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GIRL, WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO GET MARRIED?!

Are you a single, financially independent young African American woman wondering where all the single, financially independent young African American men are? Would you be willing to join other women in a focus group discussion on marriage in the African American community?

I am currently enrolled in a graduate-level Marriage and Family Therapy Program at Virginia Tech. For my thesis I have chosen the topic: **Understanding how High Functioning African American women perceive marriage and their thoughts about remaining single.** According to recent Census data, the number of African American women who never marry is growing well out of proportion to the number of White and Latina women who never marry. As part of this project, I would like to hear from some sisters why we are opting out of marriage in such large numbers. I am looking for women who are single, between the ages of 25 – 35, have at least a bachelor's degree, and make \$35,000 per year or more.

Join us: Saturday, January 3, 10:00 – Noon
Best Western Potomac View, 6400 Oxon Hill Road
Oxon Hill, MD

For two hours of your time, you will have the benefit of an open discussion with some of your peers on this issue along with free refreshments! Think of it as a pajama party without the pajamas!

To participate, please e-mail or call me at:
Linda Allen-Benton,
lallenbe@vt.edu
301-567-9422

The focus group will be limited to the first 8 women who respond.

Appendix II

Dear Chapter President:

I am currently enrolled in a graduate-level Marriage and Family Therapy Program at Virginia Tech. For my thesis I have chosen to study how African American women perceive marriage and their thoughts about remaining single. According to 1998 Census data, **41% of African American women ages 15 and older have never married compared to 22% of White women.** While the numbers of women who are not married is increasing in all ethnicities in the United States, you can see from these figures that our marriage rates are dramatically different from other women. Interestingly enough, this has not always been the case. Until the 1970's the numbers were relatively close. I am fascinated by this statistic and the potential impact it has on our families. In particular, I am interested in how this statistic plays out with a group of women I have termed Young High Functioning African American Women. These are women who are 25 to 35 years of age, have at least a bachelor's degree and make at least \$35,000 per year. While these women may decide to have children, they are deciding in record numbers not to have husbands!

I need your help. The women I have described above are members of your sorority. I would like to invite 5 – 8 women who are in this group to participate in a focus group. In order to make participation as convenient as possible, I would like your permission to hold a focus group meeting either immediately before or after one of your chapter meetings. If you are willing to help me, I will provide the attached solicitation-- either paper copies or an electronic version-- to send to your membership with your usual meeting announcement. Willing participants will be asked to e-mail me of their interest in this activity. I will confirm the first 8 women who respond.

The objective of my study is to gain a better understanding of the process that leads us to marry or stay single. Much of the research done on African Americans deals with our "pathology" or is focused on low-income families. I think it will be interesting and beneficial to service providers who work with our families to have a better understanding of how high functioning African American women perceive marriage.

I would be happy to follow-up with a phone call or a face-to-face meeting to discuss my study in greater detail and answer any questions you may have. You can reach me at 301-567-9422 or e-mail me at lallenbe@vt.edu.

Sincerely,

Linda Allen-Benton

INFORMED CONSENT

Thesis Title: Understanding how High Functioning African American Women perceive marriage and their thoughts about remaining single.

This study is being conducted by Linda Allen-Benton to fulfill the requirements for the completion of a Masters Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Falls Church, Virginia. Dr. Karen Rosen serves as advisor on this study.

Description of this research project

The purpose of this research is to examine how African American women perceive marriage and their thoughts about remaining single. In particular, the researcher is interested in a small cohort of African American women between the ages of 25 – 35, who have at least a bachelor's degree and who make a minimum of \$35,000 who have never married.

How the research will be conducted

The researcher will hold a series of focus group meetings of 2-hours each with women who fit the profile described above. By facilitating a discussion among the women present, the researcher will gather data about why the participants have not married, what factors they consider when weighing the pro's and con's of marriage, and whether or not there is a process for making the decision to marry. Participants in the focus groups will also be asked to complete a brief demographic profile. Following the focus group meetings, several participants from the focus group meetings will be asked to participate in an individual in-depth interview to answer additional questions that will build on the information obtained from the focus groups. The focus group meetings will be audio taped as well as videotaped and the structured interviews will be audio taped. All tapes will be destroyed following completion of the study.

Benefits and risks

Participating in this research project will assist the researcher in developing information of importance to Marriage and Family Therapists. Developing a more complete understanding of African American families and how the structure of these families may be changing in the future will assist therapists in providing services to the African American community.

By participating in this project, you will be asked to openly share information with up to nine other participants of the focus group as well as the researcher. While your participation is totally voluntary and you can chose what you are willing to share with the

group, it is possible that this level of disclosure may exceed your comfort level. You will not be forced in any way to provide any information you are not willing to share.

