Choosing A Rich Partner or A Fair One:

When African Americans Economically Assess Premarital Romantic Partners

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses qualitative data from college-educated black women and connects their economic evaluations of premarital romantic partners to their marital outcomes. It addresses literature describing spouses' matched traits, studies maintaining that black marriage disadvantage is caused by male employment problems, and research tying women's alternative sources of economic support to marriage postponement. The study finds that almost ¼ of the 58 sampled women's 202 romantic relationships included decisions to invest or disinvest in romance based on their evaluation of partners' economic traits. A minority of these decisions reflected women's preference for men with high economic status; an equivalent number demonstrated the importance of partners' class cultural compatibility in romance maintenance or demise. The majority (52%) reflected partners' efforts to avoid exploitative gender relations in romance and marriage. The paper concludes by explaining how subjects' concern with compatibility and exploitation expose problems with prior scholarly descriptions of premarital romantic relations.

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Introduction

Opposites attract? Not according to marriage scholarship. Indeed, those who study the traits of married individuals maintain that like marries like. This is in part related to the fact that individuals tend to study, work, live, and party in places where others who share their traits engage in these same activities. But even when they include controls for the overall homogeneity of individuals' social interactions, studies show that spouses are more alike than they would be if people were assigned their marital partners at random. So how do individuals manage to ignore the opposite and marry the same? The following study

focuses on the matched educational and economic traits of spouses and uses college-educated black women's premarital romantic decisions as data to provide an answer to these questions.

Studies of spouses' matched educational and economic traits focus primarily on already married individuals. As a category of scholarly investigations, they remain quite distinct from the literature on nonmarital romantic relations – writing that charts an historical expansion of single women's dating and sexual freedom as their presence in schools (especially higher education institutions) and the formal economy has grown. The current paper reports on analyses of how and why college-educated black women with these expanding options make the decisions that lead and do not lead to marriage to partners of similar educational and economic status. In so doing, it connects study of spouses' matched traits to the nonmarital romance and dating literature, filling in an apparent gap at the beginning of the matched trait marriage story.

In addition to linking the study of already married couples' matched traits to literature on premarital romantic and sexual behavior, this paper also addresses the set of inequality literatures that links economic and marital status outcomes. The claims in these literatures about black male unemployment leading to disproportionately low rates of marriage in the black community, about women's improved earning power leading to postponement or rejection of marriage, and about nonmarital childbearing and divorce leading to poverty while marriage improves women and children's economic status also imply that evaluations of potential partners' economic attributes play a role in the making of marriages. This paper's assessment of single women's use of information about partners' economic status in decisions for or against marriage can therefore provide relevant support to or amendment of these research findings.

This study analyzes the premarital romantic experiences of a sample of 58 college-educated, African American women. It uses these data in a qualitative investigation of the decision-making processes that lead to quantitatively observed associations between marital and economic status traits. It finds that degreed black women's educational and economic evaluations of partners were relevant in the progress of roughly one quarter of their 202 relationships. Their marital outcomes of "homogamy"[1], "heterogamy", or "single" were thus related to decisions the women made across their premarital romantic relationships and not simply to propinquity. A relevant minority of these decisions that subjects made about leaving or staying in nonmarital romantic relationships based on the educational and economic activities and

accomplishments of their partners, reflected women's preference for men with high economic status and resources. But more often, the shared educational and occupational status among spouses occurred indirectly, through decisions about compatibility of interests and through women's (and their partners') efforts to avoid exploitative gender relations in the context of marriage and long-term nonmarital romance.

Historical, Cultural, and Micro-level Journeys From Romance to Marriage

Studies of nonmarital romantic relations run the gamut from historical literature tracing the evolution of dating and premarital romance to ethnographic, interview, and survey-based research on the sexual, romantic, and childbearing behavior of singles. Generally speaking, they describe the trajectory of change in the structural and cultural context in which women make romantic decisions, and they report on change in women's premarital romantic experiences and decisions with respect to dating, physical or sexual contact, peer and parental influence, and family formation consequences. Some of these authors also explain how women's newer and different experiences and decisions are related to the context changes. But they do not typically offer commentary on women's assessments of partner traits or how these assessments affect their eventual marital outcomes. Instead claims about who actually marries whom (and consequently of how the trajectory of premarital romantic relationships are related to the economic traits and activities of the partners) come from research testing economic theories of marriage-making on marital outcome data. Below, I summarize literature that describes changes in women's premarital romantic experiences and decisions, then arguments connecting changes in gender relations and women's opportunity structure to these different experiences and decisions, and finally claims about micro-level, romantic decision-making that emerge primarily from analyses of data on married individuals.

Historical change

Historical scholars (Bailey 1988; Coontz 2005) typically describe a transition from politically and/or economically beneficial marriages arranged or directed by extended families and communities to marriage based on feelings of romantic love and the free choice of partnering individuals. They have concomitantly discussed changes in the types of nonmarital romantic relations that precede marriage. Here (in work by Bailey 1988, Bogle 2008, Coontz 2005, Murstein1980, and Stepp 2007), there seems to be agreement that at least middle-class whites in the United States have transitioned from a system of calling (in which young men were invited to visit a young woman in her parents' home), to the 20th century's

system of dating (in which singles went to public social venues and males paid for the pair to eat and/or partake in some entertaining social activity), to the current system that has emerged and been documented in and around the millenium (which includes even if it is not limited to a fair amount of "hooking up" or, in other words, sporadic instances of physical intimacy outside of the context of committed relationships or even dates).

The changes in the locale and activities of premarital romance identified above have been associated with a number of changes in premarital romantic experiences. Observed and catalogued mostly by a cadre of demographers and other quantitative scholars, they include a decline in parental supervision of and influence on premarital romance (Bailey 1988; Murstein 1980; Rosenfeld and Kim 2005), a decrease (and then in the last part of the century stabilization and a slight increase) in the age at which premarital sexual activity begins (Cooksey, Rindfuss, and Guilkey 1996; Hofferth, Kahn, and Baldwin 1987; Ku et al. 1998; Terry-Humen, Manlove, and Cottingham 2006), and a mid 20th century increase and then stabilization in the number of premarital sexual partners (Ku et al. 1998; Santelli et al. 2000; Smith 1991). The family formation consequences of premarital romance have also changed: there is less (or later) marriage (Bennett, Bloom, and Craig 1989; Espenshade 1985; Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Lichter, McLaughlin, and Ribar 2002), more cohabitation (Bumpass, Raley, and Sweet 1995; Bumpass and Sweet 1989; Murstein 1980; Raley 1996; Thornton 1988; Waite 1995) and more nonmarital childbearing (Akerlof, Yellen, and Katz 1996; Billy and Moore 1992; Smith, Morgan, and Koropeckyj-Cox 1996; Ventura and Bachrach 2000; Wu 2008); and there are apparently more interracial and same sex couples forming families (Kalmijn 1993; Romano 2003; Rosenfeld 2007; Rosenfeld and Kim 2005). Within these trends, African Americans have emerged as something of a vanguard population, leading and dominating trends in early sexual activity (Cooksey et al. 1996; Hofferth et al. 1987; Ku et al. 1998), declining marriage (Bennett et al. 1989; Brien 1997; Espenshade 1985; Lichter et al. 2002; Lloyd and South 1996; Sassler and Schoen 1999), and increased nonmarital childbearing (Smith et al. 1996; Upchurch, Lillard, and Panis 2002; Ventura and Bachrach 2000; Wu 2008).

