Exploring Partner Scarcity: Highly Educated Black Women and Dating Compromise

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Abstract

Introduction Research examining negative outcomes (e.g., condom use) among Black women traditionally focuses on those from lower educational backgrounds. There is a void in the literature surrounding negative outcomes for highly educated Black women.

Methods The current study uses a modified version of the theory of scarcity framework and mixed methods. These methods provide an in-depth examination of 22 highly educated Black women's (earning or have earned degrees over a bachelor's degree) engagement in behaviors that lead to negative outcomes (e.g., partner sharing). Participants were recruited in the summer of 2016 until spring of 2017.

Results Three broad themes were uncovered: (a) perceptions of partner availability, (b) compromising behaviors, and (c) negative outcomes influenced by both. Factors perceived to influence limited partner availability included (1) the number of equally educated and financial stable Black men, (2) interracial dating trends, and (3) regional preferences for women of other races. Negative outcomes occurred most often among women who compromised their personal values in their relationships. Findings are consistent with current literature that suggest that Black women, despite educational attainment, perceive low partner availability.

Discussion A common concern of Black women is that Black males' desires for women of other racial groups is a contributing factor to their limited pool of available partners.

Social Policy Implications It is important to understand the influence of perceived partner availability on highly educated Black women's intimate relationship decision-making and create interventions that help them engage in conversations surrounding condom use and partner sharing in their romantic relationships.

Keywords Black women · Scarcity · Educational status · Heterosexuality · Compromise

Although rates of sexually transmitted infection (STIs) are lower among Black women of higher educational status

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(enrolled in/graduated from college) (14.6%) as compared to Black women of lower educational status (high school diploma) (26.0%), they still report higher incidences and rates of acquisition than White non-Hispanic women of higher educational status (Annang, Walsemann, Maitra, & Kerr, 2010; Health, United States, 2015). Several studies have noted that perceived partner availability has an influence on Black women's willingness to engage in compromising behaviors that lead to negative outcomes such as intimate partner violence (IPV), condom negotiation, and STIs (Dauria, Oakley, Arriola, Elifson, Wingood, & Cooper, 2015). Perceived partner availability refers to the perception of available partners when an individual is selecting an intimate partner (Matson, Chung, & Ellen, 2014). If women perceive a limited number of available partners, they could begin engaging in compromising behaviors such as declining condom use to avoid ending their romantic relationships (Dauria et al.,
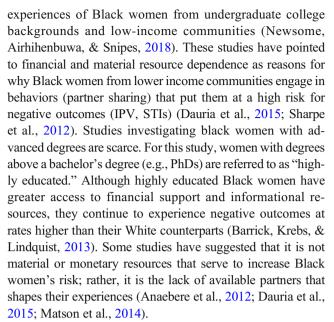
2015; Sharpe, Voûte, Rose, Cleveland, Dean, & Fenton, 2012).

For Black women, this becomes concerning as Black women are more likely to report desiring a partner of the same race (Dauria et al., 2015), despite being aware of the accurate narrative that the actual numbers of Black men available for partnership is limited (Harawa, Obregon, McCuller, 2014). Community-based studies have found that Black women have more difficulties than their White and Hispanic women counterparts finding mates of reproductive age due to gender ratio imbalances that are exasperated by issues of incarceration (Anaebere, Nyamathi, Maliski, Ford, Hudson, & Koniak-Griffin, 2012; Porter & Bronzaft, 1995), violent deaths (e.g., homicide), and fatal health disparities (e.g., AIDS, substance use; Hennekens, Drowos, & Levine, 2013). However, these partner availability ratio differences can be found across Black women in all educational statuses. For highly educated Black women, perceived partner availability extends beyond actual numbers, but includes numbers of men that hold other desirable or equitable traits. For Black women, finding an intimate partner is difficult due to a scarce resource, available Black men.

Although there have been studies that have examined perceived partner availability and negative outcomes among Black women, most have drawn from community or low-income samples (Dauria et al., 2015; Matson et al., 2014). Of the few that specifically examine Black college women's experiences, the samples are primarily recruited from undergraduate student populations attending Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) (e.g., Younge, Corneille, Lyde, & Cannady, 2014) or undergraduate women at Predominately White Institutions (PWI) (Stackman, Reviere, & Medley, 2016). This is concerning given prior research has shown that when compared to their White counterparts, Black college women's rates of STI acquisition remain high (Buhi, Marhefka, & Hoban, 2010), while condom use remains low (Bonacquisti & Geller, 2013). Further, as PWIs have increasingly recognized the necessity of providing culturally competent sexual health services to address the needs of racial/ethnic minority students across the academic pipeline (Crosby, DiClemente, Salazar, Wingood, McDermott-Sales, Young, & Rose, 2013), this information will be critical for bridging the gap between education and intervention implementation for educated Black college women. In response to this need, the present study uses a qualitative approach to better understand the subjective perceptions of partner availability from a principle of scarcity perspective.

