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ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD* AND OTHER
WORKS: THE CATALYST FOR UNDERSTANDING IMBALANCES OF BLACK
LOVE AS SEEN IN POP CULTURE

by

Dale Michelle Williams

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the respected teachers who left a legacy for me to follow:

My Great Grandmother

Mozella Marrs Vaughn

September 4, 1895--September 4, 1991

My Grandmother

Odessa S. Boyd

October 17, 1921--December 11, 1997

My Professor

Dr. Reginald Martin

May 15, 1956--July 27, 2018

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Abstract

The state of African American romantic love and marriage has garnered increased scrutiny over the last 20 years, sparking great attention among scholarly studies, pop culture, and mainstream media to combat marriage decline. African American literature offers a complex view of marriage and romantic love via the works of Zora Neale Hurston as early as the 1930s that predates other studies. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick* are the catalysts for understanding black romantic love, questions of marriage, and concerns about black male and female relationships then and now. A close read of Hurston's works and studies of African American romantic love and marriage, via statistics and mainstream media, reveals the complexities of how black love is studied under the umbrella of marriage. This work argues that Hurston's point of view impacts current studies and sheds light on representations of black love.

Keywords: Zora Neale Hurston, black love, African American marriage, marriage decline, romantic love.

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Introduction

I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up nor awake my love, until he pleases (Song of Solomon 3:5)

In the late 20th century, discussions about black love began to surge in the context of romantic and marriage relations amid declining numbers of marriage. As a result, articles, conferences, television shows, social media outlets, movies, documentaries, and self-help books sparked renewed energy into the 21st century, as marriage continues to decrease. For African Americans, specifically, the decline has been most severe. Pinderhughes (2002) said in his study of black love and marriage, that “in the wake of historical and current forces the state of African American marriage is regarded as grim and expected to get worse” (p. 273). In the next decade, Ralph Banks (2011) sparked controversy with his book *Is Marriage for White People? How the African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone*. Ten years after Banks’ book, adding to a lengthy discussion about black love, Emory professor Dianne Stewart published *Black Women, Black Love: America’s War on African American Marriage* (2020). In short, black love in the last two centuries has become a point of discussion and study, but it is not a new phenomenon. Pinderhughes (2002) points out that the study of black love did not take place officially until the 1960s when scholars began to seek answers to rising divorce rates and decrease in marriages.

Historically, romantic love for black people has been overshadowed by external forces, such as slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Great Depression, the Great Migration, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Arts Movement. However, despite historically tragic circumstances, African American literature offered a

complex examination of black love as early as the 1930s. Critics Jelks and Hardison (2019) admit in their study of black love that little scholarship exists that examines black love deeply. In their recent reexamination of E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family in the United States* published in 1939, they note that his book focused on every aspect of black life except love. In fact, Jelks and Hardison (2019) conclude:

Frazier never inquires about love in all its dimensions among black families, including his own. His study focuses on the structural damage of racism and its consequences for black households, but would it not have been equally valuable for him to consider that what sustained black Americans was love—communal, familial, and sexual? (p. 109)

Rather than looking solely at Frazier, these critics in the same examination look to Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to establish a true example of black love. Jelks and Hardison (2019) explain:

Hurston's book describes in lush and vibrant terms all that makes black people laugh and cry, all that rest at the foundation of their humanities: their fallenness, jealousies, affections, and triumphs. Hurston asserted in her story that black men and women have had and known love, however troubled or denied it may be. (p. 111)

Jelks and Hardison (2019) add that it is “the artists-the poets, novelists, dramatists, and filmmaker who have exposed and taught black love that too often has been forgotten by “sociological lamentations” (p. 111). Their commentary is true; however, before the “the artists-the poets, novelists, dramatists, and filmmakers” and even the leading black sociologist dealt with the topic of black love, there was Hurston.

This study situates Hurston's work as the catalyst for understanding the issues and imbalances of examinations of black love past and present. What leading sociologists such as Frazier failed to depict in their studies in the 1930s, Hurston had been writing about all along. Frazier may have fallen short in not including black love in his research of the black family, but Zora Neale Hurston did not shy away from the topic of romantic love between a black man and woman during the Harlem Renaissance, which began in the 1920s. This study also seeks to expose Hurston's introduction of the topic of black love and reveal issues that black love grapples with today. More than 80 years ago, Hurston questioned relationships that follow a Eurocentric paradigm, specifically the structure of marriage. She dealt with power shifts of women earning wages, marrying later in life or not at all. She questioned the significance of love and challenged marriage without love. She also addressed men who grappled with power and masculinity in love relationships and marriages. Today popular culture explores these same targeted areas when reviewing black romantic love and marriage. This examination of Hurston's input will bring understanding to a topic that has steadily gained momentum in scholarly research and mainstream media as people look for answers to resolve a growing problem. This research not only brings Hurston's works to the forefront on the topic of black romantic love and marriage, but also suggests that the topic of black love and its dilemmas is not new.

In celebration of the 80th anniversary of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 2017, the University of Kansas, along with other supporters, sponsored a weeklong national symposium. At the symposium, Jelks called Hurston's novel "the only mainstream and canonized romance novel that has been written by an African American

about and for black Americans” (“Inquiring into 'Black Love',” 2019, par. 8). In agreement with Jelks’ statement, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the primary foundation for my analysis because it exhibits Hurston’s positions on and explorations of black love. The novel redirected readers away from external problems that haunted black people, such as discrimination, oppression, colorism, and poverty, and gave them autonomy to focus on what they could control, which was their hearts. Hurston gave both men and women the ability to decide for themselves who and how they would love, which for African Americans only came into full fruition in the later part of the 19th century after the Civil War. For Hurston and her characters, love is liberating. Despite themes of black love being overshadowed by survival, sacrifice, and sometimes loss, Hurston approaches the theory of love by minimizing these obstacles and centering her novel on the quest for true love. This quest was equally important for African Americans who had been denied love, such as Nanny – the grandmother in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. However, Hurston’s storytelling moves readers past the effects of slavery from Nanny’s generation to the protagonist, Janie Crawford, who has been liberated to a different fate.

The novel was both forward thinking and timeless when published September 18, 1937 (Hardison & Jelks, 2020, p. v). This bold publication was before its time and made little sense to many African Americans who had more important problems to overcome.

As Meisenhelder (2001) explains:

When Hurston critiqued relationships between black women and men, yet another fracture in her audience presented itself. For her, as for black women writers since her day, the treatment of intragroup conflict between black women and

men presented real problems of reception not only with black men but also with potentially racist white audiences. (p. 13)

Hurston's decision to center her novel around relationships was a huge risk. To her credit, even before the publication of *Their Eyes*, Hurston had already dealt with themes of love. In 2020, new "recovered" literature resurfaced by Hurston, and a compilation of her short stories was published in the collection *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick*. Eight of the lost short stories "challenge readers to rethink their assumptions about Hurston's literary interest" (West, 2020, p. xv). In addition, some of these short stories are precursors to themes explored in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. West (2020) notes in the introduction of *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick* that the short story "Magnolia Flower" (1926) reaches its full potential in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (xxx). Many of the short stories center around relationships. Scholars of Hurston are beginning to surmise that love was her central concern. As West (2020) points out, "Hurston typically submerged her explorations of such serious topics within plots revolving around romantic relationships between men and women" (p. xvi). So why has Hurston not been more fully credited for illuminating the emotional and romantic needs of African Americans? Perhaps West (2020) answers this question best when she admits that "This new volume provides a much-needed correction to Hurston's legacy and better reflects the true breadth of her subject matter" (p. xv). Howard (2021,1977) further explains:

Hurston's works clearly convey the idea that people, regardless of their color or their peculiar burdens, must inevitably struggle with some of the same life

problems. Although several of life's problems interested Hurston, she seemed particularly interested in the problems that beset the state of marriage. (par. 1) West (2020) concludes that, “one of the reasons *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has a current popular readership is that the issues her characters wrestle with continue to be relevant more than eighty years after the book’s initial publication” (p. xxiv). In other words, this novel never goes out of style; it speaks directly to the heart and soul of its people even today.

While Hurston’s novel was ahead of its time, it still maintained traditional troupes. Readers see these traditional ideas in her cultivation of Janie’s grandmother and mother via their backgrounds, which is in keeping with African American protest literature. Up until around 1937, protest literature was prevalent; thus, African American women’s desires were quickly brushed under the rug as the hardships of the race overshadowed romantic expression. For women in general, it was not beneficial for them to express their feelings romantically because 19th century gender conventions required modesty for respectability (Foster & Davis, 2009). It was considered embarrassing and unladylike for women to express their feelings openly. Consequently, slave narratives by black women, for example, were often prefaced with apologies for calling attention to themselves by publishing their thoughts and experiences (Foster & Davis, 2009). Additionally, spirituality, religion, and morality are recurring themes in antebellum and postbellum African American women’s literature (Foster & Davis, 2009). Even so, there were African American female writers who attempted to incorporate love relationships into their work prior to Hurston with a slightly different intention.

In 1892, African American female writer Frances E. W. Harper published the novel *Iola Leroy*. According to critics, this is the first documented black romance novel written by and about a black woman. In addition, Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins in 1900 published *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*; however, both of these works took on a more political approach. This is what differentiates Hurston's novel; she frees herself from the pressure of trying to be a political spokesperson for the race. Hurston's audience and intentions were also different, not to mention times had changed. By her own admission, "Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem," but according to Hurston (1942) she was sick of the subject (p. 118). However, her foremothers did not have this freedom or opportunity. As Dubey (2009) explains, "Novelists such as Frances Harper or Pauline Hopkins play a unique twist on the sentimental romance, blurring the boundaries between private and public spheres by inventing home spaces that are hubs of intellectual and political debate" (p. 150). Dubey (2009) adds that all the significant married couples presented in the two novels are cemented by a commitment to racial uplift rather than romantic love. According to critics, Hopkins was known to be a strong voice for African American women; thus, it is believed that she deliberately incorporated politics into her work (Cordell, 2006). One can presume that, perhaps, these authors' attempts to incorporate love relationships in their work had more to do with showing equality and humanity rather than love.

Another issue as it relates to these authors' portrayal of love are the depictions of the relationships in their novels. Often these relationships would center around a female mulatto heroine, who looked white with blue eyes. For many African American readers,

this proved to be problematic; nonetheless, this would become a common archetype in early depictions of beauty and love in African American literature. To present-day readers, the intended uplifting agenda of these novels is riddled with contradictions, as declarations of racial pride came from heroes and heroines who were almost always light-skinned enough to pass for white (Dubey, 2009). Consequently, readers protested such representations. Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, who served as the editor of the *Colored American Magazine*, was openly criticized for her creation of mulatto women having relationships with white men (Cordell, 2006). One loyal white reader of the magazine complained that Hopkins favored miscegenation as a romantic ideal, and in a letter to the editor asked, “Does that mean that your novelists can imagine no love beautiful and sublime within the range of the colored race, for each other?” (Cordell, 2006). As one critic explains, Hopkins’ “commitment to ‘racial uplift’ appears compromised by the prevalence of light-skinned heroines throughout her work and the consistency with which she argues for romantic reconciliation between black and white characters” (Cordell, 2006, p. 53). Some historians perceive Hopkins’ depiction of black and white characters intermingling as a way of promoting equality; still, most of her heroines experience hardships from race matters. Foster and Davis (2009) think that “these writers created characters that model the personal sacrifices and dangers that African Americans faced” and they often showed that those persons did not always survive or succeed despite their best efforts (p. 29). These writers may have meant well but probably caused more harm than good, since the mulatto prototype struggling with life and love would trickle down to other African American writers with similar images and storylines. In most instances, the heroine would struggle with being a mulatto and ultimately suffer under the weight of

it. Consequently, rather than focusing on the romantic relationships, these books were often more about tragedy and misfortune than love. This would eventually fall under the troupe of the “tragic mulatto,” which emerged as a prevalent theme in 19th and 20th century literature. Eventually, as women evolved so did the literature, but the theme of black love or lack thereof still carried remnants of the troubled mulatto heroine.

Breaking Tradition

By 1920 things had changed tremendously for women, especially African American women, as more were going to college and seeking an education. In addition, the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote, and this was the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance period. During this period, an influx of African American women writers emerged. More than one hundred black female Renaissance writers have been discovered since that time; popular favorites like Angelina Weld Grimké, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Marita Bonner, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston found themselves writing about various themes, but the mulatto image remained prevalent. Like the female authors before them, writers like Fauset and Larsen focused on themes of passing and mulatto heroines. Hurston, like her counterparts, showed signs of the motif of a mulatto presence in her work as well. However, Hurston makes a deliberate attempt to separate her main character in *Their Eyes are Watching God* from her mixed background. In the first chapter, Hurston describes Janie’s skin as “real dark” to remove the stigma of the tragic mulatto from her main character’s appearance. Yet, traces of the theme are present as Janie’s father is white, just like the fathers of her grandmother (Nanny) and mother. Hurston separates Janie from the stereotype, but the mother and grandmother would not be so lucky, as both women were sexually violated, and these

violations resulted in them giving birth to children. For Hurston, Janie represents a new trope that does not fall in the category of the “tragic mulatto.” Hurston seems to detach herself from the trope of the “tragic mulatto” by showing in her characterization of Janie a strong disconnection from the mother’s and grandmother’s past. It is here that Hurston reveals her disdain of the past, which represents the ideas and lifestyles of the mother and grandmother, by offering Janie a different future. This future gives Janie freedom of choice, especially in romantic love.

Despite Hurston’s attempt to establish a different female character, the book was met with harsh reviews. Hurston’s innovative thinking did not fit in with the elite literary world of which she was a part. The Harlem Renaissance had its own agenda, and black love was not part of it. Understanding the emotional needs of women, especially black women, was simply not the priority nor was it openly expressed in literature for African American men or women at the time. Traditionally in African American literature the sweet spot of romance has been challenging for the authors to exclusively explore. Yet, Hurston awoke romantic emotional desires like fulfillment, passion, affection, and erotica in black love. As a writer, Hurston freed herself from the responsibility of what others expected of her and wrote therapeutically an authentic story of black men and black women. Early critics felt Hurston was not culturally sensitive or socially conscious, and that her depiction of African Americans did not reflect racial uplift. In her defense, Hurston touched on societal and racial issues that added to the hardships between black men and women early in her novel. However, she did not stay stagnant there; rather, she provided her main and minor characters the space, opportunity, and setting to work through their issues by allowing them to understand the true meaning of love on their

own terms. Hurston recognized the disadvantages of the times but did not allow her main characters to suffer because of them. Hurston's story walks readers through a process of the discovery of love by questioning its meaning throughout. She studies it from its infancy, starting with a thought in Janie's head as a teen, to its maturity when Janie is older. This type of analysis of African Americans' thought processes about romantic intentions proved that it was not so much the external pressures affecting black love, but rather the perceptions and ideas they had about love, such as male and female roles, suitable mates, or how one should operate in love, that deteriorated some relationships. To correct this, Hurston looks at love from the point of view of a female adolescent who has certain fantasies and expectations about love and marriage. When these fantasies are confronted by reality, and the woman reaches maturity, she then has a better understanding of what love really means.

However, what does love really mean? Initially, Hurston defines love in the novel through Janie's young eyes, as she rationalizes the meaning of marriage. Janie explains it the following way:

Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant. It was just so. Janie felt glad of the thought, for then it wouldn't seem so destructive and mouldy. She wouldn't be so lonely anymore. (Hurston, 1995, p 191)

On the other hand, Nanny describes love as a nuisance, as something that gets in the way. "Lawd have mussy! "Dats de very prong all us black women gits hung on" Dis Love!" (Hurston, 1995, p. 193). Janie realizes later when she finally experiences love how misguided her thinking has been. Toward the end of the novel as she has become older,

she defines her initial thoughts and experiences in what Hurston's calls "mis-love." Janie again tries to rationalize love when she says, "Most humans didn't love one another nohow, and this mis-love was so strong even common blood couldn't overcome it all the time" (Hurston, 1995, p. 247). On another occasion, she alludes to people's lack of understanding of love in her response to the Eatonville community's gossip about her relationship with Tea Cake. Janie responds, "Now they got to look into me loving Tea Cake and see whether it was done right or not! They don't know if life is a mess of corn-meal dumplings and if love is a bed-quilt!" (Hurston, 1995, p. 179). Hurston makes it clear that most people are misinformed about love, and they really do not know what it is. However, Janie triumphantly has not missed "dis love"; she has finally been able to experience what Hurston explains as "self-crushing" love, which is how Janie describes her love for Tea Cake. This expression not only speaks to the loss of self, but some scholars think it has biblical implications.

As a preacher's daughter, Hurston was familiar with the *Bible* and often referenced it in her work. Popular passages that speak to such selfless love that would have been familiar to her audience include: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son..." (John 3:16). "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). By using biblical allusions, Hurston does not leave the essence and example of love undefined. She explains in her novel that "self-crushing love" manifests when your soul crawls out from its hiding place (p. 279). Her use of the

word “soul” has spiritual connotations. This level of depth and desperation between a black man and black woman is something Hurston believes most people miss. She revealed more than anything that both African American men and women not only needed to be loved, but they needed to understand it, which, as she explains, has to do with the needs of the soul. Hurston equates love most to a feeling, not a belief. She describes it in her autobiography this way, “When I fall in love, I can feel the bump...Love may be a sleepy creeping thing with some others but is a mighty wakening thing in me” (Hurston, 1942, p. 257). Hurston not only breaks down that awakening feeling called love, but she utilizes her main character Janie to continually examine its meaning and manifestation. This, in turn, causes readers to question and study the weight of love in their own lives, making Hurston’s input and study of love beneficial and relevant to her audiences.

How Black Love is Studied

When black love is studied, research must represent more than mere outcomes based on systematic racism and hardships and delve into the ideas and beliefs African Americans subscribe to that may or may not be the best options for their success. Hurston created a model that challenged the way love is perceived. The first thing she did was to separate marriage and love. Nonetheless, black romantic love over the years has been mostly studied by looking at marriage. Hurston proves this to be inaccurate because as her novel reveals “marriage does not equate love” (Hurston, 1995, p. 194). Most researchers not only study black love based on marriage, but also on sociopolitical factors that make it difficult for marriages to flourish. According to Pinderhughes (2002), this is a grave mistake; he questions this approach by asking, “Is it not possible to understand

African American marriages fully without attention to the social, economic, racial, and historical factors that have stressed male-female relationships beyond those stresses experienced by majority couples” (p. 269). Even in the most recent study by Stewart (2020), she bases her research of black love on the long-term effects of slavery, the welfare system, mass incarceration, and black male and female ratio imbalances, to name a few. While these factors play a part, they tend to over emphasize these problems which can defeat African Americans’ ability to combat the marriage decline. These current factors then take the place of historical ones; therefore, African Americans must be careful not to trade one set of problems for the other by focusing on outside issues while ignoring internal ones when it comes to black love. Hurston would have suggested a more proactive cultural approach.

Most studies of black love signal out one gender over the other. For example, Stewart (2020), like many others, focuses exclusively on black women; she characterizes “black women’s lack of options for meaningful love and partnership with black men as the nation’s most hidden and thus neglected civil rights issue to date” (p. 5). Stewart’s attempt to spotlight this as a plight affecting African American women takes the focus off black men, which suggest this is an isolated problem for black women only. Stewart’s reasoning speaks to Hurston’s most famous quote by Nanny in *Their Eyes are Watching God*: “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world” (Hurston, 1995, p. 186). Nanny’s way of thinking places the burden on African American women, when it is not their burden to bear alone. Stewart (2020) ignores that black love is a shared responsibility between African American men and women. The declining marriage and relationship numbers among African American women may support Stewart’s claim, but the reality is when

black love is studied through sociopolitical factors the responsibility and desire to be proactive about love becomes displaced. Quite frankly, “The idea that laws and circumstances stopped African Americans from developing intimate, loving, and martial and family relationships is naïve if not simply absurd” (Foster, 2010, p. 130).

In the 2019 documentary *The Black Love Blueprint: Ending the War Between Black Men and Women*, historian Maghan Keita admits that history tells us how we might be successful in black love and that we have the potential to acquire that success despite dismal reports. Clearly, a more positive approach to studying black love is needed. One of the reason researchers have focused so much on negative circumstances is because of jaded statistics and mainstream media that have caused many African Americans to not only give up on love, but also to give up on each other. Dr. Cleo Mango and S. Tia Brown in *The Black Love Blueprint: Ending the War Between Black Men and Women* documentary warn that current statistics give dismal reports and numbers and do not paint the entire picture, and purposely contribute to stereotypes and discouragement about black love (Boyce Watkins Films, 2019). The documentary blames mainstream media for how African Americans react to and perceive love, which, in turn, feeds studies like Stewart’s. Stanley’s 2016 article “Black Men for Black Women?” claims:

Many single black women feel that there is a shortage of eligible black men because of the onslaught of negative messages in the news media and popular culture about black women and antiquated societal standards and pressures that still equate marriage with success. (par. 4)

However, Stanley (2016) explains that the traditional idea of African American men and women marrying has changed especially when you factor in “people who are lesbian,

gay, bisexual and transgender; people who are open to dating interracially and across age groups; and people who aren't interested in dating at all, the landscape looks a little different" (par. 3). Additionally, Banks (2012) points out in his research that many African American women have made conscious choices not to get married. Hurston weighs in on this by showing examples of how marriage and love are groomed into the minds of African American men and women, sometime hindering their ability to be successful.