Class cultures of premarital romance

Although some of the changes in premarital romance have been quite marked among African Americans, scholars observing and analyzing single individuals' romantic behavior tend to cite more broad,

society-level changes as opposed to race-specific causes as explanations for the trends. This means that scholars point to the class-based circumstances and lifestyles associated with urbanization and industrialization (as opposed to racial or ethnic cultural particularities) when explaining these changes. For example, Bailey (1988) maintained that the practice of dating began with young singles living in working class homes. Parental homes or apartments shared with other young working women spared no parlors for callers, while single young men's relatively higher industrial sector wages paid for dates. Rosenfeld (Rosenfeld 2007; Rosenfeld and Kim 2005) would later argue that the rise in and increased notoriety of interracial and same-sex unions was linked to more recent generations' geographic distance and financial independence from families of origin. This finding followed Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan's earlier (1990) but similar argument about the high prevalence of black-white marriages among individuals far away from their more conservative communities of upbringing.

Also focusing on the general rather than particular, Edin and Kefalas (2005) make the point that poverty and residence in lower-class neighborhoods (not race) generates Philadelphia-area Hispanic, black, and white women's high valuation of motherhood and resistance to terminating nonmarital pregnancies early in the life course. Their subjects' disillusionment with men and romance as a solution to economic challenge led to marriage delay – in order to establish personal financial stability as a kind of insurance within future marriage and in order to engage in a kind of premarital "testing" of poorer men's fitness for fatherhood and partnered parenting. In this manner, urbanicity and the class-based conditions of urban life are given credit for creating patterns of premarital romance and the family formation consequences associated with these patterns.

Importantly, Kristin Luker's (1996) analysis of the rise in nonmarital pregnancy, childbearing, and parenting places the Edin and Kefalas (2005) subjects in an even broader context. It argues for a more thorough appreciation of commonalties that exist across the nonmarital childbearing behavior of poorer teens and more advantaged delayers (i.e., those whose childbearing occurs in their thirties and forties). Luker's argument is that both sets of women are responding to a half-century of large-scale social and economic change that includes advances in contraceptive technology, rising economic inequality and the declining fortunes of the working and middle classes, and a women's movement that precipitated rising divorce rates and families headed by male and/or female parents who can both be formal sector workers.

Here, she magnifies a point that is pervasive in the largely ethnographic work on women's premarital romantic activity. That is that broad economic and political changes reverberate through gendered romantic relations. Insofar as U.S. women's status and beliefs have changed much across the twentieth century, such changes can be observed in women's (and men's) behaviors in and assessments of their romantic relationships. But these scholars (including Luker and Edin and Kefalas) typically do not evaluate whether and how these changes in the gendered romantic relationship lead to greater or less similarity in spouses' traits – how they lead to the success or failure of relationships between partners with similar or different traits.

Decisions for and against marriage at the micro-level

In the aforementioned literature, trends in premarital romance may be structured by class positioning in an urbanizing, industrializing context, but the connection of premarital romance to marriage remains obscured. In other words, the question of what women are looking for in a marriage partner in the newer modern context, the question of what women find problematic about partners they reject when same-sex and interracial unions are possibilities, and the question of what women want and can negotiate for in a marriage now that they have equivalent educations and multiple premarital sexual partners all remain unanswered in descriptions of cultures of premarital romance. On the other hand, scholarly understandings of micro-level decisions to marry or to marry partners with particular traits and to reject others who do not have those traits is usually found in marital outcome literature and the economic and demographic theory that this research tests. This theoretical tradition frames the educational and economic trait similarity of spousal partners as well as social group differences in marriage rates as the outcome of rational individuals making predictable, profit- and efficiency-maximizing exchanges in a market-like setting. Marriages are, in this literature, something akin to economic organizations. Individuals are involved in marriages and choose one spouse over another potential one for economic reasons. And premarital romance is thus constituted by individuals' economically motivated selection and acquisition of potential romantic partners based on the attractiveness of these persons' traits.

According to the household production model (Becker 1973, 1974), marital partners come together to trade specializations: women specialize in childbearing, childrearing, and housework (household production), and men specialize in earning money. The partners are dissimilar only in these

"productive" aspects; in other ways (e.g., with respect to race, religion, education, class background), because of their desire to rear children similar to themselves, they tend to be similar. In this household production model, "homogamy" prevails because individuals deliberately search for and choose partners that are class-similar – partners who share their educational experiences, class culture, lifestyles, and goals, and who will consequently facilitate their "production" of class-similar children. But this concept of the single individual that searches for and chooses a class-similar partner differentiates the household production model from the exchange model of marriage-making.

Marriage research testing the exchange model (Edwards 1969) posits that spouses "trade" by offering their labor, attractive social characteristics, or other resources (e.g., access to citizenship in nations with higher economic standing) in exchange for the labors, attractive social characteristics, and other resources of their spouse. In this instance spouses' traits match because individuals searching the market for traits "better" than their own – a spouse of higher class status, for example – are unwilling to accept one with less desirable traits than their own – like a spouse who is poor and has little education. Wives and husbands who were unable to achieve better and refused to accept worse have equivalent traits. Thus, while the household production model implies that spouses' matched traits begin with individuals interested in forming efficient households with class-similar partners and eventually class-similar children, exchange models credit individuals' lofty goals in marriage – their interest in trading for as much status, income, or education as is they can get – for married couples' matching traits.

When research employing these economic models finds that education or class homogamy prevails (Schoen and Weinick 1993; Schoen and Wooldredge 1989), they confirm hypotheses that support economic theory's ideas about the ways that individuals decide to marry and about whom they are likely to marry. Patterns of heterogamy are also used in this research to describe the ways individuals prioritize as they choose from their pool of potential spouses. For example, women's low likelihood of marrying "down" with respect to education and income is understood as an illustration of the greater emphasis that women place on partners' class in making marital choices (Schoen and Wooldredge 1989).