Review of the Literature

The research examining Black women's negative outcomes and perceived partner availability has primarily focused on the experiences of Black women from undergraduate college backgrounds and low-income communities (Newsome, Airhihenbuwa, & Snipes, 2018). These studies have pointed to financial and material resource dependence as reasons for why Black women from lower income communities engage in behaviors (partner sharing) that put them at a high risk for negative outcomes (IPV, STIs) (Dauria et al., 2015; Sharpe et al., 2012). Studies investigating black women with advanced degrees are scarce. For this study, women with degrees above a bachelor's degree (e.g., PhDs) are referred to as "highly educated." Although highly educated Black women have greater access to financial support and informational resources, they continue to experience negative outcomes at rates higher than their White counterparts (Barrick, Krebs, & Lindquist, 2013). Some studies have suggested that it is not material or monetary resources that serve to increase Black women's risk; rather, it is the lack of available partners that shapes their experiences (Anaebere et al., 2012; Dauria et al., 2015; Matson et al., 2014).

Black women desire to marry Black men (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Crowder & Tolnay, 2000). However, the ratio of Black men to Black women with similar levels of education or economic stability is uneven. As a result, highly educated Black women are less likely to marry than their less educated Black women counterparts (Porter & Bronzaft, 1995). This supports the narrative research that indicates educated Black women have difficulties finding mates, particularly with comparable education and SES levels (Anaebere et al., 2012; Dauria et al., 2015; Hall, Lee, & Witherspoon, 2014). Additionally, Black women are more likely than Black men to have never been married. This is due in part to the fact that Black men are more likely than Black women to enter interracial relationships (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Stackman et al., 2016). In contrast, research has shown that Black women are socially expected to marry, date, and have children by men within their race (Childs, 2005; Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013; Garcia, 2015; Henry, 2008). Even in cases where Black women may be willing to date outside their race, there are issues related to their desirablity to men. Specifically, recent studies have noted that men of other races view Black women as least attractive in terms of physical appearance, personality, and potential intimate partnership (Luke & Oser, 2015). This, in turn, has been found to shape Black women's perceptions of partner availability cross culturally, reinforcing the perceived necessity of dating within their own racial group (Childs, 2005; Stephens & Thomas, 2012).

Taken together, these perceived partner availability concerns are thought to contribute to highly educated Black women's willingness to engage in compromising behaviors that put them at risk for negative outcomes, including HIV (Anaebere et al., 2012; Newsome & Airhihenbuwa, 2013; Sharpe et al., 2012). Specifically, the quantity and quality of the perceived number of available Black male partners can

directly inform a highly educated Black women's willingness to accept and engage in behaviors that can put her at risk for negative outcomes. Even though this group of women may have equal or higher financial or material resources, the desire for a relationship partner can inform the degree to which she is willing to partake in compromising behaviors.

Principle of Scarcity

To identify the factors influencing highly educated Black women's involvement in behaviors that lead to negative outcomes within intimate relationships, it would be useful to consider the Principle of Scarcity (Tauer, 2007). The Principle of Scarcity, also known as paucity, applies when there is a limited supply of a wanted object (Tauer, 2007). This economic principle suggests that seeing something as scarce enhances the perceived value of an object or opportunity (Griskevicius et al., 2013). Specifically, when wants are unlimited and resources are limited, the price to acquire the specific want is raised (Henderson, 1922). This principle further suggests that this perception of limited availability drives people to make irrational buying and purchasing decisions when they view a certain item as limited and valuable (Tauer, 2007). People are willing to compromise more to acquire their wants if they have the means to get their wants and deem that it is valuable enough to take a risk.

For highly educated Black women, their negotiation of partner scarcity can directly influence their engagement in or acceptance of compromising behaviors. Given that there is an acknowledgment within the research that educated Black women perceive a lack of ideal available partners, it is asserted that these women may perceive that they must compromise some aspect of their partner selection criteria and ensuing expectations and beliefs. As such, these women may be less likely to leave unsatisfying relationships, or renegotiate personal values or perceptions of an ideal partner to "fit" what is currently available. This could happen at various stages of the relationship and could directly shape the power dynamics within the couple. This also has implications for negative outcomes, depending on the degree to which a woman perceives herself as having power in the relationship. Specifically, research has shown that when women have limited power within a heterosexual relationship, they are less likely to ask their partner to utilize sexual protection such as condoms which increases their chances for acquiring an STI (Buelna, Ulloa, & Ulibarri, 2008).

The Current Study

Although research has shown that culturally specific experiences influence negative outcomes across diverse populations of Black women, there is a void in research in specifically examining the unique intersecting processes informing highly educated Black college women's dating experiences. Given their rates of STIs and other negative outcomes, it is important that research identifies how perceived partner availability influences these outcomes. We sought to address this gap by identifying what factors increase highly educated Black women's engagement in behaviors that put them at risk for negative outcomes by specifically exploring the effects of perceived partner availability.

Research Question 1. What are the partner availability perceptions of highly educated Black women?

Research Question 2. What negative outcomes are highly educated Black women experiencing within dating?