To combat the negative influence of mainstream media, black TV networks began to create their own positive images of black love with shows like TV One's 2017 docu-series *Black Love*, which led to more African American networks such as BET (Black Entertainment Television) and OWN (Oprah Winfrey Network) to also produce black dramas, docu-series, and reality shows to create positive images of black love. These attempts to incorporate black love stories is not far from Hurston's point of view in her essay "What White Publishers Won't Publish." In this essay, published more than a decade after *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 1950, Hurston writes that she is amazed "by the Anglo-Saxon's lack of curiosity about the internal lives and emotions of the Negroes ..." (p. 54); she also explains "the lack of literature about the higher emotions and love life of upperclass Negroes and the minorities in general" is problematic (p. 55). Hurston is clear that African Americans have a love language of their own, that publishers refuse to recognize. However, it was not just what white publishers would not publish, but also what the African American writers had been persuaded not to focus on. What Hurston explains about white publishers and producers in the 1950s is that African Americans in literature, television, and film have traditionally been dictated by white

publishers and producers, who as Hurston (1950) put it, shied “away from romantic stories about Negroes... unless the story or play involves racial tension” (p. 55). Hurston attempted to correct this by establishing real romantic relationships in her depiction of African Americans. To date this has been an ongoing pursuit that black America has sought to combat. As Hurston’s words ring true, the lack of representations of black love is a contributing factor to its decline. Although the representation of black love is slowly improving, the lack of consistent portraits has been more damaging than any so-called external factors. Nevertheless, by the 1970s things began to improve. Slowly, movies like *Souther* (1972), *Claudine* (1974), and *Mahogany* (1975) began to show images of black love on the big screen.

Their Eyes Were Watching God

By 1978 *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, after being in obscurity more than thirty years, was republished and found a more accepting audience in a slightly different world. The reintroduction of the novel according to its publisher, Harper and Row, sold 75,000 copies in less than a month (Giles, 2017). Thanks to Alice Walker¹, the novel changed the course of African American literature and influenced other authors to follow in Hurston’s footsteps. Hurston would have been pleased with its reintroduction as the book had entered a space where films about African Americans relationships were also exploring such themes. Finally, Hurston’s words had caught up with society. As a result, the author found a more receptive audience because times had changed. Whereas 1937 was not a viable time for such discussions, Hurston’s words had reached fertile ground. By the late 1970s, women were coming out of the sexual revolution and had a better sense of what

¹ In 1975 Alice Walker published an article, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" in the March issue of *Ms.* magazine prompting the discovery of Zora Neale Hurston.

they wanted in their relationships. Hurston's book found a group of women who were less concerned with financial dependability, unlike generations before, but sought to be stimulated mentally, emotionally, and physically. "Prior to the sexual revolution, it was unacceptable to engage in sex before marriage. Therefore, the desire to enter into sexual relations may have been an incentive to marry" (Dixon, 2009, p. 34). The rationale to enter marriage to avoid sexual temptation is also alluded to in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. As soon as Janie's grandmother spied her kissing Johnny Taylor, she rushed the young girl prematurely into marriage with Logan Killicks. Consequently, Hurston's book sparked the conversation of why people marry, but critically the book took off in many directions.

Literary Reviews and Criticism

To the scholarly world, Hurston's novel seemed like a breath of fresh air so much so that a plethora of research from every topic imaginable ranging from socio-political, spiritual development, voice, independence, female empowerment, self-discovery, triumph, feminism, intersectionality, identity politics, and African American folklore emerged. She is studied across many disciplines, such as anthropology, philosophy, sociology, American literature, and African American studies. Her versatility is an amazing feat, and, with each decade since her discovery, students find new ways to explore her work. Despite all this, literary reviews and criticisms were slow to focus on Hurston's themes and curiosity about matters of the heart. Some critics even questioned Hurston's romantic intentions. However, after the novel's reintroduction, June Jordan (1974) coined *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as the "most successful, convincing, and exemplary novel of blacklove that we have had" (p. 6). Other critics such as Lillie P.

Howard (1977) concentrated on romantic idealism in the novel, while Cheryl Wall affirmed the novel as a true love story, and Ann duCille brought in a theory called “coupling convention”² to describe relationships in the novel. Each of these critics bring to life different components of how love works in the novel, and their research is pivotal to understanding its functionality.

However, the bulk of scholarly research on Hurston, which is enormous, does not concentrate specifically on black love. Hajjari et al. (2016) agree that Hurston’s novel has mostly been studied under the rubric of African American folklore tradition and suggests that reading the novel out of its traditional context reveal its other strategic aspects, which deserve equal attention. Christy Davis (2013) adds that “A sincere reading of Hurston is lacking in current scholarship” (p. 5). More recent research presented by Hajjari et al. (2016) looks “at Janie’s vision in the context of Hurston’s romanticism as a school of thought rather than a romantic relationship” (p. 39). These critics compare the similarities of the protagonist to an English romantic ideology, which is worth exploring. However, Hurston (1950) is clear about her intentions as a writer and explains further in “What White Publishers Won’t Print” that literature is “supposed to hold up a mirror to nature...With only the fractional...portrayed, a true picture of Negro life in America cannot be” (p. 57). According to Hurston (1950), when black people are not properly represented, “A great principle of national art has been violated” (p. 57). Unlike the novel’s first publication that went out of print, this time Hurston’s art and portrayal of African American life and love would remain extant and relevant.

² Ann duCille argues in *The Coupling Convention* that from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1940s, African American writers, women in particular, appropriated the fictive marriage plot or "coupling convention" for the expressly political purposes of challenging patriarchal ideology, claiming political freedom, and asserting female authority.

Pop Culture

In early 2000s, just when the topic of black romantic love began to soar, media mogul Oprah Winfrey identified *Their Eye Were Watching God* as one of her favorite books, generating again another publication of the novel. In 2005, Winfrey produced a made-for-television movie based on the book. Hurston's book had crossed over from scholarly territory to mainstream media and became a household name. Every woman young and old wanted a Tea Cake, and every man wanted a Janie. As a result, Janie, the main character, would become the poster child for recognizing the needs of African American women romantically, and Tea Cake would reshape the image of what a black woman was looking for in a man. Hurston's work, though written in the 1930s, is still relatable to late 20th and 21st century audiences to the extent that culture critic Beyoncé also rebirthed Hurston in 2016 when she used imagery from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in the *Lemonade* album (Giles, 2017, par. 5).

Hurston is embedded in pop culture; the exploration of a woman falling in love and finding fulfillment with a younger man was unheard of in her day, though it is presently a familiar occurrence. Hurston explored this dynamic, which is known in pop culture as a "cougar."³ The term cougar found popularity in the 21st century; the term is used to identify an older woman who dates a younger man. For readers, Hurston's book reflected familiar territory. The author proved that for Janie and black women to find true love they may have to step outside of the box. In Janie, Hurston created an African

³ A popular term of an older woman with a younger man; its origin is loosely based on the book *Cougar: A Guide for Older Women Dating Younger Men*, by Valerie Gibson. This term found popularity in early 2000s.

American woman who finds herself independent, strong, and wealthy, but ultimately alone.

Amid the startling statistics, 20th and 21st century black women found kinship with Janie. From a masculine point of view, Hurston demonstrated how black men's financial stability is tied to their emotional vulnerability, manhood, and wellbeing, a well-known point in the bestselling relationship book *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man: What Men Really Think About Love, Relationships, Intimacy, and Commitment* (2014). Equally, Hurston revealed what African American men and women needed from each other. It is these pivotal points in her work that insert her into the conversation of cultural concerns about love. Hurston's work speaks to behaviors and ideologies that are being researched today, further suggesting the conversation about black love originated with her. What readers learn from "her use of language, characters and plots" is that "she interrogates and disputes the very stereotype New Negroes objected to and treats subjects that continue to trouble American culture today" (West, 2020, p. xxiv). In short, Hurston prepared us long ago for what perplexes us now; we must look to our past for answers to heal our future, so that African American men and women do not "mis-love."

Methodology and Research Chapters

West (2020) says in her summation of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that the novel implicitly confronts these six questions:

What is the purpose and function of marriage? What does it mean to be a woman particularly a married woman? How should men behave? What are his responsibilities? How do couples navigate or share power? What is the community's role in negotiating difficult or abusive relationships? (p. xxiv)

To solidify Hurston's works as a primary resource in understanding behaviors, traditions, and stereotypes of black romantic love, West's questions will serve as a guide to this research in establishing Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and other works as the catalyst for understanding the issues and imbalances of black love as portrayed in pop culture.

Chapter 2, entitled "Pop Culture: The Aftermath of *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man*,⁴ explains the current state of black love and how just about anybody can become a relationship coach. This has led to a profitable profession for many people whose only experience is serial relationships. Chapter 2 seeks to bring readers into the pitfalls of popular culture when it comes to discussions about black love and relationships. This chapter challenges the bestselling book *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (2009), a self-help book to help African American women understand their men, from a feminist point of view by countering the author's ideas. *Act Like a Lady* demonstrates people's (black women's specifically) desperation to find solutions to love. An understanding of the history of relationship books and current statistics of African American love relationships will give readers an understanding of the state of black love in America. The book is told from the point of view of an African American man, who, like Janie, finds the love of his life the third time around. Its author Steve Harvey, a radio host, actor, and successful comedian had already reached national popularity, but the nonfiction book immediately thrust him into the spotlight as a relationship expert, despite him having no proper qualifications. Yet the book became a national bestseller producing a second publication

⁴ Previously published in *#blacklove: The Intricacies and Intimacies of Romantic Love in Black Relationships*.

in 2014. For African American women, the book brought a better understanding of African American men. However, the book is problematic, and its ideas take on a more antiquated misogynistic “Nanny” (grandmother) viewpoint. Like the relationship help books in the 1990s, Harvey’s theories lack originality. On the one hand, in relation to black love, Harvey is appreciated for exposing women to the so-called secrets of men. On the other hand, some of the advice is hard to stomach. Despite his book’s success, including generating a talk show and movie deal, it did little to bridge the gap between black men and women. However, it did provide African American men an opportunity to express their desires and be heard. Harvey is considered the first African American male to address African American women directly, sparking a trail of books by black male authors about relationships to follow. Harvey’s book continues to be one of the leading relationship books for African American women, as it opened the door to much-needed conversations. Thus, when studying black love via popular culture, the book, no matter how outdated it might seem, must be explored.

Hurston (1995) wanted to know “Did marriage end the cosmic loneliness of the unmated? Did marriage compel love like the sun the day?” (p. 191). After reviewing in chapter 2 the current state of black love in pop culture, chapters 3-5 explore what *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick* convey about marriage and love and how it is applicable today. Using West’s first two questions: What is the purpose and function of marriage? and What does it mean to be a woman, particularly a married one? Chapter 3 “So this was Marriage!” interrogates Hurston’s view of marriage. The phrase “So this was a marriage!” found in the second chapter of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* speaks to the preconceived notions Janie has about

marriage prior to getting married (Hurston, 1995, p. 181). Chapter 2 of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* sets the tone for the entire novel and represents a turning point in the story for Janie as she quickly goes from being a young girl to a wife. Hurston presents two opposing views in this chapter between Nanny's and Janie's ideas about the purpose and function of marriage. Janie's idea of marriage has to do with love, romance, and passion. Nanny, on the other hand, views marriage as providing protection, stability, and security. Janie's idea is in line with current research, which suggests that people still want to marry for love. Now that gender roles are less rigid in marriages, more people marry looking for emotional fulfillment and connection. While Janie's view of marriage supports current views, Nanny's views, which are traditional, are slowly creeping back into popular culture via what is called modern-day arranged marriages that challenge the rationale of emotionally based relationships, where compatibility, beliefs, and goals create a stronger bond. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick* provide a balance between Nanny's and Janie's views on marriage--a balance people still consider today.

While *Their Eyes Were Watching God* primarily focuses on a female protagonist, Hurston did not ignore African American men in her thoughts about marriage and love. Although it is not an area she is often credited with, Hurston captured the needs and desires of Black men and what it took for them to be men in America. Chapter 4: "What Kinda Man is You?" speaks to West's third and fourth questions: How should a man behave? and What are his responsibilities? While African American women seem to be the primary focus of the research on black love, African American men are equally affected. In much of the literary criticism of *Their Eyes*, Janie is the focus; however, men

are not excluded in this sentimental novel. As West (2020) points out in her introduction to *Hitting a Straight Lick*, “While Hurston has become known for her depiction of female characters, she began her career exploring masculine identities in both the North and the South” (p. xxvi). It can be argued that Hurston demonstrates the needs of her male characters just as much as her female characters. She exposes male insecurities causing readers to see black men in a vulnerable light. This chapter looks at the role of African American men and how they operate as lovers, partners, and husbands. It also gives an in-depth examination of the male characters in both *Their Eyes* and *Hitting a Straight Lick* to demonstrate how African American men express love. A review of Hurston’s portrayal of what constitutes a man feeling like he is a man will show little differences today. Although gender roles have decreased, many men still want to be considered as the man of the house. “What kinda man is you?” is a question that Mrs. Turner in *Their Eyes* asks her husband during a volatile situation, when he fails to defend or protect her; she, of course, is questioning his manhood. This is a question all African American males must decide in the wake of their love relationships.

Chapter 5: “Everybody’s Grown!” covers the last of West’s implications about *Their Eyes* by recognizing “How do couples navigate and share power? What is the community’s role in negotiating difficult relationships?” Hurston’s belief about shared power and responsibility in love relationships not only comes to fruition in her fictional work, but she writes about it in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, as she describes her love relationship with A.W. P., her inspiration for the novel. Hurston (1942) says:

He begged me to give up my career, marry him and live outside of New York City. I really wanted to do anything he wanted me to do, but that one thing I could not do. It was not just my contract with my publishers, it was that I had things clawing inside of me that must be said. I could not see that my work should make any difference in marriage. He was all and everything else to me but that. One did not conflict with the other in my mind. But it was different with him. He felt that he did not matter to me enough. He was the master kind. All, or nothing, for him. (p. 144-145)

Hurston explores power in her male and female relationships, showing that a power imbalance can cause major issues. As shown in her own life and in the lives of her characters, this is an internal problem that haunts romantic relationships. The phrase “Everybody’s Grown” comes from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* when Janie and Joe Starks arrive in the “colored” town of Eatonville, and Joe asks the people “Who tells y’all what to do?” (Hurston, 1995, p. 202). Joe assesses the lack of leadership and appoints himself mayor. Hurston dissects Joe’s need for control and the community’s submission to it. Joe’s control bleeds into his relationship with Janie, ultimately coming to a head. Hurston’s experience with A.W.P. in her autobiography mimics the power struggle that plays out with Janie and Joe Starks. Hurston (1942) describes in the novel, “That very manliness, sweet as it was, made us both suffer” (p. 143). Powershifts like Janie’s and Joe Starks’ are also seen in *Hitting a Straight Lick* and, in each instance, it becomes a threat to the relationships. Current research suggests that the “egalitarianism in husband-and-wife roles in today’s culture, does not diminish the gender/power issue for African Americans” (Pinderhughes, 2002, p. 275). Pinderhughes (2002) adds that the

research findings suggest that African American men highly value the traditional sex-love power distribution and male authority more than either African American women, white men, or white women (p. 275). Hurston's examples are in stride with current research. In addition, the role of the community as Hurston depicted can be very passive when getting involved in difficult relationships, although social media outlets have given a stronger voice to people's concerns. African American networks mentioned previously have taken on the responsibility to reeducate the public about healthy black love in hopes of creating positive outcomes. Hurston believed that the community played a role in the building up and tearing down of relationships. This is a belief shared today.

Ironically, in 1975 Alice Walker said in *Ms. Magazine*, "Zora Neale Hurston is one of the most significant unread authors in America" (p 74). Amazingly, forty-five years later, West says (2020), Hurston is the most popular author from the Harlem Renaissance, exceeding Langston Hughes. Yet, I contend Hurston is the most misread author in America when it comes to black love. While her art can be interpreted in many ways, she challenges readers to know and learn more of who they are and who they will become. Her work must be regarded and placed in the forefront of studies about black love because as Hurston (1942) admits her real interest "lies in what makes a man or woman do such-and-so" (p. 118). She was concerned with human nature, which does not change-another reason why she is reinvented, rediscovered, and redefined again and again. By looking at the subject of love through a single lens, through Hurston's eyes, one will discover the cultural difficulties that affect the African American community's ability to love freely without being haunted by the past and discouraged by the future.

The truth is: all ethnic groups are facing a decline in marriage. Based on Hurston's summation of marriage, that decline was inevitable. She proves that a marriage without love can be unbearable and creates a pattern of searching for something better. Although there may always be obstacles that contribute to imbalances in male and female ratios or racial injustices in systems that impact black relationships, Hurston challenges readers, particularly African Americans, to take matters into their own hands and love anyway, because biblically speaking, without love you are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2). Hurston requires readers to take a more internal look at love itself. While many critics argue that in the novel *Janie* found her voice, Hurston proved that Janie discovered her heart, making her life more productive and meaningful than it had ever been. Hurston defines black love not as a want but a need, not as unobtainable as statistics portray, but accessible. Even today, Hurston's rationale leads to models that other writers have mimicked. Hurston's formula in the creation of *Tea Cake* is best viewed in the plays and films produced by African American actor, director, producer, and screenwriter Tyler Perry. Perry's portrayals suggest that many women are looking in the wrong places, valuing materialism over quality (Harris & Tassie, 2012). Several of these women lean toward an affluent man, while avoiding the hard workers, like *Tea Cake*, who are good and have the best interest of the woman at heart. (Harris & Tassie, 2012).

Singlehandedly, Hurston, who had so little love in her life, exposed the complexities of love and provided space for other writers to do the same. *Song of Solomon* in the *Bible* charges the daughters of Jerusalem not to stir or awaken love until it pleases (Song of Solomon 8:4). Hurston woke love up for African American literature, and readers have been searching to understand its presence or lack thereof since. This

study reveals her observations of black love through her bestselling novel and posthumously published works. Her works pay homage to her contribution, commitment, and brilliant cultural understanding of her people, whom she loved and bring light to the dark issues with black love today. Hurston proves human nature does not change, nor can one control the matters of the heart because it sleeps and wakes on its own. That is the beauty of love as told by Hurston as she pleases.

Chapter 2

The Aftermath of *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* the Real Dilemma for African American Women in Finding the Love They Want

A version of this chapter was published in the *#blacklove: The Intricacies and Intimacies of Romantic Love in Black Relationships* (2020)

In understanding the climate for black love and marriage in Pop Culture, Steve Harvey's nonfiction book, *Act like a Lady, Think Like a Man*, is an example of the backlash from research data that reports black women are at a disadvantage when it comes to finding lasting partners in love and marriage. Responses to the research have caused such books to surge in popularity, despite their inability to add any real solutions or insight into understanding the problem. Yet Popular culture has lavished itself in messages that have fueled the perception that black women have few choices when it comes to finding suitable mates, thus they need assistance in doing so. Since most studies of Black love tends to report negative statistics based on socio political factors, Black women have been conditioned to believe that their romantic possibilities are limited, which has caused them to have a sense of disappointment and desperation. Thus, Harvey's book seemed to provide a source of hope for black women initially, but it did not generate much needed answers or add any real data or facts. It did, however, reveal the state of black love in Pop Culture and the need for more inclusive studies and equality-based research.

The first time I tried to read *Act like a Lady, Think Like a Man*, I could not make it

to the second half of the book. More than 10 years later, while exploring the decline of black marriages and failed relationships, the book emerged in my research. It became very clear that women, especially African American women, favored the message and saw it as valuable advice. Yet, I had serious issues with the book, which I kept to myself because I knew how others viewed the book. I, like others, favored Harvey's work as an entertainer. Appearing to disagree with the core theme of the book, for some, would be betrayal. I did not want to seem as if I, a black woman, was not supporting, Harvey, a black man. I also did not want to face the fact that this book and other statistics directly dealt with me as a single black female. More importantly, I feared the backlash that I knew accosted some African American female writers who have openly criticized their male counterparts on such issues. I did not desire the label of a feminist, nor the tagline of an angry black female. Yet I was angry and disappointed. Consequently, like many women in 2009, I bought the book, but unlike many, I found no value in it. It only proved what I knew all along: in order for women to be successful in long-term relationships, they had to do the bulk of the work.

The African American female is in a precarious position, and it is one that she cannot always speak freely about as sometimes there are no words to describe the awkward space in which she finds herself. She does not fit comfortably in the fabric of the American dream, which promises that if you work hard, you can have anything you want. Furthermore, everything about the African American female contradicts the American idea of womanhood. Yet the African American woman has worked hard, excelled, and in many cases become the best and the brightest. But among all of her accomplishments she appears to fail at obtaining a lasting relationship. Thus, Harvey's

message spoke directly to an apparent deficiency and a real need in African American females to obtain the one thing she could not seem to get—a good man. Unfortunately, Harvey’s book for many women did not turn out to be the perfect playbook, as advertised; rather, it was really a “how to book” for pleasing your man.

