work within such a system that is understood as oppressive connotes strength and an unwillingness to be
oppressed (Collins, 2005; Kitwana, 2002). It differs from being “ghetto” in that it is not about lacking knowledge of how to behave in a space, but about refusing to follow the rules of that space because one is of sufficient strength and toughness. In fact, it has been argued that this “bad boy” persona has been associated with “authentic” Blackness, particularly when compared to stereotyped middle-class and upper-class African Americans.

**The Nerd**

The parameters of “authentic” Blackness may also be demonstrated in youth’s disinterest in “nerdy” partners. While many youth described a desire for a partner who was smart and most expressed an interest in a partner who was educated or seeking to be educated, the caveat that the person was not “too smart” was consistently offered. hooks, in examining particularly the boundaries placed on Black masculinity, posits that many African Americans have been socialized to believe that intellectualism is less important than physical labor, because the latter offers more protection and more demonstrable power (hooks, 2004). In a context where racism may be understood as a limiter of social mobility, intellectual endeavors may be rendered valueless in a manner that physical strength cannot be. Further, it has been posited that an association has been made between racial authenticity and inclusion in a lower socioeconomic bracket (Collins, 2005). Accordingly, being “too smart” dis-identifies one with “authentic” Blackness, because it seems to embrace bourgeois, middle-class values (Collins, 2005; hooks, 2004). Perhaps it is this factor which makes being “too smart” unattractive for young women as well. It must be noted though that it is possible that being
“too smart” may be unattractive due to more general teenage notions about nerdiness as unattractive.

The Freak

In describing an ideal partner, many young men described a desire for someone “freaky” or a “freak.” They did not define what it meant, but it is a concept that has been broached before in the literature (hooks, 2001; Stephens & Few, 2007; West, 1994). It is an interesting concept in that it is one that could be liberating or reductive with respect to Black female sexuality. The “freak” could refer to a young woman who is sufficiently comfortable with her body and her sexuality, such that she is able to explore the bounds of her desire and pleasure (hooks, 2001). This sort of freakiness is rooted in the young woman’s sexual agency and sexual freedom. However, it is also possible that the “freak” refers to a young woman who is sexually wild and insatiable. This latter hypersexual conceptualization of the freak is more akin to the Jezebel archetype that has been used to negatively stereotype Black women (Stephens & Few, 2007; West, 1994) and which has been celebrated in music videos that depict women as hypersexual creatures focused on the pleasure of men (hooks, 2001; Kitwana, 2002). The essential difference between these two conceptualizations is that one celebrates Black female sexuality while the other objectifies it (Collins, 2005). Much like the ideal Black female body has been presented in particular ways through media, the depiction of the Black woman as a freak, particularly in the absence of agency, has been often reproduced in music and film. Accordingly, it is important that young men’s notion of a “freak” as desirable be more thoroughly queried.
Potentially supporting the notion that the “freak” described by young men is not necessarily one that celebrates young women’s sexual agency, Harper et al. (2004) found that African American young men tended to describe sex and sexuality in less personal terms than did young women. In the present study, even when young women were direct in describing their desire for a young man to be sexually pleasing, they described it in terms of the young man’s ability to interact with their body. Rather than describe a broad “freakiness,” they described sexual knowledge in addition to adequate penis size when describing a young man who could offer them sufficient sexual pleasure.

**Implications**

The present study has a number of implications for the conceptualization of African American youth desire generally. In addition, it has implications for the development of useful interventions for this population. This section will first consider the necessity of a new model of African American adolescent partnering. Then it will describe how the findings of the present study can be used to inform interventions for African American adolescents.

**Modeling Partnering among African American Adolescents**

When considering the findings of this study, the model of dating preferences put forth by exchange theory (Edwards, 1969) appears inadequate for understanding African American adolescent partner selection. It would appear that African American adolescents are seeking more than the exchange of sexual and domestic services for financial services. While this exchange may be a part of their decision to partner, it works in concert with other factors and it may not be
an exchange with gender-specific roles. More specifically, the youth in the study evidenced consideration of a multitude of factors in their dating and sexual partner selection. Further, the young men in the study sought a partner with financial resources just as did the young women in the study and the young women desired a partner who was sexually available and skilled just as did the young men. Accordingly, a new model of partner selection warrants investigation in order to better capture the experience of African American adolescents. This new model would consider multiple areas of desirable characteristics, including those which were elucidated by the present study. As such, it would allow for consideration of a combination of desired physical characteristics, desired inter- and intra-personal characteristics, and other factors related to the potential partner. Further, the present study did not examine the relationship between the characteristics of the youth and the characteristics he/she desires in a partner. This factor may have particular impact on the kinds of characteristics the youth desires and their belief in the feasibility of successfully pursuing such a partner. This chapter will conclude with some research directions which could move toward the development of such a model.

**Informing Intervention**

While previous work which has examined the dating and sexual behaviors of African American adolescents has focused on health risks and sexual health interventions, the normative data presented in this analysis can be utilized for the development of interventions to support healthy romantic and sexual development. Given that these relationships serve as an opportunity to practice
behaviors which will be used in adult relationships (Collins, 2003; Connolly et al., 2004; Furman, 2002; Furman & Simon, 2008), giving youth tools to maximize the health and benefit of these relationships could have lasting impacts.

Many youth identified qualities of an ideal dating partner that would be beneficial to the success of the relationship. For example, many youth desired a partner who could communicate or could be honest. It is unclear however how much of this is communicated clearly to youth’s potential partners. Accordingly, an intervention could be developed that coaches youth on how to express the characteristics they desire in a partner and how to recognize when those characteristics are or are not being manifested. Given the impact of early relationships on youths’ self-esteem (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992), this intervention has the potential to have multiple positive impacts.

In addition to encouraging youth to communicate what they desire from a partner, it may also be important to raise their own consciousness about what it is they desire. Youth may have a cursory notion of what they desire in a romantic or sexual partner, but they may be able to have a more fleshed out understanding of these desires if more time and consideration were devoted to examining these desires. Further, youth may conceptualize ideal partner characteristics using a short-term perspective. However, it may be important to encourage them to consider the qualities that may become important if a relationship is longer or becomes more substantial. In order to utilize this longer term perspective, youth may benefit from consultation with same-sex young adults who they believe
could understand them. These mentors could support the youth in fleshing out their desires and considering the impact of these desires in the long-term.

This is particularly relevant in terms of sexual relationships, given the potential for parenthood. Youth are often encouraged to speak openly about sexual health issues when preparing to engage in a sexual relationship. For example, they may be encouraged to have a discussion about STI and HIV status, to make active use of condoms, or to discuss and/or pursue the use of birth control. However, it may additionally be important to encourage youth to have open discussions about the possibility of parenthood and an assessment of an ideal partner’s willingness and ability to parent should the young woman become pregnant due to the dating or sexual relationship. Even if the goal of the relationship is solely sexual, the youth could be encouraged to assess potential partners’ willingness and ability to be a parent, as pregnancy is still a possibility.

Placing the findings of the present study in the context of postmodernist Black feminism raises the question of whether youth have been able to critically examine the sources of their romantic and sexual archetypes. More specifically, youth are presented with ideas of what constitutes attractiveness (both physically and interpersonally) without the question of who is presenting these ideas and to what end. The notion that one can be “too smart” is taken without critique, because an apparatus for critique has not been given nor suggested. Accordingly, it would seem appropriate to give youth such an apparatus in order to promote a more critical reading of media among youth. Freire’s critical consciousness (Friere, 2001) could serve as a useful tool in such an intervention. Critical
consciousness is the process of making one aware that the knowledge (whether through images, texts, or other media) they consume may be impacted by covert or otherwise less salient political or cultural factors. Accordingly, this knowledge warrants interrogation in order to better understand its origin, its purpose, and its utility. Youth could be asked to describe their ideal dating and sexual partners, much as they did for the present study, but then they could be challenged to consider where they learned that these qualities were ideal, who the source of that message was, and what purpose the particular qualities serve in their potential romantic or sexual relationships. This critical analysis of desire would allow youth to challenge themselves to be more analytical as they pursue partnering relationships, but also more critical as they consider popular understandings of their own characteristics. For example, a better understanding of how and why darker skin has traditionally been devalued, particularly for Black women, could be useful in strengthening the self-esteem of dark-skinned young women. Gaining the ability to examine more critically how desire is manufactured and commodified, thusly, could allow youth to better understand how they view others, but also how they may be viewed or how they may view themselves.

**Strengths and Limitations**

The present study has both strengths and weaknesses which should be considered when examining its results and when considering future exploration of the present phenomenon. Some of these are methodological while others are more related to the broader purpose of the parent study.
A major strength of the present study was the richness of the data offered by the youth. The semi-structured interview format used to gather data allowed respondents to offer as much information as they felt comfortable. Given the potential breadth of relevant characteristics in partner selection, the youth were asked more broadly what their ideal partner would be like, thus allowing them to describe the characteristics that were important without presupposing an understanding of which characteristics could be relevant. In addition, specific questions were asked regarding areas that were known to the research team to be relevant or whose relevance or lack thereof would be particularly interesting. For example, the researcher did not know which specific inter- and intra-personal qualities would be endorsed as important by youth, so this was asked about more generally. The relevance of potential to be a good parent was asked due to its potential implications for intervention and for understanding youth’s cognizance of the potential outcomes of sexual relationships.

In addition to broad and specific questions in the interview guide, there were questions which asked about desired partner traits subtly in addition to sections of questions which asked specifically about ideal partners. For example, youth were asked how they wanted a dating partner to treat them. While this was not a part of the ideal dating partner section, it still offered some useful data about what characteristics an ideal dating partner should have. These sorts of questions were interspersed throughout the interview protocol and, as such, served as a useful supplement to the more specific questions asked about ideal dating and sexual partners.
In addition to the richness of the data provided by the youth due to the variety of questions asked, the sample itself is a strength of the study. The two cities from which the respondents were sampled are similar yet they have some cultural differences, with San Francisco being more culturally and ethnically integrated than Chicago. In addition, these locations represent different geographic areas of the United States (West Coast vs. Midwest) and cities of different sizes. As such, the convergence of themes across these two sites suggests that the preferences described by the youth are likely not due to specific city-related factors, but more broad factors which would impact African American youth in various types of spaces. However, more detailed analysis of the similarities and differences between the Chicago and San Francisco samples would be necessary in order to more definitively claim the universality of findings.