In addition to the preferences that motivate individuals' choices (discussed above), the characteristics of markets also determine the spousal choices that women make and thereby, the prevalence of matched-trait outcomes. Scholarly analyses of the relationships between marriage market conditions and

marriage outcomes maintain that such conditions both limit individuals' ability to act on their preferences and alter individual preferences in marriage (Blau, Kahn, and Waldfogel 2000; Lichter, LeClere, and McLaughlin 1991; South 1991). More specifically, their work indicates that the degreed, black, and female subjects in the current study exist in a marriage market context that constrains marriage and lowers levels of homogamy by constraining and altering their and their potential partners' preferences and choices.

Scholarly explanations of contemporary declines in African American marriage rates and black-white differences in marriage often blame the marriage market for these trends. The relevant studies indicate that black marriage rates are lowered by a list of conditions that includes higher Welfare payments, higher black male unemployment, higher wages of black women relative to black men, and lower ratios of men to women in the population (Bennett et al. 1989; Lichter et al. 1991; Lichter et al. 1992; South 1991; South and Lloyd 1992). Theoretically speaking, black women's economic motivations for and reasoning around marriage are the same in these studies as they are in studies of individuals' spousal choices, but the focus is on the way in which the life options presented by the market alter or constrain their preferences and choices.

Some scholars (e.g., Bennett et al. 1989; Blau et al. 2000; Murstein 1980; Waite and Spitze 1981) point out that women's preferences are different – that greater proportions of women will prefer to remain single rather than marry – when they have greater economic alternatives to marriage (e.g., when generous Welfare payments are available from the state, or when the wage gap between women and men in the local economy is smaller). Others point to the constraints on African American women's preferences that emerge in low sex-ratio contexts (i.e., in local settings where the women outnumber the men) and cause them to marry down in the class hierarchy (Guttentag and Secord 1983; Schoen and Wooldredge 1989). The low "desirability" or "value" of black women in marriage markets also means that black women cannot afford to "trade" for what they want in marriage (Guttentag and Secord 1983; South 1991) as many in the pool of potential partners may reject them (see a 2009 Feliciano, Robnett, and Komaie article for a recent study of internet singles' rejections of partners with particular racial traits that supports this idea). Finally, some studies focus on the constraints on black women's marriage choices created by the economic viability (rather than the numbers) of black men. The argument in these cases is about the high proportions of black men who are "unmarriageable" because they are unemployed or because present or past

incarceration has made them unemployable. (Oppenheimer 1988; Oppenheimer, Kalmijn, and Lim 1997; Testa and Krogh 1995; Testa, et al. 1989; Wilson 1987; Wilson and Neckerman 1987).

Quantitative study on marital outcomes tells us that that the matched traits of spouses are more common than they would be if premarital romantic acceptance and rejection of partners was random. It also tells us that the observed gender patterns of marrying "up" or "down" in education indicates that women prioritize males' educational and economic traits (as opposed to "social characteristics" like race or religion) in their decisions for and against spouses. And this quantitative literature tells us that women's achievement of their economic aspirations in marriage is limited by the characteristics of marriage markets. In this sense, they have used marriage market and matched trait research to connect changes in the broad social context (whether they are changes in the Welfare policy affecting unmarried mothers or women's increases in wages relative to men) to women's decision-making on marriage. But this literature does not observe premarital romance. The conclusions they make about the economically motivated preferences, selections, and rejections that constitute premarital romance are based on outcomes and not on observation of the actual decisions that women and men make on partners and relationships that do and do not lead to marriage.

The present study shares with the above studies an interest in evaluating whether women accept and reject potential spouses based on their higher and lower economic or educational status characteristics. But its qualitative data from degreed black women's decisions on premarital romantic partners is different from these studies' evaluation of the matched and unmatched traits of already married couples. Analyses of qualitative data on premarital romance progress permit exploration of women's economic reasoning in ways that observations of quantitative data on economic outcomes of spouses do not. Thus the current analyses are able to demonstrate that the motivations of sampled women's economic evaluations of their partners include but are not limited to or dominated by efforts to produce class-similar children (in the manner suggested by the household production model) or to "exchange" their attributes for the highest possible incomes and educations (in the manner articulated in the exchange model). The current analyses are able to demonstrate that women's constraints with respect to the achievement of their economic aspirations in marriage may have more to do with the limitations that nonmarital partners attempt to place on them within romance than they do with the availability of partners with particular traits in their marriage

markets. Perhaps most significantly, the current analyses indicate that discussion of educational and economic evaluating and choosing is imprecise and somewhat misleading as a characterization of the journey from premarital romance to marriage. Such activity may only be a relevant factor in the progress of nonmarital relationships toward or away from marriage a minority of the time.

College-educated black subjects, Qualitative data, and

Spouses' achievement of matched traits

There are a number of reasons why African American women with college degrees are an ideal population for exploration of marriage making in a more direct way than the more prevalent models and tests of economic theories permit. First, African Americans have long held the interest and curiosity of marriage researchers because of the large declines in marriage that they have experienced and their consequent low rates of marriage (Lichter et al. 1992; Lopoo and Western 2005; Sassler and Schoen 1999; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995). Talking with a sample of African Americans about their access to and involvement in romantic relationships and the terms under which these relationships do and do not progress to marriage is one way to shed some light on how these individual behaviors aggregate to macro-level trends.

Second, in spite of the fact that explanations for these large racial differences in marriage often focus on economic factors – including high rates of African American poverty, low levels of African American males' employment and wages, and the availability of Welfare to black single mothers – models explaining marital rates and marital status that rely on these and other economic explanatory variables, rarely eliminate the race effect (Bennett et al. 1989; Lichter et al. 1991; Lichter et al. 1992; South 1991). Because the influence of black racial status remains even when poverty, male employment, and wage differentials between black men and women are controlled, black women with college degrees, who presumably travel in circles with men whose employment possibilities and wages are less depressed, might be able to shed light on the persistence of low marriage rates for black women even in settings and circumstances where more "marriageable" (in economic terms) men are available. Moreover, if black women refuse to marry particular black men because of their relatively lower earnings or educational achievements (as theoretical claims and empirical conclusions about "unmarriageable" men suggest),

college-educated African American women are the best subjects to demonstrate this to us: they are the women in the position to reject men with for their lack of status attainment.

And third, black women and black families have demonstrated a longstanding commitment to the labor force participation of wives and female household heads. Studying marital decision-making in a community in which large fractions of women have routinely balanced household and formal labor market work, in both single-parent or two-parent households, should be informative with respect to how productive and reproductive sector roles and matched or unmatched economic status traits do and do not figure into marital decision-making in the context of a theoretically "new" gender order.

The following study relies on qualitative data from a snowball sample of 58 African American women with college degrees, who were part of a larger study designed to observe and explain relationships between race, class, and degreed black women's family formation behavior. The interviewees resided in two northeastern U.S. cities that experienced heavy industrial pasts and the late twentieth century economic declines associated with "rust belt" cities. Their economies have shifted so that they are now dominated by service industry, health, and higher education employers. However, the cities differed in terms of size (one was among the top ten cities in terms of population during the 2000 Census while the other is small by the same Census standards) and in terms of the relative size of the black population (the larger city was just about 50% black while the smaller city was closer to the national population, being about 12% black).