In exploring the basis of his message, Harvey (2009) said, that he began to impart advice to women based on one concept. that he lives by, which is “how to be a man.” He added that he spent countless hours talking to friends, all of whom are men. According to Harvey (2009), all men basically think in similar ways. In addition, Harvey explained that he teaches women to have a clear-eyed knowing approach to dealing with men on their terms, so that women can get exactly what they want. Yet this theory is problematic because women are still not getting what they want; and Harvey’s recommendations for women to transform themselves so that they can have successful relationships suggests that women cannot be who they are authentically and get what they want out of a relationship. Lang (2012) countered by saying, “The message here is that women can be strong and empowered, only as long as their power or success still caters to male power and ego” (par. 2). Thus, Harvey’s assertion that all men are simple, and women must think like them, is contradictory and bizarre. Although the book was written for women, Harvey (2009) admitted that initially he toyed with the idea of writing a book in response to his listeners from his radio show that would help men and women. However, he deliberately focused his entire book on women, although he has no authority as a female to speak from their point of view. When Harvey, says that he has the authority from “being a man” to tell women how to get a man, he takes on a masculine point of view, which puts women at a deficiency. Harvey says men are simple which implies that

the woman is either not smart enough or knowledgeable enough to maintain a relationship with a man.

The man in Harvey's book is an oxymoron because he is simple and also the unobtainable prize. Even more disturbing, Harvey tries to side with his female audience by referencing his daughters, saying that one day, "They will all grow up and reach for the same dream most women have: The husband. Some kids. A house. A happy life. True love" (p. 5). Yet these comments are nothing more than "old school sexism"; while some women want such things, not all are dreaming about them. Some women are dreaming of a successful career among other goals; thus, Harvey's remarks are steeped in traditional masculinity. Harvey, like a savior figure, says women need "... a voice, someone to help get them through and decipher the muck, so they can get what they're truly after" (p. 5). Thus, he promised in his book to reveal the secrets of men so that women can live happily ever after, believing that after these secrets are uncovered, they will understand the man better and have a fulfilling relationship. How desperate are we for relationship advice that this book, which ignores the totality of being an African American woman, serves as a self-help guide to finding a man by thinking like one?

Dominate by Nature

It can be argued that the African American woman is dominant by nature; furthermore, her African roots suggest she is matriarchal although some critics combat this research. Fortunately, this does not negate her experiences, which always antagonize traditional gender roles in American culture. Contrary to Harvey's message, rarely does the African American woman have the time to "Act like a Lady" and seldom is she not "Thinking like a Man." The truth of the matter is that her thinking like a man is what has

contributed to her singleness. The African American woman is often the foundation of her family; if she is not the head of her household, she usually runs it. Many African American women, who have significant others, still complain of taking on the bulk of the responsibility in the household; therefore, seemingly doing it alone. Moynihan (1965) wrote that black women were violating traditional gender roles by being too strong and independent. He suggested that black men should participate in the military in order to masculinize themselves. These comments, of course, infuriated the African American male community at the time. Over the years, many scholars disputed and dismissed his matriarch thesis as an insult to African American men. Yet what Moynihan's (1965) research explained was that slavery had initiated a single-mother structure that excluded meaningful participation by black men thus rendering them incapable of conforming to traditional norms of masculinity. The report was crucified, but the reality of the research still lingers as African American women are even more dominant emotionally, personally, and professionally.

Most African American women admit to being raised by their mothers to be dominant. As a result, the African American woman has been prepared to live independently, if necessary, unlike her male counterpart, who has often been cuddled by African American mothers, hence the necessity of the section in Harvey's book entitled "Mama's Boys." African American women who experience this type of upbringing are taught to be independent and oftentimes their dominance cannot be contained or suppressed. Consequently, they are often misunderstood and mistreated because of it. Wallace (2007) described this dilemma this way:

Let's face it, black women have, for centuries, been taught how to be "fathers"

--protectors and providers for their families-- in fact, they have been expected to know how. Black men, however, have not been taught how to be "mothers" --how to nurture partners, family, and friends in emotional ways; how to put their own wants and desires aside for the benefit of the group and how to find joy and fulfillment in that which they create and care for. (p. 19)

Perhaps there are times when African American women want to take on a more passive role and "Act like a Lady," but she does not have time for such frivolity. Therefore, she is not at home, trying to figure out how to please her man or even how to get one because she has children to raise, bills to pay, and work to do. And yes, she is aware that amid her doing it all, there is a chance she may be doing it alone. Thus, she has learned how to accept and navigate this space. Sadly, the reality of the situation as Banks (2012) pointed out is "Nearly seven out of every ten black women are unmarried and as many as three out of ten may never marry. For black women, being unmarried has become the new normal, single the new black" (p. 6).

The Numbers Imbalance

Harvey failed to address the lack of opportunities that African American women have in comparison to African American men in finding a mate. Yet he does identify that women are losing the game of a winning relationship due to their lack of understanding of what drives and motivates men (Harvey & Millner, 2009). Harvey's failure to acknowledge the numbers imbalance is misleading to African American women, who often place the blame of not having a man on themselves. The numbers imbalance is one of the consistent problems attributed to the decline in African American relationships and marriages. Simply put, there is a lack of availability of black males due

to mass incarceration, interracial marriages, and economic status. In addition, black women are the least likely of any other ethnic group to marry outside of their race, further limiting their choices. Here is where we find the black woman, alone amid staggering statistics that confirm she is not only the least likely to marry but has the least amount of options to do so. Meanwhile her partner, the “simple” black man, rides off into the sunset with unlimited possibilities. Banks (2012) reported:

With African Americans, in contrast, the numbers imbalance favors men.

What this means is that for a black man and black woman negotiating a relationship, the man will have more options and more opportunities outside the relationship than the woman. If for whatever reason their relationship negotiation breaks down –if they can’t agree about what sort of relationship to have--the man will encounter surfeit of beautiful, accomplished, single black women. The woman, in contrast, will have to contend with a much shallower pool of desirable men. (p. 61)

Jackson (1971), who wrote *But Where Are the Men*, reminds us that there has been a continuous decline in the number of black males available to black females since 1850. Banks (2012) identified some major reasons for this imbalance:

First, black men’s incarceration constricts the market for poor and working-class black women. Second, interracial marriage depletes the pool of men for middle-class, college-educated black women. Third, the economic prospects for many men have worsened while those for women have improved. (p. 29)

Therefore, Harvey, knowing that black women do not have an adequate pool of men to choose from, turns his message of empowerment into a call for submissiveness.

Despite his overall success in giving African American women advice on relationships, he has left them no better than he found them. Due to the numbers' imbalance, most African American women cannot find compatible men with whom to have a relationship and many settle in order to have or maintain one. A study by Vaterlaus, Skogrand and Chaney (2015) focused on positive marital qualities, citing that being equally yoked was a major factor for success in marriage. Therefore, if men and women are not compatible or in an equally yoked situations from the onset, the relationship usually does not last. Consequently, many women spend a lot of time trying to turn the man into something they want him to be and morphing themselves into something they are not. While Harvey's book focuses on women capturing the man of their dreams, his message does little to help the woman who cannot find a man. More importantly, his one-sided advice ignores the fundamental needs of the African American woman who also wants her desires met. There is more to just having the man of your dreams; women also want him to be able to cater to them as well. Harvey and Millner (2009) insinuate that women must compromise themselves, by altering their behavior to fulfill their dreams. African American women find themselves limited, ignored, and smothered emotionally by such advice.

So why are black women buying this message? Black women are buying messages like Harvey's because of constant statistical data like Banks', which reports that Black women are on the bottom of the marriage pool. "Some of these women live with the creeping sense that they may never marry" (Banks, 2012). "As a result of the black male shortage, there is an intense competition for the available few" (Aborampah, 1989). Thus, as one critic asserts the female may have to bargain on the male's own terms

(Aborampah, 1989). Therefore, Harvey's book is nothing more than a bargaining tool that ultimately diminishes a woman's character and self-esteem. He directly speaks to the fear that black women have about marriage and gives them a sense of proactive steps to try and change the odds against them. Hence, his book is entertaining but ineffective. Despite Harvey's compromising advice, for some African American women the book at the time seemed like the only answer to an ongoing problem in black love.

Black Love

When Harvey's book, *Act like a Lady, Think Like a Man*, was published in 2009, it seemed to awaken the topic of Black love. In some ways, it gave women a glimmer of hope, in that finally African American men had spoken and acknowledged things from a female perspective. Harvey even dedicated the book to all women, with hope that it would "empower" them to have a deeper look into the minds of men. Surprisingly, the book spent two years on *The New York Times* hardcover for advice bestseller's list, and was number one for 23 weeks. In addition, the popularity of the book led to a top grossing movie (*Think like a Man*) followed by another book sequel called *Straight Talk, No Chaser*, which had equal success. Harvey's book seemed to have reawakened the conversations and concerns about black love and his Hollywood success at the box office proved people were interested. The publication of the book did not just spark success for Harvey but works with similar themes in film, television, and talk and reality shows followed.

In 2017, the OWN network debuted the docu-series "Black Love" with 1.2 million total viewers. According to the network (2017), the series became OWN's most-watched unscripted series and the network's highest-rated unscripted series, proving

people are desperate for answers. People were interested in black love and the state of Black marriage. While, Harvey could be credited for revitalizing the conversation of Black love, his book still presented a lopsided view, which exposed unhealthy dynamics in African American male/female relationships. According to Aborampah (1989), “Overall there seems to be general agreement about the existence of unhealthy conflicts between black males and black females” (p. 320). The conversation of black love-- male and female relationships-- has been consistent over the decades. In 1984, Clyde W. Franklin, II, tackled the topic of black love stating that the topic is traceable as early as 1939 in Edward Franklin Frazier’s book *The Negro Family in the United States*. However, I argue that while Frazier did not elaborate much on the matter of Black love in his study, one can find an in-depth look at black love in the works of Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston’s exploration of the topic was arguably the first attempt in understanding black love’s significance and sustainability. Post Hurston in 1945 St. Clair Drake and Horace Clayton’s published *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* and briefly covered black love. Among other beneficial work on the topic is psychiatrist William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs’ book *Black Rage*, written in the 60s and focused on issues such as the hostility of Black men toward black women. The dialogue surged in the 1960s after the emergence of Black Power Movement and continued to gain momentum in the 1970s.

Harvey’s book proved timely and innovative as there is no other book written by an African American male as a self-help guide for females in relationships, but his advice did not resonate enough to provoke any real change in the marriage or relationship dilemma for African Americans as marriage numbers continued to decrease. According to

Banks (2012): We are the least likely to marry and the most likely to divorce; we maintain fewer committed and enduring relationships than any other group. Not since slavery have black men and women been as unpartnered as we are now (p. 2). Statistics prove that black people have struggled the most in maintaining romantic relationships, partly because of outside pressures such as poor family structure, racism, and even lack of economic development. African Americans have been systematically conditioned to prosper individually, but not as a group, consequently making them ill equipped and the least likely racial group to marry. Such statistics give books like Harvey's a platform to give advice, especially when presented with a light tone. Nevertheless, the subject of black love remains one of the most popular topics of discussion in the African American community, making people susceptible to possible explanations that may or may not be valuable and giving entryway to messages like Harvey's. Harvey's success increased after his book and movie, thus leading to a daytime talk show, where his target audience is primarily female. He seems to have turned into a relationship specialist. Meanwhile TV and film continue to capitalize on the awakening of black love, while African Americans continue to seek ways to master it.

Feminist Criticism

Relationship books began to surge in the 1990s when people could take their minds off the economic and political issues of the 70s and 80s. As women became more independent economically, these books became a huge factor in relationships, as needs shifted from security to fulfillment. Therefore, books like Harvey's that sought fulfillment and understanding began to gain an audience, but Harvey's messages and suggestions were not new. In 1992, Dr. John Gray published *Men are from Mars, Women*

are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What you Want in your Relationships. A man was again giving advice, but unlike *Think Like a Man* this book covered how men and women should conduct themselves in relationships by breaking down communication barriers. Similarly, Gray experienced instant success and had several sequels. Yet such instruction was received differently and was somewhat resented when told from a female point of view. For example, in 1995, *The Rules: Time-tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right*, a self-help book by authors Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider, gained noteworthy success but the *New York Times* bestseller's book was heavily criticized for being anti-feminist for suggesting that women should not aggressively pursue men, but rather, they ought to get the men to pursue them. Anderson (2015) noted this review of the book 20 years after its publication:

Criticism of “The Rules” was primarily directed at women — that it encouraged women to play games, that it made women manipulative. But in a patriarchy, it's rational to define the needs of the powerful, to meet them, and to be chosen to share their position in the world. Historically, women haven't had a lot of agency in selecting a mate, and that history, however muted now, still influences contemporary courtship. “The Rules” proposes to correct that lack of agency by taking away even more of your agency. It could be subtitled “Strategies for Chattel.” (par. 21)

Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider message are very similar to Harvey's message, yet he has avoided such harsh feminist criticism as his book has been widely accepted and acted upon by women. Yet from a feminist standpoint, like *The Rules*, Harvey's book is also chattel, which somewhat explains why women must be coached

into transforming their thinking and altering their behavior. Ironically Harvey's co-writer Denene Millner published a counter to *The Rules* in 1997, called *The Sistah Rules: Secrets for Meeting, Getting, and Keeping a Good Black Man*, though the book had little success. Although Millner's *Sistah Rules* was much more liberal and seemed to challenge the rigid themes in *The Rules*, Harvey's, and her book mimics characteristics of a conduct book.

Early feminist critics Gilbert and Gubar (1979) studied the concept of acting like a lady and revealed that conduct books for ladies had proliferated in the 18th century, enjoining young girls to submissiveness, modesty, and selflessness, and reminding all women that they should be angelic. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) emphasized when a woman steps outside of these conforms of behavior, she is seen and described as a monster. This seems to explain accurately the negative descriptions of African American women who openly show aggression. Portrayals of African American women have been; sacrificial, strong, or self-righteous. Rarely are African American women portrayed as gentle, soft, kind, or pure. When such endowments are ascribed to them, they are interpreted as weaknesses.

Nevertheless, conduct books were not foreign to the African American community as they moved out of slavery; they began to educate themselves to assimilate as free men and women into society. As a result, such books on how to conduct oneself could also be found in schools for African American children. For example, in 1902, Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown founded the Alice Freeman Palmer Memorial Institute when she was 19 years old (Brown, 2003). Over the next 50 years, it became one of the most renowned schools in the nation (Brown, 2003). Brown published an etiquette guide for

young people entitled *The Correct Thing to Do, To Say, To Wear*. In her book, she referenced boy and girl relationships and courtships:

A girl must be considerate, not overbearing or dictatorial. She must give the boy plenty of room to be gracious, chivalrous, but confident in his ability to entertain her in a wholesome manner. 3. A girl must not do all the talking. It is the nature of man to dominate. Feed his pride by letting him get all the glory for the planning of a swell evening. (p. 75)

Such books guiding women in the appropriate behavior and the concept of “Acting like a Lady” is an old theme. Gilbert and Gubar (1980) specifically point out that part of being a lady is equated to the “arts of pleasing men.” “The arts of pleasing men, in other words, are not only angelic characteristics; in more worldly terms, they are the proper acts of a lady” (Gilbert & Gubar, 1980). Likewise, Harvey’s book’s title, *Act like a Lady, Think Like a Man*, is in keeping with the traditional ideas in these conduct books on how to please a man and stay in a lady’s place. Harvey’s chosen title directly translates this primary message of pleasing men. Notably, when the book was made to the film version, the title was shortened to *Think Like a Man*. One can only speculate as to why “Act Like a Lady” was appropriately dropped.

Also familiar in previous conduct guides/books are some of the personality types described in Harvey and Millner’s book. Harvey reveals the dreamer who lacks responsibility; the cheater who lacks loyalty; the non-committer who lacks commitment; and the Mama’s boy who lacks accountability. However, in 1992 Terry McMillan published *Waiting to Exhale* revealing the same four male personality types. McMillan’s fiction quickly rose to fame, but she was accused of male bashing. McMillan, like

Harvey, also had her book adapted into a movie. Where Harvey pointed out that how much a man makes defines his ability to be productive in his love relationships, McMillan pointed this out in her characterization of her male characters 25 years earlier. Yet, men said she was not being fair to them. However, when Harvey exposed these same male traits as major problems for women, men were silent.

In the same year, that Gilbert and Gubar published their criticism, Michelle Wallace published *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* to a wave of controversy as she criticized the masculinity bias of black politics in the 60s. Her book took on the marginalization of women by the patriarchal culture of Black Power. Like female writers before her, she received a lot of criticism from males and females in the African American community. She wrote then:

While she stood by silently as he became a man, she assumed that he would finally glorify and dignify Black womanhood just as the White man has done for White women. (Wallace, 1979)

Wallace goes on to say that this has not happened for black women (Wallace, 1979). She paid a heavy price for such criticism. When *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* appeared in print, Wallace was twenty-six years old and unprepared for the onslaught of criticism. While some members of the African American community supported her work, many others were openly hostile. Wallace was accused of causing a division in the African American community that would aid whites; of being a dupe of white feminists who only wanted to exploit her; and of weakening the African American community. The sharp criticism gave Wallace a nervous breakdown. (Wallace, 1979)

Wallace's controversial book, *Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, was

re-released 37 years after its debut in 2015. Many of the things Wallace said then still resonate now and are important. The reality is African American women have been exposing the needs of African American men for a long time and giving them a voice, while silencing hers. She has portrayed his strengths and his weaknesses and has never blamed him solely for the weight of the African American community's dilemmas. What Harvey demonstrates in his book by failing to acknowledge her equally continues to prolong her journey.

The Mind-Set of the Book

Harvey (2009) says, if you are in a committed relationship and you are trying to get the ring-- this book is for you. If you are married and you want to regain control and strengthen your bond – this book is for you (Harvey & Millner, 2009). Although Harvey's book includes three major parts, The Mind-set of a Man, Why Men do What They Do, and The Playbook: How to Win the Game, the core mind-set of the book entails having an overall understanding of men. Harvey (2009) says, "...with this book you can put into play your plans, your dreams, and your desires, and best of all you can figure out if he's planning to be with you or just playing with you" (p. 7). Harvey's comments reveal the overall purpose of the book is to teach women how to understand the mindset of a man, which will give women a better chance of maintaining the man of their dreams. This sounds more like a 1960's appliance commercial geared toward housewives.

In part one of the book, Harvey (2009) says that men are driven by three things: who they are, what they do, and how much money they make. Admittedly, Harvey's research for the book was sparked from his experience as a radio host who responds to black women who call in to talk about relationships. Although Harvey's

book is not particularly based on scientifically proven research, some points align with current studies that suggest that economic fortunes drive marital outcomes. Therefore, it has been proven that the decline in marriage occurred with changes in women's labor market participation (James, 1998). Thus, in this case, Harvey's assessment is correct; men are driven by who they are, and this becomes even more challenging if they feel the woman is more accomplished than them. Another point that Harvey makes is, if the man is not particularly happy with where he is in terms of what he does, he is also incapable of being in a productive relationship. Further, if his money is limited, then he feels inadequate as a man and this becomes an issue in the relationship. Harvey (2009) admits that until the man accomplishes his goals he will be too busy to focus on a relationship. Harvey (2009) says men want to feel like they are number one and "in charge." While these are all substantial points, they are also very common themes. Thus, part one of the book, deals with primarily what drives men, how their love differentiates them from women, their needs, and how they communicate. Part two specifies the behavior, of men, and the lack of control women have in changing them, thus understanding his mind-set goes right along with accepting his behavior. Finally, part three, guides women into how they should behave to win the game with a series of questions women always wanted to ask.

If the analogy of equating loving your partner to winning a game does not throw one off, the well-meaning advice will. Despite the overall male dominated focus, rather than dismiss Harvey's ideas, it is necessary to examine his theories more closely to understand why this ideology resonated with so many women. For many women, the book gave insight to behaviors of men which they did not understand. However, it

became clear that part one was more about pleasing your man, more so than understanding him. Part two was about excusing his behavior because he will not change, and part three was about how to conduct oneself to gain the man of your dreams. Harvey's message is that to get the best out of your man, the woman must understand his needs, in terms of how he thinks, behaves, and reacts. It is not that women are opposed to knowing the mind-set of the man; it just shifts all of the weight of the responsibility of the relationship over to her when she already does not possess the upper hand in the situation, which puts her in a position of inferiority. As a result, she has little choice but to participate in such behavior if she wants the relationship to work or, as Harvey puts it, to win the game. Therefore, in an attempt to understand his needs, she ultimately ignores her needs. What Harvey's message revealed as the mind-set of the book is that African American men are more comfortable with traditional gender roles in which the woman's goal is to please him. However, the reality is this only works if her needs are reciprocated because the needs in a relationship cannot be at the expense of one partner.

Conclusion

Sociologist Orlando Patterson concluded in the late 1990s that African American women assumed leadership positions in almost all areas of the African American community and outperformed African American men at the middle and upper-class levels socially and professionally (Banks, 2012). What Harvey understood, and why he primarily targeted African American women in his book, is that unlike her male counterpart, the African American woman has accessed more opportunities and encouragers to be successful. But encased in her glorious success, the African American woman has found herself unexplainably single. In fact, in an ethnographic study in 2009,

just when *Think Like a Man* was published, Rochelle Holland researched the perceptions of mate selection for marriage and the decisions of 25 college-educated African American mothers who chose to have children while single. The key word here is choice, for many women have chosen to be single. Holland (2009) pointed out that many of the participants expressed that being in poor relationships with their child's/children's father tainted their desire to marry and influenced their levels of intimacy and trust with men. One woman even reported that she did not have the necessary compromising skills required for marriage (Holland, 2009).