Method

Participants

The current study gathered data from 22 highly educated Black women who self-identified as single and heterosexual; this included three women who were in a non-marital, non-cohabitating relationship. Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 35 years old ($M = 28.05$). Twenty-one of the 22 participants desired a long-term relationship. The one participant who did not want a long-term relationship stated that she was taking a break from dating and therefore, did not desire a long-term relationship at the time of the interview. However, she expressed her interest in having a long-term partner in the future. Almost half of the participants reported being "satisfied" with their current dating experiences (45.9%), while 49.9% reported being somewhat neutral or somewhat dissatisfied. Seventy-three percent of participants obtained/were pursuing Masters' degrees and six participants obtained/were pursuing a PhD. Participants reported their familial nation of origin to be Haiti (41%), the USA (36%), Jamaica (14%), Nigeria (1%), and the Dominican Republic (1%). Participants recruited from the study reported that they were born in the USA. To prevent issue with acculturation, in case the participants were not born in the USA, the researchers of the current study selected participants who graduated from a high school in the USA. All 22 participants recruited completed the study. It is important to note that most participants expressed their excitement in participating in the study and that highly educated Black women's stories should be investigated more often.

Data Collection Tools

Three data collection techniques were utilized for this study which included (1) Black Women & Dating Survey consisting of demographic information and four scales, and inventories,

(2) semi-structured individual interviews, and (3) researcher notes. These multiple sources of data, discussed in the following sections, were collected to investigate the perceptions, practices, and perceived partner availability among participants within this study. Participant interviews ranged from 40 min to an hour and a half. The survey portion of the study was taken before the interview began and took 10–15 min to administer. Before participants began the survey, they were promoted to create a pseudonym, of their choosing, that would be used throughout the study (Table 1).

Descriptive Quantitative Data Tools

Participants completed a short background questionnaire at the time of consent to gather quantitative descriptive data about their demographics and beliefs related to dating and compromising behaviors. They were asked to report demographic information including date of birth, gender, race, familial nation of origin, number of sexual partners, relationship status and satisfaction, sexual orientation, and their attitudes towards interracial dating and relationships. The Sexual History Questionnaire (SHQ) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$) evaluates the degree to which an individual's sexual behavior was putting them at risk for HIV and other STDs (e.g., "Have you ever had unprotected penetrative sex with a condom?") (Cupitt, 2010). Participants self-

reported their behaviors and were asked about their knowledge of the risks associated with the transmission of HIV. The 10-item self-report The Health Protective Sexual Communication Scale (HPSC) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$) contained questions regarding safe sex, the sexual history of the participant, and the use of contraceptive methods (e.g., "Told a new sex partner that you won't have sex unless a condom is used, discussed the need to get tested for HIV AIDS, and asked if they've ever had some type of venereal disease (VD), Heroin, cocaine, or speed, homosexual experience") (Catania, 2010). Finally, the Socio-sexual Orientation Inventory (SOI) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$) assesses how open or closed participants are in willingness to engage in an uncommitted sexual relationship (e.g., "With how many partners have you had sex with in the past year?") (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991).

Qualitative Questioning Route A questioning route (please see Appendix) created by the principal investigators (PIs) was used to assess participants' reflections on sexual practices regarding Black women. The 14 questions that featured prompts focused on experiences with intimate relationships and decision-making. Examples included "Looking back on past relationships, have you had to compromise on certain values and beliefs to be in a relationship? What are some issues that black women face when dating in today's society? Black women

Table 1 Participant characteristics	Participant pseudonym	Degree	Age	Compromised (Y/N)
	AL	Master's (completed)	29	Y
	Antoinette	Master's (completed)	32	N
	Arianna	Master's (completed)	30	Y
	Ashley Jenkins	Ph.D. (en-route)	26	Y
	Beberly	Master's (completed)	28	Y
	Bow	Ph.D. (en-route)		N
	Erica	Master's (completed)	27	Y
	Fierce Kitty	Master's (completed)	28	Y
	Fruit Friendly	Ph.D. (in process)	25	Y
	Elizabeth	Ph.D. (in process)	26	N
	JDW	Master's (completed)	26	Y
	Jordan	Ph.D. (in process)	24	Y
	Kay Lara	Ph.D. (in process)	26	N
	Kimberly	Ph.D. (in process)	27	Y
	Lei	Master's (completed)	29	Y
	Moe	Master's (completed)	25	Y
	N	Master's (completed)	35	Y
	Passion	Master's (completed)	28	Y
	Pineapple	Master's (in process)	24	Y
	Riley	Ph.D. (in process)	24	Y
	Risque Dukes	Master's (completed)	28	Y
	Yarissa	Master's (completed)	31	N

seeking a partner often have agreed to have sex earlier than they planned/ wanted, under what circumstances could you see this occurring? Black women seeking a partner often accept that their partner may be having multiple relationships or is married. Under what circumstances could you see this occurring?" Notes were taken during each interview that detailed the body language of participants, questions that drew long pauses, style of communication/relational dynamics, and themes that emerged that were important to the participant. It is important to note that before these interviews were administered, two highly educated Black women above our cut-off age of 35 were used to assess the relevancy of the questions placed into the study. They were compensated with a $10 gift card as well for their participation.

Researcher's Notes The researcher took detailed notes about significant themes and patterns that emerged during the interviews (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017; Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnette, 2003). How the participant interacted with the researcher and vice versa were included within interview notes (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). Such interactions included but were not limited to body language, question probes, and outlines of any significant patterns and themes. It was very important that the researcher took copious notes during the interview process to note and highlight the interactions between the participant and the researcher (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017).