In each community, I began the snowball with individuals that I knew, who referred me to a few women who fit my study criteria (black, college-educated, and under age 50). I asked each interviewee for their own list of referrals, and over ¼ of them gave me at least one referral that I subsequently interviewed. Only one person that I contacted refused the interview, and just one failed to complete the interview. These interviewees provided the data that I analyzed during open-ended interviews that covered their romantic and family formation histories as well as their educational and professional life trajectories. They were encouraged to discuss decision-making moments with respect to education, work, romance, and family formation, including the options they faced, why they did and did not choose one or another course of action, and whether they might have in retrospect done certain things differently.

There are disadvantages to relying on retrospective data: women may forget the reasons they rejected a boyfriend they dated long ago; they may also have better or worse memories of particular kinds

of relationships. I tried to ask questions in ways that would minimize these problems – e.g., proceeding chronologically and checking the reported timing of events against more salient life moments like the year of graduation from high school or college or a child's birth year. However some biases and omissions are likely to remain. There are also disadvantages to relying on a single gender's and a single individual's descriptions for an understanding of what are essentially romantic relationship dynamics. However, I am hoping that one person's description of their romantic choices and constraints as they understood them represents an important improvement over studies that describe this decision-making using outcome data.

The analyses for this paper proceeded after coding and organizing transcribed interview dialogue into discussions of the 202 romantic relationships experienced by the women in my sample. The average of 3.5 relationships per woman falls pretty close to the center of the range – between zero (a 32-year-old said she had had no boyfriends, romantic relationships, dates, or voluntary sexual experiences) and eight romantic relationships (a figure also reported by just one subject who was 35 years old). The discussions about romance were then separated into decision-making moments that allowed me to develop descriptions of everything from the situations in which women met and began relationships with partners, to the things that they liked and disliked about particular romantic partners, to the reasons for relationship breakups and/or other relationship status changes (e.g., the change from neighbors to long-distance lovers, the changes from less to more exclusive dating and back again, the change from dating to marital engagement).

I coded the decisions leading to romantic relationship change or progress by topic. Educational and economic evaluations of partners were just one of a list of issues raised to explain couples' decisions to invest further or disinvest in relationships. The most popular items on the list (see Table 1) were partners' personal characteristics (including looks and personality traits like being nice or jealous) and compatibility (as in when a subject maintained that a breakup was due to the fighting that started when they began cohabiting or when a subject claimed that she quickly became close with a partner with whom negotiations about ways to spend couple time were easy). In this paper, I focused on decision-making moments that involved evaluations of the class characteristics and/or educational and economic activities of women's partners. These economic issues were raised with similar frequency to issues of distance and timing, attractive or unattractive social behavior, and infidelity, but at least twice as often as family and friends' opinions and interference, and partners' differences with respect to commitment. I used the subjects'

economics and education talk (1) to describe the range of different reasoning and motivations behind women's decisions to attach themselves to or distance themselves from romantic partners with particular economic or educational traits and (2) to assess the implications of these economic decision-making moments for the prevalence of class homogamy.

<<Table 1 about here>>

Three Journeys to the Matched-Trait Marriage

The descriptions below focus on the 50 relationships in my sample in which women made relationship decisions based on their evaluations of their partner's class, class attributes, status achievements, labor market activity, and economic resources. I analyzed the trajectories of 202 romantic relationships, described by the 58 degreed black women in my sample. 34 of these relationships led to marriage, 74% of which were educationally homogamous marriages (i.e., marriages in which my research subject said vows with a man that shared her educational status) and 26% of which were heterogamous marriages (i.e., marriages in which one partner – in almost all cases, my subject – had earned a college degree at the time of marriage and the other partner had not). The remainder of the 202 relationships (83%) either dissolved without marriage or are ongoing without marriage. Educational and economic evaluations were a bit more common in discussions of romances that eventually proceeded to marriage than they were in the total sample of relationships (see Table 2). But they were no more relevant in the progress of relationships ending with a matched-trait marriage than they were in those where partners with different education levels exchanged vows (also see Table 2).

<<Table 2 about here>>

I identified three different ways in which partners' educational and economic criteria were relevant for degreed black women's decision-making on romantic relationships. In Table 3 below, I list the frequencies with which I encountered these different motivations for economics and education talk. "Status Interest" – i.e., an individual's interest in partnering with persons with the highest educational, income, or professional status that is possible – was the least popular reason for incorporating information about education and occupation into descriptions of romantic relationship progress. "Compatibility Concern" –

i.e., an individual's desire to share activities and goals with their partner – ranked second on the list of factors motivating subjects' discussions of their partners' schooling and work. And the third category of "Exploitation Consideration" appeared most frequently. It reflects women's fears that partnering with a particular person will mean a loss of personal resources and/or unnecessary limitation of the productive and reproductive roles that they can play. Below, I describe the ways in which women's economic evaluations of partners reflects these varied motivations and explain how these differing motivations facilitate these women's marriage to men with similar educational and professional credentials to their own.

Status Interest

As exchange theory (Edwards 1969) predicts, there were women in my sample who connected the intensification of romantic commitment to a potential partner's high economic status, and who, in so doing, made it clear that maintenance of or increases to their own economic status were at issue. Nadine was one such case. Age 30 and employed in human services at interview, she discussed her decision to move in with her current partner as an opportunity to improve her neighborhood surroundings. She had become involved with this man that was 10 years her senior partly because his greater economic establishment made him more attractive. She explained,

> I twisted his arm to get him to move in with me… My roommate had moved out… and I knew I would not be able to afford to move into this complex alone. Living with him meant that I could afford to be in a better neighborhood and a better apartment complex, where I could be with a different – better – class of people. I couldn't afford to live anywhere like this without him.

In a similar vein, when a 34-year-old information science specialist and single mother (Jane) dismissed the possibility of dating a man without a college degree, she indicated that an assessment of this partner's likelihood of depleting or negatively affecting her own economic resources was in order. Looking directly into my face and with a sober expression, she maintained, "I'm not trying to go back."

Table 3 shows that concern for personal movement up or down economic hierarchies constitutes a relatively small portion of subjects' economic evaluations of partners. This is true despite the fact that the category includes discussions focused more on status hierarchies and outsider perceptions of potential couple status in addition to those focused specifically on income and education. Thus, Nancy's positive assessment of an ex-boyfriend that was the "type of guy [that] was easy to bring home… that [one's] mother would like" because his educational credentials meant that "he looked good on paper" is also

included in this category labeled "Status Interest". So too is Eartha's acknowledgement that the businessman who would show up to the hospital where she nursed, exuding success with his suit, tie, briefcase, and gift bouquet of flowers, was the "man of everyone's dreams." And yet, such concerns make up just under a quarter (22%) of women's discussions of partners' economic attributes (see Table 3).

