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Black Dating Professionals’
Perceptions of Equity, Satisfaction,
Power, and Romantic Alternatives and Ideals

Larry E. Davis
Shirley Emerson
James Herbert Williams
Washington University

Blacks are the largest group of single individuals in America; they also have the lowest male to female gender balance. However, little is known about the romantic perceptions of single Black daters. Data were obtained via a questionnaire from a group of professional single Black men (n = 44) and Black women (n = 91). Of interest were perceptions of their existing relationships with respect to satisfaction, equity, power, and romantic alternatives and ideals. Findings indicate significant gender differences: Males and females indicated similar levels of overall satisfaction, but females reported perceiving less equity and wielding more power in their relationships than did males. Males and females did not differ in their perceptions of available romantic alternatives, but females did report their existing relationships to be less ideal than did males. Sexual relations and partner’s physical attractiveness were significant predictors of satisfaction for both males and females; equity was also significant for females.

Black singles are a significant proportion of America’s Black population. Approximately two thirds of Blacks are single. By contrast, approximately two thirds of Whites are married (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). Despite the large numbers of Black singles, the wealth of attention given to Black relationships has addressed, almost exclusively, Blacks who are married. It

AUTHORS’ NOTE: Direct correspondence and requests for reprints to Larry E. Davis, Ph.D., George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University, Campus Box 1196, St. Louis, MO 63130; phone: (314) 935-6632; e-mail: larryd@wuacn.wustl.edu.

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is well known that Blacks have lower than average marriage rates and higher than average divorce rates (Cherlin, 1992; Fossett & Kiecolt, 1993; Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, & Lardry, 1992). In addition, they are less likely than Whites to remarry once divorced. In comparison to Whites, Blacks spend a greater proportion of their lives as singles. Hence it would seem that this sizable segment of their lives would receive greater research attention. Actually, the existing brevity of focus on Black singles is also surprising given that the area of research known as close and intimate relationships has increased significantly within the last decade (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986; Brehm, 1985; Clark & Reis, 1988; Derlega, Hendrick, Winstead, & Berg, 1990; McKinney & Sprecher, 1991). It is also safe to say that more is known about “at-risk” Blacks than those who are “normal,” as few have paid attention to middle-income Black populations (Coner-Edwards & Spurlock, 1988; Davis, 1993; McAdoo, 1978; Staples, 1981).

Commonly we hear anecdotal reports that both Black men and women are dissatisfied with their romantic partners. However, often unaddressed are specifically those areas with which they are dissatisfied. Those who have studied close relationships have often attempted to assess such concerns as sexual relationships and physical attractiveness, satisfaction, equity, and the availability of romantic alternatives. These factors are noted to have a major impact on the quality of romantic relationships (Fairchild, 1985; Gary, 1986; Hatfield, Utne, & Thompson, 1979; Rusbult, 1980; Scanzoni, 1977; Sprecher, 1988). With these considerations in mind, a number of questions might be asked. In which areas do Black men and women share similar/different perceptions of their dating experiences? Do different factors contribute to their levels of romantic satisfaction or equity? A greater understanding of the contributions of these factors to the satisfaction of Black daters should enhance the stability and maintenance of their relationships.

RELATED LITERATURE

Why are so many Blacks single? Most scholars of the Black family would concur that macro rather than idiographic factors are most responsible for the extensive state of singleness among Blacks (Bennett, Bloom, & Craig, 1989; Hill, 1993; Lichter, LeClere, & McLaughlin, 1991; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995a; Wilson, 1987). Currently, the worst gender imbalance experienced by any group since the beginning of the census exists for Blacks (Guttenstag & Secord, 1983; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Because of this low ratio of Black men to women, some contend that as many as 25% of
Black women will never marry (Cherlin, 1992; Rodgers & Thornton, 1985). Concerned scholars (Gary & Leashore, 1982; Jackson, 1978) have for decades been asking the question “Where are all the Black men?” Appallingly high infant mortality and homicide rates of Black men are two of the major factors that contribute to the low numbers of Black males (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Moreover, high rates of drug addiction and incarceration also reduce the numbers of potential Black males as romantic partners (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 1991; U.S. Department of Justice, 1992). The scarcity of employed Black males also contributes substantially to the low marriage rate for Blacks (Testa, Astone, Krogh, & Neckerman, 1989; Testa & Krogh, 1995; Wilson, 1987).