Harvey's book misses this point that it is not so much that women do not understand the mind-set of the man, it's just that some have chosen not to deal with it. So, Harvey is not telling women anything that they do not already know. As black women have walked outside of the lines of role expectations, which have been an intricate part of their intimate relationships, they created conflict that African American males have never recovered from; and because men have the upper hand, African American women are expected to adjust through submission. The African American woman must choose between tragic singlehood or submissive compensation. Thus, like the women in Holland's case study, many have decided to have children on their own or be alone. As a result, Harvey's promise to lead African American women to their dream man, through the mind-set of men, is a ruse. Harvey narrowly focuses on turning women into what men want yet silences the voices of African American females, all in the name of love. Although it may not have been profitable for Harvey to tailor his book to both a male and female audience, he could have approached the subject more diplomatically.

Finally, rather than African American women seeing themselves as the

victims of the marriage crisis, our power must be invoked to look at the problem equally from both a male and female perspective. Harvey gives the female a false sense of power, as she believes she controls the man, which in fact Harvey's advice has her under his (simple-man) control. However, what she must realize is the overall problem is not something which she can change alone, nor is it her sole responsibility to do so. It is not only important that she understands how her male partner thinks but he also must understand how she thinks. One without the other cancels one person out.

As previously stated, the reality is the African American woman has been championing the needs of African American men for a long time and giving him voice, while silencing her own. She has shouldered his strengths and his weaknesses; and has never blamed him solely for the weight of the African American community's dilemmas. Our work must continue as both African American males and females move away from old arguments and look beyond outside pressures for the decline, success, or even the breakdown of African American marriages and relationships. What we learned from Harvey 10 years ago, is that not much has changed. While Harvey's book is credited for reintroducing the topic of conversation regarding black love and even fueling some excitement, his sexist approach does more harm than good to an already controversial topic. At times, his suggestions are more like ultimatums rather than friendly advice. He missed the internal conflict that both the black man and the black woman must contend with due to equally produced poor communication, unrealistic expectations, and lack of preparedness to work collectively. Harvey (2009) says there are women who can run a small business, keep a household with three kids in tiptop shape, and chair a church group all *at the same time*, but cannot figure out what makes men tick. Yet could it be

that the African American woman understands the African American man just fine; she is just tired of running backwards. Also, since Harvey concludes that the way strong, black, and phenomenal women can help the African American man get there -- a happy, healthy, and committed relationship -- is to help him focus on his dream, see the vision, and implement his plan, I wonder, while we are helping him get there, who is helping us?

Zora Neale Hurston's words are louder than ever, "The nigga woman is the mule of the world."

Chapter 3

“So this was Marriage!”

Hurston (1995) wanted to know “Did marriage end the cosmic loneliness of the unmated? Did marriage compel love like the sun the day?” (p. 191). These questions from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* may seem rhetorical, but they not only interrogate the institution of marriage but also provoke deep analytical thought as to marriage’s functionality. Hunter (2019) says, “The lack of sustained treatment of black marriage over a wide temporal and geographical scope has inhibited a full understanding of the intricacies of its nature and historical evolution” (p. 17). Yet this chapter seeks to bring insight to the lack of knowledge and understanding of black love when it comes to African American marriage by utilizing the works and viewpoints of Hurston. Employing West’s (2020) first two questions from her critique of *Their Eyes* which ask: “What is the purpose and function of marriage? and what does it mean to be a woman, particularly a married one?” (p. xxiv), this study reveals Hurston’s outlook and solidifies her contribution to the study of black love and marriage. Culturally as an anthropologist, she investigates and offers fictional case studies of marriage from every emotional angle, thereby giving readers countless examples of its operation in black culture. Hurston uses narrative techniques to share accounts of people’s daily lives within marriage. This is important because narratives have “become a popular source of data in qualitative research” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 34). Of the 21 short stories ranging from 1921 to 1934 that are included in *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick*, 16 of them center around marriage. These short stories ultimately led to Hurston’s novel and most profound work *Their Eyes*, which finally gives her overall synopsis of love and marriage. When

looking at the author in context to the state of black love during Hurston's time as well as today, her views are still applicable and provide valuable input that can be useful to current studies. Therefore, Hunter's observation that black marriage has not been studied to its fullest potential suggests she has not discovered the various examples found in the works of Hurston. These works breakdown African American love and marriage in a multitude of ways that include, but are not limited to, the effects of slavery, Western world views, emotional-based marriages and arranged marriages. In addition, Hurston's obsession with the topic of love and marriage, a common theme in most of her work, provides a historical overview of how black love and marriage evolved from slavery into the twentieth century. Although Tera W. Hunter published *Bound in Wedlock* in 2017, adding a much-needed in-depth look at African American marriage in the nineteenth century, there is still a void in the study of black love and marriage that I argue should be filled with Hurston. Hurston's works exemplify external and internal factors which include positive and negative examples that provide pivotal knowledge to missing data. It is no surprise that when Hurston began her investigation into the matter of black love and marriage, she, like Hunter, started with the effects of slavery. Just to be clear, what Hunter began in 2017 sparked Hurston's curiosity in the 1920s. Clearly Hurston is the mother of black love and marriage.

Slavery and Marriage

Historically, African Americans were prohibited during slavery to marry, causing black people to wed in secret or to look for ways to legitimize their unions. Despite such difficulties, "Slaves considered marriage the most treasured heterosexual bond" (Hunter, 2019, p. 32). Those slaveowners who did allow their slaves permission to marry, even

though these matrimonies were not legal, refused to honor such commitments by not allowing couples and children to stay together. Consequently, enslaved men and women were discouraged from pursuing permission to marry because they were considered property. “Selling husbands away from their wives and separating families became a common feature of the domestic slave trade in America, especially after the Revolutionary War” (Stewart, 2020, p. 34). As property, not only were they sold, but also labored out and sent to other plantations. Any sanctioned sexual activity with one another was solely for producing offspring. Although it was not easily obtainable, for the first time in law the Civil Rights Act of 1866 extended the right for slaves to marry (Hunter, 2019). Even though slavery was officially abolished, African Americans still struggled to prove their capability of having intimate feelings or human emotions. To make matters worse, “Proslavery thinking questioned whether people of African descent regarded families as important or were capable of forming meaningful relationships in the ways that white Americans did” (Hunter, 2019, p. 17). Hurston addresses this issue in her 1947 essay, “What White Publishers Won’t Print.” What is most revealing from the timing of the article is that black people were still grappling with the misconception that they were incapable of expressing romantic intimacy or “higher emotions.” In her article, Hurston says, there is “skepticism in general about the complicated emotions in minorities. The average American just cannot conceive of it and would be apt to reject the notion” (Hurston, 2000, p. 55). Although Hurston is addressing specifically the white publishing world, her comments shed light on her awareness of such fallacies and on her opinion toward the matter. Nevertheless, despite the campaign to ignore the emotional make-up of African Americans, for many black people marriage represented not only love but

freedom. As free men and women, African Americans gained access to social conventions such as marriage, but as they assimilated into these customs, they faced racial oppression. Blacks utilized marriage as a way to demonstrate power and prosperity. To have the ability to marry, meant freedom, and this freedom warranted a sense of liberty with certain rights and privileges. Pines (2006) says, “In the aftermath of slavery, marrying, like voting, demonstrated newly won freedom, citizenship, and equality; marriage confirmed and showcased black civility and morality within a racist society” (p. 76). As a result, for many blacks, marriage morphed into a vehicle for advancing the “interests of the group, not just a privilege to be enjoyed by individual couples” (Hunter, 2019, p. 17). For middle class blacks in the late nineteenth century marriage became a position of influence. Couples were perfectly matched for the “upliftment of the race.” By the “twentieth-century marriage could be held in esteem as a personal aspiration, but it would no longer carry the weight of securing the fate of the entire race” (Hunter, 2019, p. 17). Despite the historical trajectory of marriage, its pros and cons, and declining numbers today, many African Americans--as during slavery--still consider marriage the highest form of commitment and love in the black community. Despite dismal research findings, African Americans still report positive perceptions regarding marriage (Chaney, 2014; Curran et al., 2010). In 2014, a Pew Research Center survey discovered that:

While blacks are more likely than whites to have never been married (and less likely to be currently married), a much higher share of blacks (58%) than whites (44%) say that it’s very important for a couple to marry if they plan to spend their lives together. (Wang & Parker, 2020, par. 8)

Overall, for many African Americans, marriage is considered a privilege and a right.

Western World Views and African American Marriage

Critics have long debated the Western world view and the patriarchal system of marriage in the United States. The social construction of marriage has been highly racialized, for it is the elite groups with the power, particularly white men, that control its definitions (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). Simply put, those with access to wealth and power have had the biggest role in shaping the norms and the values that underlie institutions such as marriage (Collins, 1990; Schwalbe et al., 2000). Collins argues (1990) that the societal values associated with marriage are a major expression of upper-class white male power. According to Pinderhughes (2002) these social, racial, and historical factors stress male-female relationships such as marriage for African American men and women more so than any other ethnic group. While the Western world's patriarchal system regarding marriage has been thoroughly covered by academic scholars and is a common topic among feminist critics, Hurston introduces the problem specifically as it relates to black love and marriage. Her attempt to identify and to correct the problem by confronting these behaviors in both *Their Eyes* and various short stories in *Hitting a Straight Lick* are seen through examples of marriages that are framed in Western culture. Yet, the issue with the Western frame is that marriage in the U.S. was not created with African Americans in mind; therefore, in many cases, it does not fit their needs or expectations. Hurston assesses the effect of Western ideas on the structure of black love and marriage. What she reveals is that in an attempt to take on these ideas African Americans face racial oppression that is still seen today. Through her work, Hurston subtly critiques these patterns of behaviors that African Americans have adopted from Western culture and shows how these behaviors play out in the lives of her characters. In

a close contextual read of her work, Hurston's concepts coincide with historical and current criticism that reveal Western culture's patriarchal ideas about marriage. However, what she mostly explains is the damaging impact this system has had on the psyche of African Americans, which produces negative beliefs, behaviors and ideas that affect marriage. She uses works like her short story "Magnolia Flower" to express these negative impacts and the African Americans' navigation around them.

In "Magnolia Flower" (1926), which scholar West (2020) calls the precursor to *Their Eyes*, rather than tell a simple love story, Hurston uses the couple's love as an analogy to expose the effects of slavery and Western culture's patriarchal ideas. However, underneath this frame is one of the most beautiful depictions of African American love. The narrative gives an example of just how racial oppression affects and fuels difficulty into love and marriage. By demonstrating the power of true love through a long-lasting satisfying marriage, Hurston not only allows readers to imagine the possibility of love through "Magnolia Flower," but also shows what must be done to obtain it. In the short story, John is in love with Magnolia Flower. Like a respectable man, he wants to ask her father Bentley for her hand in marriage. However, Magnolia's father hates John because he is light-skinned. As Magnolia explains to John, her father does not like him at all because "youse too white" (Hurston, 2020, p. 67). The father's discrimination causes him to attempt to kill the potential lover, but luckily John and Magnolia escape his wrath. This story is Hurston's way of theorizing the obstacles black people face in their intimate relationships amid Western ideas, particularly racism. For instance, John and Magnolia plan to marry, but he wants to do it respectably by gaining the permission of her father. The custom of asking one's father dates back to ancient

Rome. The tradition of asking one's father can be found in many cultures, and although seemingly outdated, it remains an existing practice in Western culture today. *The Wall Street Journal* reports that, "Some 77% of suitors ask parents' permission to wed their daughters..." (Shellenbarger, 2017, par. 6). In Western culture historically girls were considered the property of their husbands and fathers and even as these young ladies matured, they typically lived with their parents until they were married. Consequently, it was considered a sign of respect for a young man not only ask the father but also to present something in which to barter. Following in the footsteps of Western traditions, John wants to adhere to the customs and properly honor Magnolia by asking the father for her hand in marriage. Unfortunately, although John is following social convention, as far as Bentley is concerned, this practice does not apply because of John's complexion. Magnolia is aware of how much her father hates John. She tries to persuade John not to seek her father's permission. Instead, she suggests that she and John run away and send word back to her father. Magnolia knows that her father will not be receptive and is prone to violence; he is hated and feared by everyone in the community. "He done violence to workmen. There was little law in this jungle, and that was his, --'Do as I bid you or suffer my punishment'" (Hurston, 2020, p. 66). For Bentley, he has another type of man envisioned for his daughter, "The flower was seventeen and beautiful. Bentley thought often of a mate for her now, but one that would not offend him either in spirit or flesh. He must be full of humility, and black" (Hurston, 2020, p. 66). Bentley, an ex-slave, has a limited outlook on who should marry his daughter. Hurston describes Bentley as a bully, but John is the only man willing to stand up to him. John is not threatened by Bentley and stands his ground. John is playing into societal rules thinking he can reason with the

father intelligently; yet the young man is unaware that the deck (system) is already stacked against him. There is absolutely nothing John can do to persuade Bentley to accept him because the father simply hates him because of the color of his skin. Here Hurston makes a great parallel to the world in which black people live.

The love John and Magnolia have for one another cannot operate fully because of racial oppression from their own community. John, a respectable schoolteacher, has joined this community to teach, but he is ostracized by the people he serves because of Bentley's discrimination. Because of Bentley's wickedness--as Ham, one of his workmen, explains--they have little choice but to go along with Bentley's plot to murder John. They are afraid of Bentley! Bentley fears no one, not even the law. Hurston shows that Bentley is fully operating under the mindset of oppressive Western ideas that directly stem from slavery. Bentley is inflicting this learned behavior onto John and Magnolia. Although Bentley has his freedom and has done well for himself, his mind is still enslaved. Bentley seeks to punish John in the same way black men have been punished all throughout the South--by lynching. The following passage reveals how Bentley evolved from being an ex-slave to being an oppressor, "Black men came and went now as they pleased and the father had many to serve him, for now he had built a house such as white men owned when he was in bondage" (Hurston 2020, p. 55). Hurston shows through Bentley's actions that for John and Magnolia to successfully be together, they must escape the tyrannical thinking and behavior of her father so that they are free to thrive as a married couple. Bentley's behavior seems to be a result of his experience from slavery, "He hated anything that bore the slightest resemblance to his former oppressors. His servants must be black, very black or Cherokee" (Hurston, 2020, p. 66).

Symbolically, the father in this short story perpetuates the hatred that was shown to him. On three different occasions, Bentley refers to John in the most offensive way, devaluing John as a person. Bentley first refers to John as a “yaller skunk” when he has him locked in the back room to be killed the next morning. Next, Bentley calls him, a “yaller pole cat.” Bentley’s last derogatory statement about John takes place when he realizes the couple has escaped, Bentley calls him “yaller dog.” Each time, these descriptions reduce John’s physical appearance to an animal and feed into the belief rooted from slavery about the African Americans’ ability to be human and to express emotion. By likening John to a skunk, pole cat and dog, Bentley indicates that he is incapable of accepting John as a man. Bentley is not only showing cruelty to John but also displaying the same treatment toward Magnolia--although not as severe. For example, Bentley says:

Ah got a dose uh mah medicine ready for her too, Befo’ ah hangs dis yaller pole-cat ahm gwinter marry her to Crazy Joe, an’ John kin loo on; den ah’ll hang him, and she kin look on. Magnolia and Joe oughter have fine black chillen, Ha!Ha!”

(Hurston, 2020, p. 68-69)

The father’s decision to hang John and to make Magnolia watch is unexplainably cruel. Hurston demonstrates how this type of thinking has caused black people to discriminate against one another. But it also shows how deeply rooted these practices and ideas have saturated the heart and mind of Bentley. Even love for his daughter does not subdue his cruelty.

The reason West (2020) claims “Magnolia Flower” is the precursor to *Their Eyes* is because although not as cruel, Nanny in the novel plays the same role as Bentley. Janie and Magnolia are around the same age when the thought of marriage is introduced. When

confronted with situations they do not like, both Nanny and Bentley attempt to control Janie and Magnolia by marrying them off to men they feel are most appropriate. When Nanny sees Janie kissing Johnny Taylor, she is appalled just as Bentley is when he finds out John wants to marry Magnolia. Nanny, like Bentley, is just as insulting to Johnny. She tells Janie, “Ah don’t want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lak Johnny Taylor usin’ yo’ body to wipe his foot on’ (Hurston, 1995, p. 185). Both characters take extreme measures by using violence to manage the situation. When Janie shows displeasure in Nanny’s decision to marry her to Logan Killicks, in retaliation Nanny “slapped the girl violently and forced her head back so that their eyes met in struggle” (Hurston, 1995, p. 186). In like manner, Bentley has Magnolia locked in the parlor while he ties up John. Eventually, both women flee with Magnolia absconding with John and Janie eventually ditching Logan.

Once John and Magnolia evade the wrath of her father, she and John sustain their marriage for 47 years. In one of Hurston’s most endearing lines in “Magnolia Flower,” Magnolia says to her husband after their long marriage together, “Love is wonderful, isn’t it dear?” (Hurston, 2020, p. 71). Not only does Hurston believe love is wonderful, but she sees maturity as a vital part of it. Hurston does not assume love is enough to combat the challenges of marriage, especially when it comes to Western world views, which counteracts black love and its success. Thus, by separating these couples from oppressive behaviors and ideas, Hurston confirms that marriage has a better chance of survival for African Americans. On the other hand, what makes the problems reoccurring is that most African Americans cannot separate themselves from these societal norms produced by Western culture, so they struggle through them. What is learned from

Hurston is that stepping outside of Western ideas and thinking as shown through John and Magnolia is necessary. By ridding themselves of Bentley, they are free to operate as they see fit. At the end of “Magnolia Flower,” John asks Magnolia, “You never have regretted” running away to marry. And she answers, “Of course Not!” (Hurston, 2020, p. 71). Hurston removes John and Magnolia from this despotic situation in the same way she moves Tea Cake and Janie from the oppression from the Eatonville community to the Everglades, which is more accepting of their love. As each couple detaches themselves from these toxic customs, their love and marriage can then survive and flourish with no regrets. According to West (2020), Hurston shows in subversive, often subtle ways situations that challenge the status quo. By allowing both couples in “Magnolia Flower” and in *Their Eyes* to go against the grain of Western culture for the benefit of their relationships, Hurston reveals how African Americans must change their thinking about love and marriage for sustainability.

The influence of Western culture must have been a concern of Hurston’s because many of her other works also show this pattern of behavior. For example, in the short story “Muttsy” in *Hitting a Straight Lick*, Muttsy Owens in his pursuit of Pinkie Johnson tells everyone, “Ahm gointer git mah’ried tuh de doll baby...An’ ahm gointer treat her white too” (Hurston, 2020, p. 110). Muttsy has placed value on being able to treat Pinkie like she is white. He equates wealth with whiteness; therefore, treating Pinkie white in his mind is not only providing for her but also lavishing her with nice things. Hurston sees the Muttsys of the world as a real problem, and she demonstrates these types of dichotomies in her urban migration fiction in *Hitting a Straight Lick*. However, in many of Hurston’s works, she indicates how some black people measure their worth based on

the values and traditions of white people. In her essay “Race Cannot Become Great Until it Recognizes its Talents,” Hurston (1934), warns that imitation of white traditions will do nothing to advance African Americans “as pupils never stand on equal footing with the master.” Having grown up in an all-black town, it is reasonable to understand why Hurston would see things from a different perspective; however, many African Americans find it hard to imagine things any other way. Gerald (2000) explains:

We are black people living in a white world. When we consider that the black man sees white cultural and racial images projected upon the whole extent of his universe, we cannot help but realize that a very great deal of the time the black man sees a zero image of himself. (p. 83)

It’s not only the zero image, as with Muttsy, that plagues black men and women but also as Fuller (2010) points out, until one fully understands the role of White supremacy, everything else will be confusing. Kunjufu (2004) supports this statement and asserts, “Until we understand the significance of Nelly Fuller’s position then martial stability will be a fleeting desire” (p 109). In the book *Black Skin, White Mask*, Fanon (2008) says that although African Americans look black our value system is indicative of a Eurocentric worldview. The problem with this is “It is becoming increasingly difficult for African Americans to provide the financial, emotional and spiritual stability that marriage requires in a racist, sexist, class-conscious environment (Kunjufu, 2004, p. 109). Hurston recognizes these problems as with Muttsy and as with Janie’s husbands in *Their Eyes*. For these men, the ability to provide for their wives becomes their measuring rod for being good or bad husbands. Such standards line up with marriage seen from both a Eurocentric point of view and from today’s points of view. For example:

Some African American women expect African American men to be the major breadwinners. She will look at him the way White women look at their men, as commodities that are supposed to provide financial stability, a house with a two-car garage and a trip to Disney world once a year. If men do not understand White supremacy they will expect that they should be able to provide these things for their wives. They will also expect their women to be submissive and financially dependent on them because of the patriarchal society in which we live. (Kunjufu, 2004, p. 109)

In *Their Eyes*, it is not until Janie selects a man outside of this patriarchal idea that she is able to obtain true love and find fulfillment. As with Magnolia, John tells her, “I know I am poor, but I have a great Vison, a high purpose, and he [your father] shall not be ashamed of me! (Hurston, 2020, p. 67). Like Janie with Tea Cake, Magnolia accepts that John is poor. In the short story the word “Vison” is capitalized, showing that although John is poor, he still has a vison for not only himself but for Magnolia. Therefore, Hurston questions the patriarchal system of marriage not just from a female perspective as so many critics contend but also from a male point of view, demonstrating Western patriarchal expectations undermine both black males and females in marriage. Hurston’s views feed right into the problems of black love in the 21st century, which suggests:

The dilemmas surrounding black love in 21st-century America are all too often mischaracterized as personal hardships that individuals must struggle to surmount. But, in fact, over the past 400 years structural forces - racial slavery and terrorism, government welfare programs and mass incarceration - have forged the institutional basis for undermining black marriage. (Stewart, 2019, par. 4)

In *Hitting a Straight Lick*, in the short story “John Redding Goes to Sea,” (1921) the main character John cannot live up to the societal pattern of marriage and tries to break free from its traditionalism. Here again, Hurston goes against the status quo and offers her main character an alternative against the patriarchal structure. For John, as an African American man, his only freedom from the traditional role as a husband is to go “out to the sea,” to join the Marines. Unfortunately, he does not find this true freedom until he dies from drowning. In both *Their Eyes* and in the short story, Hurston compares the sea with both love and freedom, but neither comes without a great cost. Hurston (1995) says, “Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore” (p. 332). For Hurston, the sea represents a middle passage, the two worlds in which African Americans must decide. Hurston (1995) begins *Their Eyes* with the analogy of dreams and ships:

Ships at distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing, until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of man. (p. 174)

The following passage from *Their Eyes* perfectly coincides with the conflict in the short story “John Redding Goes to Sea.” “No matter what he dreamed or whom he fancied himself to be he always ended by riding away to the horizon, for in his childish ignorance he thought this to be the farthest land” (Hurston, 2020, p. 2). Yet, John's father warns him against such thinking by telling him, “some ships get tangled in the weeds” (Hurston, 2020, p. 11). In both stories, the comparison of the sea and ships speaks to a greater message in which Hurston expects readers to grasp the recurring theme of the sacrifices

of love and marriage. John's internal conflict or difficulty is not that he does not want to be a husband, but that he does not have the liberty to follow his dreams. As with *Their Eyes*, Hurston questions why it is so complicated to do both. Throughout many of her texts, she alludes to marriage being the extinction of one's dreams. John Redding does not comfortably fit into the expectant role of a husband "identified" for him, so he is miserable. Yet, when he tries to deviate from societal expectations, he is criticized by his community for doing so. For wanting to step outside the norm, John is labeled many things: conjured, queer, and odd. Prior to getting married his wife is advised not to wed him.