Data Collection Procedures

Protocol approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to recruit self-identified Black heterosexual women between the ages of 22 and 35 years to participate. Eligibility included being currently enrolled in or recently graduated from a graduate degree program, having attended college in the USA and being single (e.g., not married). Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, social media announcements (e.g., Facebook), and flyers placed in community spaces. Unlike random sampling methods used in quantitative methods (Babbie, 2017), snowball sampling does not specify sample size in advance and is emergent in design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A $10 gift card was provided as compensation for participation. An IRB-approved consent document was provided to participants informing them of the details of the research. Once consent had been obtained, participants completed an online questionnaire via a provided tablet. Afterward, participants were asked to participate in one-on-one in-person interviews in a private office on a large southeastern university campus in the USA about dating, higher education, and compromising behaviors. This questionnaire included measures that assessed beliefs about dating, dating compromise, familial and cultural attitudes, and racial/ethnic identity perceptions.

Data Collection

Data Analysis

The results from the quantitative Black Women & Dating Survey only provides descriptive information about sources of scarcity and health problems in this study. The sample size is too small to generate other conclusions or generalize these findings. Therefore, scoring was not applied. The researchers only used frequencies to gauge how often and if participants engaged in certain compromising behaviors such as low condom use. Saturation was monitored continuously during data collection. After the 20th interview, there were no new themes generated from the interviews, meaning that the data collection had reached a saturation point (Saunders et al., 2018). Data collection was continued for two more interviews to ensure and confirm that there were no new themes emerging, like the technique used by Jassim and Whitford (2014).

For the qualitative data, a content analysis approach was utilized as a means of systematically describing the relevant perceptions and behaviors shared in the individual interviews. A content analysis approach was utilized for its ability to guide the taxonomy of open-ended interview responses. Some questions such as "Looking back on past relationships, have you had to compromise on certain values and beliefs to be in a relationship?" were closed-ended but were followed up with questions to have participant elaborate on answer. The use of qualitative descriptive was ideal for this kind of study which aimed to obtain foundational knowledge within this specific population. Content analysis provides fundamental information that can be used in future studies to develop better questions for interviews and surveys given the common and core themes that emerge from the data (Green & Thorogood, 2004).

Recorded interviews were first transcribed by research assistants. After transcription, the researchers used a thematic analysis approach to code the data. Three women research assistants and the two PIs (women) created a general coding scheme based on themes and concepts that came up during the interview process. Then, the two PIs utilized open coding, an inductive reasoning governed process, to develop categories of themes and concepts that emerged from the collection of data (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Before coding, the researchers did not assume what themes may have occurred. Key themes and issues emerged through line-by-line examination of participant responses. The researchers also reported and highlighted within this coding, any inherent contraindications of participant responses. These initial codes were used in comparison to previous codes that were identified through later transcription reviews.

The second stage of the analysis included reviewing and organizing initial codes into groups/themes by the two PIs. Codes and categories were held in comparison between all

interviews, starting with the first interview transcript to every interview transcript that follows. This method of analysis connected clear and detailed categories to the surfacing of relationships between categories. It is important to note that both PIs on the current study identify as highly educated Black women.

Results

The interview data provided insights on the ways in which partner availability perceptions informed compromising behaviors that lead to negative outcomes for the participant. The results presented here are organized around three major themes identified in the analysis: (1) perceptions of partner availability, (2) types of compromising occurring for partners, and (3) these factors' influence on negative outcomes.

Partner Availability Beliefs

Many participants (63.6%) agreed that their partner availability options were limited. In response to the question "Do you think that there is a shortage of desirable Black men, especially those "educated" and employed?" on the other hand, 36.3% of participants felt that partner availability was only limited in cases where Black women kept themselves from dating outside of their race or were "too picky" with their options. When asked in the interview about partner availability, two additional themes that emerged as contributing to this perception of partner scarcity were regional preferences for Caribbean and Latin American women (45.5%), and social pressures to limit their partner choices to Black men.

Regional Preferences for Latinas and Caribbean Women

This aspect of interracial dating that emerged in the data was the belief that Black men preferred women that appeared to be from other nations (45.5%). However, it is important to note that 54.5% of participants did not cite this as a reason for limited partners. Specifically, for those who believed that interracial dating impacted partner availability, participants noted that in the region, Black men tended to prefer women from Latin America and the Caribbean, over women identifying as Black American. This was closely tied to the physical appearance of these women, such that their lighter skin and "exotic" appearance made them more desirable to Black men.

> In South Florida, you know, we have to compete with all the little mamacitas, because apparently, that's all of what most Black men in South Florida want to be with…but we are talking about South Florida. (Black women) got to deal with the competition. There is a lot of competition down here and it's not fair because all of

the Spanish men are scared of the Black women, so we can't compete. (Fierce Kitty, 28)

Social Pressure to Date Black Men

Another aspect of interracial dating that emerged in the data was the belief that dating outside the race was not acceptable (27.2%), even though it could increase the number of available partners for these women. Other participants, however, felt that dating outside of the race was acceptable (72.8%). The women participants who did not agree with interracial dating reported that they had been pressured to date within their race from family members and peer groups. These women were told that seeking non-Black partners was a signal of their desperation and inability to catch a quality man. Having to negotiate this pressure was perceived as limiting their pool of quality potential partners.