Mate availability and employment explain a great deal about why so many Black men and women are single. However, these factors do not, as some have suggested, explain the total picture (Hatchett, Veroff, & Douvan, 1995; Mare & Winship, 1991). Even in light of demographic realities, fewer Black men and women are married than would seem numerically warranted. Moreover, demographic factors alone do not provide insights into the values, attitudes, and expectations of Black couples. Clearly, even among those Black men and women who do manage to find eligible partners, there appears to be a reluctance to stay together and marry (Cherlin, 1992; Martin & Bumpass, 1989). Research on Black couples has sometimes noted less than favorable attitudes toward marriage among Black partners (Chadiha, 1992; Gary, 1986; Scanzoni, 1977). Indeed, close relationships between Black couples do not seem to be getting any better, as witnessed by the continued high divorce and low marriage rates (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994).

**EQUITY**

Do Black couples perceive their relationships to be fair? An area that has received considerable attention in the study of both married and dating couples has been the perception of equity (Blau, 1964; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Hatfield et al., 1979; Scanzoni, 1977). An equitable relationship is defined as one in which partners perceive themselves as receiving benefits commensurate with their contributions: They perceive themselves to get as much out of the relationship as they put into it. A number of benefits appear to be derived from the perception of equity in relationships: greater compatibility and stability, higher levels of intimacy, and greater longevity (Hatfield et al., 1979). Some contend that notions of equity are of concern only at the early phases of dating and newlywed relationships (Rubin, 1973), whereas others (Traupmann, Peterson, Utne, & Hatfield, 1981) contend that the issue...
of equity is of concern at all stages of a relationship. It is also noteworthy that some research evidence suggests that relationships do not become more equitable over time (Hatfield et al., 1979; Traupmann et al., 1981). In other words, early inequities in romantic relationships are likely to sustain and beget inequities.

There is also reason to believe that women may be more sensitive than men to issues of equity and fairness in interpersonal relationships. The argument is that justice concerns are more salient to those members of our society who have little power in it (Hay & Horton, 1981). If such is the case, issues of equity may be of major concern to Black women given their statuses as women and minorities.

SATISFACTION

For many people, the most important aspect of dating is being in a satisfying, romantic relationship. The extent to which individuals are satisfied with their partners is a critical factor in determining whether they maintain an existing relationship or forgo it for another. Of course, factors contributing to romantic satisfaction are varied and their order of importance is strongly dependent on individual values. For example, for some individuals, having a high-income partner, a good sex life, or a partner who holds strong religious or political beliefs may contribute most significantly to their levels of satisfaction. Not surprisingly, research in this area has also found that individuals who perceive their relationships as more equitable or fair are also more likely to be more satisfied with their relationships (Utne, Hatfield, Traupmann, & Greenberger, 1984). It is also possible that some individuals may possess unclear criteria for romantic happiness. However, even if the criteria are unclear, the level of satisfaction may be of considerable importance in determining whether individuals stay or elect to leave a given relationship.

AVAILABILITY ALTERNATIVES AND ROMANTIC IDEALS

The scarcity of romantic options as noted earlier is something particularly troublesome and commonplace to Black females (Davis & Strube, 1993; Guttentag & Secord, 1983; Jackson, 1978). Given their lower ratio in the population, Black males should perceive themselves to have greater numbers of available romantic alternatives than do females. It seems also plausible that the gender group that has the greater number of available alternatives could be more selective in choosing partners. Subsequently, those individuals
having greater romantic alternatives should find it possible to date partners who are closer to their romantic preferences, that is, closer to their romantic ideals.