Another strength of the present study is that it attempted to offer a more holistic description of African American adolescent desire. The extant literature has been somewhat general in its analysis of these youths’ desire as it relates to dating and sexual partners. However, the present study examined multiple domains of desire, considering the physical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and various other characteristics that youth consider in choosing a partner.

While the study was able to examine and thusly present a wider range of relevant factors in African American adolescent partner selection, the sample was comprised of only sexually experienced youth. An analysis of sexually inexperienced youth may have given a fuller view of this phenomenon. A
decision was made not to include these youth in the present analysis, because their responses may have been qualitatively different from the responses of sexually experienced youth. The sexually experienced youths’ desired sexual partner characteristics were based on experiences whereas an inexperienced youth would have been describing ideal partners based on conjecture. However, it is possible that the qualities sexually inexperienced youth endorsed as relevant for the selection of a dating partner may have added to the texture of what was said by the sexually experienced youth analyzed here.

Further, the present analysis is limited somewhat due to the fact that the parent study from which these data were taken was broad and primarily focused on understanding how gender ideologies impacted sexual health knowledge and behaviors. Accordingly, though there were a number of questions relevant to partner selection, the interviewers were not instructed to probe particularly deeply with regard to it. As such, some of the youths’ responses were not as full or textured as they could have been if partner selection had been a primary focus of the data collection.

**Future Directions**

While the findings of the present study are interesting and have implications for the partner selection literature and intervention development, they also highlight the necessity of further research into partner selection among African American heterosexual adolescents. It would be useful for researchers to conduct a more focused analysis on the characteristics these adolescents find important when selecting a dating or sexual partner. The present study was a
secondary data analysis, so a study which is tasked specifically with assessing these characteristics may yield more textured data in that it would allow interviewers to delve more deeply into aspects of the partner selection process, including the characteristics that are relevant, to what degree they are relevant, and under what circumstances they are most relevant. This might best be accomplished through a combination of interview and observation. An initial set of interviews could broach the subjects examined in the present study in greater detail while also gathering information to inform the observations and later interviewing. Specifically, the preliminary interviews could inform which venues were best for observing interaction between African American adolescent males and females as well as identifying subject areas which require even greater focus. For example, the present study identified a large number of interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics relevant to partner selection. Given the relative absence of this focus in the extant literature, the value and purpose of these characteristics could be investigated in an interview focused solely on them.

In addition to better understanding the characteristics that are valued in partner selection, it would be important to examine more carefully why particular features are esteemed while others are not. Youth receive messages from a variety of sources regarding what constitutes beauty as well as what constitutes a worthwhile relationship. Accordingly, asking youth to describe the archetypes of beauty, archetypes of relationships, and other sources of relevant information will allow a better understanding of how these desires come to be. It has been shown that parents’ relationships often serve as models for youth (Corsaro & Elder,
1990; Harper et al., 2012; Maccoby, 1998; Nomaguchi, 2008), but it has also been shown that ideas about desirable characteristics are often made in consensus with same-sex peers (Harper et al., 2004). These previous analyses however have not identified the sources of particular characteristics. For example, it is possible that the source of information which espouses “thickness” is not the same source that espouses honesty as a worthwhile characteristic. Understanding the sources of this information will allow researchers to better explore the meaning and purpose of particular desired characteristics. This information could be useful for interventions which aim to bolster self-esteem as well as interventions which empower youth to critically examine their romantic and sexual decision-making.

The phenomenological approach used in the current study was useful for understanding more broadly what dating and sexual partner selection was like among the study’s youth. However, a case study or narrative analysis approach might allow for an examination of how ideal dating and partner characteristics differ for particular youths. A case study approach (Creswell, 2007) could include examination of a small group of youth’s experiences in dating and sexual partner selection. The sample could be as small as 6 to 8 youth, half male and half female. These youth would be interviewed about their past partner selection experiences as well as their ideal partner experiences. Additional data could be gathered by interviewing their friends, family, and other key informants about the characteristics of the youth’s past and present dating and sexual partners. Information could also be gathered about the models of beauty and models of relationship that informed the youth’s decisions. By focusing on such a small
sample, more effort could be put toward crafting the clearest portrait of their experience.

A narrative approach (Creswell, 2007) could also focus on a smaller sample but without the necessity of additional informants about each youth. For a narrative study of African American adolescent partner selection, a researcher could ask youth to describe their ideal dating and sexual partners. This could be done over the course of several interviews, ideally across multiple years in order to gather a sense of how desire may change over the course of time and experiences. These interviews would be analyzed in order to construct a narrative of how desired dating and sexual partner characteristics shift over time. In order to give the clearest description of the narrative, it would be important that information about relationships that occurred between interviews be discussed and their potential impact on conceptualizations of dating and sexual partners explored.

In addition, the use of either case study or narrative analysis would allow a researcher to utilize information about a youth’s own characteristics to better understand their partner selection experience. By focusing on individuals, the researcher could consider how these characteristics limit or broaden the characteristics a youth finds desirable. For example, youths who believe that they have high desirability may be very specific about the criteria a partner would need to meet. They may have higher standards in particular domains (e.g. being very attractive, having a lot of money) and they may also take into account more domains (e.g. attractiveness, employment, education, status, etc.). Youths who
believe they have lower desirability may be less specific about their partners’
required characteristics and may have fewer mandatory qualities.
SUMMARY

Dating and sexual relationships among adolescents have been identified as both normative and beneficial. However, the research examining the dating and sexual relationships of African American adolescents has been narrow in scope, focusing primarily on risks of intimate partner violence, pregnancy, and STI/HIV transmission. This myopic focus has left a gap in the literature as it relates to the normative aspects of dating and sexual relationships for these youth.

The present study sought to better understand the dating and sexual partner preferences of 51 African American adolescents (male = 32, female = 19) recruited from Chicago and San Francisco. The adolescents were interviewed by study personnel using a semi-structured interview guide meant to explore gender ideologies. While the interview had a wide scope, it also included questions that specifically query respondents’ ideal dating and sexual partners. These questions served as the core of the present analysis, though the entirety of the interviews was analyzed. The study utilized qualitative analysis guided by a psychological phenomenological framework.

The study found that there were eight primary domains of relevance in the selection of an ideal dating and/or sexual partner: physical characteristics, self-presentation characteristics, interpersonal characteristics, intrapersonal characteristics, financial resources, age, preferred race, and similarity to celebrities. Contrary to expectations based on exchange theory, both young men and young women considered characteristics across the spectrum when selecting their partners. In general, both young men and young women had a great deal of
similarity between their ideal dating and ideal sexual partners. However, there were some characteristics that were unique to a dating partner or sexual partner. In general, young men’s ideal dating partners had all the characteristics required of an ideal sexual partner, but they also had additional qualities related to the increased seriousness and potential length of a dating relationship. Young women’s ideal dating and sexual partners both had unique characteristics, despite sharing a large number of qualities. Young women’s ideal dating partners had qualities necessary due to the seriousness of the relationship, the amount of time which would be spent together, and the potential length of the relationship. Young women’s ideal sexual partners had qualities more related to minimizing the risk of embarrassment resulting from the primarily sexual focus of the relationship.
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intercourse, and the importance of age, gender, and ethnic background.

APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR SEXUALLY EXPERIENCED

FEMALE
Interviewer instructions

[Interviewer: See Screening interview for age and sexual experience; Confirm this information]

Screener Check List:
Age (yrs.)______________

Sexual Experience: Yes No

[Interviewer: Whenever R uses terms that you don’t understand, or that you think the reader won’t understand, Inquire as to what the word(s) mean.

[Interviewer: Get to know the person a bit before launching into the interview questions. Have them tell you about themselves.]

[Interviewer: Throughout the interview, and as appropriate, ask R for stories or other examples of things R talks about.]

[Interviewer: Try to use R’s terms for phenomena, but make sure you know what the terms mean!]

Section A. Introduction
First, I would like to tell you about the interview we’ll be doing today. The interview will help us learn from you what it’s like to be a young woman in today’s world.

Think of yourself as a teacher. These are your opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. I will respect your views. Some questions are on sensitive topics, so tell me if there is something that you’d rather not talk about. Everything you say will be kept completely confidential.

[Interviewer: If R asks what confidential means you may supplement with the following material. What I mean by confidential is that we will not use your name on the recording or connect your name with anything you say in the interview. After we have typed out what you said in the interview we will destroy the recording.] The interview should take a couple of hours. We’ll take a break about half way through, but if you need a break sooner, let me know.

Before we get started do you have any questions?

To get started, I’d like to know a little about you.

A1. How would you describe yourself?
[Probe as needed: Do you prefer the term African American or Black or doesn’t it matter to you?]

[Interviewer: Ok, I’ll use [Preferred Term] as we talk today.]
[Interviewer: Skip questions below as necessary if the answer is covered in A1 Response]
A2. Who do you live with? [short answer]

A3. How old are you? ______________(Yrs.)
A4. Where are you currently living? Which neighborhood? [short answer]

A5. What is it like living in your neighborhood? [Interviewer: If R has just moved, it is ok to get information about the prior neighborhood in this question.] [short answer]

A6. Are you in school? [short answer]

A6a. [If yes, ask:] Where do you go to school?

A6b. [If yes, ask:] Do you do activities like sports, drama, music, or leadership at school? [short answer]

A6c. [If yes, ask:] What are your favorite subjects? [short answer]

A7. Do you have a job? [yes, no]

A7a. [If yes, ask:] Where do you work?

A8. If you could live anywhere you wanted in the United States, where would you like to live? [short answer]

A9. Is there someone you look up to, that you really admire and want to be like? [yes, no; short answer]

A9a. [If yes, ask:] Tell me about him/her/them. [short answer]

Section B

These next questions are about the kinds of things you like to do.

B1. Which of the following do you like to do [Read Each] …

B1a. Watch TV? [yes, no]

B1a1. [If yes, ask:] What programs do you watch? [short answer]
B1b. Listen to music? [yes, no]

B1b1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of music do you like to listen to? [short answer]

B1b2. Who are your favorite artists? [short answer]

B1c. Go out to movies or rent movies to watch at home? [yes, no]

B1c1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of movies do you like to watch? [short answer]

B1d. Read magazines? [yes, no]

B1d1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of magazines do you like to read? [short answer]

B1d2. What are your favorite magazines? [short answer]

B1e. Read books? [yes, no]

B1e1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of books do you like to read? [short answer]

B1e2. What are your favorite books? [short answer]

B1f. Spend time on the internet? [yes, no]

B1f1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things do you like to do on the internet? [short answer]

Probe as needed: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace, what else?