> I think that there are many of us that even if it's not Black men, we're open to dating outside of our race. I don't think we really know where to begin and because of that, I think we limit ourselves because we don't want to seem—sometimes, our family will make us seem like we're being desperate if we bring home a man of another race. It's almost like you need a man that bad and go over there to get one. (Lei, 29)

Compromise

For the purposes of this study, compromise is defined as having to give up something or having to compromise their values, beliefs, or desires to be in/maintain a romantic relationship. Some women in the study, however, did not report engaging behaviors that would have been coded as compromising. These women expressed that they resisted compromising because they had identified personal values that were non-negotiable, or had goals outside the relationship that made compromise difficulty or undesirable.

> I think once you turn 30, like, all that goes out the door and just does not matter anymore. You do it when you want to. But I think the pressures now are just making sure I am true to who I am every single time. I think when you are younger, you were trying to figure it out and now I'm 30 and I think I know who I am, and I have to stay true every single time. That is the biggest pressure for me. (Antoinette, 32)

Most participants (77.2%) in the study engaged in behaviors that compromised beliefs or values they held. The data analysis revealed three broad categories of compromise that

emerged most prominently: (1) personal values, (2) gender role beliefs, and (3) defined relationship status. Within these, specific subcategories emerged.

Personal Values

The most common form of compromise reported by these women were their values, including religious (41%), personal appearance (32.3%), and personal belief systems (32.3%).

Religious values (41%) were coded to include comments that illustrated their beliefs reflected scriptures and a religion's established norms. Drawing from their interpretations of moral principles founded in religious traditions, texts, and beliefs, over one-third of the women in the study admitted that they compromised their religious values; many noted that they struggled with their decision at the time.

> I've always, like, believed in God and had my faith. But, it's definitely times where I was not in the church and not trying to hear. I think also, as I've like refocused and begin to like, get more active in church and building my personal relationships and my spiritual journey. I've realized that like in the past, sometimes, I would try to be like who I felt like this person wanted to be…I compromised [religious beliefs], to just kind of, like, have a man. (Al, 29)

Personal appearance compromises (32.3%) were coded to include making changes to their personal style, beauty regime, body management, or overall physical self-presentation. Changing how they dressed, changing their hair, and other physical characteristic changes were the types of physical appearance compromises that these participants made.

> But you know, every time I got around him, I had to put extra oil on my hair, make sure it was watered down, make sure it was tight and neat. So, trying to fit into the stereotype of what a girl should look like or what kind of hair you should have. And as far as myself, yeah, I tried to change myself in the process. (Erica, 27)

The altering of personal goals also emerged as a compromise made by participants (32.3%). Comments that indicated the participant deferred or modified a desired result, plans, commitment, or possible outcome in their personal life was defined were included in this subcategory. Personal needs, gender role beliefs, and financial responsibilities are examples of some modified, changed, or ignored general personal goals women undertook to remain in relationship with their partner.

> When it comes to men for some reason I'll fold. Like I may not necessarily want to do something but I'll do it or I'll put them before me and I need to but myself first

because that's when of my hugest downfalls, I always do that. (JDW, 26)

Gender Role Beliefs

The second broad category of compromise that emerged was gender role beliefs. Gender role beliefs were coded to include gendered behaviors that were opposite of traditional cultural norms for the participant. Forms of gender role compromise that emerged from this data included taking on leadership roles (76.5%) and financial responsibility (29.4%) in the relationship.

Leadership, under the gender roles theme, focused on who was involved in the developing the direction, goals, and focus of the relationship (76.5%). In this context, the traditional framework of a leader is characterized as being the one who makes decisions, is responsible for determining the relationship goals, and initiating the steps for reaching these goals. Taking on the leadership role in their relationship was viewed as a negative compromise. In actuality, the participants within the study desired a partner in leading the relationship, or the traditional dynamic of the "man taking charge" or acting as "head of the household."

> I was the one that I had a business and I would go to work so I was the one, the initiator. Go initiate, let's do this let's do that or let's go here, let's go there. Like, I was playing both the man and woman role. (Beberly, 28)

Relatedly, gender role compromise was defined as having to take the bulk of the financial responsibilities within the relationship (100%). The women often described this as having to solely shoulder most their partners' financial responsibilities, or most monetary costs associated with the relationship. Nearly one-quarter of the women in the study reported having fulfilled the primary "breadwinner" role as a concern with relationships they experienced.

> He didn't have a job, he didn't have a car, he didn't have any of those things, so I had to do all of it. (Ashley Jenkins, 26)

Defined Relationship Status

Defined relationship status was the third and final category of compromise that emerged from the interview transcripts (29.4%). Coded within this category were negative comments surrounding the fact that the participant and her partner had not defined or discussed their relationship status. Not having a defined relationship was viewed as a sign their partner did not

view them as an important relationship or was using her as "Mrs. Right now." For these five women, being in these self-defined "situationships" was something that they did not want and went against what they valued about being in a relationship. A lot of times, it is a "situationship" and not relationship.