POWER

The highest levels of satisfaction are believed to be in relationships in which power between the partners is equitable. Similarly, some evidence has indicated that relationships reporting the least satisfaction are those in which females appear to be dominant (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). Moreover, higher levels of education and career goals among dating women are associated with the possession of greater power in relationships (Peplau, 1978). Black women have been viewed in the literature by some as wielding excessive levels of power in their interpersonal relationships (Moynihan, 1965). Unquestionably, this view of Black women is primarily an artifact of their historical roles as workers and breadwinners. However, the most recent evidence finds Black women increasingly equal to Black men in areas of income and education (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). A question of importance here is how do professional Black males and females, given their respective levels of high earning power, perceive their levels of influence within their relationships?

The purpose of this study was to assess the romantic perceptions of single Black dating professionals. Specifically, we wanted to inspect for gender differences in their perceptions of romantic satisfaction, equity, power, ideal partners, and the availability of romantic alternatives.

METHOD

SAMPLE

The sample for this study, which was conducted in 1992, consisted of a group of professional Black men and women who were attendees at a “Black professional” conference held in the Midwest. The study participants (all volunteers) were queried as a group in a large conference room, prior to a workshop on close relationships. They were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire as part of an effort to study Black male-female relationships. Our total sample of 212 completed questionnaires included married, dating, and persons not currently dating persons. Analysis for this study was re-
stricted only to those who were both single and currently dating. Hence the total subsample employed for these analyses was 135: 44 men and 91 women.

INSTRUMENTATION

In the effort to obtain a greater understanding of our subjects, we also asked a number of demographic questions as well as questions pertaining to subjects’ dating histories. This information is summarized in Tables 1, 2, and 3. In addition to the demographic items, the survey questionnaire employed both single items to assess sexual relations, partner’s level of attractiveness, power, and romantic ideal. Composite question items were employed to assess perceptions of equity, satisfaction, and romantic alternatives.

Equity was assessed by employing two global-type questions as developed by Hatfield (1978): The first question was “Considering what you put into your relationship, compared to what you get out of it and what your partner puts in compared to what he or she gets out of it, how does your relationship ‘stack up’?” This question was followed by a 7-point Likert-type scale, which ranged from 1 = My partner is getting a much better deal to 7 = I am getting a much better deal than my partner. The second question was “Sometimes things get out of balance in a relationship and one partner contributes more to the relationship than the other. When your relationship becomes unbalanced, which of you is more likely to be the one who contributes more?” This question was followed by a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 = I am much more likely to be the one to contribute more to the relationship to 7 = My partner is much more likely to be the one to contribute more.

The perception of power was assessed by a single item: “In your relationship, who has more power?” “My partner has much more power than I do.” This question was followed by a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from

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**TABLE 1**

Age and Dating History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>33.38</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>31.77</td>
<td>5.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age began dating</td>
<td>16.64</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>16.60</td>
<td>1.56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of prior dating relationships</td>
<td>13.34</td>
<td>16.81</td>
<td>10.07</td>
<td>12.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of intimate relationships</td>
<td>34.87</td>
<td>116.13</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>5.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of current relationship (years)</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 2
Education, Marital History, Marriage Plans, and Partner’s Race

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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Males</th>
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<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of times married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In the next 1-2 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the next 2-5 years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td></td>
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<td>In the next 5-10 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Islander</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 = *My partner has much more power than I* to 7 = *I have much more power than my partner.*

Perception of agreement on sexual relations was also assessed by a single item: “Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Indicate the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner on sexual relations.” The range of possible responses for this question was 1 = *always agree* to 7 = *always disagree.*

Partner level of physical attractiveness was assessed by asking, “How physically attractive do you think your partner is?” The possible range of responses was 1 = *not at all* to 9 = *extremely* on a 9-point Likert-type scale.