B1g. Hanging out with your friends? [yes, no]

B1g1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things do you and your friends like to do? [short answer]

B1h. Being with your family? [yes, no]

B1h1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things do you and your family do together? [short answer]
Bli. Go to Church-related activities or services? [yes, no]

Bli1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things do you do with people you know from church?
[short answer]

Section C
These next questions ask about what you think the messages and images are of (African American/Black) girls your age. People get lots of ideas and messages about how girls your age should act from a lot of different places.

[Interviewer: In items below, C1a to C1h, we often ask about several influences in a single item. Within an item, we do not need to know about specific sources of the ideas or images (e.g., TV vs. magazines), but if this information is offered that’s ok.]

[Interviewer (If needed): By messages we mean the ideas or themes that you hear or see around you. These messages can come from lots of other people, from books, or from media or from other places. (If needed): By images we mean the images of what African Americans should be like. Sometimes we think of images as “pictures” or “snap shots” of what people should be. The images can come from lots of other people, from books, or from media or other places.]

C1. Do you think that ideas and messages about what African American girls your age should be like, come from [Read Each]… (what girls your age should say or do, how they should dress, how they should act, etc.)

C1a. TV, Radio, Magazines, Books? [yes, no]
C1a1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from TV, radio, books, or magazines about being a teenage girl?
[short answer]

C1b. The Internet: Facebook, Myspace, YouTube? [yes, no]
C1b1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from the internet about being a teenage girl?
[short answer]

C1c. Movies, Music? [yes, no]

C1c1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from movies or music about being a teenage girl?
[short answer]

C1d. Family members? [yes, no]
C1d1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from family about being a teenage girl?
[short answer]

Probe as needed: Have you learned different things about being a woman from different family members, say from a Mom or from an uncle?

C1e. Sports figures or politicians? [yes, no]

C1e1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from sports figures or politicians about being a teenage girl?
[short answer]

C1f. Teachers, Ministers, or Pastors? [yes, no]

C1f1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from teachers or religious leaders about being a teenage girl?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: If No Boyfriend Ever, Skip to C1h]

C1g. Boyfriends? [yes, no]

[Interviewer: Explain that a boyfriend is someone you feel romantic about, are going out with, and may or may not be having sex with.]

C1g1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from Boyfriends about being a teenage girl?
[short answer]

C1h. Friends? [yes, no]

C1h1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from friends about being a teenage girl?
[short answer]

C1i. Are there other people or places that you have learned about being a teenage girl from?
[short answer]

Probe as needed: Where else does R think she has gotten her ideas on what girls are like?

[Interviewer: Construct next item, C2, using example sources described by R in C1a to C1i, as things that influence their images of girls]
C2. Thinking about the images of (African American/Black) girls that come from the people, places, or things you just talked about (for example, insert example sources from C1a to C1i), would you say you are different from or similar to these images?

[Interviewer: If images the R has presented are contrasting or contradictory, probe this issue in C2a and C2b.]

[Interviewer: If R is having difficulty answering this question, ask specifically about one source that seems central (e.g., family) to get the R started.]

[Longer Answer]

C2a. In what ways are you different?
[Longer Answer]

C2b. In what ways are you similar?
[Longer Answer]

C3. Do you feel pressure to be different than you want to be? [yes, no]

C3a. [If yes, ask:] Tell me about that?
[Longer Answer]

C4. When an (African American or Black) girl doesn’t fit the popular image of what a girl should be like, how do other people treat her?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: If R has difficulty understanding the phrase “popular image.” you should paraphrase it, for example, popular image means the images that the media have of what girls your age should be like; alternatively, it means the stereotypes people sometimes have of girls your age]

C4a. Do you know someone like this? [yes, no]

C4a1. [If yes, ask:] Can you tell me a story about that person and how others sometimes treat her?
[short answer]

C4a2. [If no, ask] How do you think someone who doesn’t fit the popular image of what an (African American or Black) teenage girl should be like would be treated by other people?
[short answer]

C5. If an African American girl your age is known for having a lot of sex partners, how do other people treat her/what do other people say about her?
C5a. If an African American girl your age is known for being a virgin, how do people treat her/what do people say about her?

C6. If an African American girl your age is known for always using condoms, how do other people treat her/what do other people say about her?

C6a. If an African American girl your age is known for never using condoms, how do other people treat her/what do other people say about her?

Section D

These next questions are about sex and your views on sex.

D1. Have you had a sex education class, a health class, or other class that talked about sex?
[yes, no]

[Interviewer: If No, Skip to Item D2]

D1a. [If yes, ask:] Some sex education teaches about how to make decisions and protect yourself when you have sex. Have you had a class that did those things?
[yes, no]

D1b. [If yes, ask:] Some sex education classes only teach about not having sex (sexual abstinence). Have you had a class that talked only about not having sex and ways to avoid having sex?
[yes, no]

[Interviewer: For next question, start with the root question, asking specific questions as needed. Use the definition work sheet for sexual behaviors as needed, especially for non-sexually experienced youth.]

D2. What do the words “to have sex” mean to you?

D2a. Does it mean to have vaginal sex, oral sex, or anal sex?

D2b. Does it mean all of those things?

D2c. Would you include anything else?

Transition sentence to acknowledge and think about other types of sex.
[Interviewer: Confirm sexual experience if needed: Have you had sex with anyone including vaginal or anal intercourse, oral sex, or other types of sex? [yes, no]

[Interviewer: If R’s definition is different than ours, say… Thanks for telling me what sex means to you. Now, we’re going to broaden the definition. In the next few questions we want you to think about the definition I am going to read to you.]

These next questions ask about having sex with another person. By the word sex I mean any of the things people do sexually with a partner. This includes oral sex, when a guy puts his mouth on a girl’s vagina, or a girl puts her mouth on a boy’s penis. It also includes vaginal intercourse, when a guy puts his penis in a girl’s vagina, or anal intercourse when a guy puts his penis in a girl’s anus (or butt).

So, a person who is doing any one of these sexual activities with a partner is having sex.

Is that clear or would you like me to explain further?

[Interviewer: Use Additional Explanation as needed: So, if I was to ask you, what age is it ok for girls to start having sex?—this would mean at what age is it ok for a girl to start doing any one of the sexual things I mentioned earlier including oral sex, vaginal sex, or anal sex.]

[Interviewer: use alternative explanations as needed until it is clear that the word sex means any one of the things mentioned previously.]

D3. People have different ideas about whether it is ok to have sex as a teen. Do you think it is ok for teenage girls and guys to have sex [Of any kind]? [short answer]

D3a. How do you think a guy views that? [short answer]

D4. What age is it ok for a guy to start having sex [Of any kind]? [Age or Age Range]

Probe: Why then? [short answer]

D5. What age is it ok for a girl to start having sex [Of any kind]? [Age or Age Range]

Probe: Why then?
D6. Do you think it is ok for young people to start having sex [Of any kind] when they are ready, whether they are married or not? [Yes, No, or short answer]

D7. Is it ok for married people to have sex [Of any kind] with someone other than their wife or husband? [Yes, No, or short answer]

D7a. How do you think guys view having sex outside a marriage? [short answer]

Transition Sentence: “That’s all I want to ask about marriage, now I’d like you to think about some other things”

D8. Tell me about a time when you wanted to have sex with a new guy, someone you just met, what did you do to get him interested in you? [short answer]

Probe: What did you do or say to get him interested?

These next few questions are about condoms.

D9. What do you think about condoms? [short answer]

Probe each as needed:
Do you like using them?

Do they work (E.g., stay on, break, prevent STDs/Pregnancy)?

Are they easy to buy or get in your neighborhood?

[Probe, Girl Rs only:] Do you like it when guys use them?

D10. What do your male friends think about condoms? [short answer]

Section E

Our next questions are about boyfriends and about sex. I want to ask you about the words you like to use in talking about boyfriends and girlfriends, and if you want me to use those words in the interview.
E1. First, what words do you use to describe a boyfriend, that is, someone you are going out with, feel romantic about, and may be having sex with?

[Interviewer: R might not be having sex with this person, but the person needs to be someone they feel romantic about.]

Boyfriend:_______________________________________________________

E2. If someone is your boyfriend does it always mean he is having sex with you or can someone be your boyfriend and not be having sex with you? [short answer]

E3. Are there different kinds of boyfriends? [yes, no]

E3a. [If yes, ask:] What do you call the different kinds of boyfriends? [short answer]

[Interviewer define sex as needed: As before, by the word sex we mean vaginal, oral, or anal sex.]

E4. How is a boyfriend different from someone you are having sex with who is just a friend (friends with benefits)? [short answer]

Probe. If you were having sex with someone who is not your boyfriend, what do you call that [that person]? 

E5. How is a boyfriend different from someone you might have sex with in exchange for something like money or clothes and stuff? [short answer]

E6. If someone is your boyfriend does it mean that you should only have sex with that person or are you free to have sex with others?

[Interviewer: If needed, ask a ‘What if question.’ What if [a friend had sex with someone else] even though she had a boyfriend. What would you think of that?] [short answer]

Other Sexual Relationships:

These next questions ask about your views on and experiences with boyfriends and having sex.
E7. What would your ideal boyfriend be like, that is someone you are in love with and may be having sex with? [Long Answer]

Probe each as needed:
How old would your ideal person be?

What would he look like?

What kind of person would he be like (e.g., respectful, reliable, honest, loyal, exciting, dangerous, have your back)?

Would he have a job?

Would it be important for him to be religious or go to church?

Would it be important for him to be going to school or want that?

E8. How important is it for teenagers to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend? [short answer]

E9. What do you think it means to a guy to have a girlfriend? [Long answer]

Probe as needed: Do guys see this the same way you do or different? [short answer]

Probe: How so? [Long answer]

E10. Do you have a boyfriend? That is someone you are going-with, that you might feel romantic about? [yes, no]

[Interviewer: If Yes to E10, skip to E10f]

E10a. [If no, ask:] Have you had a boyfriend in the past couple of years? [yes, no]

[Interviewer: If No to E10a, and E10: No Boyfriend Ever, Skip to E15.1a]

[Interviewer: These next questions, E10b to E10e, are about Rs most recent ex-boyfriend.]