Exchange theory maintains that choices individuals make based on this type of "Status Interest" create a prevalent homogamy. The accumulation of money- or status-motivated rejections and acceptances of partners that emerges as individuals reject those of lower status and fail at attracting those of higher status leads to the predominance of education and class equivalence in marriage. But these data indicate that it takes more than the predictable, status-maximizing choices of individuals with the most income or education to create the level of homogamy that scholars routinely observe. Instead, they show that spouses' matched traits are more often the outcome of choices related to relational patterns and activity than they are a reflection of individualistic, profit-maximizing concern.

<<Table 3 about here>>

Compatibility Concerns

In Table 3, worries over smooth relationship interactions, over agreement between partners on the ways to spend time and money or raise children, and over a partner's comfort in one's own social circles falls into the category named "Compatibility Concerns". Occurring with roughly equal frequency (25.4%) to evaluations in the "Status Interest" category, they reflect sampled women's relational as opposed to individual outcome concerns. This category of talk also differs from the "Status Interest" category in the sense that it reveals women's motivation to partner with persons that were class-similar rather than higher class, in the way that exchange theory suggests. Moreover, a third distinction between the "Compatibility Concerns" and "Status Interest" categories is the degree to which class stands for a cultural attribute (in the former) rather than an economic resource (in the latter category).

When Karie compared one ex-boyfriend to another, she made it clear that the former candidate was unsuitable for marriage for a number of reasons, including,

> He was a smoker. That was the main issue. Major problem. He wasn't a Christian. He didn't profess to be… This is gonna sound silly: He didn't have any hobbies. He has nothing to do with his time. You know what I mean? Just nothin'. I was like, "Lord, I never thought that was important," but it is. I need you to have something to do with your time. I don't need to be your hobby.

While this list may appear to have little to do with class or educational credentials, Karie's discussion of the man that was more appropriate marriage material connects educational credentials to a certain style of interaction, to a way of passing time in romantic relationships, and to the ability to develop the hobbies Karie believes that partners need to occupy their time. Discussing this second ex-boyfriend she maintained,

> He was the one who had the qualities I wanted… the opposite of [boyfriend discussed above]. He was educated, and it's not that I need somebody who's been to college, but I do want someone who is interested in other things. [Here she indicates intellectual interest by pointing to her head.]

Imani's transition from her second long-term boyfriend to her third (this third one was the man she ultimately married) also illustrates the importance of class culture and lifestyle compatibility in degreed black women's talk about potential partners' educational and professional achievements. She shows that such women may depend upon cultural similarity more than the accumulation of additional resources for the achievement of long term relationship success. About her breakup with her second boyfriend, she maintained,

> When you're in love, you try to tell yourself that the flaws don't matter… He worked for a package delivery company: I told myself that my impending college degree and that his was not going to happen didn't matter, but – He would not read! – I mean if he would read – He wouldn't attend lectures. He expected me to tell him about the things that happened at the lecture… I mean he was very supportive. He told me to "just go to school and I'll pay for everything."
>
> {Did he actually do it?}
>
> Yes! One semester from September to January, but then I started to feel badly… He never wronged me in any way – the nicest guy – but we were going in different directions. I asked myself, "Would he be comfortable in certain situations?"

Not long after Imani broke up with this second boyfriend, she met the man that she eventually married. According to Imani, this man had not made, over the course of their 10 years of marriage, much money at all. But his focus on earning one degree after another has facilitated their mutual participation in the pastime activities of intellectual elites and their comfortable interaction with others who share this lifestyle. This apparently fulfills Imani's "class" needs from her romantic partner in the ways that the monetary resources of her former boyfriend did not.

Sharing activities, discussing shared interests, and easily socializing with the same sets of people as one's partner are relational aims. They structure Imani's evaluation of her partners' educational and

economic behaviors and her choice of the latter partner over the former for marriage. In working to achieve these aims, she used at least two strategies. First, she tried to get the earlier boyfriend to behave more like someone who was earning or had completed a college degree so that he might comfortably share her activities, interests, and friends and associates. In other words she indicates that his literal occupational and income status "matter" less than his participation in the lifestyle and activities that are associated with educated elites. And when that strategy failed, she chose a partner whose class cultural attributes had developed similarly to her own. Both strategies show spouses' matched traits to reflect this woman's search for compatibility of cultural interests in romance and family formation rather than her pursuit of the partner with equivalent financial resources or educational credentials for their own sake.

The extent to which this valuation of equivalent culture (and not necessarily highest status) underlies the observed prevalence of homogamy among the degreed black women sampled here is reiterated in the claims women made about relationships working out because they "both were ambitious" or they "both wanted advanced degrees". It is also reinforced when the women blame relationship failure on the fact that they and their partners "were on two different levels" (as in she "was in the books" and "he was in the streets") or on the end of the shared experience of a volunteer year and the beginning of her efforts "to start her career" at a time when "he still needed to go to college." In these cases, jobs, careers, and schooling achievements are points of similarity and difference and not necessarily measurements of more and less money and status. Indeed, this interest in similarity may even mean that a degreed black woman with working class cultural origins or political ideology rejects a partner with higher status because of his class cultural difference. She might say as Randi did, "I was never really attracted to bourgeois black men. This was the one such man that I had a relationship with, and he was an asshole that got me pregnant."

While some sampled women focused on equivalent culture across the romantic partnership, some evaluated partners' class culture because they saw class cultural compatibility in these nonmarital relationships as important precursors to creating the families that they wanted in the longer term. As Becker's (1973, 1974) theory of household production predicts, the degreed black women in the sample want and expect their children to value education in the ways that they do and to earn college degrees as they have. Thus compatibility concerns extended to these women's evaluations of whether and how the

beliefs and outlooks of a person without their same type of educational and work experiences might affect childrearing experiences and outcomes. Below, Denise, a 25-year-old speech pathologist, describes her worries over how class differences between her and her current boyfriend might affect the family they hope to form. She states,

> He did not go to college, so I'm the one who makes more money. I'm the one who has the car... I'm starting to see this as more of an issue than him.…I mean "How can you look at your child and tell them to get an education when you haven't attempted to do so for yourself?

And at the same time, Tristan (age 34 and employed in marketing at a pharmaceutical company) argues that her husband's lack of a college degree is not a problem because he is so supportive of education in general and of her and her children's educational and professional achievements. Her "defense" of her decision to marry him went as follows:

> My husband is not book smart, but he is about learning new things. Furthermore, even though he didn't go to college, he had strong common sense, family values, also street sense, a good sense about people. He taught me things about people… My husband is also strong proponent of education. When I was accepted to my master's program, I had just had the baby. I was really worried that there was no way I could handle school and work and an infant. I was thinking about postponing the degree. But he was very reassuring. He kept saying, "You can do it. We'll be fine."