Confidentiality

All information shared in the focus group and interviews is confidential. (The only exception to this confidentiality is if, in the process of the discussion, the researcher learns that you are in danger of hurting yourself or someone else, or if you reveal information that leads the researcher to believe that a child or dependent adult is being abused.) Information will not be used outside of this research project without your written consent and no real names or identifying information will be used in the report or in any subsequent articles that may be written about this project. Audio and videotapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet with access restricted to the researcher and the research advisor. All tapes will be destroyed following completion of the study. Additionally, by signing this consent agreement, you are also pledging that you will honor the confidentiality of other participants in the focus group.

Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for projects involving human subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by the Department of Human Development.

Participant's Agreement and Responsibilities

By signing in the space below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand what my participation in this research entails. I have had all my questions answered and understand that I can leave the focus group at any time. My signature below indicates that I give my informed consent to participate in this study.

____ I am willing to participate in the focus group

____ I am willing to participate in the focus group and a follow-up structured interview

Signature

Date

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

Linda Allen-Benton
Researcher
301-567-9422
lallenbe@vt.edu

Dr. Karen Rosen
Faculty Advisor
703-538-8461
krosen@vt.edu

Dr. David Moore
IRB Chair
540-231-4991
moored@vt.edu

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____ **e-mail:** _____

Marital Status: __Single/Never married __Single/Divorced __Married

Level of Education:

___Some College ___Graduate Degree
___Bachelor's Degree ___Post Graduate Degree(s)

Level of Income:

___Below \$35,000 ___\$71,000 - \$85,000
___\$36,000 - \$55,000 ___\$86,000 - \$100,000
___\$56,000 - \$70,000 ___above \$100,000

Do you define yourself as heterosexual?:

___Yes ___No

Which of the households below best describes the one you grew up in?

- ___ Grew up with both biological parents in the home
- ___ Mother and father divorced, lived with my mother
- ___ Mother and father divorced, lived with my father
- ___ Mother was a single Mom, grew up with my mother
- ___ Mother remarried, grew up with my mother and step-father
- ___ Father remarried, grew up with my father and step-mother
- ___ Other, please describe: _____

Do you have a child(ren) ___Yes ___No

Are you in a committed relationship? (i.e., currently living with someone, engaged to be married, in a relationship with an expectation of exclusivity and longevity?)

___Yes ___No

Focus Group Questions:

1. Think back to when you were a little girl—10 or 12 years old—did you dream about your wedding day and the kind of man you would marry?
2. What has happened to that dream? Do you still have an expectation of marrying some day?
3. Do you get pressured at family gatherings by well meaning relatives to explain why you are not married? What do you tell them?
4. What keeps you from getting married?
5. Who are your single role models?
6. What would it take for you to say yes to marriage within the next year?
7. Do you have friends who have “settled” in order to have a husband?
8. Have your experiences with dating been mostly positive or negative? When was your last date? What is the length of the longest serious relationship you have been in?
9. What would you have to give-up if you were to marry at this point in your life?
10. What would you gain if you were to marry at this point in your life?
11. How many of you grew up in a two-parent household? What did that relationship teach you about marriage? What message did you get from your parents about marriage?
12. How many of you grew up with a single Mom? What did you learn from her about marriage? What message did you get from your mother about marriage?
13. Have you made a decision to never marry?
14. What would you tell your sixteen-year-old daughter about marriage?

QUESTIONS FOR STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

What are the reasons you have never married?

To what extent has being an African American woman influenced your choice to remain single at this point in your life?

How has your family influenced your decision to remain single?

What did you learn from your parents about being married?

Did you have single role models when you were growing up? Do you have single role models now? How have they influenced you?

To what extent does “family” play a different role in your life today than in the life of your White counterparts?

Tell me about your experiences dating?

What qualities attract you to a man?

What would you say about the difference in maturity between African American men your age and you? To what extent do you find that African American men your age share your career focus? Your drive and ambition?

What would it take for you to get married at this point in your life?

What would you gain?

What would you give up?

How would you balance career and family if you were to get married?

Does spirituality play a major role in your life? If so, in what way?

Appendix VII
INFORMED CONSENT

Thesis Title: Understanding how High Functioning African American Women perceive marriage and their thoughts about remaining single.

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Benefits and risks

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Signature

Date

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

Linda Allen-Benton
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VITA

Linda Allen-Benton lives with her husband in Fort Washington, Maryland. She has a Bachelors degree in psychology from the University of Maryland. Before entering the Marriage and Family Therapy program at Virginia Tech, she spent over 30-years in the federal service. While completing the program, Ms. Allen-Benton interned at Ft. Belvoir's Family Life Ministry Center and the Washington Assessment and Therapy Services clinic in Lanham, Maryland. In addition, she is a mediator in the Multi-door program at the District of Columbia Family Court.