Satisfaction with the relationship was assessed by eight items. These items were taken from the Rusbalt (1980) scale of romantic commitment: (a) “My partner is very physically attractive,” (b) “Our physical relationship is very satisfying (however intimate it is),” (c) “My partner and I get along well,” (d) “My partner and I want the same things in life,” (e) “My partner and I have very similar attitudes,” (f) “My partner has a very good sense of humor,” (g) “My partner and I support each other,” and (h) “My partner makes me
TABLE 3
Respondent’s and Partner’s Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Respondent</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Respondent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $14,999</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000-$19,999</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000-$29,999</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000-$39,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000-$49,999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$59,999</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000-$69,999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000-$79,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000-$89,999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>$90,000-$99,999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than $100,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

see good about myself.” A 4-point Likert-type scale was employed for each of these questions with a range of 1 = don’t agree to 4 = agree completely.

The perception of romantic alternatives was assessed by eight items: (a) “Alternative partners I might date are very physically attractive,” (b) “I enjoy spending time on my own, not involved in a dating relationship,” (c) “I would have a very satisfying physical relationship with alternatives I might date,” (d) “There are many single people around with whom I might become involved,” (e) “Alternative partners I might date would want the same things I want in life,” (f) “In alternative relationships I might form, my partner and I would support each other,” (g) “I enjoy spending time with friends as much as with a dating partner,” and (h) “Alternative partners I might date would make me feel good about myself.” A 4-point Likert-type scale was employed for each question, ranging from 1 = don’t agree to 4 = agree completely.

Last, we asked a question that we believed to be conceptually related to the perception of alternatives: “All things considered, how does your relationship compare to your romantic ideal?” The idea behind this question is that having more romantic alternatives should result in a closer approximation toward one’s ideal, given greater choice. Conversely, fewer options should result in a restricted market and thus fewer choices, resulting in a mate who less closely approximates one’s romantic ideal. This question employed a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = far from ideal to 9 = ideal.
ANALYSES

First, we conducted a series of $t$ tests comparing the mean scores of all measures for males and females. Second, standard multiple regression was employed using one dependent variable, satisfaction, and seven independent variables: partner’s income, partner's physical attractiveness, sexual relations, equity, power, alternative, and gender. Three interaction terms of Gender $\times$ Power, Gender $\times$ Alternatives, and Gender $\times$ Equity were also included in the model for the total sample. Separate regression models were conducted for both males and females. Analysis was performed using SPSS Regression with an assist from SPSS Frequencies in evaluation of assumptions. Results of evaluation of assumptions did not indicate any significant outliers, or skewness, of the distribution.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the demographic and personal romantic histories of the sample. Seventy-nine percent of the men and 74% of the women were holders of graduate degrees. Seventy-nine percent of the males and 70% of the females reported annual incomes exceeding $40,000. The modal income ranges of the males and females were $50,000 to $59,999 and $40,000 to $49,999, respectively. In comparison, the modal income ranges of their partners were $30,000 to $39,999 and $40,000 to $49,999, respectively. Hence males reported earning more income than their partners, whereas females reported earning the same incomes as their partners. The mean ages for men and women, respectively, were 33.38 and 31.77 years. Seventy-seven percent of the men and 80% of the women reported never having been married previously. The mean length of time dating their current partner was 1.27 years for males and 1.48 years for females. Ninety-two percent of the men and 90% of the women reported that they hoped to marry within 5 years. Ninety-three percent of the males and 95.6% of the females indicated that they were currently dating another Black person.

PRELIMINARY ANALYSES

The measure of equity contained two items with a coefficient alpha equal to .79 for the total sample, .72 for males, and .80 females. The measure of
satisfaction contained eight items with a coefficient alpha equal to .82 for the total sample, .78 for males, and .83 for females. The measure of alternatives contained eight items with a coefficient alpha equal to .65 for the total sample, .72 for males, and .63 for females. Perceptions of sexual relations, partner attractiveness, ideal partners, and power were assessed by single items.