Thus, in the one case (Denise's), a boyfriend's valuation of education and his ability to pass that value on to his children is in question, jeopardizing the development of a long-term, nonmarital relationship into marriage. In the other case (Tristan's), a college-educated woman and her boyfriend have an appreciation for one another's different class cultural experiences and similar values; their differences become similarities as they learn from one another; and in marriage they support and encourage family members' educational endeavors.

Note, however, that in this latter case, the class cultural similarity that Tristan chooses would not show up as a matched-trait marriage in a quantitative report on survey data describing married subjects with educational and occupational status traits. She and her husband bond and marry over shared class cultural values, but they are values that tout the importance of both her "book sense" and his "street sense". Surveys of married individuals miss this kind of homogamy – or, actually, this kind of choosing based on class cultural similarity – when the individuals that make up the couple might more appropriately be described as culturally "mixed class" or "multi-class"[2] " (i.e., not solely "educated elite", "working-class",

or “lower class”). They may therefore be underestimating the importance of class-cultural similarity in marriage-making even as they classify such couples as class-dissimilar or heterogamous.

The ‘Status Interest” category of women’s economic assessments of their partners makes an individual, profit-maximizing, rational actor the author of homogamy. But in scenarios where subjects have “Compatibility Concerns”, people tend to marry partners with equivalent traits because premarital decisions to delay marriage or to separate prior to marriage evolve out of conflicts associated with class cultural differences among the partners. Decisions to invest in romance and to make more permanent commitments emerge from easy interactions and decision-making moments between lovers who take similar things for granted around school, work, leisure, and childrearing – between lovers who share class constraints, lifestyles, attitudes and aspirations. Class cultural similarities and differences do not always align with similarities and differences in educational achievement, occupational status, or wages, but they often do.

Table 3’s third category – “Exploitation Consideration” – is like the “Compatibility Concerns” category in the sense that spouses’ matched traits emerge from patterns of relations and romantic conflict and accord as opposed to the accumulation of individual’s predictably “rational” choices. Here too, the individuals’ feelings about the relationship, their ability to be a partner in a particular relationship context, and the level of agreement between partners on the definition of romantic coupling are more determinative of the achievement of marriage than are individual feelings about the relatively fixed class attributes of a potential partner.

Exploitation Consideration

Women like Terri, whose comments were classified in the “Exploitation Consideration” category, struggle over the definition of fair exchange, equal sharing of productive and reproductive labor responsibilities, and the use or abuse of relationship resources for satisfaction of personal aims. Aged 32 and a public defender at interview, Terri was one of the exceptional informants that discussed her progress in a lesbian relationship. Because biology did not seem to constrain the possibility that she and her partner could play equivalent productive and reproductive labor roles in the way that it did for heterosexual couples, I chose her unusual case to illustrate this category of partner economic evaluations in which issues of equity in productive and reproductive labor are so central.

Although gay marriage was not legal in the state where they resided, Terri and her partner had approached the point in the relationship where they were considering making a more permanent commitment to one another. One of the issues causing Terri to hesitate concerned the timing and "staffing" of the childbearing role. During our conversation, Terri expressed some irritation with her partner's sudden interest in bearing a child by artificial insemination and her need to be the first of the couple to do so. Her irritation stemmed from the fact that she has been on a "five-year [financial] plan to buy a house and to get [her] finances in order to prepare for having a child" while her partner (who I call Gina) had only become seriously interested in being artificially inseminated over the course of the six short months of their relationship. Terri explained that Gina's rationale for being first is that she is older – almost 40 – and her window of opportunity to have a baby is shrinking. But Terri feels that her own long-term financial planning and the fact that she has taken the time to gather certain material resources in support of childbearing and family formation (home purchase, money for support during a maternity leave) make Gina's attempt to go ahead of her unfair and problematic.

Terri teeters on the brink of long-term commitment and moving forward with family formation with Gina because she is worried about getting the worst end of a bad deal. Why should she postpone what she has worked for so that someone who has not made the same efforts and sacrifices can take their turn first? What if Gina goes first and is unable to offer Terri similar support for Terri's own childbearing experience? Can Gina, given her own limited experience with Terri's particular journey of planning and sacrificing, really understand and appreciate the journey enough to make her promises of reciprocation believable? And thus Terri considers whether allowing Gina to step ahead of her in childbearing, and thereby forming a family with Gina amounts to a fair and acceptable arrangement. And thus Terri's statements come to stand for the larger sample of degreed black women's questions and conclusions about freedom and fairness in love.

Statements in the "Exploitation Consideration" category reflect considerations of what "more", "less", or "equal" financial and status contributions mean for adult romantic partners in the context of their romantic and familial relationships; they reflect questions about the connections between work, earnings, and decision-making power with respect to individual and relationship resources; and they reflect assessments of the economic and reproductive labor responsibilities and privileges that attach to individuals

and couples forming families. A key distinguishing feature of the sentiments expressed in the "Exploitation Consideration" category is that the "more", "less" or "equal" that is being negotiated (whether it be more money, more time, less school, less work, or equal amounts of individual freedom) is implicitly or explicitly connected to some normative or ideological justification about who works, who pays, who needs, who has the right to, or who is capable of. In Terri's adjudication above, she works within an ideological framework that says that earning, saving, and material well-being give her the right to go first in childbearing. Therefore, she finds Gina's request to "go first", despite the absence of that behavior, presumptuous and perhaps even potentially exploitative. Below, the exploitation considerations of Maya and Francine are focused on whether partners' economic behaviors and demands are connected to patriarchal ideology; they worry about forms of exploitation and repression that are typically justified by patriarchy.

Maya (who was aged 27 and working as a social worker at interview) decided against marrying her military-serving boyfriend at age 21 because he believed that she should not return to college after the birth of their unplanned child. The two essentially disagreed about whether Maya's role as mother and wife should include a four-year college degree and a professional career. Since Maya wanted to finish school and get the type of job she believed would support her child more than she wanted to be married, their relationship ended a few months after the baby was born.

On the other hand, Francine presents a case in which a similar "exploitation consideration" was made but in which the outcome for the relationship was different. Below, her description of how she came to believe that her husband's higher educational achievement and her own educational curtailment would help to maintain the quality of their relationship draws more explicit links between economic evaluations of a partner and belief in the intransigence of patriarchal ideology. She states,

> Roderick's career made him more attractive: I always wanted a man with more education [than I had] because my dad was jealous of my mom's greater education. She had completed her GED and he did not… And every time she wanted to do something to better herself, he stopped her. She wanted to take this cooking class to try to become a chef and he got in the way of that. She tried to go back to school and he wouldn't let her do that… I'm glad my husband has his master's. I'm not interested in going back to school [to get mine] because right now my job pays more than his. Both of us have to work. If he could do it for both of us, he would, but we both have to work. But right now that means that he has more education than I do. And if I were to go back to school – Things are good the way that they are. And I'm not interested in disturbing that.