E10b. Thinking about your most recent ex-boyfriend, what kinds of things did you and he [your ex-boyfriend] like to do? [short answer]

E10c. Were you and your ex-boyfriend having sex? [yes, no]
E10d. Did you have sex with anyone else while you were going with your ex-boyfriend? [yes, no]

E10e. Did your ex-boyfriend have sex with anyone besides you while you were going together? [yes, no]

[If No to E10 and Yes to E10a: R has a past, but no current Boyfriend, skip to instructions before E11]

[Has Boyfriend, ask E10f]

E10f. What kinds of things do you and your boyfriend like to do? [short answer]

E10g. Are you having sex with your boyfriend? [yes, no]

E10h. Do you have sex with anyone else besides your boyfriend? [short answer]

E10i. Does your boyfriend have sex with anyone besides you? [short answer]

[Has/Had Boyfriend, read instruction below]

Relationships can be respectful or disrespectful. These next questions ask about respect and disrespect in relationships.

E11. What does it mean to you to show your boyfriend respect? [Long Answer]

Probe Each and get examples:

How does a girl show that she respects her boyfriend?

What might a girl do to show she disrespects her boyfriend?

E12. What are some of the things a boyfriend might do to show you disrespect? [long answer]

E13. How would a boyfriend act towards you if he were being respectful of you? [long answer]

These next questions are about getting advice on boyfriends.

[Interviewer: If R does not understand the term advice, try an alternative term or rephrase as, “ideas have you gotten about…”]
[Interviewer: The term sex in the Probes for E14 and E15 is more generic, it could be advice on anything (e.g., birth control, STDs) about sex and boyfriends, not necessarily on how to have sex]

E14. Have you gotten advice about boyfriends from somewhere, like magazines, books, or the Internet?  
[short answer]

Probe as needed. Have you gotten advice on boyfriends and sex?

E14a. What kind of advice have you gotten?  
[Long Answer]

E15. Have you asked another person for advice on boyfriends? [yes, no]

E15a. Who did you get advice from?  
[Short answer]

E15b. What kind of advice did they give you?  
[Long Answer]

Probe as needed. Has the advice included advice on boyfriends and sex?

[If R has had a boyfriend in the past/currently, Skip to Instructions Before E16]

[Interviewer: If No Boyfriend Ever, ask E15.1a]

E15.1a. Earlier you mentioned that you haven’t had a boyfriend yet. However, have you ever talked to anyone, or saw or read things that have told you about what it might be like to have a boyfriend? [short answer]

Probe Response for each:  
What age it is ok to have a boyfriend?

How to get a boyfriend?

Probe R for all the possible sources that she may have learned things about boyfriends from: magazines, books, the Internet, or a person.

These next questions are about boyfriends and sex.

[Interviewer: In this section by sex we mean having oral, vaginal, anal sex]
[Interviewer: For those who have never had a boyfriend, ask R to imagine that she has a boyfriend she is having sex with.]

E16. If you have/had a boyfriend, would you expect him to have sex only with you?  
[yes, no]

E16a. [If yes, ask:] Why do you think that is important to you?  
[short answer]

E17. What do you think about guys who have lots of sex partners besides their girlfriend? [short answer]

Probe: Why do you think you feel this way?  
[short answer]

Probe: Do you think other girls feel pretty much like you do or different? [short answer]

E17a. What does it mean to you for a teenager to have “a lot of sexual partners;” That is, in your opinion about how many sexual partners might that be? [Short answer]

[Interviewer: look for a number or a range of numbers; Clarify as needed that we are talking about teenage years.]

E18. What do you think about girls who have lots of sex partners besides their boyfriend? [short answer]

Probe: Why do you think you feel this way?  
[short answer]

Probe: Do you think other girls feel pretty much like you do or different? [short answer]

This next question asks you to imagine what your ideal or perfect sex partner might be like?

E19. First, tell me what is your idea of the ideal guy that you would want to have sex with? [Long answer]

[Interviewer: This item differs from the item about ideal boyfriends. Here we want to focus on an ideal person to have sex with.]

Probe each:
How old would you want him to be?

What would he look like and what kind of person would he be like (e.g., respectful, reliable, honest, loyal, exciting, dangerous, have your back)?

Would he have a job?

Would it be important for him to be a religious person or go to church?

Would it be important for him to be the kind of person who would be or is a good dad?

Would it be important for him to be going to school or want that?

E20. If you wanted to live with a guy or get married, what would that guy need to be like?

Probe each:

How old would your ideal person be?

What would he look like and what kind of person would he be like (e.g., respectful, reliable, honest, loyal, exciting, dangerous, have your back)?

Would he have a job?

Would it be important for him to be a religious person or go to church?

Would it be important for him to be the kind of person who would be or is a good dad?

Would it be important for him to be going to school or want that?

These last questions ask about how you think guys and girls should show respect to each other. This is not asking about boyfriends but guys in general.

E21. What does it mean to you to show a guy respect? [Long answer]

Probe Each:

How does a girl show that she respects a guy?

What might a girl do to show she disrespects a guy?

E22. What are some of the things a guy might do to show you disrespect? [Long answer]
E23. How would a guy act towards you if he was being respectful of you?  
[Long answer]

Section F

These next questions are about talking to guys about sex. When people talk about sex they sometimes talk about the things they like to do sexually or they might talk about health stuff like birth control, condoms, or STDs.

These first questions ask about how you would feel talking about different kinds of sexual things with a boyfriend. If you don’t have a boyfriend, use your imagination to think about what it would be like to talk to a boyfriend about these things.

[Interviewer. Emphasize that R does not have to have ever talked to a guy about sex. If they have not, then ask them to imagine what it would feel like to do so.]

[Interviewer, if needed: Remind R that boyfriends are someone you are going-out with, feel romantic about, and may be having sex with.]

[Interviewer: R is being asked about how they feel about talking about sexual matters, that is, are they comfortable, uncomfortable, embarrassed, find it easy, find it hard to do, etc.?; We are not asking about the actual experience until item F7]

F1. How would you feel about talking to a boyfriend about sexual health matters or things you like to do when you have sex?

Probe as needed for specific topics:

How about talking about birth control?

How about talking about condoms?

How about talking about STDs?

How about talking about the things you might want to do when you have sex?

F2. How would you feel talking about these kinds of sexual things [see Probes] with a guy you are having sex with but who is not your boyfriend?

[short answer]

Probe each as needed:
How about talking about birth control?

How about talking about condoms?

How about talking about STDs?

How about talking about the things you might want to do when you have sex?

F3. How do you think other girls your age feel about talking to a boyfriend about these kinds of sexual things? [short answer]

[If R has never had a boyfriend, Skip to Interviewer instructions before F5.]

F4. Have you ever talked to a boyfriend about sex? [yes, no]

[Interviewer: If No skip to Instructions before F5]

F4a. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you talked about?

F4b. [If yes, ask] Is there anything you would be uncomfortable talking to a boyfriend about [when it comes to sex]?

[Interviewer: Define “new guy” as someone you just got to know or only recently met]

These next questions are about someone you’re interested in but have only known a short time. In these questions, we will refer to him as a “new guy”

F5. Have you ever talked to a new guy about sexual health things like using condoms, or birth control, or STDs? [yes, no]

F5a. How would you feel talking to a new guy about these different kinds of sexual things [see Probes]? [short answer]

Probe each as needed:

How about talking about birth control?

How about talking about condoms?

How about talking about STDs?

How about talking about the things you might want to do when you have sex?
F6. How do you think other girls your age feel about talking to a new guy, someone they just got to know, about sexual things? [short answer]

F7. Who do you think is better at it when it comes to talking about sex, guys or girls? [Guys, Girls; short answer]

Probe: Why do you think that is? [short answer]

These next questions ask about who should make decisions about sex, guys or girls.

F8. Do you think the guy or the girl should make the first move when it comes to having sex for the first time? [Guys, Girls; short answer]

F9. When it comes to using condoms, who should decide if the guy has to wear a condom, the guy or the girl? [Guys, Girls; short answer]

F10. If you had a sex partner who wanted to use condoms and you did not, what would you do? [short answer]

F10a. What if you wanted to use a condom and he did not, what would you do? [short answer]

F11. Has there been a time when you and your sex partner disagreed about using condoms? [yes, no]

F11a. [If yes ask] Tell me what happened? [long answer]

Probe: Was a decision reached?

Probe: Who made the decision?

F12. When it comes to using birth control, who should take care of these things?
[Guys, Girls, Both; short answer]

F12a. [If Guy is Responsible, ask:] Why do you think the guy should take care of these things? [short answer]

F12b. [If Girl is Responsible, ask:] Why do you think the girl should take care of these things? [short answer]

F12c. [If Both Responsible, ask:] Why do you think both the guy and the girl should take care of these things? [short answer]

Section G

As teenagers become adults they learn a lot about relationships, and about sex. That’s part of being a teenager.

These next questions ask about where you may have learned about sex. The things people learn about sex might come from talking to someone, reading, or watching TV.

This first question asks about where you might have learned things about birth control. Birth control includes condoms, birth control pills and shots, IUDs, and diaphragms.

G1. Have you or a sex partner ever used birth control? [yes, no]

G2. Have you learned about birth control from [Read Each]...

G2a. Did you learn from Friends?

G2a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them? [short answer]

[If R has never had a boyfriend, Skip to G2c]

G2b. Did you learn from boyfriends?

G2b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them? [short answer]

G2c. Did you learn from Family:

G2c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
G2d. Did you learn from teachers, coaches:

G2d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G2e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G2e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G2f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G2f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G2g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G2g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G2h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G2h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

This next question asks about where you might have learned things about using condoms to avoid getting a disease (an STD).

G3. Have you or a sex partner ever used condoms to avoid getting a disease? [yes, no]

G4. Have you learned about condoms from [Read Each]…

G4a. Did you learn from Friends?

G4a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a boyfriend, Skip to G4c]

G4b. Did you learn from boyfriends?

G4b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]
G4c. Did you learn from Family:

G4c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G4d. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G4d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G4e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G4e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G4f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G4f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G4g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G4g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G4h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G4h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

These next questions are about your opinions about sex and what you think has influenced your opinion.

[Interviewer: These next few questions are about numbers of sex partners in general, which differs from earlier questions that ask about numbers of sex partners while you have a boyfriend.]

G5. First, do you think it is ok for teenage girls to have a lot of different sex partners or do you disagree with that?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: Probe as needed to elicit R’s opinion]
G5.1. How about guys, do you think it is ok for teenage guys to have a lot of different sex partners or do you disagree with that? [short answer]

[Interviewer: Probe as needed to elicit R’s opinion]

G5.1a. Who do you know that shares your opinion [On Questions G5 and G5.1 above]?

Probe each:

Friends?

[If R has never had a Boyfriend, Skip to FAMILY]

Boyfriends?