> I don't understand why we don't have title right now. We're always together. All my boys know about you and your girls know about me and the whole world knows. We do everything together, we travel together, and we basically live together, but there's no title. (Pineapple, 24)

Negative Outcomes

The results indicate that women who compromised in their relationships experienced negative outcomes (100%). Specifically, greater proportion of women within this group of women had been in relationships where their partner was not monogamous (35.3%), or perpetrated IPV against them (64.7%). Further, eight reported that they would not insist on using a condom during sex. Among those who had not compromised, fewer reported not insisting on using a condom during sex (17.6%). However, two acknowledged having partners that were not monogamous with them. The specifics related to these experiences are detailed below.

Condom Use

Condom-use information was gathered from the descriptive quantitative data. There were no qualitative data on condom use. Specifically, in response to the question asking if they "would not have sex unless a condom is used," those women who had compromised reported that they always (23.5%), or almost always (23.5%) would not have sex without using a condom. However, 23.5% said they would refuse sometimes or never, and one participant did not respond. When asked the same question, those who had not compromised within their relationships, one had always and one almost always asked to use a condom; in contrast, 60% reported that they had never done so.

Sharing Partners/Non-monogamy

From the interview data, the risk of having a partner with multiple partners emerged as an experience shared by both groups of women. Only 11.8% of participants who believed that they had not compromised in relationships reported that they could have possibly been in a non-monogamous relationship. One woman knew her partner was engaging in sexual/romantic behaviors with one or more other women. The second woman noted that at no point did she discuss the

possibility that her boyfriend had other sexual partners, despite being unsure he was monogamous. Similarly, 35.3% of participants who had compromised in relationships were in situations where they knew that their partners were being intimate with other women.

> I have dated a married man, I have, I will admit that, I have dated a married man, but it's not something I was accepting of. In a way, I guess you can say I did accept it, in a way I did. (Arianna, 30)

Intimate Partner Violence

Overall, the most reported negative outcomes these women experienced was IPV. Reported in the interviews, 53% of participants who had compromised in their relationship experienced over 30 instances where descriptions of behavior fit the Duluth Model's definitions of IPV (Pence & Paymar, 1990) emerged; in the current study, none of the women who had avoided compromising in their relationships reported experiencing IPV. When examining the types of IPV experiences, the subcategories of verbal sexual coercion (55.6%), verbal abuse (22.2%), and physical abuse (22.2%) emerged as most common.

> After that I was in a relationship when I was 18 until about 21, 22s. An abusive relationship. It was physically, mentally, and verbally abusive and I was in that on and off. (Lei, 29)

Defined as psychological pressure that leads to coerced sex, verbal sexual coercion was the most common form of IPV reported (55.6%). Comments that revealed experiencing involuntary sex due to intimidation or forceful threats were coded under this subcategory. Tactics, such as overwhelming arguments, continual pressure for sex, or instilling fear were used by these perpetrators.

> When I was in a relationship, he was like "if you're not going to have sex with me, I'm going to go and have sex with someone else" so you don't want him to go and have sex with someone else, even though he does anyway, so you give into the pressures of having intercourse with him. (Ashley Jenkins, 26)

Similarly, verbal abuse encompassed non-physical behaviors such as threats, insults, or excessive monitoring. This form of abuse emerged in two (22.2%) women's narratives; both were among those who had compromised in their relationship. These women reported experienced name calling, "gas lighting," and lying to them.

Him going through my phone, him stealing things, him stealing money, him doing all these kinds of horrible things and him blaming it back on me. Um, it took a lot to realize that I had to leave, and I couldn't stay, and it wasn't healthy. (Lei, 29)

Finally, 22.2% of the women reported that they experienced physical abuse perpetrated by their partner. This form of IPV was defined as intentional and unwanted contact with a participant's body; it could include the use of a tool or weapon. For the 22% of women in the study that experienced physical violence, it was often tied to the man's belief that she was not respecting the relationship or him.

When it got physical, he hit me over a stranger on the street who was about to walk into the street. And I grabbed [the stranger's] arm. He was drunk and I grabbed his arm because he was walking on a red light and it was traffic. And he claimed that I was feeling all over this man. And he, in his mind saw me touching another man. And he hit me for it. (Kimberly, 27)

Discussion

There is a gap in research surrounding highly educated Black women and their perception of partner availability and their engagement in compromising behaviors that lead to negative outcomes such as IPV and lowered condom usage. This study sought to address this gap in 22 highly educated Black women by identifying what factors increase highly educated Black women's engagement in behaviors that put them at risk for negative outcomes by specifically exploring the effects of perceived partner availability. More specifically, this study sought to investigate (1) partner availability perceptions of highly educated Black women and (2) negative outcomes that highly educated Black women experiencing within dating. The current study was unable to provide a solid connection between perceived partner availability (scarcity) and compromising behaviors; however, this study highlights the compromises being made in terms of conversations surrounding condom use and IPV victimization in highly educated Black women. What was reported in terms of perceived partner availability is that some participants in the study reported that they felt that they had to compromise in terms of partner sharing and monogamy in order to be in a relationship.