In this way, Francine's experience of her mother's discordant marriage makes her wary of choosing a partner with educational and income statuses that are lower than her own. Without mentioning the words, "patriarchy" or "gender", she communicates the way in which her economic evaluations of potential partners assume a patriarchal world order and expect that men's behavior in romantic relationships will be guided by that order. Her search for a man with higher educational credentials is similar to Maya's rejection of a man with fewer not because either sought to climb the class ladder through marriage but because both seemed to worry about the problematic relationship roles and experiences that awaited those women whose marriages to lower status partners disrupted the economic rules of a patriarchal order.

Patriarchal gender ideology was connected to much of the economic and education speech about partners in my "exploitation consideration" category, but it was not the only relevant ideology. For example, a more gender egalitarian (and class unequal) ideology in which both parents were morally obligated to work to provide a certain level of material support to their children played the same role in several of the women's evaluations of heterosexual male partners as it did in Terri's considerations of her lesbian relationship above. Similarly, even when children were not present or discussed as an explicit component of future marital plans, women (and their partners and parents) expressed concern about relationships where productive labor efforts and attitudes as well as the distribution of financial and reproductive responsibilities and roles were less than egalitarian. This might mean that Brenda's boyfriend who was a "waiter that sometimes sold drugs… would sometimes feel inferior because he wasn't doing anything while [she] was in school [earning an undergraduate degree]." It might also mean that Jessica would find herself being mistrusted and scorned by her younger boyfriend's family because of her decision to follow through with an unplanned pregnancy and because, despite her elder age, she depended on his help while returning to school to complete her degree. In these situations, involved parties, as well as their family and friends, are concerned about whether one partner's generosity or work ethic and activity is being exploited for the other person's "free ride" or economic gain in the context of the relationship.

If degreed black women's "exploitation considerations" are more likely to lead to matched than unmatched educational and economic traits, it is not because "more is better" (as is the case when they decide based on "status interest") or because "commonality is easiest" (as is the case when they let their "compatibility concerns" win the day). Indeed there were more than a couple of occasions when "more" or

"equal" income or status contributions made it difficult for women to negotiate around a partner's repressive patriarchal ideology, toward arrangements that they believed were fair. For example, Chandra ended up breaking up with a boyfriend because he regarded his educational and professional status and his potential income as high enough to let him off the hook for emotional care responsibilities. After pointing out to me that he used to make much of his degree from a top medical school and his acceptance into a residency program for one of the higher earning specialties in medicine, she reminded me of her own undergraduate degree from an Ivy League university and the corporate law career she had recently abandoned because of an interest in public interest law. She then maintained, "He could only offer me status, but I had my own status, and he didn't satisfy me emotionally."

For Chandra then, marriage to a man who shares her class achievements means having to deal with his sense that he is entitled to forego efforts at the emotional work of romantic partnership. Unable to negotiate past an ideology legitimating his male specialization in the productive sector and her own consignment to the more female emotional work, she abandons a relationship that had the potential to develop into a marriage of partners whose educational traits matched. Moreover, her situation shows how difficult it is to say that partnerships with equal or higher status men are more likely to survive an "Exploitation Consideration" than those with lower status men.

Exploitation considerations appear to lead to matched trait marriages in this sample only because the data come from college-educated women with a history of involvement in mostly heterosexual partnerships. Ideologies that legitimate the divisions of labor and the distributions of roles and resources in these women's romantic partnerships and families tend to stigmatize female partner dominance in the productive sector and male partners who follow instead of lead in educational and career status achievement. Men who are at the top of the educational status hierarchy can look to a number of such ideologies to legitimate their marriage to women who do not share their high educational or income status, but women in similar positions vis-à-vis lower status partners face a series of ideologies that would cause either of the partners (and their friends and family) to question the fairness and equity of or to start a fight about the definition of these romantic commitments. Thus, the largest plurality of economic evaluations observed in these data remain tied to education and income homogamy through the weakness of available ideological support for women's economic and productive sector superiority in romance.

Of the three kinds of economic evaluations associated with matched trait marriages in the sample, the latter two – and the majority – are relational. This means that it takes more than the predictable, status-maximizing choices of individuals with the most income or education to create the level of homogamy that scholars routinely observe. It also takes patterns of nonmarital romantic interaction influenced by partners' class cultural similarities and differences. These similarities and differences shape premarital romantic interactions that are agreeable and smooth in their progression toward more intense commitment or else consistently disrupted by conflict and supportive of breakup. Moreover, the matched trait marriages in this sample most often depend on highly educated women's "exploitation considerations," or sets of romantic actions and reactions informed by experiences with and ideologies of familial as well as class, gender, and sexual relations.

Premarital beginnings and Marriage endings in Inequality and Family Scholarship

The findings from this study are consistent with the literature that describes the historical evolution of premarital romance in the U.S. In other words, they are consistent with the general point that women's freedom with respect to premarital romance has expanded even as their power to direct the course of specific relationships is limited. In the large category of "exploitation considerations", we can observe this expansion of freedom amidst limited power. It documents couples' attempts to figure out which distribution of responsibilities, privileges, and resources from amongst numerous possibilities is most appropriate and possible. And at the same time, the category shows how existing ideologies limit couples' ability to sift through these various possibilities as a series of free choices. Gender and class status, age, pregnancy and childbearing experience, and education and work activities are linked in these ideologies to particular romantic relationship roles and privileges. When partners' individual desires and expectations conflict with particular ideological frameworks, suspicion, confusion, doubt, and unrealistic expectations impede the movement of relationships toward marriage.

But the study's findings also underscore the limited applicability of individualistic economic theories of marriage-making to the task of connecting decades of change in premarital romance to contemporary spouses' matched traits. The relatively large category of exploitation considerations created by data on singles' actual evaluations of and decisions on their premarital romantic partners indicates that women's interest in high status partners or in creating efficient households where they specialize in

reproductive labor do not play the major role in the education level homogamy observed in this sample. Instead, reliance on available ideologies of gender and class equivalence or distinctiveness in romantic relationship roles support high status women's decisions to reject lower status partners and to accept those with equivalent class characteristics. In addition, couple conflict and accord are experienced because of differences and similarities in class culture even when individuals appear uninterested in Becker's (1973, 1974) gendered division of family labor designed to maximize efficiency in household production.