In *Their Eyes*, a similar pattern emerges as Janie is also criticized from her community when she steps out of her place or position in society to marry a man not only younger but also financially ill-established, Janie is then labeled a fool and looked down upon. She, too, is advised not to marry Tea Cake. Like Janie, John did not want to be consumed by marriage, especially as a young man. As John explains to his wife, "Stella darling, I do want you, but I want to go away too. I can have both if you'll let me. We'll be so happy when I return" (Hurston, 2020, p. 8). When Stella refuses to accept John's solution, he then says:

Stella I know I should have never married you with my inclinations, but it's done now...I love you and I want to keep you, but I can't stifle that longing for the open road, rolling seas, for people and countries. I have never seen. I'm suffering too, Stella, I'm paying for my rashness in marrying before I was ready, I'm not trying to shrink my duty—you'll be well taken care of in the meanwhile.
(Hurston, 2020, p. 8)

Hurston is not only describing the lack of freedom in marriage for both men and women, but the rashness in which these decisions are made. Hurston's explication of marriage suggests that often because of societal pressures people rush into marriage prematurely. In *Their Eyes*, Janie is automatically rushed into marriage because her grandmother sees her kissing Johnny Taylor—although, like John Redding, she admittedly is not ready for such a commitment. The exchange between Nanny and Janie proves that the child is horrified at the mere thought of getting married:

“Yeah, Janie youse got yo’ womanhood on yuh. So Ah mout ez well tell yuh what Ah been savin’ upfo uh spell. Ah wants to see you married right away.”

“Me, married? Naw, Nanny, no ma’am! Whut Ah know ‘bout uh husband?”

(Hurston, 1995, p. 184)

Consequently, Janie and John Redding both try to find a way to fit into these ideas that others have for them. John's attempt in negotiating with his wife is important because it shows his effort to restructure things to fit his needs. However, Stella has been groomed to believe that marriage should look a certain way; therefore, John's proposal is unsatisfactory to her, and she cannot go along with it. This was the overall issue with Janie that marriage did not look a certain way with her second husband Joe Starks. Like Stella, Joe saw the marriage like Janie and wanted Janie to conform to his thinking, eventually stifling her in the relationship. Like John, Janie is miserable. Both see their marriages as obligations to be filled. John calls his marriage a “duty” which is to provide for his wife, causing him to miss her need for emotional support. Joe Starks provides for Janie, but he, too, fails to give emotional support. These two stories reveal how the patriarchal system works and how its structure burdens the relationships between men

and women. If Stella had accepted John's alterations to the relationship, perhaps she would have gained more than she lost. Likewise, if Joe had not tried to imitate Western culture he, too, would have had a more satisfying marriage with Janie.

Tea Cake, Janie's third husband, steps outside of the lines of the patriarchal system, making Janie's experience in their union more fulfilling than in her previous marriages. Initially, Tea Cake tests the waters and tries to fit into the role he thinks is expected of him by telling Janie they cannot live on her money. He establishes himself as the breadwinner as she stays home. Eventually, he succumbs to his role, claiming he misses her at work and wants her near him. Tea Cake and Janie then both work outside the home and are both happier in doing so, thereby creating a system that works for them. Continuously, Hurston "critiques dominant norms, exposes the flaws embedded within those norms, and posits an alternative (West, 2014, p. 489).

In addition, Hurston scholars note that Hurston is a champion for women's rights through her creation of female characters that defy gender roles. In her depiction of Lilya Barkman in "The Back Room" (1927), Hurston's representation of how this middle age woman puts off marriage until she is ready as opposed to being rushed by society--such as is Janie in *Their Eyes* and John in "John Redding Goes to Sea"-- feeds right into what was happening with the Women's Rights Movement and how it affected marriage. Although times had changed and women were more independent, Hurston proves the patriarchal system was still hard to crack, especially for men who were not willing to let these ideas go, so, although Hurston adorns Lilya with the ability to wait until she is older to marry, the plan seems to backfire. Again, Hurston is demonstrating how ingrained these thoughts are imbedded. Hurston's assessment of Lilya is right in line with current

research that shows that African American women can now expect to marry for the first time later in life. Although, for slightly different reasons, Hurston predicts as current research shows women marry later in life because of careers, independence, and opportunity. Lilya says the reason she hasn't married is because "it ages a woman so—worrying with house and husband at the same time" (Hurston, 2020, p.173). For Lilya, just as John Redding describes, marriage is a "duty." It is in these instances that readers uncover Hurston's personal thoughts about marriage. For Lilya it seems like a burden, one in which she probably would have taken on earlier if she had not been self-sufficient. Lilya, from the description of her house and the large oil painting of herself on the wall, seems to be financially independent and self-centered. Therefore, she does not need a man; she just wants one. She enjoys the company of many suitors, and one of her admirers Dr. Cameron notes that Lilya has done very well for herself. He mentions how well she has managed alone as a single woman. Dr. Cameron says, to Lilya, "... you have a house, and you seem to manage several men pretty well without leaving any traces of wear and tear on your face" (Hurston, 2020, p. 173). Dr. Cameron's comments may seem complimentary, but readers will find a hint of sarcasm and almost resentment. After all, Lilya did refuse his marriage proposal when they were younger. In a way, Hurston creates the same level of independence for Lilya that readers eventually see in Janie in *Their Eyes*. Like Tea Cake, Dr. Cameron is not impressed with such independence and wants no part of it. While it is celebratory that Hurston gives these women the power to marry based on their own desires rather than their needs, Hurston shows the effects of such empowerment and what it has cost some women. At the end of both stories, the tragic cost for both Janie and Lilya is that they end up alone. Hurston proves again and

again that no matter how far African Americans evolve, Western culture and its patriarchal system still have an adverse effect on marriage.

The Separation of Love and Marriage

Love became an integral part of marriage in Western culture in the mid-1900s. As a result, divorce rates increased (Soloski, et.al.,2013). The problem with understanding the concept of love is determining what it means. Researchers discovered that “Identifying the unique qualities and attempting to quantify the construct proved difficult” (Soloski, et.al.,2013, p. 774). As emotional based marriages increased, researchers sought ways to determine concrete definitions for love. Beall and Sternberg (1995) identify love as a socially constructed entity that is influenced by a person’s environment and personal experience. For African Americans, the study of black love has only been examined traditionally through marriage particularly focusing on marital distress. Current studies of black love have restructured its focal point, realizing that not only has black love been exclusively focused on marriage but that these studies have gathered data mainly on negative outcomes centered around failed relationships. Thus, it’s reasonable to assume that based on Beall and Sternberg’s definition, not much is known about black romantic love. In 2007, DeFrain and Asay advocated for a redirection in the research of black marriage by moving away from marital conflict and distress to concentrating on marital strengths with hopes of encouraging strong black relationships (Vaterlaus et. al, 2017). This redirection was necessary because as Hurston illustrates in her work, love and marriage are two different things. While black love can be studied as a part of marriage, it cannot be exclusive to marriage alone. In her work, Hurston distinguishes love from marriage and explores if marriage can be fulfilling without love.

She concludes that although most people want their marriage to encompass love and romance, in many cases these unions do not automatically come with or contain such emotion-- although like many of her characters, they desire it. The marriage of Janie and Tea Cake in *Their Eyes* as well as the marriages in the short stories "Magnolia Flower" and "The Gilded Six-Bits," and in the short tale "Turpentine Love" in the "The Eatonville Anthology," postulate couples who find fulfillment, satisfaction, and love in their marriages. For Hurston marriage works better with love, but she proves it does not guarantee the emotion.

According to Coontz (2006), historically "In some cultures and times, true love was actually thought to be incompatible with marriage" (p. 16). Thus, marriages were arranged by one's relatives. While arranged marriages are practiced around the world, for the benefit of this study, *arranged marriage* means a "marriage dictated by other people." For Western culture, marriages arranged by other people lost its momentum in the early to mid-1900s while women entered the work force. As a result, marrying for love became more prominent in society resulting in emotion becoming a common reason to marry. However, by the same token, the loss of that feeling of love became a common reason for divorce (Coontz, 2005). Hurston explores the pros and cons of emotional-based and arranged marriages that never work up to a state of love through the thought patterns of Nanny and Janie in *Their Eyes*.

When Nanny forces Janie to marry old man Killicks, Hurston exposes two clashing ideas about love and marriage between two generations of women. By showing the effects of slavery on Nanny's thinking about love and marriage she also demonstrates the effects of freedom on Janie's thinking about love and marriage. In her long soliloquy

about why Janie should marry Logan Killicks, Nanny says, “Ah was born back due in slavery, so it wasn’t for me to fullfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do” (Hurstun, 1995, p 187). To Hurstun, Nanny represents the past and the lack of opportunities afforded black women to fulfill their dreams, whereas Janie represents the future. Nanny is forcing Janie to marry Killicks prematurely without even letting her finish school. Should she not survive, Nanny thinks this is the only opportunity she can give to Janie. Nanny’s decision goes to show that while “Nanny” is physically free, like Bentley in “Magnolia Flower,” her mind has not experienced true freedom. Nanny only wants provision for Janie. Nanny sees marriage as not only a safer option but the only option. Nanny tells Janie, “Ah wanted yuh to school out and pick from a higher bush and a sweeter berry. But dat ain’t yo’ idea, Ah see” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 185). She explains further, “Tain’t Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it’s protection” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 186). Nanny seeks a better life for Janie through a man. In Nanny’s mind Logan Killicks is Janie’s best option because “He’s a good man” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 185), he “got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road...” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 193). When Nanny’s mode of thinking is compared to African Americans now, the old woman’s position is not as farfetched as one might think. Researchers say the role of marriage in the African American community serves as a protective factor for individual psychological well-being, as evidenced by married African Americans who experience higher levels of happiness than those who are not married (Crohan, et. al, 1989; Williams et. al 1992). In addition, although not widely discussed, arranged marriages have surprisingly low divorce rates. “In the U.S., while the divorce rate hovers around 40 or 50 percent, the divorce rate for arranged marriages is 4

percent” (Emery, 2020, par. 2). So, Nanny’s ability to arrange Janie’s marriage typically could have been successful if Janie was not anticipating love. Janie went into the marriage “to wait for love to begin” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 191), but it never came. “She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 194).

While both women represent two opposing sides, they are both in agreement when it comes to the concept of dreams. While Nanny reminds Janie “it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams,” likewise Janie, in reference to her loveless marriage, thinks, “her first dream was dead.” Since Nanny could not fulfill her dreams, she suspects Janie will not be able to fulfill hers either. Consistently, Hurstun contrast dreams with marriage as in “John Redding goes to Sea.” However, Janie’s desire to fulfill her first dream of falling in love based on her ideas may be the very reason for her disappointment. Nanny counters her frustration by saying, “Lawd have mussy! Dat’s de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis Love!” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 193). She then tells Janie to “Wait awhile, baby, Yo’ mind will change” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 193). Unfortunately, Janie’s mind never changes, but she does try to see things from a different outlook. Prior to marrying Logan, Janie thought:

Yes, she would love Logan after they were married. She could see no other way for it to come about, but Nanny and the old folks had said it, so it must be so.

Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant.

(Hurstun, 1995, p.191)

Going back to Beall and Sternberg’s (1995) definition of love, which they say is influenced by a person’s environment and personal experience, one discovers that Janie

knows very little about love and that some of the things she has assumed about love are based on romanticism. Researchers show that most people, especially women, prior to marriage, have “articulated their expectations of marriage to be largely fantasy-based or unrealistic—not foreseeing any relational problems and having visions of ‘happily ever after’” (Waterlaus et. al., 2017, p.893). Nanny sees these unrealistic ideas in Janie. After the wedding, Hurston describes that there is a large quantity of food, including “three cakes.” “Everything to eat in abundance” (Hurston, 1995, p. 191). “But nobody put anything on the seat of Logan’s wagon to make it ride glorious on the way to his house” (Hurston, 1995, p. 191). The word glorious is used in the novel twice, once to describe the presence of Johnny Taylor and the second time to describe the disappointment with how things look with Logan. Already, Janie’s expectations are based on preconceived notions rooted in fantasy about love and romance, to which Logan does not actualize. Hurston is elusive when it comes to where Janie is getting such thoughts about romanticism other than what Janie observes about nature from sitting under the pear tree. Janie says, while sitting under the pear tree:

She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sisters-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from the root to the tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. (Hurstun, 1995, p. 183)

Hurston’s use of nature to describe marriage is the only influence that Janie expresses. For example, later when Janie enters the house she observes, “flies tumbling and singing, marrying and giving in marriage” (Hurston, 1995, p. 183). Hurston does not give another

example of Janie's view of marriage other than what people say and what she observes from nature.

Hurston often writes in the style of romanticism and goes to great lengths to display these conventions. Her use of language signifies that she is in keeping with romantic ideas. Nevertheless, when Janie as a young girl is forced into marrying "Brother Killicks," Nanny shatters these fantasies. Hurston shows in *Their Eyes* and other short stories the pitfalls of marriage built on fantasy and what happens when those expectations or romantic notions are not realized. Janie hated Killicks, mostly because he just did not fit into her idea of what love and marriage meant. Therefore, the marriage was doomed to fail before it even started. However, Janie's view of Killicks compare to the beauty of what she observes at the pear tree. Janie says, "Some folks never was meant to be loved and he's one of em." (Hurston, 1995, p. 193). Her description of Killicks is deplorable. She says, "his head is so long one way and flat on de sides and dat pone uh fat back up his neck...His belly is too big too... his toe-nails look lak mule feet" (Hurston, 1995, p. 193). These physical descriptions do not represent what Janie had in mind for marriage. After Janie meets Joe, she is anticipating the romance she is missing. At first, "Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but spoke for far horizon" (Hurton,1995, p. 197). When Janie runs off with Joe Starks, she is anticipating experiencing a whirlwind romance only to be disappointed again. This time, Janie endures the marriage. However, in her last marriage to Tea Cake, Janie experiences a full courtship into which she can romanticize and fall in love. Tea Cake took the opportunity to win Janie's affections over time. In reference to Tea Cake, Janie says, "He's easy to love tuh love if you mess round 'im. Ah loves 'im" (Hurston,

1995, p. 289). In her first marriage she says, “Ah wants things sweet things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 193). Tea Cake finally made her marriage sweet and brought her fantasy under the pear tree to fruition. Tea Cake is “glorious” just like Johnny Taylor.

Although Janie’s thoughts about love do not seem realistic, they still speak to what most women want. While Nanny’s position seems harsh, it also represents what most women look for in their mates. Hurstun does not seem pleased with Nanny’s rationale in forcing Janie to marry all because of the young girl’s interaction and attraction with Johnny Taylor. Janie expresses pure hate for Nanny for this decision, another clue of Hurstun’s disapproval with such practices. However, it is not really Nanny whom Janie hates. Janie resents being denied the right to experience love on her terms. To the contrary, Nanny sees marriage as a safe place. Although Nanny shares bits and pieces with the young girl, Janie has no concept of what Nanny has endured in life. Janie’s young mind cannot conceive the horrors of Nanny’s experiences that led her to make such decisions. Therefore, Janie thinks more of her opportunities and dreams of places she has never been. Nanny strips her of these dreams when she weds her to Logan. Readers are left to decide if Nanny’s actions spring from a place of love or from a position of fear.

Nevertheless, Hurstun’s views about emotional-based love and arranged marriages are still major topics for debate today. Coontz (2006) says:

I don’t believe that people of the past had more control over their hearts than we do today or they were incapable of the deep love so many individuals now hope to

achieve in marriage. But love in marriage was seen as a bonus, not a necessity. (p. 19)

Although most people in Western culture favor emotional-based marriages these unions have consistently shown the least amount of stability and not only lead to divorce but serial marriages. If there is dissatisfaction in the marriage, couples are conditioned to quickly move to another relationship as shown with Janie in *Their Eyes*. Accordingly,

U.S. News & World Report predicts that in the year 2033, relationships will be a confusing tangle as a result of people living longer and changing mates to suit the seasons of their lives. The editors go on to predict that the growing trend of serial marriages will be normal and planned part of adulthood. (Kunjufu, 2004p. 108)

The track record of emotional based marriage creates what Bumpass & Sweet (1970) coin as the “social inheritance of marital instability”(p. 758). Yet, like Janie, people are still driven by emotion and want to feel as if they are in love with their mate. Others feel compatibility-based relationships are longer lasting, as couples can learn to love one another. By comparing Nanny’s perception with Janie’s perception, Hurston challenges readers to separate the idea of marriage from the concept of love. In Janie, Hurston represents a new generation of women desiring more and following their emotions. These women take matters into their own hands, and rather than being told whom to marry, they make the decision for themselves. In Nanny, Hurston represents arranged marriages that produce security and well-being with the promise of a better life.

Biographers speculate that this subject is very personal for Hurston. In the introduction of *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick*, West (2020) explains, “When Zora’s mother died and her father remarried to a woman she despised, it initiated

a period of wandering” (p. xviii). The similarity of being motherless and wandering is unveiled in *Their Eyes* and is also evident in Hurston’s life. M. K. Wainright has said in his studies of Hurston that she may have been married to an older man as a young girl (Woodson, 1992). This might explain why Janie in the novel expresses such hate for her grandmother after being married to Logan. The overreaction of anger toward the grandmother is never resolved and may represent Hurston’s disdain for young girls who are forced to marry older men for security. Like Janie, Hurston was unable to finish high school because of the death of her mother. However, unlike Janie, she had to work. Ultimately, like Janie, things would turn around and she would eventually obtain her education. By lying about her age, Hurston was able to attend high school for free by taking a decade off her life. To meet the age requirement for free high school, Hurston says she was born in 1901 instead of 1891 (West, p. xviii). It is during this decade that biographers think Hurston could have been married and that the life Janie endures with both Logan Killicks and Joe Starks may have been all too familiar to the author. If this is true, it would explain why Hurston always puts marriages and dreams in direct competition with one another. This also sheds light on the attitude of the characterization of Lilya Barkman’s in “The Back Room” and her attitude about marriage when she says, “it ages a woman so—worrying with a house and husband at the same time” (Hurston, 2020, p. 173). Just like in her life Hurston restores the lost time Janie spent with Logan Killicks and Joe Starks and gives her a second chance to discover her dreams.

Conclusion

As black love and marriage have now become a point of interest, researchers are finding limited information in early studies and discovering that findings solely based on

marriage are inaccurate. In the beginning of this research, Hunter (2019) attests that there is a lack of treatment of black marriage that offers a historical study. Thus, Hurston's literature provides answers to much needed questions about black love and marriage and should be identified as such. Hurston's fictional interrogation of marriage offers the complex analytical study and understanding of African Americans' love and marriage that is currently missing. Through an historical account of the pros and cons of black love and marriage, Hurston takes readers from slavery to the 20th century. Her observation of black love is two-fold. First, in keeping with research today, Hurston agrees that black love and marriage is overshadowed by Western culture through *Their Eyes* and *Hitting a Straight Lick*. She also reveals how both a patriarchal and racist system work against black love and marriage. She also challenges African Americans to think outside of the box to work around these systems by creating a method that works for them. Hurston finds when African Americans fail to depart from the racial oppression that hinders their intimate relationships, they either mimic the negative behavior or become a victim of the oppression.