Family?

Probe: Which family members share your opinion?

Teachers or Coaches?

Ministers, pastors?

Other adults you know?

G5.2. Have you seen or heard opinions like yours [On questions G5 and G5.1 above]

Probe Each:

On TV, Movies, and the Radio,

On the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

In Books and Magazines

This next question is about what you might do if you thought you had an STD

[Interviewer: If needed: STDs are sexual diseases you can get from having sex; those that you might have heard of are Chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, and syphilis.]

G6. What would you do if you thought you had an STD?

Probe: Would you go get tested at a clinic?
Probe: Where would you go?

Probe: Have you ever been told by a doctor or nurse that you have an STD?

G7. Have you learned about where to go to get tested for STDs from [Read Each]…

G7a. Did you learn from Friends?

G7a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them? [short answer]

[If R has never had a Boyfriend, Skip to G7c]

G7b. Did you learn from boyfriends?

G7b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them? [short answer]

G7c. Did you learn from Family:

G7c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them? [short answer]

G7d. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G7d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them? [short answer]

G7e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G7e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that? [short answer]

G7f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G7f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them? [short answer]

G7g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G7g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that? [short answer]
G7h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G7h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G8. This next question asks about what you would do if someone was putting pressure on you to have sex and you didn’t want to have sex with him.

G8a. If it was a new guy (someone you just met) who was putting pressure on you, what would you do to let him know you did not want to have sex with him?
[short answer]

G8b. If it was someone who was a friend who was pressuring you, what would you do to let him know you did not want to have sex with him?
[short answer]

G8c. If it was an Ex-boyfriend who was pressuring you, what would you do to let him know you did not want to have sex with him?
[short answer]

G8d. If it was a current boyfriend who was pressuring you, what would you do to let him know you did not want to have sex with him?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: If R said “Don’t Know” or “I just go along” to Items G8a to G8d, then Skip to Instructions before G10]

G9. You just told me about some ways to avoid having sex with someone you don’t want to have sex with. Have you learned about ways to avoid having sex from [Read Each]…

G9a. Did you learn from Friends?

G9a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a Boyfriend, Skip to G9c]

G9b. Did you learn from boyfriends?

G9b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G9c. Did you learn from Family:

G9c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
G9d. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G9d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G9e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G9e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G9f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G9f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G9g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G9g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G9h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G9h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

These next questions ask about how you have learned to meet guys and talk to them.

G10. Meeting a new guy that you are feeling attracted to can be difficult. Have you learned about how to meet a new guy from someone, and what ideas did you get from them? [Read Each]

G10a. Did you learn from Friends?

G10a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a Boyfriend, Skip to G10c]

G10b. Did you learn from boyfriends?

G10b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
IDEAL PARTNER CHARACTERISTICS FOR AF AM ADOLESCENTS

G10c. Did you learn from Family:

G10c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G10d. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G10d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G10e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G10e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G10f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G10f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G10g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G10g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G10h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G10h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G11. Earlier we asked about talking to a new guy, someone you recently met, about sexual things you might like to do. Have you learned to talk to a new guy about sexual things you might like to do with him from [Read Each]…

G11a. Did you learn from Friends?

G11a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a Boyfriend, Skip to G11c]

G11b. Did you learn from boyfriends?
G11b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G11c. Did you learn from Family:

G11c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G11d. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G11d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G11e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G11e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G11f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G11f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G11g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G11g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G11h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G11h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: If R indicated in F5 that she has previously talked to a new guy about condoms, birth control or STDs, rephrase G12:

“These next questions ask about how you learned to talk to new guys about condoms, birth control, or STDS.”

Use participant’s answer from F5 to decide whether to proceed to G12a or G12b
Then go to G12a and proceed as indicated]

G12. Have you ever talked to a new guy about sexual health things like using condoms, or birth control, or STDs? [yes, no]
G12a. [If yes, ask:] Have you learned to talk to a new guy about sexual health things like condoms, or birth control, or STDs from [Read Each]…

G12b. [If no, ask:] Even though you have not talked to a new guy about sex, have you learned something about ways you might talk to a new guy about condoms, birth control, or STDs from someone such as [Read Each]…

[Interviewer: If R says she has never learned anything about this from anyone, SKIP TO SECTION H]

G12c. Did you learn from Friends?

G12c.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a boyfriend, Skip to G12e]

G12d. Did you learn from boyfriends?

G12d.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G12e. Did you learn from Family:

G12e.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G12f. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G12f.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G12g. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G12g.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G12h. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G12h.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G12i. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G12i.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that? [short answer]
G12j. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G12j.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

Section H

H1. Thinking about all the things we have talked about today, who have you learned things from about having sex, or sexual health matters (e.g., birth control, or STDs) that has given you information that was helpful to you in some way? That is you learned something you wanted or needed to know about. [Read Each]

H1a. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from Friends that was helpful?
[yes, no]

H1a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?
[If R has never had a boyfriend, Skip to H1c]

H1b. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from boyfriends that was helpful?
[yes, no]

H1b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?
[short answer]

H1c. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from Family that was really helpful? [yes, no]

H1c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

H1d. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from teachers, coaches that was really helpful?
[yes, no]

H1d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

H1e. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from other adults you know that was helpful?
[yes, no]

H1e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?
H1f. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from doctors, other health workers, at a clinic that was really helpful?  
[yes, no]

H1f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

H1g. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from ministers, pastors, or religious reading that was helpful?  
[yes, no]

H1g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

H1h. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines that was helpful?  
[yes, no]

H1h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

H1i. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from the Internet: You Tube, Facebook, Myspace, or chat rooms that was helpful?  
[yes, no]

H1i1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

Section I

These last few questions are about having children and living with someone.

I1. Do you have children? [yes, no]

[If no to I1, skip to I4]

I2. How many children do you have?

I2a. Is/Are he/she/they a boy(s) or girl(s)?

I2b. What is/are his/her/their age(s) and

I2c. Does he/she/they live with you?

I3. Has having a child changed your opinions about sex or using birth control?  
[yes, no]

I3a. [If yes, ask:] How have your opinions changed?
[short answer]

Probe: What has changed? R’s views on sex, talking about sex, birth control?
[short answer]

[If yes to I1, Skip to 15]

I4. How old do you think you will be when you have your first child?
[age range]

I5. Do you think guys and girls feel the same about when is a good time to have children? [short answer]

Just a few more questions and we are done.

We’ve been talking about teens for most of the interview. Now I have a few questions about adults. The next two questions ask for your opinions about how men and women should make decisions about some daily life issues.

I6. When a man and woman get married or live together, who do think should make most of the decisions about [Read Each] …

I6a. How to spend money?
[short answer]

I6b. How to raise kids if they have them?
[short answer]

This next question asks about what you think the messages and images are of adult (African American or Black) men and women in the world today. Again, we’re asking for your ideas about adult men and women.

I7. What messages or ideas do you think you have gotten about what women should be like?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: Also use examples as needed, for example: Ideas or messages about how people should look, act, live their life, treat the opposite sex, and so on. Ask R to be specific about what they believe they are hearing/seeing.]

I have one last question and then we are done. This last question asks about how you see the future and life in general. I want you to imagine what life will be like when you’re older, say 25 to 30 years old.
I8. What will life be like for you then? [short answer]

Probe each as needed:

What do you think you’ll be doing when you’re 25 to 30 years old? [short answer]

What kind of work might you be doing? [short answer]

Do you think you might have kids (or more kids)? [short answer]

Who might you be living with? [short answer]

Where might you be living? [short answer]

TURN OFF RECORDER AFTER COMPLETING THIS SECTION.

V. Conclusion

Ok that’s all the questions I have today. I want to thank you for your help and for talking about your experiences and opinions. Do you have any final questions or comments? I’d like to mention again that we keep all your information confidential. Okay, thanks again.

Time Interview Ended: _______________

VI. Post-Interview Data

After the interview is over and you’ve left the informant, spend a few moments dictating the following thoughts into the recorder.

Label it: Final Comments by: _______________

1. Where was the interview done?
2. Give the date, day of the week and time of day the interview took place.

3. Provide a verbal description of respondent's appearance -- apparent maturity, physical appearance, articulateness, etc.

4. Were there other people present other than the interviewee? Explain any third voices heard on the tape. Explain any interruptions. Explain anything unusual that happened during the interview.

5. How comfortable was respondent with the interview process?

6. How honest do you think respondent was?

7. Did respondent display any emotion that you think needs further explanation?

8. How comfortable were you with the interview? Did you have any emotional reactions to respondent that might have colored how you did the interview?

9. Mention any observations of things that might make the comments on the tape more clear -- anything you noticed that you think may not have come through on the tape.

10. Mention any thoughts you have about this interview compared to others you have done. Is there anything that you want the analyst to take special note of?

11. Reflect on the content of the interview? Give any analytic thoughts you have? Does this have a lot of new info in it? Or is it the same as others? Any internal contradictions in R’s interview you noticed?
APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR SEXUALLY EXPERIENCED MALE
Interviewer instructions

[Interviewer: See Screening interview for age and sexual experience; Confirm this information]

Screener Check List:
Age (yrs.)_____________

Sexual Experience: Yes    No

[Interviewer: Whenever R uses terms that you don’t understand, or that you think the reader won’t understand, Inquire as to what the word(s) mean.

[Interviewer: Get to know the person a bit before launching into the interview questions. Have them tell you about themselves.]

[Interviewer: Throughout the interview, and as appropriate, ask R for stories or other examples of things R talks about.]

[Interviewer: Try to use R’s terms for phenomena, but make sure you know what the terms mean!]

Section A. Introduction

First, I would like to tell you about the interview we’ll be doing today. The interview will help us learn from you what it’s like to be a young man in today’s world.

Think of yourself as a teacher. These are your opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. I will respect your views. Some questions are on sensitive topics, so tell me if there is something that you’d rather not talk about. Everything you say will be kept completely confidential.

[Interviewer: If R asks what confidential means you may supplement with the following material. What I mean by confidential is that we will not use your name on the recording or connect your name with anything you say in the interview. After we have typed out what you said in the interview we will destroy the recording.]

The interview should take a couple of hours. We’ll take a break about half way through, but if you need a break sooner, let me know.

Before we get started do you have any questions?
To get started, I’d like to know a little about you.

A1. How would you describe yourself?

[Probe as needed: Do you prefer the term African American or Black or doesn’t it matter to you?]

[Interviewer: Ok, I’ll use [Preferred Term] as we talk today.]