**GENDER DIFFERENCES**

Mean scores for male and female perceptions of equity, satisfaction, power, alternatives, sexual relations, partner's attractiveness, and ideal partner are presented in Table 4. A comparison of means revealed a number of significant gender differences: Males perceived their relationship as being more equitable than females. Males had an equity mean score of 4.03 and females of 3.38. These means were significantly different with \( t = 2.38, df = 91, p < .05 \). Males had a satisfaction mean score of 3.28, and females a score of 3.14. This difference in mean scores is not significant.

Females reported perceiving themselves as having more power in their relationships than did males. Females had a power mean score of 3.86, as compared to a mean score of 2.91 for males. These mean differences in the perception of power were statistically significant with \( t = -4.04, df = 107, p < .001 \).

The mean scores for available alternatives were 2.97 for males and 2.84 for females. These available alternative mean scores were not significantly different. This was counter to our expectations. We had anticipated that males would report themselves as having significantly more alternative partners than did women, given the greater numbers of Black females, in general.
Males’ and females’ perceptions of how their relationship compared to their ideal was found to be significantly different. Males reported perceiving their relationships to be more ideal than females. Males had an ideal partner mean score of 6.21, and females had a mean score of 4.83. These mean differences in ideal partners were statistically significant with $t = 3.19$, $df = 89$, $p < .01$. Hence, whereas Black males do not report themselves to have greater romantic options, they may, in fact, be using their greater options to find more prototypical partners. Finally, neither the mean scores for physical attractiveness of partner nor sexual relationships differed by gender.

**PREDICTORS OF SATISFACTION**

We were particularly interested in better understanding those factors that contributed to romantic satisfaction because of its importance to the maintenance and longevity of relationships. Hence we regressed measures on our satisfaction measure. Table 5 presents the standard multiple regression results of the full model for the sample ($N = 110$). The independent variables in the model accounted for about 39% of the variance in satisfaction ($F = 6.47$, $df = 10/99$, $p < .001$). Of those factors inspected, only sexual relations and partner’s physical attractiveness contributed significantly to the level of satisfaction for our total sample. To our surprise, neither equity, power, alternative, partner’s income, gender, nor the interaction of these variables was significant in explaining satisfaction.

However, because it was possible that differential factors may have contributed to the romantic satisfaction of males and females, we conducted separate analyses for each group. In the multiple regression model for males ($n = 38$), independent variables accounted for about 43% of the variance in satisfaction ($F = 3.95$, $df = 6/31$, $p < .01$). Consistent with the analysis for the total sample, only the independent variables of sexual relations and partner’s physical attractiveness contributed significantly to the level of satisfaction. Equity, power, alternative, and partner’s income were not significant in explaining satisfaction for males. No interaction effects were observed from these analyses.

In the separate analysis for females ($n = 72$), the independent variables accounted for about 38% of the variance in satisfaction ($F = 6.65$, $df = 6/65$, $p < .001$). As with the other analyses, the independent variables of sexual relations and partner’s physical attractiveness contributed significantly to explaining satisfaction. However, equity was observed to be significant for females in explaining satisfaction, where it was not for males. Power, alternatives, and partner’s income were again not significant in explaining
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Total Sample (N = 110)</th>
<th></th>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>Equity</td>
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<td>.016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.051</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternatives</td>
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<td>-.242</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual relations</td>
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<td>.349</td>
<td>16.549 ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner's physical attractiveness</td>
<td>-.163</td>
<td>-.356</td>
<td>18.059 ***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner's income</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>-.501</td>
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<td>Gender × Power</td>
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<td>$ R^2 $</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted $ R^2 $</td>
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<tr>
<td>$ R $</td>
<td>.63</td>
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a. Romantic ideal was not included in these analyses because it conceptually was too closely related to satisfaction.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
satisfaction for females. No interaction effects were observed from these analyses.