Broadly speaking, these spousal couples that achieve matched traits because of "exploitation considerations" and "compatibility concerns" compel reconsideration of the decision-making processes that bring about observed associations between economic and marital status outcomes. They suggest that quantitative studies of the black male unemployment behind African American marriage disadvantage (Lichter et al. 1991; Lichter et al. 1992; Lopoo and Western 2005; Loughran 2002; Sassler and Schoen 1999; South and Lloyd 1992; Testa et al. 1989; Testa and Krough 1995; Wood 1995; Wilson and Neckerman 1987) and of the gender wage equality at the foundation of contemporary marriage delay (Oppenheimer 1988; Oppenheimer, Kalmijn and Lim 1997), as well as of spouses' matched traits, are most problematic when it comes to the inadequacy of their conceptualization of premarital romantic interactions. Such studies appear to correctly assess the economic outcomes and effects of marriage while offering misleading ideas about what marriage is to marrying subjects. Their claims constitute premarital romance as a series of individuals "consuming" or "negotiating trades" in a marketplace. But instead, degreed African Americans' economic and educational evaluations of partners show premarital romantic interactions to reflect two-person, relationship-building processes and conflict and accord across partnering (as opposed to individual) activity. Thus, when the college-student Imani left her boyfriend that worked for the package delivery company, her economic evaluation was more than a choice to reject a lower status man. If it had been solely about that, she could have refused to begin the relationship with him based on his job and skipped the efforts to get him to attend campus lectures and to read the texts that she recommended. Similarly, Maya's relationship with her military-serving boyfriend ended in a disagreement over her interest in returning to school after giving birth to their child. The couples' ideological conflict over the mother's role and responsibility in their developing family and not the individuals' preferences for or selections of partners with particular economic or educational traits created this marital outcome as well.

It may well be true that contemporary marriage postponement is related to increased wage equality between women and men and that partners with similar educational and economic traits are more likely to marry without it being the case that economic trait evaluations and concerns about status typically drive marital decisions. After all, the sampled degreed black women only reported that economic and educational evaluations of partners were part of decisions about romantic relationship progress in ¼ (50 out of the 202) relationships. Similarly, it is possible that marriage improves poor women's economic status (Budig and England 2001; Neumark and Korenman 1994; Waite 1995; Waite and Gallagher 2000; Waldfogel 1997) and that divorce and nonmarital childbearing compromise family's economic status (Bianchi, Subaiya, and Kahn 1999; Holden and Smock 1991; Morgan 1991; Peterson 1996; Popenoe 1996; Smock 1993; Smock 1994; Smock, Manning, and Gupta 1999; Stirling 1989; Waite 1995; Waite and Gallagher 2000) without it being the case that personal aims of resource acquisition and maintenance are the basis of premarital choices of one partner over another. But when research demonstrating associations between economic and marital outcomes makes theoretical claims about the role of these economic outcome traits in marriage-making or in decisions to remain single, it fails to leave room for these possibilities and potentially paints a misleading picture of subjects' intentions and actions in premarital romance. Scholarly understandings of premarital or nonmarital romantic activity – activity which is increasingly comprising a large and significant portion of young adult lives – is not advanced and may even be hampered by these misleading claims.

Economic traits and behaviors are relevant variables in the study of marriage and marriage-making. But with respect to this sample of college-educated black women, this is not so because preferences, choices, and constraints in a marriage marketplace are inscribed on the economic traits and behaviors of a relative minority of romantic actors. Instead, ideologies of gender, class identity and relations, heterosexual romance, and family relations (between parents and between mothers and/or fathers and children) inform action and interpretation of action – and thereby conflict and accord – across premarital partnerships. In other words, ideologies inform the nagging question in an elite woman's mind about whether a working class boyfriend is going to inhibit certain aspects of her elite childrearing agenda, the feelings of guilt in a lower class boyfriend's mind about whether he is working as hard as his college-attending girlfriend, and the worrisome complaints of a new college alumni's mother that his older

pregnant girlfriend is using the baby to extract resources from him that she should have earned on her own. Premarital relationships so structured create marital outcomes in which spouses' economic and educational traits match, in which family economic standing improves with mother's marriage, and in which African American women are highly likely to remain single and to have children out of wedlock.

Future research should collect and analyze additional data that can reconcile individuals' specific romantic goals and actions and couples' actual premarital interactions and experiences with the observed social variables that are associated with marital status outcomes. Only through direct observation of these processes can the whether and how of socioeconomic factors' influence on marriage making and the characteristics of singles, spouses, unmarried couples, and families be adequately described and ascertained.

ENDNOTES

[1] In this paper, "homogamy" refers to marriage between partners whose class status traits (e.g., education level, income, class background or parental income and education) match, and "heterogamy" refers to marriage between partners with unmatched traits.

[2] Kesha Moore (2008) uses the term "multi-class" to refer to upwardly mobile individuals whose class origins and outcomes are different and who retain ties to and identification with lower or working class origins even as they wear the marks of middle-class status achievement.

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Table 1
Distribution of Issues Raised in Relationship Progression

	Issues Relevant in Relationship Progression	Issues Raised in Explanations of Relationship Failure
Personal Characteristics	77 (16.8)	33 (15.9)
Compatibility	63 (13.8)	19 (9.1)
Distance &/or Timing	53 (11.6)	25 (12.0)
Economic &/or Educational Evaluation	49 (10.7)	19 (9.1)
Unattractive or immoral social behavior	47 (10.3)	21 (10.1)
Infidelity	44 (9.6)	35 (16.8)
Pregnancy &/or Reproductive Issues	36 (7.9)	9 (4.3)
Subject's Own Self-Esteem, Anger, or Trust	29 (6.3)	10 (4.8)
Family & Friends' Opinions & Interference	23 (5.0)	3 (1.4)
Differences in Partners' Willingness to Commit	20 (4.4)	6 (2.9)
Don't know or refused	16 (3.5)	28 (13.5)
Total	457 (100)	208 (100)

Table 2
Distribution of Degreed Black Women's Premarital Relationship Outcomes

	Relationships Including Economic Evaluations (%)	All Premarital Relationships (%)
Relationships leading to homogamy	9 (75% of marital)	26 (76% of marital)
Relationships leading to heterogamy	3 (25% of marital)	8 (24% of marital)
Relationships leading to marriage	12 (24)	34 (17)
Ongoing nonmarital relationships	7 (14)	11 (5)
Failed relationships	31 (62)	157 (78)
Total	50 (100)	202 (100)

Table 3
Degreed Black Women's Motivations In Economic Evaluations of Premarital Romantic Partners

	All Evaluations	Evaluations associated with…		Evaluations in relationships leading to…		
		Romance investment	Romance disinvestment	Marriage	Breakup	Ongoing/ Unresolved
Status Interest	14 (22.2)	6 (26)	8 (20)	2 (12.5)	10 (27)	2 (20)
Compatibility Concern	16 (25.4)	6 (26)	10 (25)	4 (25)	10 (27)	2 (20)
Exploitation Consideration	33 (52.4)	11 (48)	22 (55)	10 (62.5)	17 (46)	6 (60)
Total	63 (100)	23 (100)	40 (100)	16 (100)	37 (100)	10 (100)