[Interviewer: Skip questions below as necessary if the answer is covered in A1 Response]

A2. Who do you live with?
[short answer]

A3. How old are you? _____________(Yrs.)

A4. Where are you currently living? Which neighborhood?
[short answer]

A5. What is it like living in your neighborhood?

[Interviewer: If R has just moved, it is ok to get information about the prior neighborhood in this question.]

[short answer]

A6. Are you in school?

A6a. [If yes, ask:] Where do you go to school?

A6b. [If yes, ask:] Do you do activities like sports, drama, music, or leadership at school?
[short answer]

A6c. [If yes, ask:] What are your favorite subjects?
[short answer]

A7. Do you have a job? [yes, no]

A7a. [If yes, ask:] Where do you work?

A8. If you could live anywhere you wanted in the United States, where would you like to live?
A9. Is there someone you look up to, that you really admire and want to be like? [yes, no; short answer]

A9a. [If yes, ask:] Tell me about him/her/them. [short answer]
Section B.

These next questions are about the kinds of things you like to do.

B1. Which of the following do you like to do [Read Each] …

B1a. Watch TV? [yes, no]

B1a1. [If yes, ask:] What programs do you watch? [short answer]

B1b. Listen to music? [yes, no]

B1b1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of music do you like to listen to? [short answer]

B1b2. Who are your favorite artists? [short answer]

B1c. Go out to movies or rent movies to watch at home? [yes, no]

B1c1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of movies do you like to watch? [short answer]

B1d. Read magazines? [yes, no]

B1d1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of magazines do you like to read? [short answer]

B1d2. What are your favorite magazines? [short answer]

B1e. Read books? [yes, no]

B1e1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of books do you like to read? [short answer]

B1e2. What are your favorite books? [short answer]

B1f. Spend time on the internet? [yes, no]

B1f1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things do you like to do on the internet? [short answer]

Probe as needed: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace, what else?
B1g. Hanging out with your friends? [yes, no]

B1g1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things do you and your friends like to do? [short answer]

B1h. Being with your family? [yes, no]

B1h1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things do you and your family do together? [short answer]

B1i. Go to Church-related activities or services? [yes, no]

B1i1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things do you do with people you know from church? [short answer]

Section C

These next questions ask about what you think the messages and images are of (African American/Black) guys your age. People get lots of ideas and messages about how guys your age should act from a lot of different places.

[Interviewer: In items below, C1a to C1h, we often ask about several influences in a single item. Within an item, we do not need to know about specific sources of the ideas or images (e.g., TV vs. magazines), but if this information is offered that’s ok.]

[Interviewer: (If needed): By messages we mean the ideas or themes that you hear or see around you. These messages can come from lots of other people, from books, or from media or from other places. (If needed): By images we mean the images of what African Americans should be like. Sometimes we think of images as “pictures” or “snap shots” of what people should be. The images can come from lots of other people, from books, or from media or other places.]

C1. Do you think that ideas and messages about what guys your age should be like, come from [Read Each]…

C1a. TV, Radio, Magazines, Books? [yes, no]

C1a1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from TV, radio, books, or magazines about being a teenage guy? [short answer]

C1b. The Internet: Facebook, Myspace, YouTube? [yes, no]
C1b1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from the internet about being a teenage guy?
[short answer]

C1c. Movies, Music? [yes, no]

C1c1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from movies or music about being a teenage guy?
[short answer]

C1d. Family members? [yes, no]

C1d1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from family about being a teenage guy?
[short answer]

Probe as needed: Have you learned different things about being a man from different family members, say from a Mom or from an uncle?

C1e. Sports figures or politicians? [yes, no]

C1e1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from sports figures or politicians about being a teenage guy?
[short answer]

C1f. Teachers, Ministers, or Pastors? [yes, no]

C1f1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from teachers or religious leaders about being a teenage guy?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: If No Girlfriend Ever, Skip to C1h]

C1g. Girlfriends? [yes, no]

[Interviewer: Explain that a girlfriend is someone you feel romantic about, are going out with, and may or may not be having sex with.]

C1g1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from Girlfriends about being a teenage guy?
[short answer]

C1h. Friends? [yes, no]
C1h1. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you learned from friends about being a teenage guy?
[short answer]

C1i. Are there other people or places that you have learned about being a teenage guy from?
[short answer]

Probe as needed: Where else does R think he has gotten his ideas on what guys are like?

[Interviewer: Construct next item, C2, using example sources described by R in C1a to C1i, as things that influence their images of guys]

C2. Thinking about the images of (African American/Black) guys that come from the people, places, or things you just talked about (for example, insert example sources from C1a to C1i), would you say you are different from or similar to these images?
[Interviewer: If images the R has presented are contrasting or contradictory, probe this issue in C2a and C2b.]

[Interviewer: If R is having difficulty answering this question, ask specifically about one source that seems central (e.g., family) to get the R started.]

[Longer Answer]

C2a. In what ways are you different?
[Longer Answer]

C2b. In what ways are you similar?
[Longer Answer]

C3. Do you feel pressure to be different than you want to be? [yes, no]

C3a. [If yes, ask:] Tell me about that?
[Longer Answer]

C4. When an (African American or Black) guy doesn’t fit the popular image of what a guy should be like, how do other people treat him?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: If R has difficulty understanding the phrase “popular image,” you should paraphrase it, for example, popular image means the images that the media
have of what guys your age should be like; alternatively, it means the stereotypes people sometimes have of guys your age]

C4a. Do you know someone like this? [yes, no]

C4a1. [If yes, ask:] Can you tell me a story about that person and how others sometimes treat him?
[short answer]

C4a2. [If no, ask] How do you think someone who doesn’t fit the popular image of what a teenage (African American or Black) guy should be like would be treated by other people?
[short answer]

Section D

These next questions are about sex and your views on sex.

D1. Have you had a sex education class, a health class, or other class that talked about sex?
[yes, no]

[Interviewer: If No, Skip to Item D2]

D1a. [If yes, ask:] Some sex education teaches about how to make decisions and protect yourself when you have sex. Have you had a class that did those things?
[yes, no]

D1b. [If yes, ask:] Some sex education classes only teach about not having sex (sexual abstinence). Have you had a class that talked only about not having sex and ways to avoid having sex?
[yes, no]

[Interviewer: For next question, start with the root question, asking specific questions as needed. Use the definition work sheet for sexual behaviors as needed, especially for non-sexually experienced youth.]

D2. What do the words “to have sex” mean to you?

D2a. Does it mean to have vaginal sex, oral sex, or anal sex?

D2b. Does it mean all of those things?

D2c. Would you include anything else?
[Interviewer: Confirm sexual experience if needed: Have you had sex with anyone including vaginal or anal intercourse, oral sex, or other types of sex? [yes, no]

[Interviewer: If R’s definition is different than ours, say…
Thanks for telling me what sex means to you. Now, we’re going to broaden the definition. In the next few questions we want you to think about the definition I am going to read to you.]

These next questions ask about having sex with another person. By the word sex I mean any of the things people do sexually with a partner. This includes oral sex, when a guy puts his mouth on a girl’s vagina, or a girl puts her mouth on a boy’s penis. It also includes vaginal intercourse, when a guy puts his penis in a girl’s vagina, or anal intercourse when a guy puts his penis in a girl’s anus (or butt).

So, a person who is doing any one of these sexual activities with a partner is having sex.

Is that clear or would you like me to explain further?

[Interviewer: Use Additional Explanation as needed: So, if I was to ask you, what age is it ok for guys to start having sex?—this would mean at what age is it ok for a guy to start doing any one of the sexual things I mentioned earlier including oral sex, vaginal sex, or anal sex.]

[Interviewer: use alternative explanations as needed until it is clear that the word sex means any one of the things mentioned previously.]

D3. People have different ideas about whether it is ok to have sex as a teen. Do you think it is ok for teenage girls and guys to have sex [Of any kind]?
[short answer]

D3a. How do you think a girl views that?
[short answer]

D4. What age is it ok for a guy to start having sex [Of any kind]?
[Age or Age Range]

Probe: Why then?
[short answer]

D5. What age is it ok for a girl to start having sex [Of any kind]?
[Age or Age Range]
Probe: Why then?
[short answer]

D6. Do you think it is ok for young people to start having sex [Of any kind] when they are ready, whether they are married or not?
[Yes, No, or short answer]

D7. Is it ok for married people to have sex [Of any kind] with someone other than their wife or husband?
[Yes, No, or short answer]

D7a. How do you think girls view having sex outside a marriage?
[short answer]

D8. Tell me about a time when you wanted to have sex with a new girl, someone you just met, what did you do to get her interested in you?
[short answer]

Probe: What did you do or say to get her interested?

These next few questions are about condoms.

D9. What do you think about condoms?
[short answer]

Probe each as needed:
Do you like using them?

Do they work (E.g., stay on, break, prevent STDs/Pregnancy)?

Are they easy to buy or get in your neighborhood?

D10. What do your female friends think about condoms?
[short answer]

Section E

Our next questions are about girlfriends and about sex. I want to ask you about the words you like to use in talking about boyfriends and girlfriends, and if you want me to use those words in the interview.

E1. First, what words do you use to describe a girlfriend—that is someone you are going out with, feel romantic about, and may or may not be having sex with?
[Interviewer: R might not be having sex with this person, but the person needs to be someone they feel romantic about.]

Girlfriend: ______________________________________________________

E2. If someone is your girlfriend, does it always mean she is having sex with you or can someone be your girlfriend and not be having sex with you?
[short answer]

E3. Are there different kinds of girlfriends? [yes, no]

E3a. [If yes, ask:] What do you call the different kinds of girlfriends?
[short answer]

[Interviewer define sex as needed: As before, by the word sex we mean vaginal, oral, or anal sex.]

E4. How is a girlfriend different from someone you are having sex with who is just a friend (friends with benefits)?
[short answer]

Probe. If you were having sex with someone who is not your girlfriend, what do you call that [that person]?

E5. How is a girlfriend different from someone you might have sex with in exchange for something like money or clothes and stuff?
[short answer]

E6. If someone is your girlfriend, does it mean that you should only have sex with that person or are you free to have sex with others?

[Interviewer: If needed, ask a ‘What if question.’ What if [a friend had sex with someone else] even though she had a boyfriend. What would you think of that?]

[short answer]

Other Sexual Relationships: ________________________________________________
These next questions ask about your views on and experiences with girlfriends and having sex.

E7. What would your ideal girlfriend be like, that is someone you are in love with and may be having sex with?  
[Long Answer]

Probe each as needed:

How old would your ideal person be?