Second, the debate between Nanny's and Janie's ideas in terms of emotional-based and arranged marriage is still a major topic today. Janie's idea of love, romance, and passion in marriage is a desirable goal for many women, not just African Americans, but it may be based on romanticism and fantasy. However, Hurston shows that because of Western culture many women, specifically African American women, have been groomed to want Nanny's version of marriage which is provision, stability, and security. Hurston seems to sway toward emotional-based marriage but she allows readers to come to their own conclusions by presenting both sides.

Finally, the phrase “So this was a marriage!” found in the second chapter of *Their Eyes* not only speaks to Janie’s preconceived notions about marriage prior to her first marriage but also to the disappointments she faces when the relationship does not turn out the way she thought it should (Hurston, 1995, p. 181). Hurston’s insight of how love and marriage work in the African American community details many of the ways in which African Americans work now in terms of expectation and communication. While there have been many debates about how the study of black love and marriage should be measured, Hurston realizes the complexity in black male and female relationships and marriages and spent a great deal of time writing about it. In her efforts to help others to understand she explains in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick* that in most people’s views on love and marriage, they desire with just as much passion as Janie did under the pear tree.

Chapter 4:

“What Kinda Man is You”

Most of the attention on the study of black love and marriage focuses on black women because of their extreme inability to find a partner compared to any other ethnic group. Unlike many black women, black males broaden their opportunities by dating outside of their race. Therefore, black men do not share the same difficulty in finding a mate but do have similar challenges as black women maintaining relationships.

Researchers tend to overlook black males when it comes to studies on intimacy, love, and marriage, which leads to a deficiency in understanding the complexities of what black men experience and face emotionally. Culturally, black men are conditioned to ignore their feelings in order to maintain societal expectations of “being a man” and acting like one. Kivel (2010) argues that:

From a very early age boys are told to ‘Act Like a Man.’ Even though they have all the normal human feelings of love, excitement, sadness, confusion, anger, curiosity, pain, frustration, humiliation, shame grief, resentment, loneliness, low self-esteem, self-doubt, they are taught to hide their feelings and appear to be tough and in control. (p. 148)

As a result of being groomed at an early age to set aside their emotions, African American men are not always willing to express their feelings or vulnerabilities; therefore, their emotions are easily overlooked by society. Franklin (2000) argues that this pattern of black men being unable to express themselves traces back to stigmas from slavery. For example:

Historians who have evaluated the effects of slavery on black men have identified three distinct personality types that emerged from slavery. One was Nat, openly rebellious insurrectionist... The other two types were Sambo, the slave who adopted the pose of “fawning dependence” and Jack, the ‘trickster.’ Jack was called a trickster because he fooled many planters... The common theme in Sambo’s and Jack’s behavior is their ability to hide their real feelings—

Ultimately, the traits they hid from whites were those generally associated with ‘manliness’ (Franklin, 2000, p. 30).

Franklin’s statement affirms the dilemmas African American men face traditionally with trying to uphold masculinity. Kivel (2010) argues that black men still grapple with this problem today and it affects their most intimate relationships. Overall, black men struggle with the question of manhood and with how that looks for them. Cobb (2008) poses the question in his study by asking what does it mean to be a black man? Cobb (2008) says: This vexing question is the natural result of living in a society where it was required that you grow older without growing up, where the ideals of “manhood” are to project and provide but both law and custom prevent you from doing either, where violence and domination are the cornerstones of manhood, but you are the target of violence and under the legal control of other men.

Cobb’s question--“What does it mean to be a Black man?”--is the catalyst for Chapter 4, “What Kinda Man is You?” and speaks directly to West’s (2020) third and fourth questions: How should a man behave? and what are his responsibilities? The inquiry “What Kinda Man is You?” is a question that Mrs. Turner in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* asks her husband during a volatile situation, when he fails to defend or

protect her; she, of course, questions his manhood, yet this is an inquiry that all African American men will answer, especially about love and marriage. However, the challenges they face put the question of “What Kinda Man is You?” at risk. How can African American men formulate an answer to Mrs. Turner’s question when they are trying to maintain equal footing in a white patriarchal system along with a black matrifocal system? How and where is the African American man free to be a “man” when, at times, he fits in neither system—the patriarchal or matrifocal? These are the questions that *Their Eyes are Watching God* and *Hitting a Straight Lick* explore by giving cultural insight into black men’s fight against a fixed system to love not just their partners but to love themselves.

Although many critics coin Hurston as a staunch feminist, it should not be ignored that she addresses the emotional predicaments of African American men in *Their Eyes* and in *Hitting a Straight Lick*, proving as West (2020) proclaims that Hurston gives as much attention to her male characters as to her female characters. Jordan (1988) argues that Hurston's contemporaries “found her aggravatingly contradictory and amazingly complex” (p. 105). Hurston’s complexity surfaces when scholars attempt to put her works into one category. Yet, her works prove time-after-time that Hurston is uncommittable to any one genre. Hurston scholars have learned in recent years to critique her carefully, so there is no need to apologize later for their limited points of view about her works. However, what Hurston really demonstrates is that it is not her writing that is “aggravatingly contradictory and amazingly complex,” but it is the black race about whom she writes—who bear these characteristics. Hurston uses material from everyday people to expose the most intimate emotions of African Americans--and men

are not excluded. The men in Hurston's works experience love, fear, anger, jealousy, and disappointment. Hurston allows these men to feel and express all of these emotions.

Through the various personalities, lifestyles, and values of black men in *Their Eyes* and *Hitting a Straight Lick*, Hurston proves that just like her, these men do not fit in any one category.

In a close examination of how Hurston shapes her male characters, this chapter demonstrates black men's vulnerabilities, emotions, and heart. Furthermore, examining the dilemmas black men face and the circumstances that affect their ability to operate and maintain intimate love and marriage proves that Hurston is not just a champion for black women but also a hero for black men. Her thoughtful portrayal of the emotional needs of African American men gives place to their weakness, dissatisfaction, and heartache. Uncovering how they show up as husbands, sons, and fathers, Hurston's examples of black masculinity and love are relevant and needed, especially in a world that portrays black men as inferior. Garfield (2010), in *Through Our Eyes: African American Men's Experiences of Race, Gender, and Violence*, argues:

There is a sociopolitical symmetry in the historical context that shapes both black women's and men's experiences in America. But the structural constraints that emerge from that history position their experiences differently: depending on a given social and cultural setting, they experience race, gender, and violence quite differently. (p. 2)

Garfield's statement is correct and speaks to why this chapter focuses exclusively on black males. However, the problem with his statement is that it excludes black men's and women's experiences in terms of love itself. Thus, when love is added to Garfield's

(2010) approach, there is evidence that black men and women experience history differently--“depending on a given social and cultural setting based on race, gender,” violence and love. Franklin (2010) says it this way:

When black men and women try to relate to one another today, their starting point is fixed by experiences of injustice and oppression that have affected them in ways that are both similar and profoundly different. These experiences have interacted in complex ways with larger trends in society to shape their self-concepts, their images of each other, the values and expectations they bring to their relationships, and their views of what it means to be a man or—woman--let alone a black man or a black woman. (p. 22)

Therefore, Hurston’s insight into what it means to be a black married man in America from an in-love and out-of-love, positive and negative, young, and old, wealthy and poor point of view gives light to the need for more studies that seek to understand how black men process romantic love and marriage. In both *Their Eyes* and in *Hitting a Straight Lick*, one cannot understand the emotional journey of the women without giving place to the emotional journey of the men.

The Men of Eatonville

Pritchard (2019) argues that in *Their Eyes*, “Hurston offers an essential insight into the experience of African-American women and their relationships with men” (par. 2). This research counters by describing in the same work African American men and their relationships with women. Many critics have written about *Their Eyes* and about the various ways Hurston has dealt with the novel, but not many critics have dealt with her attention to men exclusively. It is important to note that the men in *Their Eyes* are

described from the point of view of women. For example, Nanny dissects the hierarchy of men and women and how they function in the world. She says:

...de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out.

Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where the de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So the white man throws down de load and tell the nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hands it to his womanfolks (Hurston, 1995, p. 186).

Despite Nanny's harsh interpretations, these comments end up being the backdrop of the novel and give place to the male perspective on how they envision the world. Early criticism of *Their Eyes* initially ignored the male chauvinistic characteristics of the men in favor of the ideal romanticized love story. Newer criticism points to the flaws in the theory of a love story, focusing on domestic violence and male domination. Nevertheless, Hurston rejects the fairy tale version. Although these men lack perfection, she permits them to love authentically. Exploring the ways in which they love is necessary in order to authenticate Hurston's position on love. The novel gives many examples of the ways in which these men advocate for their own happy ending. Through Janie's various suitors, readers learn the expectations of what men really desire from women.

Hurston introduces the "glorious" Johnny Taylor, as Janie's first suitor in the exposition of *Their Eyes*. Although he is minor in the novel, Johnny's prototype will remain relevant throughout the story as the standard by which Janie judges love. Critics such as Pritchard (2019) describe Johnny Taylor as "lazy and irresponsible." Yet, Janie describes him as a "glorious being." Although she is aware of the negative implications from other people, "she chooses" to see him in an idealistic way. In the popular TV show

called *Power, Book II: Ghost*, a young girl, opens up to her mother (Monet) regarding the way she feels about a certain boy (Tariq). The mother explains to her that “A man doesn’t fall in love with you, he falls in love with the image of himself that he sees in your eyes” (Kemp & Jackson, 2020). In other words, how Janie sees these men, including Johnny Taylor, is often based on their treatment of her. Janie sees, “Through pollinated air ‘she saw’ a glorious being coming up the road” (Hurston, 1995, p. 184). It is important to note that everything Logan Killicks, Janie’s first husband is, the “shiftless” Johnny Taylor is not. In her study Pritchard (2019) translates Logan Killicks as “the most prosperous man in their community,” who will “give Janie a comfortable and better life” (p. 20). Nanny views Johnny the way Janie views Logan. In other words, Janie is just as disgusted with Logan as Nanny is with Johnny. Johnny is described as a tall and lean man who is “shiftless.” To the contrary Logan Killicks is described as responsible and fat. Hurston does not give much more information about Johnny’s bad reputation, but she juxtaposes him in contrast to Logan Killicks to rationalize why Nanny forces Janie to marry “Brother” Killicks. He seems to be an upstanding man who is notably respected by the community. On the other hand, Johnny is a replica of Tea Cake, Janie’s third husband. Logan is described as upright. Of the three husbands, Logan is the only man that inquires about Janie properly. The other men seem to just wander into her life.

Critics are quick to classify Janie as a victim because she is forced as a young girl to marry Logan. However, critics rarely analyze Janie’s behavior towards Logan, which deflates his ego causing him to feel rejected. This rejection leads to a change in the way he treats Janie. For example, “Long before the year was up, Janie noticed that her husband had stopped talking in rhymes to her. He had ceased to wonder at her long black

hair and finger it” (Hurston, 1995, p. 193). The more Janie rejects Logan, the less he does for her and the more he wants her to do for him. According to Kunjufu (2004), in relationships, men desire these five things: physical attractiveness, sexual fulfillment, recreational companionship, domestic support, and admiration. Logan, like Janie’s second husband Joe, is admired by the community, but Logan found no admiration from Janie. Janie says she is waiting for love to happen between them. It can be observed that Logan is waiting for love to happen too. Nanny warns Janie as it relates to Logan, “He’s kissin’ yo’ foot and ’taint in uh man tuh kiss foot long” (Hurston, 1995, p. 192).

Many critics suggest that Janie did not claim her voice until her second marriage to Joe Starks; however, this is untrue. There are various examples of how Janie stands up for herself throughout her marriage to Logan. Janie is extremely vocal with Logan about her likes and dislikes as well as about what she will and will not do. For example, one day when Logan asks Janie to bring in the wood he chops, she tells him, “Ah’m just as stiff as you is stout. If you can stand not to chop and tote wood Ah reckon you can stand not to git no dinner” (Hurston, 1995, p. 195). Logan retreats and tells Janie that her grandmother and he have just spoiled her. Janie’s behavior towards Logan is indicative that she not only uses her voice of authority but also, her posture of rebellion and entitlement. She never conveys any warmth towards Logan, so he begins to treat her less like a wife and more like a tenant. One of the reasons Janie cannot connect with Logan is that he is not Johnny Taylor. Unlike Johnny, Janie thinks Logan is hideous. She describes him as a monster—saying--his head is long, belly is big, neck is fat and toenails like mule’s feet (Hurston, 1995). The night before she leaves him, Janie tries to find a reason to stay, showing that she is still looking for love from Logan, but she fails to initiate any

of these feelings for such an emotion to occur. Janie tells Logan that she has been thinking “real hard about us; about you and me” (Hurston, 1995, p. 198). His response reveals how little interest Janie has taken in their marriage prior to this moment. Logan counters:

It’s about time. Youse powerful independent around here sometime considerin’... Considerin’ youse born in a carriage ‘thout no top to it, and yo’ mama and you bein’ born and raised in de white folks back-yard... Ah thought you would ’preciate good treatment. (Hurston, 1995, p. 198)

Emotionally Logan has completely shut down because of the lack of admiration, love, and consideration Janie has shown to him. As Kunjufu (2004) points out, in his book *The Power Passion & Pain of Black Love*, a lot of men express their love through provision. In return they expect appreciation and admiration. Thus, Logan shoots down Janie’s independence as a rejection of himself. This behavior mirrors the existing descensions between African American men and women in the 21st century, proving that men then and now want to be needed. Ultimately, Logan never receives the affirmation he needs from Janie, and he fails to understand why.

Unfortunately, according to society’s standards Logan assumes that he has provided what Janie needs. Logan thinks highly of himself as a good man fulfilling his duties as a husband. In his mind, his behavior should equal love, but like he and Janie both discover “marriage doesn’t make love.” Logan’s failure to win Janie over equates to his failure as a man and leads to his resenting her. He knows Janie does not want him. His behavior towards her eventually reflects how he consumes and acts out his rejection. Out of anger, Logan says to her, “Ah’m too honest and hard-workin’ for anybody in yo’

family, dat's de reason you don't want me!" (Hurston, 1995, p. 199-200). Logan's statement is twofold: to make himself feel better and to situate his "manhood" and to retain his masculinity; *and* to knock Janie down a peg. Hurston describes Logan's comment very emotionally. Logan made the statement about his hard work and why Janie does not want him with "half a sob and half a cry" which not only demonstrates his pain and frustration but also his vulnerability and fear. Logan when compared to Janie's other husbands is the only one that does not take his frustration out on her physically. This is important because this type of pain and frustration often leads to violence, as shown with Joe Starks. However, although "Brother" Killicks feels hurt and betrayed by Janie, he refuses to lay a hand as he initially promised he never would. This may be why Janie feels comfortable standing up to him because she knows Logan will not hurt her. Janie does not fear Logan in the way she fears Joe. Even when Logan out of anger threatens to kill Janie, she takes no thought in his words. Janie's rejection and disrespect of Logan is displayed in the following response when he says, "Heah, Ah just as good as take you out de white folks' kitchen and set you down on yo' royal diasticutis and you take and low rate me!" (Hurston, 1995, p. 199). Logan thought because Janie had received so little love judging from her situation that he could "make somethin' outta" her. He thought he could be her savior--her knight in shining armor. Instead, Janie rejects all that he has to offer. When Janie alludes to leaving him, he says "Shucks! 'Tain't no mo' fools lak me. A whole lof of mens will grin in yo' face, but dey ain't gwine tuh work and feed yuh" (Hurston, 1995, p. 199). Logan feels that he has been played for a fool, and he is right because Janie has been taking up with Joe Starks behind his back. In the marriage between Janie and Logan Killicks, critics often overlook Logan's position regarding his

marriage and his aspirations for its success. However, what is mainly ignored is like Janie, Logan desires love and like Janie, he did not receive it. By Janie's own admission to her grandmother, Logan is good to her. Janie just does not love him, and there is nothing he can do about it. Janie says, "Some folks were never meant to be loved and he's one of 'em (Hurston 1995, p. 193). Janie does not love Logan because he desecrates not only her idea of love but also, there is no physical attraction to him. As Kunjufu (2004) explains, chemistry is paramount in relationships:

Unfortunately, one of the major reasons why many of us would not adhere to the advice of elders, parents and community leaders regarding the selection of a mates is the fact that the individuals making the selection do not have the same chemical formula that we have and desire in a mate. (p. 90)

Therefore, Janie cannot accept Nanny's selection of Logan, so the young wife leaves him powerless, dejected, and alone. His pain is obvious, as the last night they have together he reflects, "He flopped over resentful in his agony and pretended to sleep. He hoped that he had hurt her as she had hurt him" (Hurston, 1995, p. 199). Hurston is showing Logan's vulnerability; therefore, readers cannot empathize with Janie's lack of love without understanding Logan's position. Actually, both Janie and Logan want the same thing, which is to be loved. Logan tries but fails to meet Janie's needs as a husband, despite his best efforts to provide a better life for her. As a man, he has failed. The failure of the marriage rests on both Janie and Logan, but only Logan is left discarded in the end. Janie abandons Logan to run off with Joe Starks. Immediately she changes places for she no longer has the power over Joe that she had over Logan. Thus, Janie has traded "Brother" Killicks for Mayor Starks.

Joe Starks is described as always wanting to be a “big voice” (Hurstun, 1995 p. 196). This may be the reason Janie hears him “coming down the road” before she sees him. Janie is just as intrigued with Joe as she is with Johnny Taylor “coming up the road.” Hurstun makes a distinction between the road by showing that Johnny is moving upward towards Janie, but Joe is moving downward towards Janie. This up and down fluctuation expresses how Janie feels about both men. On one hand, Johnny represents “golden dust of pollen.” On the other hand, Joe fails to represent “sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke of change and chance” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 184, 197). Once again, Janie is not receiving the type of feelings that she has when she is, “Looking, waiting, breathing, short with impatience. Waiting for the world to be made” anticipating the arrival of Johnny Taylor (Hurstun, 1995, 184). Rather, when Janie meets Joe Starks, she says that the only man she could compare him to is Mr. Washburn (a white man). The reason Janie compares Joe to a white man is because he is “cityfied” and stylish and doesn’t belong in these parts (Hurstun, 1995, p. 196). This comparison reveals that Janie has never seen a black man like Joe Starks. Using sensory details to describe Joe’s presence, Hurstun places emphasis on not only what Janie sees but also, on what Joe does not see. While walking down the road, Joe does not notice Janie because he is focused on his goals of being a “big ruler of things” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 197). Therefore, “He didn’t look her way nor no other way except straight ahead.” By interjecting herself into the picture, Janie interrupts Joe’s concentration (Hurstun, 1995, p. 196). Once Janie gets Joe’s attention, upon seeing her, he compares Janie to a “pretty doll-baby,” which is a red flag as Janie never overcomes this image in their relationship. Hurstun’s choice of words may remind readers of the popular 20th century play, *A Doll’s House* by Henrik Ibsen.

Hurston, a voracious reader, would have been familiar with Ibsen's play. The drama deals with a married woman whose husband only wants her to fit into his high society lifestyle. The husband ignores her need for opportunity and self-fulfillment. In essence, the husband in Ibsen's play treats his wife like a child. The only way the wife experiences true fulfillment is to leave her family. Like Janie in her second marriage to Joe, the wife in Ibsen's play feels suffocated, dominated, and bored. Hurston's and Ibsen's portrayals of both Janie and Nora (the wife) tackle a huge social issue of the 20th century that Hurston mocks, showing a stark parallel between white and black middleclass women. Jordan (1988) says that *Their Eyes* "skillfully expose[s], through its delineation of Janie's marriage to Jody Starks, the devaluation and aloneness of the middle-class woman whose sole purpose is to serve as an ornament and symbol of her husband's social status" (p. 108).

What Hurston unfolds about Joe is his desire to possess the same power and authority as his white bosses. According to Bealer (2009), "Joe's unceasing aspiration to replicate white upper-class authority figures damages his connection to "the folk" and ultimately to his wife as well" (p. 317). In his quest, Joe to seeks dominance not only over Janie, but also over the town, naming himself:

the Mayor—post master—landlord—storekeeper, than he bought a desk like Mr. Hill or Mr. Galloway over in Maitland with one of those swing-around chairs to it...And then he spit in that gold-looking vase that anybody else would have been glad to put on their front table. Said it was a spittoon just like his used-to-be bossman used to have in his bank up there in Atlanta. (Hurston, 1995, 212)

When Janie compares Joe to Mr. Washburn (a white man), she is unaware of the accuracy of her portrayal and the extent to which Joe patterns his quest for success after white images. In Joe's effort to be in charge, he becomes like the white man that Nanny describes, "de ruler of everything" in the town. Some of the town's people negatively paint Joe as bossy, saying, "...all he do is big-belly round and tell other folks what tuh do. He loves obedience out of everybody under the sound of his voice" (Hurston, 1995, p 213). Joe becomes intoxicated with power and enjoys finally being the person in charge. Like Logan, Joe thinks highly of himself, and Joe tells Janie he is a man "wid principles" (Hurston, 1995, p. 198). Ironically, this man with principles runs off with someone else's wife. He takes what he wants from other people because Joe wants to be a "big man," not a good man. As a result, he fails to be the man that he promises to be for Janie, and he fails to live up to her expectations.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Joe's imitation of a patriarchal system is what he thinks honors Janie, but his fixed ideas of how a woman should behave cause him to be hard on Janie. Joe "wanted her submission" (Hurston, 1995, p. 232). Joe visualizes himself as a big man, and he wants Janie to be a big woman. He also "classes her off," which Janie hates. Jordan explains (1988) that Hurston's novel exposes the domestic bliss of Janie's and Joe's marriage ironically as a middle-class, empty American dream. "Joe's commitment to replicating white power structures leads him to import sexist expectations of Janie into their marriage that destroy their relationship" (Bealer, 2009, p. 317).