DISCUSSION

Black singles are proportionately the largest group of singles in America. However, research on romantic and close relationships among Black singles remains a neglected area of study. In particular, very little is known about the perceptions and attitudes toward dating among middle-income Black singles. The goal of this effort was to obtain insight into the perceptions of relationships of a group of professional Black singles. These dating men and women were, for the most part, young and never married. However, the overwhelming majority of them (i.e., 90%) hoped to marry within the next 5 years. This expressed intention suggests that marriage is a highly valued status for these individuals. These intentions also raise some cause for concern given the demographic realities of this group in the 1990s.

Our findings suggest that, on the whole, this group of Black men and women were similar in their levels of satisfaction to their dating partners. However, we did observe a number of significant gender differences. First, females perceived their relationships to be less equitable than did males. We view this to be a critical finding as the perception of equity is believed to be a significant predictor of happiness and stability in relationships. We attempted to uncover factors that might contribute to this perception of lesser equity on the part of females; however, we failed to uncover what might be the precipitating factors. Also of note was the seeming contradiction that females reported less equity in relationships than did men and yet reported greater income equality with their partners than did men. The income of our female professionals was in the same range as those of their partners, whereas males reported earning more than did their female partners. This observation suggests that income of partner is not the sole or perhaps even main contributor to the perception of inequity for this group. By the same token, it is possible that our finding may be an observation of relative deprivation, as females may feel that their partners “should” earn more than they do. Evidence suggests that despite the traditionally high earnings ratio of Black females to Black males, females may still expect males to earn more (Schoen, 1995).

Second, our sample of professional females perceived themselves to exert more power in their relationships than did the males in our sample. This finding was somewhat surprising, as females reported possessing less equity and earning less money than did males. It must be remembered, however, that
the males and females reported in this study were not matched couples. Hence females were reporting on the interactions of their relationships, whereas males were reporting independently on interactions within their relationships. In fact, it may again be the case that the disparity in perceptions here may derive from the variance in incomes. That is, men in our sample may wield power commensurate with their expectations based on their incomes, whereas females may perceive themselves as having more power than they might have if their partners had higher incomes. Third, although we did not observe differences in male/female perceptions of available partners, males did report their existing partners as being closer to their romantic ideals than did females. This finding makes at least intuitive sense in light of the restricted field of available Black males. It may be the case that given greater options to shop around, males are obtaining partners who more closely conform to their expectations.

Finally, our efforts to inspect factors predicting satisfaction in relationships were also productive. Overall, the factors employed in our analyses explained a significant amount of the variance in the levels of satisfaction among these dating couples. Sexual relations and the physical attractiveness of partners were significant predictors of satisfaction for both males and females. These findings, which are consistent with those of other researchers (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Testa & Krogh, 1995; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995b), suggest that demographics alone do not explain Black male/female relations. Hence, irrespective of race, gender, or class, it appears to be the case that good sexual relations and partner’s physical attractiveness remain important attributes to those who date. Still, our sample consists largely of young, never married individuals in their prime dating years, and it is possible that the relative importance of these factors might change for older dating couples or for couples who have previously been married.

We recognize that our sample for this study has serious limitations. It is small and unrepresentative. It is also one of convenience and is not random. Hence it is not known the extent to which the observations made here represent other Black professionals at those income or educational levels. In keeping with these realities we, therefore, suggest caution in generalizing these findings to other groups of Black Americans. Despite these limitations, we were happy to obtain as our sample such a high-income group of professional Blacks.

Last, the study of factors affecting close relationships and family formation among Black singles has been a neglected area of research. Such neglect is exacerbated by the fact that Black individuals are continuing to experience low rates of family formation. Hence we strongly encourage additional research initiatives in what is both an exciting and much needed area of study.
REFERENCES