What would she look like?

What kind of person would she be like (e.g., respectful, reliable, honest, loyal, exciting, dangerous, have your back)?

Would she have a job?

Would it be important for her to be religious or go to church?

Would it be important for her to be going to school or want that?

E8. How important is it for teenagers to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend?  
[short answer]

E9. What do you think it means to a girl to have a boyfriend?  
[Long answer]

Probe as needed: Do girls see this the same way you do or different?  
[short answer]

Probe: How so?  
[Long answer]

E10. Do you have a girlfriend? That is someone you are going-with, that you might feel romantic about? [yes, no]

[Interviewer: If Yes to E10, Skip to E10f]

E10a. [If no, ask:] Have you had a girlfriend in the past couple of years? [yes, no]

[Interviewer: If No to E10a, and E10: No Girlfriend Ever, Skip to E15.1a]

[Interviewer: These next questions, E10b to E10e, are about Rs most recent ex-girlfriend.]
E10b. Thinking about your most recent ex-girlfriend, what kinds of things did you and she [your ex-girlfriend] like to do? [short answer]

E10c. Were you and your ex-girlfriend having sex? [yes, no]

E10d. Did you have sex with anyone else while you were going with your ex-girlfriend? [yes, no]

E10e. Did your ex-girlfriend have sex with anyone besides you while you were going together? [yes, no]

[If No to E10 and Yes to E10a: R has a past, but no current Girlfriend, skip to instructions before E11]

[Has Girlfriend, ask E10f]

E10f. What kinds of things do you and your girlfriend like to do? [short answer]

E10g. Are you having sex with your girlfriend? [yes, no]

E10h. Do you have sex with anyone else besides your girlfriend? [short answer]

E10i. Does your girlfriend have sex with anyone besides you? [short answer]

[Has/Had Girlfriend, read instruction below]

Relationships can be respectful or disrespectful. These next questions ask about respect and disrespect in relationships.

E11. What does it mean to you to show your girlfriend respect? [Long Answer]

Probe Each and get examples:

How does a guy show that he respects his girlfriend?

What might a guy do to show he disrespects his girlfriend?

E12. What are some of the things a girlfriend might do to show you disrespect? [long answer]

E13. How would a girlfriend act towards you if she were being respectful of you? [long answer]
These next questions are about getting advice on girlfriends.

[Interviewer: If R does not understand the term advice, try an alternative term or rephrase as, “ideas have you gotten about…”]

[Interviewer: The term sex in the Probes for E14 and E15 is more generic, it could be advice on anything (e.g., birth control, STDs) about sex and girlfriends, not necessarily on how to have sex]

E14. Have you gotten advice about girlfriends from somewhere, like magazines, books, or the Internet?  
[short answer]

Probe as needed. Have you gotten advice on girlfriends and sex?

E14a. What kind of advice have you gotten?  
[Long Answer]

E15. Have you asked another person for advice on girlfriends? [yes, no]

E15a. Who did you get advice from?  
[Short answer]

E15b. What kind of advice did they give you?  
[Long Answer]

Probe as needed. Has the advice included advice on girlfriends and sex?

[If R has had a Girlfriend in the past/currently, Skip to Instructions Before E16]

[Interviewer: If No Girlfriend Ever, ask E15.1a]

E15.1a. Earlier you mentioned that you have not, as of yet, had a girlfriend. However, have you ever talked to anyone, or saw or read things that have told you about what it might be like to have a girlfriend? [Short answer]

Probe Response for each:  
What age it is ok to have a girlfriend?  
How to get a girlfriend?

Probe R for all the possible sources that he may have learned things about girlfriends from: magazines, books, the Internet, or a person.
These next questions are about girlfriends and sex.

[Interviewer: In this section by sex we mean having oral, vaginal, anal sex]

[Interviewer: For those who have never had a girlfriend or have one but have
never had sex with her, ask R to imagine that he had a girlfriend he was having
sex with.]

E16. If you have/had a girlfriend, would you expect her to have sex only with
you? [yes, no]

E16a. [If yes, ask:] Why do you think that is important to you? [short answer]

E17. What do you think about girls who have lots of sex partners besides their
boyfriend? [short answer]

Probe: Why do you think you feel this way? [short answer]

Probe: Do you think other guys feel pretty much like you do or different? [short
answer]

E17a. What does it mean to you for a teenager to have “a lot of sexual partners;”
That is, in your opinion about how many sexual partners might that be? [Short
answer]

[Interviewer: look for a number or a range of numbers; Clarify as needed that we
are talking about teenage years.]

E18. What do you think about guys who have lots of sex partners besides their
girlfriend? [short answer]

Probe: Why do you think you feel this way? [short answer]

Probe: Do you think other guys feel pretty much like you do or different? [short
answer]

This next question asks you to imagine what your ideal or perfect sex partner
might be like?
E19. First, tell me what is your idea of the ideal girl that you would want to have sex with? [Long answer]

[Interviewer: This item differs from the item about ideal girlfriends. Here we want to focus on an ideal person to have sex with.]

Probe each:

How old would you want her to be?

What would she look like and what kind of person would she be like (e.g., respectful, reliable, honest, loyal, exciting, dangerous, have your back)?

Would she have a job?

Would it be important for her to be a religious person or go to church?

Would it be important for her to be the kind of person who would be or is a good mom?

Would it be important for her to be going to school or want that?

E20. If you wanted to live with a girl or get married, what would that girl need to be like?

Probe each:

How old would want her to be?

What would she look like and what kind of person would she be like (e.g., respectful, reliable, honest, loyal, exciting, dangerous, have your back)?

Would she have a job?

Would it be important for her to be a religious person or go to church?

Would it be important for her to be the kind of person who would be or is a good mom?

Would it be important for her to be going to school or want that?

These last questions ask about how you think guys and girls should show respect to each other. This is not asking about girlfriends but girls in general.

E21. What does it mean to you to show a girl respect? [Long answer]
Probe Each:

How does a guy show that he respects a girl?

What might a guy do to show he disrespects a girl?

E22. What are some of the things a girl might do to show you disrespect? [Long answer]

E23. How would a girl act towards you if she was being respectful of you? [Long answer]
Section F

These next questions are about talking to girls about sex. When people talk about sex they sometimes talk about the things they like to do sexually or they might talk about health stuff like birth control, condoms, or STDs.

These first questions ask about how you would feel talking about different kinds of sexual things with a girlfriend. If you don’t have a girlfriend, use your imagination to think about what it would be like to talk to a girlfriend about these things.

[Interviewer. Emphasize that R does not have to have ever talked to a girl about sex. If they have not, then ask them to imagine what it would feel like to do so.]

[Interviewer, if needed: Remind R that girlfriends are someone you are going-out with, feel romantic about, and may be having sex with.]

[Interviewer: R is being asked about how they feel about talking about sexual matters, that is, are they comfortable, uncomfortable, embarrassed, find it easy, find it hard to do, etc.?; We are not asking about the actual experience until item F7]

F1. How would you feel about talking to a girlfriend about sexual health matters or things you like to do when you have sex?

Probe as needed for specific topics:

How about talking about birth control?

How about talking about condoms?

How about talking about STDs?

How about talking about the things you might want to do when you have sex?

F2. How would you feel talking about these kinds of sexual things [see Probes] with a girl you are having sex with but who is not your girlfriend?

[short answer]

Probe each as needed:

How about talking about birth control?

How about talking about condoms?

How about talking about STDs?
How about talking about the things you might want to do when you have sex?

F3. How do you think other guys your age feel about talking to a girlfriend about these kinds of sexual things?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: If R has never had a girlfriend, Skip to Instructions before F5.]

F4. Have you ever talked to a girlfriend about sex? [yes, no]

[Interviewer: If No, skip to Instructions before F5]

F4a. [If yes, ask:] What kinds of things have you talked about?

F4b. [If yes, ask] Is there anything you would be uncomfortable talking to a girlfriend about [when it comes to sex]?

[Interviewer: Define “new girl” as someone you just got to know or only recently met]

F5. How would you feel talking to a new girl about these different kinds of sexual things [see Probes]?
[short answer]

Probe each as needed:

How about talking about birth control?

How about talking about condoms?

How about talking about STDs?

How about talking about the things you might want to do when you have sex?

[Interviewer: Record response to F5 as to actual experience with talking to a new girl about condoms, for use in rephrasing G12. That is, if the respondent describes having done these things, then the question you ask in G12 reflects this prior information.]

F6. How do you think other guys your age feel about talking to a new girl, someone they just got to know, about sexual things?
[short answer]

F7. Who do you think is better at it when it comes to talking about sex, guys or girls? [Guys, Girls; short answer]
Probe: Why do you think that is? [short answer]

These next questions ask about who should make decisions about sex, guys or girls.

F8. Do you think the guy or the girl should make the first move when it comes to having sex for the first time? [Guys, Girls; short answer]

F9. When it comes to using condoms, who should decide if the guy has to wear a condom, the guy or the girl? [Guys, Girls; short answer]

F10. If you had a sex partner who wanted to use condoms and you did not, what would you do? [short answer]

F10a. What if you wanted to use a condom and she did not, what would you do? [short answer]

F11. Has there been a time when you and your sex partner disagreed about using condoms? [yes, no]

F11a. [If yes ask] Tell me what happened? [long answer]

Probe: Was a decision reached?

Probe: Who made the decision?

F12. When it comes to using birth control, who should take care of these things? [Guys, Girls, Both; short answer]

F12a. [If Guy is Responsible, ask:] Why do you think the guy should take care of these things? [short answer]

F12b. [If Girl is Responsible, ask:] Why do you think the girl should take care of these things? [short answer]

F12c. [If Both Responsible, ask:] Why do you think both the guy and the girl should take care of these things? [short answer]
Section G

As teenagers become adults they learn a lot about relationships, and about sex. That’s part of being a teenager.

These next questions ask about where you may have learned about sex. The things people learn about sex might come from talking to someone, reading, or watching TV.

This first question asks about where you might have learned things about birth control. Birth control includes condoms, birth control pills and shots, IUDs, and diaphragms.

G1. Have you or a sex partner ever used birth control? [yes, no]

G2. Have you learned about birth control from [Read Each] …

G2a. Did you learn from Friends?

G2a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a girlfriend, Skip to G2c]

G2b. Did you learn from girlfriends?