Prior to their marriage Joe tells Janie, "You ain't never knowed what it was like to be treated like a lady and Ah wants to be de one tuh show yuh" (Hurston, 1995, p. 98).

However, Janie does not live up to Joe's expectations either. It can be reasoned that Joe

persecutes Janie in the way he has experienced persecution by white men. However, Joe thought Janie would succumb to his action because of all he accomplished in the town. He never receives this type of affirmation or approval from Janie regarding his success. Joe's actions reflect the contradictions the patriarchal system has created for black men. Cobb (2008) says that black manhood for black men means embracing the twisted ideals of masculine domination that exist in America. By inheriting these traits, black males have latched on the insecurities of those black men who preceded them and those who will bequeath to the black men coming after them (Cobb, 2008). Critical studies that emphasize Janie's oppression without bringing understanding to the scope of Joe's subjugation miss the plight of what black men face in America. Hence, it is difficult to explicate Janie's concerns without giving the same attention to Joe when society has victimized them both.

When looking at Joe and his behavior, it is important to understand that readers are only seeing him through Janie's eyes, which may present a restricted viewpoint. If Janie's behavior was analyzed from Joe's point of view, he may have mistaken Janie as an opportunist for running away with him. After all, Janie's reason for marrying Joe is the same reason Nanny marries her to Logan, which is for a better life.

Joe is "very solemn" the day that Janie runs away to meet him, and to maintain authority, this is his demeanor throughout the marriage (Hurston, 1995, p. 200). Janie tries to tell Joe early on that his behavior is unnatural. "Naw Jody, it jus' looks lak it keeps us in some way we ain't natural wid one 'nother. You'se always talkin' and fixin' things, and Ah feels lak Ah' jus' markin time. Hope it soon gits over" (Hurston, 1995, p. 211). After Janie's comment, Joe reminds her "again" that from the beginning, he aimed

to be a big man and she should be glad because that would make her a big woman (Hurston, 1995, p. 211). Almost immediately, Hurston shows how ill-suited Joe and Janie are for marriage. Joe, like Janie, is operating in his own fantasy where he is trying to make Janie fit. Joe Stark's wants his "doll-baby" Janie to be, what is called today, his "trophy wife¹." As with Logan, Janie is disillusioned again and unenthused about taking part in Joe's imaginary world—a world where women are seen and not heard. Joe, like Logan, feels rejected, and his behavior towards Janie progressively escalates to more aggression and abusive. As far as Joe is concerned:

...the way he thought things out... She wasn't even appreciative of his efforts and she had plenty cause to be. Here he was just pouring honor all over her; building a high chair for her to sit in and overlook the world and she here pouting over it!

(Hurston, 1995, p. 224)

Just like, Logan, Joe reacts to what he perceives as ungratefulness. He attacks Janie with his words and is also physically abusive.

Hurston shows there is little difference between the way Logan and Joe express rejection. Both men attack Janie in different ways to break her independence. Both men also pride themselves on who they are and what they have done for Janie. Each remind her of who she is because of them and who she was *not* without them. When Janie rejects their authority, Logan and Joe put her to work. Logan is about to have Janie plowing a mule and Joe's promise of a lavish lifestyle of Janie sitting on the front porch rocking back and forth fanning herself turns into her working in his store every day except

1. ¹ Trophy wife--a young, attractive wife regarded as a status symbol for an older man. (oxford language dictionary)

Sunday (Hurston, 1995, p. 197, 215). Even though Joe is more grandiose and chauvinistic than Logan, both men are ruled by their egos and their desire to have Janie idealize them as great men.

Initially Joe mesmerizes Janie. Hurston does not say much about Joe's physical attributes other than he is "portly"—that is, his clothes, ambition, goals, and personality describe him. "Janie took a lot of looks at him and she was proud of what she saw" (Hurston, 1995, p. 201). Unlike Logan, Janie even admits that she loves Joe, but because of Joe's behavior towards her, she is miserable and pulls away. According to Kunjufu (2009), "It is very difficult to feel good about your mate when you're unactualized and unempowered" (p. 31). Janie's resistance eventually causes a power struggle in the marriage. When Janie finally stands up to Joe, like Logan, her comments deflate his ego to the point of humiliation. Janie is confused by the fragility of Joe's ego and says, "Why must Joe be so mad with her for making him look small when he did it to her all the time?" (Hurston, 1995, p. 240). In other words, Joe cannot take what he dishes out because Janie's words are an attack on his "manhood." As a result, "Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible...Joe Starks didn't know the name for all of this, but he knew the feeling" (p. 239). Again, Hurston is delving into the rejection that Logan and Joe feel as men, not just from Janie but from society. As a result, both Logan and Joe want Janie to feel their same hurt and rejection. These feelings resort to negative behaviors that only push Janie away. Towards the end of Joe's and Janie's marriage, it becomes clear that Joe is unaware of how Janie perceives his behavior. He is crushed that she has overlooked his efforts to be a "big voice." Based on patriarchal standards, Joe thinks that everything he accomplishes, as

Janie's husband, is more than enough. Joe's thinking is not far off from Logan's in that both men sought to make "something out of her," but Janie has no interest in changing to fit these men's ideals. She tells Joe, "But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was" (Hurston, 1995, p 244). On the other hand, Janie was not satisfied with the way Joe was. As describe from the beginning of Joe's entrance when he is coming down the road, he never really saw Janie, but she never saw him either. The Janie whom he met is the sixteen-year-old girl who is waiting for Johnny Taylor to "come up the road." Joe's disappointment in Janie turns to anger because he spends his whole life working for white people who did not appreciate his efforts, and now he finds that Janie refuses to appreciate him, too. Furthermore, "There was no doubt that the town respected him and even admired him in a way. But any man who walk the way of power and property is bound to meet hate" (Hurston, 1995, 213). Joe makes Janie his enemy because of her rejection toward him. He never recovers from her outlook of him. "He didn't really hate Janie, but he wanted her to think so" (Hurston, 1995, p. 240).

Hurston reveals that big man or not, Joe Starks is an angry man because the patriarchal system he idealizes has failed him. Out of anguish and disgust Joe says, "There was nothing to do in life anymore" (Hurston, 1995, p. 239). With Joe's efforts to be loved, admired, and honored, he loses all hope, not just in Janie but in the system, he believed would bring him the most satisfaction. Joe's real confidence rested in Janie's eyes and when she stopped believing in him, he stopped believing in all that he created. Joe laments, "And the cruel deceit of Janie! Making all that show of humbleness and scorning him all time! Laughing at him, and now putting the town up to do the same" (Hurston, 1995, p. 229). Joe is humiliated, embarrassed, and cast down. Hurston wants

readers to sympathize with Joe, which is why Janie is kind to him at the end of his life. Janie realizes, “Jody had been hard on her and others, but life had mishandled him too. Poor Joe!” (p. 245). The statement “Poor Joe!” represents the outcome for so many black men who think the more money, education, and connections a man has, the easier it is for him to buy and manipulate what he wants (Kivel, 2010). However, as Joe finds out after having accomplished material things, being “a big ruler of things” does not equal love. Joe did all he could to be a “big voice” in a little town only to be silenced in the end; that was one load he could not pass off to his “doll-baby”--he had to carry it on his own.

The Men of the Everglades

Vergible Woods, called Tea Cake for short, is said to be the man who makes Janie’s heart bloom. For readers who think love is magical, Tea Cake will fall short of their expectations. Others who understand that Janie has not really received or been given a fair chance at love will see why Tea Cake is the epitome of black love. Of Janie’s husbands, Tea Cake is the youngest and symbolizes Janie’s youth. Tea Cake restores all the years Janie lost when she was married to Joe. Janie expresses that she “felt like a child breaking rules” with Tea Cake (Hurston, 1995, p. 257). Tea Cake is the Johnny Taylor who Nanny refuses to allow Janie to have. Tea Cake does not have a carriage like Logan or a car like Joe. Tea Cake has neither a town nor a house with sixty acres. As matter of fact, at Janie’s first introduction to Tea Cake, he asks her to borrow a pound of “knuckle puddin,” which reveals his meager means. Tea Cake has the same type of charisma as Joe, without ambition, clothes, wisdom, and, of course, pretentiousness. Unlike Logan, Tea Cake does not see himself as a good man nor does he confess his dreams of being a “big voice” like Joe. Even Janie admits that “...Tea Cake ain’t no Jody

Starks, and if he tried tuh be, it would be uh complete flommuck” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 267). Throughout the novel, Hurston subtly alludes to the arrival of Tea Cake. In Chapter 6, Janie tells Joe, “Everybody can’t be like you, Jody. Somebody is bound tuh want tuh laugh and play” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 225). Janie’s comments describe the joy and pleasure she eventually experiences with Tea Cake. “Rather than revolting or stifling her. Tea Cake loves Janie by and through encouraging her equal participation in play and pleasure” (Bealer, 2009 p. 320). Hurston also uses foreshadowing to announce Tea Cake’s arrival. While still married to Joe Janie contemplates, “Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he [Joe] could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 233). For Janie, Tea Cake encompasses all the qualities she desires in a man. She even overlooks the fact that he is one of the best gamblers “God ever made” (Hurstun, 1995, p. 276).

Yet, Janie’s desire of what she wants in a love partner comes from the premise of her sixteen-year-old mind, and it stands to reason why Tea Cake meets her expectations. Tea Cake, for Janie, represents everything that love has denied her. Janie’s acceptance of him represents her rebellion towards Nanny, Logan, and Joe. Nonetheless, Tea Cake is an unlikely match for Janie in every way. In today’s definitions, Tea Cake would be defined as a “Bad Boy,” and women love the perception of this stereotype. In the article, “Why Women Find “Bad Boys” So Attractive, Even Though We Know They’re Trouble,” psychologist Robyn McKay explains:

These traits are typically repressed during childhood, as females are socialized to be compliant and agreeable. If a girl’s inner life is unexpressed, she may be drawn

to a bad boy as a way of vicariously expressing her own inner rebel (Cheyney, 202, par. 7).

Tea Cake is appealing to Janie because he takes her away from the boring, stuffy life she had with Logan and Joe. He rids Janie of a community of people who have looked up to her and looked down on her simultaneously. Most of all, Tea Cake frees her from the store. It is no coincidence that Hurston has readers referring to him by a nickname, suggesting Tea Cake's lightness of character. His character perfectly coincides with the word's definition--"a light yeast-raised sweet bun." To add to his appeal, Tea Cake is tall like Johnny Taylor, a pursuer of Janie like Logan, and a big personality like Joe. As a result, Janie falls hard for Tea Cake, and in turn, Tea Cake falls hard for Janie. For Tea Cake, Janie is out of his league because he has never met a woman of her caliber. Yet, because Tea Cake is a gambling man, he is fearless when taking his chances with Janie. Unlike Logan and Joe, Tea Cake lacks a steady income, but he seems to know how to find work when necessary. Unlike with her first two husbands, Janie experiences the courtship with Tea Cake that she was denied by Nanny with Johnny Taylor. Janie even inadvertently compares Tea Cake to Johnny Taylor. Nanny refers to Johnny Taylor as a "trashy nigger" and when Tea Cake disappears a few days later--when he and Janie first meet--she uses the same terminology to describe his actions, "Whut do Ah want wid some trashy nigger out in the streets?" (Hurston, 1995, p. 261). Janie's reference to Tea Cake as "some trashy nigger" brings the image of Johnny Taylor full circle. "In her former blindness she had known him as shiftless Johnny Taylor, tall and lean. That was before the golden dust of pollen had beglamored his rags and her eyes" (Hurston, 1995, p. 184). Just as with Johnny, Janie sees all that she wants to see in Tea Cake.

In keeping with the times, Hurston's portrayal of Tea Cake shows an economic shift in the decline of farming for black men and how it affects their ability to keep steady work. This makes it harder for men like Tea Cake to stay employed. Kunjufu (2004) explains that there is a tremendous shift in the decline in the African American family that is directly parallel to the changes in the economy--from agriculture to manufacturing to high technology (p. 26). If he wants to provide a stable income, Tea Cake is at a disadvantage as a husband because of the agricultural changes. Luckily for him, Janie is not looking for a provider, so Tea Cake is relieved from expectant hardships because he "ain't got doodly squat." Still, he still tries to provide for Janie. However, unlike the other men, Tea Cake does not allow his income to determine his self-worth although he does take pride in his "common ways." While there are many differences between Tea Cake and Janie's first two husbands, there are also many similarities. For instance, like Joe, Tea Cake suffers from jealousy. Readers begin to see Tea Cake unravel when Mrs. Turner tries to fix Janie up with her light-skinned brother. According to Kunjufu (2004), "The whole issue of jealousy is tied to the capitalistic concept of ownership. 'That's my man/woman. You better not out your hands on him/her!'" (p. 111). This conflict is an issue that both Tea Cake and Janie experience in the novel. Tea Cake's jealousy leads to his whipping Janie, which is one of the most controversial discussions by critics who question whether or not *Their Eyes* is a love story. Both Joe and Tea Cake hit Janie. Whereas Joe's behavior stems from sexism, Tea Cake's behavior comes from fear. Tea Cake feels inferior to Mrs. Turner and her brother because they are "light-skinned." Since Tea Cake does not possess certain material possessions for Janie his "high time woman," he uses the only power he has. He admits, "Ah didn't whup Janie 'cause she done

nothin'. Ah beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss" (Hurstons, 1995, p. 295). It is the first-time readers witness Tea Cake's insecurities as it relates to Janie.

Since readers see Tea Cake only through Janie's eyes the awareness that she is hopelessly in-love seems obvious, but for Tea Cake, he is not convinced Janie is satisfied with him until later in the novel, which brings clarity as to why Mrs. Turner and her brother with their Eurocentric features are a threat to Tea Cake. Bealer (2009) adds, "Tea Cake beats Janie after overhearing Mrs. Turner's disparaging remarks about him because he fears that his inadequacy, according to racial hierarchies, threatens his marriage and his masculinity" (p. 322). Janie validates her feelings to Tea Cake in the midst of the hurricane. Tea Cake says, "...Ah never *knowed* you wuz so satisfied wid me lik dat. Ah kinda thought—" (Hurstons, 1995, p. 304). Although Tea Cake has a loss for words to Janie, readers are aware that he is not privy to the depth of Janie's feelings. Unlike Logan and Joe, who expected Janie to be satisfied based on what they provided for her, Tea Cake satisfies Janie by just being himself. Both Logan and Joe tell Janie they want to make "somethin' outa her," but Janie says to Tea Cake:

Ah never 'spected nothin' Tea Cake but bein' dead from the standin' still tryin' tuh laugh. But you come 'long and make somethin' outa me. So Ah'm thankful fuh anything we come through together. (Hurstons, 1995, p. 311)

Tea Cake not only gains the appreciation and admiration that Logan and Joe never received but also, makes "somethin' outa" Janie--which was something the other men failed to accomplish.

Too, Tea Cake still battles demons of the patriarchal system like the other men. By valuing the opinion of white men over others, he refuses to leave the muck despite the

threat of a hurricane. When warned to leave Tea Cake asks, “You ain’t seen de bossman go up, is yuh!” (Hurston, 1995, p. 301). Later, after another warning Tea Cake says, “De white folks ain’t gone nowhere. Dey oughta know if its dangerous” (Hurston, 1995, p. 301). Despite warnings from the Indians, Bahaman boys, and his friends, Tea Cake will not leave unless the white folks leave. The fact that Tea Cake puts his trust in white people causes him to fail and jeopardizes not only his marriage but their lives. Tea Cake and Joe both put their trust in actions from the “bossman.” They both die the same way--paranoid, scared, and angry.

In wrapping up the men of the Everglades, it is only fair to discuss Mr. Turner, for whom this chapter is named. Although he has a minor role in the novel, Mr. Turner is important because Hurston uses him to define what a man is not. Mr. Turner has been totally emasculated by his wife Mrs. Turner. The following description explains Mr. Turner’s demeanor:

He was a vanishing-looking kind of man as if there used to be parts about him that stuck out individually but now he hadn’t a thing about him wasn’t dwindled and blurred. Just like he had been sand-papered down to a long oval mess. Tea Cake felt sorry for him without knowing why. (Hurston, 1995, p. 292)

When Tea Cake has a problem with Mrs. Turner’s interaction with Janie, as a man, he goes to Mr. Turner, man to man, in hopes that he will tell his wife to stop visiting Janie. However, Mr. Turner informs Tea Cake that “Muh wife takes time fuh whatever she wants tuh do. Real strong headed dat way” (Hurston, 1995, p. 292). Phrases like “powerless laugh,” “Ah b’lieve he’s skeered of her,” and “squinched down into a chair” all describe Mr. Turner’s behavior and question his authority and position of power with

his wife. Not only does Mr. Turner not have any influence over his wife, he does not appear to be concerned about her. When a fight breaks out at their restaurant, Mr. Turner does not intervene to stop the fight or to make sure Mrs. Turner is safe. Instead, he crouches in a corner until the fight is over and then smokes his pipe. Mrs. Turner let him have it! She then attempts to hit him. This reversal of power that displays Mrs. Turner as the aggressive person in the relationship and her husband as the weaker defies gender roles. Notably, when men do not take on their expectant role as the dominant partner in the relationship, their “manhood” is usually questioned. Mr. Turner’s manhood is not only questioned by the men around him, but also by his wife. Because he allows his wife to dominate him, Mr. Turner is portrayed as less than a man. His wife’s statement, “What Kinda Man is You,” is just another way to affirm his weakness. Mr. Turner is a direct contrast to Logan, Joe, and Tea Cake. As shown in the novel, Hurston links being a man to such qualities as protection, dominance, violence, and authority. The depiction of Mr. Turner does not represent these qualities and leads to Mrs. Turner’s question, “What Kinda Man is You.” The persona of Mr. Turner is not new in Hurston’s works. For she writes about men who are similar in *Hitting a Straight Lick*. The compilation further exposes the difficulty for black men to maintain their manhood amidst “real strong headed” women.

The Men of Harlem

According to West (2020), “In some of Hurston’s earliest stories, she focuses on the ways in which class intersects with masculinity to determine just what it means to be ‘a man’” (p. xxvi). Hurston illustrates what it means to be a Harlem man in *Hitting a Straight Lick*, compared to black men down South. In *Their Eyes*, she deals with a

different set of issues such as infidelity, divorce, and “dickty.”² In *Hitting a Straight Lick*, African American men who have migrated North face new challenges as they try to apply their patriarchal thinking to a very different Harlem lifestyle. In their arrogance, many men get caught up in situations they are ill equipped to handle. In Hurston’s Harlem, “manhood” is based on what one has, how one dresses, and how one looks--each proving difficult for most Southern migrants. *Hitting a Straight Lick* mostly focuses on male protagonists. Five newly published short stories included in this compilation are directly tied to Harlem. This new literature has caused critics to revisit their views on Hurston’s portrayals of male characters. While Hurston depicts the men in *Hitting a Straight Lick* in various ways, the men in Harlem bring to light African American men’s issues on love and marriage during the Great Migration. However, the dominance, violence, and authority seen in the men in *Their Eyes* has little room to surface in the Harlem men. In the five Harlem-based short stories, these men fight to sustain their manhood.

“Monkey Junk” is awkwardly written in what (Carpio & Sollors, 2010) call mock biblical tone. The story follows an unnamed protagonist who is taken advantage of by a woman who only marries him for his “checkbook.” While the notion of marrying for provision seems natural in *Their Eyes*, in “Monkey Junk” this notion is frowned upon. The main character in “Monkey Junk” has migrated to Harlem from the South, and he thinks highly of himself. He boasts to himself saying, “Verily, I am a wise guy, I knoweth all about women (Hurston, 2020, p. 181). Although he believes many women love him, Hurston (2020) affirms, “none desired him” (p. 182). The unnamed character says he

² A term used by Hurston which means middle class

knows "all there is about the females" and shall not let himself get married. Despite this warning to himself, an affirmation of his wisdom, the man does exactly what he says he will not do. In one month, he meets and marries a woman who only wants to spend his money. Meanwhile, he continues to brag about his wisdom and thanks God that he is not like other men—"stupid and blind." To make matters worse, his new wife not only wants his money but also flirts with other men. When he attempts to leave her, she threatens him for alimony. The man believes that the court will rule in his favor, but she has manipulated the jury and the judge. Thus, the man is forced to pay alimony. In the end, he must return to Alabama to pick cotton.