This study reinforces the existing literatures' assertions that Black women across all educational and economic subgroups have trouble finding desirable partners (Stackman et al., 2016; Dauria et al., 2015; Matson et al., 2014; Sharpe et al., 2012; K. D., & Tolnay, S. E. 2000). Those who are highly educated are uniquely disadvantaged because their level of academic achievement and related economic and employment status further shrinks their pool of equal status partners (Stackman et al., 2016). This is due in part to Black men's inability access and achieve equitable levels of higher education (Stackman et al., 2016). For highly educated Black women who are often encouraged by family to prioritize and invest in their own educational and economic independence, this creates a tension, as there is a continued expectation that they find a romantic partner and eventually marry (Newsome, Airhihenbuwa, & Snipes, 2018). Unfortunately, there are unique barriers that were noted by these women that contributed to their difficulties finding desirable partners, including social pressures to only date Black men and Black men's preferences for women of other ethnic and regional groups.

As noted in previous studies, a common concern of Black women is that Black males' desires for women of other racial groups is a contributing factor to their limited pool of available partners. The current study was unique, however, in that the participants perceived Black men preferring women of other ethnic groups or nationalities (e.g., Hispanic, Caribbean), rather than broader racial groups as was found in previous research (e.g., Asian, White; Keels & Harris, 2014). Specifically, it was not race that was a determining factor as the values that Black men were perceived to use in their selection of partners were tied more closely to phenotype and cultural differences.

This outcome is likely a reflection of regional options. The urban center where this data was collected is 48.1% Hispanic, and with 11% the population coming from the English and Spanish speaking Caribbean countries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In contrast, Whites and other races account for only 27.7% and 2.6% of the population, respectively. Thus, most of the women in this area within the participants' age group come from Hispanic and Caribbean islands noted in the study. Women identified as Hispanic or Caribbean are associated with lighter skin and assumed to be more attractive, even in cases where their skin color is the same as African American women (Stephens & Fernandez, 2012; Stephens & Thomas, 2012). Stephens and Fernandez (2012) tied this to the exoticizing of non-African American Black women, creating a within group hierarchy tied to both skin color and cultural meanings around Blackness. Specifically, darker skin was associated with American Black women while a more tanned or lighter (but not white) is perceived as more beautiful, desirable, attractive, and Hispanic or Caribbean women.

Consistent with previous research that suggests that mere awareness of safe sex practices such as condom use does not directly lead to sexually responsible behaviors within highly educated Black women, the study found that 73% of the participants did not engage in or sometimes engaged in conversations surrounding condom use with their partners (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013). Although evidence for low condom usage was not found, it is still concerning that conversations

surrounding condom use is not being had at high rate. This is concerning as women's perception of monogamy significantly impacts their condom-use behaviors (Bonacquisti & Geller, 2013). The current study found that for almost half of these highly educated Black women (45.5%), monogamy was not discussed or assumed. However, these women still engaged in compromising behaviors that put them at risk for negative outcomes. Research suggests that fear of condom negotiation is a major barrier to condom use among Black women (Crosby et al., 2013). This is not unfounded, however, as the women in the study perceived that their partners may react negatively to conversations surrounding condom use (Crosby et al., 2013; Flash et al., 2014). Overall, Black women are utilizing condoms less than they want to, suggesting that they are not in full control of their sexual behaviors (Bonacquisti & Geller, 2013; Crosby et al., 2013).

Social Policy Implications

The current study highlights that highly educated black women are still experiencing negative outcomes in their dating relationships. This is concerning given that Black women already experience the highest rates of these negative outcomes. Most current approaches to decreasing rates across Black communities focus primarily on increasing sexual health knowledge and target populations deemed high risk. These must be reconsidered given highly educated Black women are also experiencing the same risks as those who have lower levels of education and economic stability.

Instead, there is a need for interventions to begin to focus on issues related to empowerment, and cultural level values associated with intimate relationships. Clearly, this requires a broad focus that encompasses issues related to identity (including nationality, beauty, and religion), values (personal, spiritual, familial), and personal agency (live events, achievement of life goals, and consequences related to change). Two therapeutic interventions relevant to this population and phenomena would be sexual communication and behavioral counseling. This broad-based clinical approach teaches women how to have difficult conversations with partners surrounding personal values, relationship goals, sexual preferences, and safe sex practices (Painter, Herbst, Diallo, & White, 2014; Schmid, Leonard, Ritchie, & Gwadz, 2015). Those who discuss condom use with their partners are more likely to consistently use condoms (Nesoff, Dunkle, & Lang, 2015; Schmid et al., 2015). Studies have found that having conversations around condom use begin with assertiveness (Widman, Noar, Choukas-Bradley, & Francis, 2014; Schmid et al., 2015). Studies have also found that when trained on sexual negotiation, refusal skills, and conflict resolution, Black women were more likely to engage in sexually protective behaviors like consistent condom and contraception usage

(Wingood, Hunter-Gamble, & DiClemente, 1993; Flash et al., 2014).