G2b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G2c. Did you learn from Family:

G2c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G2d. Did you learn from teachers, coaches:

G2d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G2e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G2e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]
G2f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G2f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G2g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G2g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G2h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G2h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

This next question asks about where you might have learned things about using condoms to avoid getting a disease (an STD).

G3. Have you or a sex partner ever used condoms to avoid getting disease? [yes, no]

G4. Have you learned about condoms from [Read Each]…

G4a. Did you learn from Friends?

G4a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a girlfriend, Skip to G4c]

G4b. Did you learn from girlfriends?

G4b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G4c. Did you learn from Family:

G4c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G4d. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G4d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]
G4e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:
G4e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that? [short answer]

G4f. Did you learn from other adults you know:
G4f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them? [short answer]

G4g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:
G4g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that? [short answer]

G4h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:
G4h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that? [short answer]

These next questions are about your opinions about sex and what you think has influenced your opinion.

[Interviewer: These next few questions are about numbers of sex partners in general, which differs from earlier questions that ask about numbers of sex partners while you have a girlfriend.]

G5. First, do you think it is ok for teenage guys to have a lot of different sex partners or do you disagree with that? [short answer]

[Interviewer: Probe as needed to elicit R’s opinion]

G5.1. How about girls, do you think it is ok for teenage girls to have a lot of different sex partners or do you disagree with that? {short answer}

[Interviewer: Probe as needed to elicit R’s opinion]

G5.1a. Who do you know that shares your opinion [On Questions G5 and G5.1 above]? 

Probe each:

Friends?
[If R has never had a girlfriend, Skip to FAMILY]

Girlfriends?

Family?

Probe: Which family members share your opinion?

Teachers or Coaches?

Ministers, pastors, or teachers?

Other adults you know?

G5.2. Have you seen or heard opinions like yours [On questions G5 and G5.1 above]

Probe Each:

On TV, Movies, and the Radio,

On the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

In Books and Magazines

This next question is about what you might do if you thought you had an STD

[Interviewer: If needed: STDs are sexual diseases you can get from having sex; those that you might have heard of are Chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, and syphilis.]

G6. What would you do if you thought you had an STD?

Probe: Would you go get tested at a clinic?

Probe: Where would you go?

Probe: Have you ever been told by a doctor or nurse that you have an STD?

G7. Have you learned about where to go to get tested for STDs from [Read Each] …

G7a. Did you learn from Friends?

G7a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a girlfriend, Skip to G7c]

G7b. Did you learn from girlfriends?

G7b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G7c. Did you learn from Family:

G7c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G7d. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G7d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G7e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G7e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G7f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G7f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G7g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G7g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G7h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G7h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G8. This next question asks about what you would do if someone was putting pressure on you to have sex and you didn’t want to have sex with her.

G8a. If it was a new girl (someone you just met) who was putting pressure on you, what would you do to let her know you did not want to have sex with her?
[short answer]
G8b. If it was someone who was a friend who was pressuring you, what would you do to let her know you did not want to have sex with her?
[short answer]

G8c. If it was an Ex-girlfriend who was pressuring you, what would you do to let her know you did not want to have sex with her?
[short answer]

G8d. If it was a current girlfriend who was pressuring you, what would you do to let her know you did not want to have sex with her?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: If R said “Don’t Know” or “I just go along” to Items G8a to G8d, then Skip to Instructions before G10]

G9. You just told me about some ways to avoid having sex with someone you don’t want to have sex with. Have you learned about ways to avoid having sex from [Read Each]…

G9a. Did you learn from Friends?

G9a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a girlfriend, Skip to G9c]

G9b. Did you learn from girlfriends?

G9b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G9c. Did you learn from Family:

G9c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G9d. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G9d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G9e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G9e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]
G9f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G9f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G9g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G9g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G9h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G9h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

These next questions ask about how you have learned to meet girls and talk to them.

G10. Meeting a new girl that you are feeling attracted to can be difficult. Have you learned about how to meet a new girl from someone and what ideas did you get from them? [Read Each]

G10a. Did you learn from Friends?

G10a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a girlfriend, Skip to G10c]

G10b. Did you learn from girlfriends?

G10b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G10c. Did you learn from Family:

G10c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G10d. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G10d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]
G10e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G10e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G10f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G10f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G10g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G10g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G10h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G10h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G11. Earlier we asked about talking to a new girl, someone you recently met, about sexual things you might like to do. Have you learned to talk to a new girl about sexual things you might like to do with her from [Read Each] …

G11a. Did you learn from Friends?

G11a1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a girlfriend, Skip to G11c]

G11b. Did you learn from girlfriends?

G11b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G11c. Did you learn from Family:

G11c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G11d. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G11d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]
G11e. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G11e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G11f. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G11f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G11g. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G11g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G11h. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G11h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: If R indicated in F5 that he has previously talked to a new girl about condoms, birth control or STDs, rephrase G12:
“These next questions ask about how you learned to talk to girls about condoms, birth control, or STDS.”
Then go to G12a and proceed as indicated]

G12. Have you ever talked to a new girl about sexual health things like using condoms, or birth control, or STDs? [yes, no]

G12a. [If yes, ask:] Have you learned to talk to a new girl about sexual health things like condoms, or birth control, or STDs from [Read Each]…

G12b. [If no, ask:] Even though you have not talked to a new girl about sex, have you learned something about ways you might talk to a new girl about condoms, birth control, or STDs from someone such as [Read Each] …

[Interviewer: If R says he has never learned anything about this from anyone, Skip to Section H]

G12c. Did you learn from Friends?

G12c.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

[If R has never had a girlfriend, Skip to G12e]
G12d. Did you learn from girlfriends?

G12d.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G12e. Did you learn from Family:

G12e.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G12f. Did you learn from Teachers, coaches:

G12f.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G12g. Did you learn from a minister or pastor or religious readings:

G12g.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

G12h. Did you learn from other adults you know:

G12h.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them?
[short answer]

G12i. Did you learn from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines:

G12i.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that? [short answer]

G12j. Did you learn from the Internet: Facebook, You Tube, Myspace:

G12j.1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them/that?
[short answer]

Section H

H1. Thinking about all the things we have talked about today, who have you learned things from about having sex, or sexual health matters (e.g., birth control, or STDs) that has given you information that was helpful to you in some way? That is you learned something you wanted or needed to know about. [Read Each]

H1a. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from Friends that was helpful?
[yes, no]
H1a. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

[If R has never had a girlfriend, Skip to H1c]

H1b. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from girlfriends that was helpful? [yes, no]

H1b1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful? [short answer]

H1c. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from Family that was really helpful? [yes, no]

H1c1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

H1d. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from teachers, coaches that was really helpful? [yes, no]

H1d1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

H1e. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from other adults you know that was helpful? [yes, no]

H1e1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

H1f. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from doctors, other health workers, at a clinic that was really helpful? [yes, no]

H1f1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

H1g. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from ministers, pastors, or religious reading that was helpful? [yes, no]

H1g1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

H1h. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from TV, Movies, Radio, Books, Magazines that was helpful? [yes, no]

H1h1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?
H1i. Have you learned anything about having sex, or sexual health matters from the Internet: You Tube, Facebook, Myspace, or chat rooms that was helpful? [yes, no]

H1i1. [If yes, ask:] What did you learn from them that was helpful?

Section I

These last few questions are about having children and living with someone.

I1. Do you have children? [yes, no]

[If no to I1, skip to I4]

I2. How many children do you have?

I2a. Is/Are he/she/they a boy(s) or girl(s)?

I2b. What is/are his/her/their age(s) and

I2c. Does he/she/they live with you?

I3. Has having a child changed your opinions about sex or using birth control? [yes, no]

I3a. [If yes, ask:] How have your opinions changed? [short answer]

Probe: What has changed? R’s views on sex, talking about sex, birth control? [short answer]

[If yes to I1, Skip to 15]

I4. How old do you think you will be when you have your first child? [age range]

I5. Do you think guys and girls feel the same about when is a good time to have children? [short answer]

Just a few more questions and we are done.

We’ve been talking about teens for most of the interview. Now I have a few questions about adults. The next two questions ask for your opinions about how men and women should make decisions about some daily life issues.
I6. When a man and woman get married or live together, who do think should make most of the decisions about [Read Each] …

I6a. How to spend money?
[short answer]

I6b. How to raise kids if they have them?
[short answer]

This next question asks about what you think the messages and images are of adult (African American or Black) men and women in the world today. Again, we’re asking for your ideas about adult men and women.

I7. What messages or ideas do you think you have gotten about what men should be like?
[short answer]

[Interviewer: Also use examples as needed, for example: Ideas or messages about how people should look, act, live their life, treat the opposite sex, and so on. Ask R to be specific about what they believe they are hearing/seeing.]

I have one last question and then we are done. This last question asks about how you see the future and life in general. I want you to imagine what life will be like when you’re older, say 25 to 30 years old.

I8. What will life be like for you then?
[short answer]

Probe each as needed:

What do think you’ll be doing when you’re 25 to 30 years old?
[short answer]

What kind of work might you be doing?
[short answer]

Do you think you might have kids (or more kids)?
[short answer]

Who might you be living with?
[short answer]

Where might you be living?
[short answer]

TURN OFF RECORDER AFTER COMPLETING THIS SECTION.
V. Conclusion

Ok that’s all the questions I have today. I want to thank you for your help and for talking about your experiences and opinions. Do you have any final questions or comments? I’d like to mention again that we keep all your information confidential. Okay, thanks again.

Time Interview Ended:___________

VI. Post-Interview Data

After the interview is over and you've left the informant, spend a few moments dictating the following thoughts into the recorder.

Label it: Final Comments by: _____________

1. Where was the interview done?

2. Give the date, day of the week and time of day the interview took place.

3. Provide a verbal description of respondent's appearance -- apparent maturity, physical appearance, articulateness, etc.

4. Were there other people present other than the interviewee? Explain any third voices heard on the tape. Explain any interruptions. Explain anything unusual that happened during the interview.

5. How comfortable was respondent with the interview process?

6. How honest do you think respondent was?

7. Did respondent display any emotion that you think needs further explanation?

8. How comfortable were you with the interview? Did you have any emotional reactions to respondent that might have colored how you did the interview?

9. Mention any observations of things that might make the comments on the tape more clear -- anything you noticed that you think may not have come through on the tape.

10. Mention any thoughts you have about this interview compared to others you have done. Is there anything that you want the analyst to take special note of?
11. Reflect on the content of the interview? Give any analytic thoughts you have? Does this have a lot of new info in it? Or is it the same as others? Any internal contradictions in R’s interview you noticed?