Behavioral counseling is another effective approach for changing behaviors that put individuals at risk for STI acquisition and other negative outcomes (Jaworski & Carey, 2001). This type of counseling involves changing negative and maladaptive behaviors of an individual by allowing them the space to safely explore alternative options to their current behaviors (Jaworski & Carey, 2001). For example, a goal of an educated Black woman within behavioral counseling could be to help her learn how to be more proactive in engaging in safer sex practices. This approach may be an effective way to intervene with this unique population as it considers the specific and unique factors of the individual (Jaworski & Carey, 2001). Combined, these approaches move individuals from just having a foundation of sexual health education into actual practice. This is important because as the study showed, women were aware of their potential risk for STI acquisition, yet still engaging in sexually risky behaviors.

An ideal space for integrating these clinical efforts would be in university settings where Black women are able to access developmentally appropriate mental and physical health services related to their sexual health concerns (Jaworski & Carey, 2001; Stackman et al., 2016; Walsh, Banyard, Moynihan, Ward, & Cohn, 2010). However, this requires these campus systems to address voids in their approaches for addressing the sexual health concerns specific to graduate and racial/ethnic minority populations. Specifically, campus health services tend to focus on undergraduate health in part based on the assumption that degree level and health knowledge are correlated within college student populations (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007; Wyatt & Oswalt, 2013). Research has shown that graduate students engage in behaviors that put them at risk for negative outcomes almost to the same degree as undergraduates (Williams & Goebert, 2003). Moreover, the study found that graduate women who had sex with multiple partners were less likely to use condoms than graduate men who had sex with multiple partners (Williams & Goebert, 2003). This further highlights the necessity of ensuring that education and services address women's specific knowledge and empowerment needs (Walsh et al., 2010).

Further, the specific concern regarding the link between perceptions of partner scarcity and compromise is especially important to address given Black women (and men) are underrepresented across graduate programs. This point to the need for the provision of support services that can address the dating and intimacy concerns that put these women at risk for increase compromise, and in turn, engagement in risk behaviors. The creation of social opportunities to meet other graduate students and discuss dating concerns could be critical for helping women feel less isolated about their concerns, provide a space for engaging in critical discussions, and create

opportunities for considering other intimacy options (Stackman et al., 2016).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the current study provides some foundational data about the ways in which perceived partner availability and sexual risk are negotiated by highly educated Black women using a principle of scarcity framework, there are some limitations that need to be addressed. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, there can be no assumption of causality for risky behavior. Additionally, because the sample is a snowball sample, some information may not be included in the qualitative synthesis as would have been for random sampling such as generalizability, standard comparisons, and variance accountability (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). These results cannot be generalized to educated Black women across the USA but only reflects the unique challenges and struggles of educated Black women where the study took place. Additionally, snowball sampling tends to overlook individuals who are not socially connected and close to the network in which the researcher is drawing from (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Qualitative studies utilize a small sample and the results may not reflect the experiences of those from different regions (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). As a result, the current study may have overlooked individuals who could have given additional perspectives but could not do so because they were outside the social network of those who participated within the study. Additionally, the participants within the study were sampled from a major southeastern city in the USA. These results could have been different if the sample was taken from a rural town, an institution located in a rural town, or a town where the racial/ethnic makeup differed significantly (i.e., less or more racially diverse).

The current study did not specify a period of time in which these women's dating experiences occurred. It would be beneficial to know whether the compromises found in the study were occurring during an earlier period of their life such as in undergraduate school versus graduate school. Answers for these women may have varied if asked about these experiences couched within a certain period of time. This would have been important in understanding if socioeconomic background or current socioeconomic status is more relevant to the findings of this study. Despite this limitation, it is important to note that regardless of the time of reference, these women overall felt that there was a shortage in available partners which led some of the women to compromising in their relationships.

Future studies should examine cultural implications and limitations to partner selection and the ways in which perceived partner availability impacts negotiation/compromising behaviors. The current study also highlights the limited research done on college students of color. This is very important as this group is grossly overlooked and college, developmentally, is a critical time in relationship formation. Future studies should also look at compromising in educated Black women in undergraduate and graduate school separately. Women in graduate school may be experiencing compromise and negative outcomes differently than women in undergraduate school.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations, the current study highlights unique experiences of highly educated Black women and how they compromise and engage in behaviors that increase their chances for negative outcomes based on their perceptions of partner scarcity and willingness to compromise. These findings suggest that although sexual health knowledge and education is presented to this group, these women are still engaging in behaviors that increase their risks for negative outcomes such as being in concurrent relationships and having unprotected sex without condoms due to low perceived partner availability. Highly educated Black women are still engaging in high-risk sexual behaviors at the same rates as their uneducated counterparts.

The current study adds to the limited knowledge of the unique cultural factors that surround Black college women and dating. It provides fundamental information for future studies to investigate the nature of behaviors leading to negative outcomes and perceived partner availability for not only Black women but college students overall. It provides novel information where investigation is limited. Finally, these findings reinforce the importance of researching, creating, and implementing culturally based interventions to reduce behaviors that lead to negative outcomes in marginalized groups that may be overlooked due to perceived advantages such as education.

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