"Monkey Junk" draws on the naivete of Southern migrants coming into Harlem, but they are no match for the urban community. However, this short story candidly exposes the ego and tragic downfall of the main character. While the husband sees himself as wise, the wife refers to him as a "dumb cluck" (Hurstun, 2020, p. 190). The story also focuses on divorce and the unfairness of the judicial system. The wife plays victim to the court, which sympathizes with her claims despite her inability to prove her husband's wrongdoing. The man then becomes a victim of the woman and the court system, leaving him desolate. "The object of the story's satire is not so much divorce per se but the fact that the woman is able to use her sexuality to get her way, first with her husband and, after milking him for his money and cheating on him, in court" (Carpio & Sollors, 2010, p. 563). Here, Hurstun taps into another area of popular study that effects black men--how the judicial system is typically in favor of women and how the judicial system is sometimes unfair to black men.

Miles Paige is the only character in the story that Hurston names. Critics think Miles Paige was an actual person. Carpio & Sollors (2010) point out:

...Hurston's choice of identifying the woman's divorce lawyer as "Miles Paige" - the name of an African American judge in New York's family court system. This raises the possibility that Hurston's story may be satirizing an actual case from the 1920s that readers of the *Courier* would have remembered when the story was published. (p. 563-564)

Miles is also given the physical description of having a "fair countenance." The word "fair" is a play on words or a pun since Miles represents the wife's best interest. The husband seeks no legal counsel, further proving his naivete about the difference in Northern culture. Although there are witnesses to attest to the woman's behavior, the judge still rules in her favor. At the end of the story, Hurston illustrates a defeated man whose wife dupes him. "And then did the husband rend his garments and cover his head with ashes for he was undone" (Hurston, 2020, p.190). The macro-masculinity seen in *Their Eyes* is lost in *Hitting a Straight Lick*, for the Harlem short story reveals a different type of man.

"The Country in the Woman" and "She Rock" have the same plot but are developed differently. Both stories focus on the infidelity of the husbands. These two stories are written in different styles—one in narrative form and one in verse form. Yet, both stories are told from the point of view of the husbands who are mutually frustrated with the women. [unclear: The husbands are outsmarted or able to rid of them. Reading audiences are fascinated with the wives because both unfaithful husbands--Mitchell in "The Country in the Woman" and Oscar in "She Rock"-- are attacked by the women with

axes. The wives, Caroline in “The Country in the Woman” and Cal’Line in “She Rock,” are described by their husbands as strong-willed women. Mitchell’s description of Caroline explains his conflict in the marriage:

Her body was wiry and tough as nails and she could hold up her end of the argument anytime in a rough and tumble with her husband, so he couldn’t hope to settle things that way. All these things were in Mitchell’s mind as he faced her on Seventh Avenue. (Hurstun, 2020, 194)

Cal’Line in “She Rock” is describe by her husband in this way:

Behold how she crieth not like unto other women when I strive against her with mine fists, Nay, she weepeth not, but verily taketh stove-wood in the left hand and weighteth the right hand with iron and smitheth me hip and thigh. (Hurstun, 2020, p. 218)

Mitchell Potts in “The Country in the Woman” has many issues with his wife Caroline. She will not conform to the ways of Harlem. Caroline refuses to take on the appearance of Harlem women; she still wears from the South “sloppy” clothes and “run-down” shoes. Mitchell is frustrated by Caroline’s inability to change. His “vanity was injured” by Caroline’s appearance (Hurstun, 2020, p. 196). Thus, he is fascinated with Harlem and it’s pretty women. Each time he pursues another woman, Caroline runs her off. “No one besides her husband believed that she was jealous. She has an uncultivated sense of humor. She enjoyed the situation” (Hurstun, 1995, p, 193-194). The climax of the story occurs when Mitchell buys a fur coat for his mistress and Caroline strolls through town with her axe and returns with the coat. In the end, the community does not see Mitchell for five weeks.

Likewise, Oscar in “She Rock” complains about his wife’s “strong mind and arm” (Hurstun, 2020, p. 215). He tries to get away from her by taking a job in Harlem, but she follows. Oscar, like Mitchell, loves the ladies but his wife Cal’line is always one step ahead of him. She, like the wife in “The Country in the Woman,” will not permit his affairs. Oscar laments, “Verily love I the city of Babylon and all the women therein, but it is written a man shall possess a wife of exceedingly broad-mindedness, else he cannot come at the essence of the thing” (Hurstun, 2020, p. 226). Both husbands want their wives to be accepting of their behaviors, but neither wife will submit. Comparably, these stories show a battle of wills in which, ultimately, the wives win. While the men want their wives to be open-minded, the men try to implement patriarchal thinking that as husbands, they can do what they please. However, the women push against this system. By doing so, they expose the consequences of the matrifocal system on men. “She Rock” insinuates that Cal’line is as strong as a rock, which ultimately means she is as strong as a man--“bringeth home the bacon with the axe” (Hurstun 2020, p. 225). Both the husbands, Mitchell and Oscar, have no other choice but to succumb to their wives and that submission further strains their relationships.

“The Book of Harlem” and “Book of Harlem,” similar stories with the same plot and premise, portray male protagonists who are pleasure seekers fascinated by the allure of Harlem. According to West, these two stories “allow readers to see these characters transform themselves from men in “mail-order-britches” to Harlem sophisticates (West, 2020, p. xxvii). However, the goals of all the men who migrated from the South is to fit in. They are not only judged by the Harlem community but also judged themselves. Their ability to thrive as men in Harlem as shown in both “The Book of Harlem” and “Book of

Harlem” is their adoption of urban clothes, straightened hair, and financial resources (West, 2020, p. xxvii).

Conclusion

Hitting a Straight Lick is told from a male point of view and paints the women as dominant, unlike in *Their Eyes*, where the story is told from a female point of view which portrays the men as dominant characters. Thus, Hurston proves her fairness to both black men and women, remaining neutral in her defense of both. She does not take a side. Furthermore, she proves that both black men and women struggle for position and power in their relationships. Both the patriarchal and matrifocal systems fail. More importantly, what is discovered is that the patriarchal system offers a false sense of empowerment for black men. When black men try to shift patriarchal ideas into their intimate relationships, this thinking backfires. As evident in both works, the women refuse to submit, leaving the men powerless. Hurston explores the difference in generations and geographical locations to determine the impact these systems--patriarchal and matrifocal--have on black men.

The men of Eatonville, Logan and Joe, represent a generation of men in the South in what today would be known as “old school.” “Old school” means the adherence to certain traditions where men and women have distinct roles to fulfill. To function properly, the relationships depend on these gender roles. Logan and Joe are staunch providers who, in return, want absolute power. In direct contrast, the men of the Everglades represent a younger generation of men who are transient and looking for work. As Mrs. Turner confessed, she had “Never dreamt so many different kins uh black folks could colleck in one place” (Hurston, 1995, p. 289). Since it was seasonal work, the

Everglades attracted migrant workers from all over. As a result, these men are more willing to be flexible partners. By highlighting their strengths and talents--such as gambling, singing, joking, and dancing--they prove their manhood. These are the things that empower them.

On the other hand, Hurston's inclusion of Mr. Turner in *Their Eyes* shows that some men have no control whatsoever in their relationships while others struggle to find balance--like the men from Harlem in *Hitting a Straight Lick*. Hurston's ability to shift power back and forth between black men and women is important to prove her equality and objectivity . Her exploration of masculinity in the Eatonville men can be traced back to Nat Turner, the "openly rebellious insurrectionist." While the men of the Everglades represent "Sambo, the slave who adopted the pose of fawning dependence." Lastly, the men of Harlem represent "Jack, the 'trickster.'" These recycled traits from slavery that (Franklin, 2000) categorize are realized in both *Their Eyes* and *Hitting a Straight Lick* through the various personalities, environments, and situations within marriage. Hurston suggests that black men need more space to express their fragility, vulnerabilities, disappointments, and fears so that they are not just acting like a man but becoming "bigger" men. "What Kinda of Man is You?" is a question every black man must define for himself--whether in or out of love.

Chapter 5:

“Everybody’s Grown!”

This chapter, “Everybody’s Grown!”, covers the last of West’s implications about *Their Eyes* by first recognizing “How do couples navigate and share power?” and second, “What is the community’s role in negotiating difficult relationships?” These foundational research questions explore Hurston’s position on shared power and the community’s responsibility for black love and marriage. In *Their Eyes* and in *Hitting a Straight Lick*, Hurston’s belief about shared power and responsibility in love relationships comes into full fruition. Hurston’s exploration of how power is distributed among her male and female characters indicates that a power imbalance can cause major issues. Her assessment, as with many of her declarations, is not far off from what is happening today. Many professional black women with high powered careers believe that either they will never marry or that they will experience trouble in their marriages because of their profession. An article entitled “Marriage Eludes High-Achieving Black Women” states that “Michelle Obama may have become an archetypal black female story — law career, strong marriage, happy children — but the reality is often very different for other highly educated black women” (Alexander, 2009). Likewise, Hurston saw her literary career as an issue in her own love life.

In *Their Eyes* Hurston’s ideal relationship between Tea Cake and Janie demonstrates shared responsibility. However, it is important to keep in mind, unlike many women, Janie does not have the responsibility of juggling children or a career. Hurston purposely leaves children out of many of the marriage equations to narrow her focus on the couple and their issues. In fact, most of the wives in both *Their Eyes* and

Hitting a Straight Lick do not work outside of the home. However, there is one short story in *Hitting a Straight Lick* where Hurston portrays the female protagonist, Delia Jones, as the breadwinner in her marriage. Through the depictions in “Sweat,” Hurston shifts the power dynamics of the sexes. This powershift proves to be fatal for Sykes, the husband, and illustrates the damages power imbalances can cause.

Power shifts are also seen in the “Back Room.” Lilya Barkman, although not married, is financially stable and supporting herself. Although like Delia in that both women have financial freedom apart from a man, Hurston reveals they experience disappointment and ultimately, through no fault of their own, end up alone. Yet, Hurston’s biggest example of a power struggle is in *Dust Tracks on the Road*, where she chooses between her career and A.W.P. For Hurston, love could not sustain her, so she chooses her career. Like her characters, Hurston, too, ends up alone.

The second issue Hurston addresses is the community’s role as it relates to black love and marriage. While most of the studies on black love and marriage point to slavery and systematic racism as the root cause of its setbacks, Hurston also explores the influence of the black community. Today, while African Americans continue to fight for civil rights, the fight for black love and marriage has recently been outed by Stewart (2020) as a public matter for national concern. “The 2010, U.S. Census reveals that 71 percent of black women in America are still single” (Stewart, 2020, p. 1). These facts concerning black love did not elude Hurston. She illustrates that the black community’s position on black love and marriage is shockingly silent and this ambiguity has come at a high price. In her works Hurston gives voice to the community to express their views and opinions privately but rarely are these views expressed openly. As a result, behaviors that

should have been addressed formerly have persisted. Clearly, Hurston thinks the community has the authority to evoke change. However, in many instances, the community deals with black love and marriage as an isolated problem. As shown in *Their Eyes*, there is little resolve when the community does nothing.

When Janie and Joe arrive in the “colored” town of Eatonville, Joe is surprised that the town has not been developed and that the residents are sitting around doing nothing. Joe asks the people, “Who tells y’all what to do?” Coker, a local resident, responds, “Nobody, everybody’s grown, And then agin, Ah recokon us just ain’t thought about it since then.” Joe responds, “No wonder things ain’t no better” (Hurston, 1995, p. 202). Chapter 5, “Everybody’s Grown!”, analyzes the reasons that “things ain’t no better” in black love and marriage. Like Joe, the character Coker, acknowledges in the novel, perhaps it is because “us ain’t thought about it since then.” In her autobiography, Hurston gives a rational account from Joe Clarke, on whom the fictional character Joe is based:

Joe Clarke had asked himself, why not a Negro town? Few of the Negroes were interested. It was too vaulting for their comprehension. A pure Negro town! If nothing but their own kind was in it, who was going to run it? With no white folks to command them, how would they know what to do? Joe Clarke had plenty of confidence in himself to do the job, but few others could conceive of it. (Hurston, 1942, p. 14)

Joe’s comment demonstrates the trepidation black people have had in chartering their own path, separate from white people. He realizes that despite the obstacles, someone must take on the responsibility for the benefit of the community. In like manner, the black community must be just as proactive about love and marriage. Emphatically,

Stewart (2020) contends that “All Americans, including public servants, policy makers, activists, and religious leaders, have a role to play in establishing new structures and creating optimal environments that foster loving, healthy, and enduring Black couples and communities” (p. 13).

Like Hurston demonstrates with the town, prior to Joe’s organization, the community had been ambivalent about its operation. When Joe brings vision to Eatonville, the community thrives and becomes self-sufficient by insourcing rather than by outsourcing. In other words, the Eatonville community begins to prosper. Similarly, as Stewart suggests, when scholars and researchers study more exclusively about black love and marriage, then ways to combat the decline in marriage and love relationships will increase. Hurston’s use of Joe as a metaphor to establish a new vision for the town is the same formula needed for black love and marriage to thrive and be successful for the black family.

In an effort to provoke change, in recent years, the black community began to provide major intervention, creating a movement against messages that discourage black love and marriage. According to Mitchell (2021), it is the American way to discourage black people from choosing one another. Negative images and stereotypes through mainstream media constantly reinforce the idea that black women are “not feminine or submissive enough” and that black men are not available because of mass incarceration, sexual orientation, and interracial marriages. Such stereotypes cause tension between black men and women and result in each group pointing fingers at one another. Meanwhile, the marriage gap for black people continues to hemorrhage. “Between 1950 and 1996, the percentage of Black families headed by married couples declined from 78

percent to 34 percent” (Blackman et al., 2006). In 2010, ABC’s *Nightline* attempted to cover this crisis by focusing on black women, in particular, in an episode entitled, “Why Can’t a Successful Black Woman Find a Man?” Shortly after this episode, the black community could not continue its silence. Thus, the blacks who had viable platforms began to brainstorm methods to reeducate and reunite other black men and women. To circumvent negative messages, black-owned production companies began to strategically enforce positive images and messages regarding black love. Black love and marriage finally became the responsibility of the black community. Images of black love began to emerge by way of theaters, television, books, podcasts, and social marketing. These images now create new interests, conversations, discussions, and scholarly work on black love from a wider spectrum. Despite the wave of interest, answers to the solutions of black love prove to be complex. Where to go from here is difficult to assess. Nevertheless, researchers continue to explore the historical paths of love in the black community. To understand the future of black love, it is necessary to revisit how couples navigate and share power and what is the community’s role in negotiating difficult relationships in black love. Simply stated, Hurston asserts that black people must work cohesively to complete the task.

How Couples Navigate and Share Power

In *Their Eyes*, Hurston illustrates the shared responsibility between Janie and Tea Cake as an ideal relationship. Examples from the novel prove that the couple is building a strong partnership: Janie cooking and Tea Cake washing dishes; Tea Cake catching the fish and Janie cleaning and cooking the fish; Tea Cake working to provide their income and Janie working only if she desires. Also, Janie has her own money, but

the couple only makes use of Tea Cake's funds. Obviously, by today's standard, Tea Cake would be the perfect husband:

In a 2017 Pew Research Center survey of 4971 adults, 84 percent of Blacks (compared to 67 percent of Whites) said it was 'very important for a man' to be able to financially support a family when it comes to being a good spouse or partner. (Parker & Stepler, 2020, par. 4)

In keeping with statistics, Hurston purports that Tea Cake works within the patriarchal system to retain his manhood by being the financial breadwinner. He also works around the same system by sharing duties within the marriage to maintain his relationship. As a result, both Tea Cake and Janie have shared responsibilities in the relationship, where they have created defined, comfortable, and sustainable roles. These roles allow them to distribute power evenly and provide the nurturing each needs so that the weight of the responsibilities of the marriage does not rest solely on one person. Tea Cake and Janie's relationship is an example of a partnership in which Hurston believes gratifies both people. Her examples correlate with Stewart's (2020) comment about marriage, when she says, "Patriarchy is not the secret sauce of long, healthy marriages no matter how much Black couples may strive to achieve Euro-American familial model of the breadwinner husband and the caregiver wife" (p. 215). Therefore, Hurston must alter the relationship of Tea Cake and Janie so that they can have a fulfilling marriage: "To achieve these ends, they have to escape the plantations of patriarchy that hold them captive" (Stewart, 2020, p. 216). This shared power and bliss shown in Tea Cake and Janie's marriage is the complete opposite in Sykes and Delia's marriage in "Sweat" and indicates a power imbalance that the couple fails to overcome.

In “Sweat,” Delia Jones works and is the breadwinner in her marriage. As a result, the marriage is strained. Seidel (1991) argues that “Sweat” functions “as a documentary of [the] economic situation of Eatonville in the early decades of the twentieth century” (p. 110). If the previous assertion is correct, Hurston’s foresight sheds light on issues black men and women still face today.

In black families, college-educated wives often assume the conventional economic role of husband. According to one study, married, college—educated black women earn more than 60 percent of their household income, approximately the same percentage earned by the average white husband.

College-educated women are sometimes the sole earners in their family, as more than one out of ten married, college-educated black women have a husband who is unemployed. (Banks, 2012, p. 85)

Thus, “Sweat” not only mimics the unemployment dilemma of the black men in Eatonville but also as Banks’s statement suggests, “Sweat” represents the fragility of the black man’s unemployment situation even today. The unemployment and irresponsibility of Sykes, Delia’s husband, leads to his destructive behavior. If Sykes falls into the category of some of Hurston’s other male characters who uphold patriarchal beliefs, not working and depending on his wife could affect his ego. Stewart (2020) asks:

If black husbands can’t perform their patriarchal role because of their inherited poverty and wealthlessness, how does it affect their sense of manhood, their wives’ and children’s perceptions of them, and their overall marriages and family lives? (p. 215)

Assumptively, the only way for Sykes to feel like a man--by being verbally, mentally, and physically abusive--is for him to make Delia feel like less of a woman. Sykes claims to hate Delia's job because she washes clothes for white people. He says, "Ah done tole you time and again to keep them white folks' clothes outa dis house" (Hurstons, 2020, p.114). Sykes' demands are totally unreasonable since Delia is the only person bringing in an income. Delia reminds him, "Mah tub of suds is filled yo' belly with vittles more times than yo' hands is filled it. Mah sweat is done paid for this house and Ah kin keep on sweatin' in it" (p. 115). Though Sykes is abusive toward Delia, she uses her authority to remind him that it is her hard work that feeds him and pays for the house. Even though there are a few times Delia seeks to defend herself against Sykes' horrid treatment, she endures the marriage for 15 years. Stewart (2020) poses another question:

And how many wives have submitted themselves to abuse and toxicity at the hands of their patriarchal spouses because they have accepted subtle overt cultural messages to mind their place and preserve their marriages at any cost. (p. 215)

Delia, a religious woman, is longsuffering in her marriage not only because of her patriarchal belief to submit to her husband but also because of her spiritual values. Religious beliefs play a huge role in promoting patriarchal systems. "The most ardent pusher of patriarchy is the Black community are revered Black male pastors, but Black church cultures in general reinforce inherited White American patriarchal values that prescribe roles for husbands and wives" (Stewart, 2020, p. 196). Despite Delia being the breadwinner and Sykes carrying on in an openly-known marital affair, Delia remains faithful. Eventually she has an attitude of "indifference to all that he was or did" (p. 117). Yet, as with *Their Eyes*, in the relationship of Janie and Joe, once Janie loses her

affections toward Joe, the power in the relationship shifts. As with Delia, she begins to stand up for herself. Delia says, it's "Too late now to hope for love" (Hurston, 2020, p. 116). With his power declining in the relationship, Sykes looks for ways to aggravate Delia. He cheats on her with another woman and flaunts the woman around town, but his final devilish act is to bring a snake home to scare Delia. Delia begins to hate Sykes. She says to him, "Ah hates you tuh de same degree dat Ah uster love yuh" (Hurston, 2020, p. 123). Sykes' demise is his inability to accept his wife as the breadwinner, and his attempt to hurt her in the way that society has hurt him backfires. For Hurston, these types of imbalances in marriage prove unsuccessful, as both the wife and the husband lose.

Stewart (2020) adds:

We need to cultivate a new national affect regarding Black love and marriage—one that never forgets Zora Neale Hurston's vernacular theorization, that the Black woman is "de mule uh de world," and one that simultaneously creates what Alisha Gaines calls "empathy plus" for Black males and their structural alienation from gainful employment as well as wealth building resources and opportunities. (p. 220)

Stewart's comment calls attention to the fact that both black men and women need support when it comes to black love. Just as Delia is unrewarded for her hard work in "Sweat," unfortunately, Hurston fails to gain a supportive partnership when it comes to love. Like many of her characters, she faces giving up one dream to obtain another. According to *Dust Tracks on the Road*, Hurston could not have the two things in life that she loved most-- writing and A.W.P, her love interest. Hurston finds it difficult for men and women to achieve the highest level of success when love is involved, especially

when it comes to women. Therefore, as noted earlier, when CBS suggests that Michelle Obama has it all--law career, strong marriage, happy children, the network overlooks her giving up a lucrative career to support her husband's political ambitions. It also overlooks that being the first lady to the first black president put her and her children's lives at risk. CBS did not ask First Lady Obama about her "dreams deferred." It just assumed she had it all because becoming first lady was more than what America expected a black woman to achieve. In her own words, First Lady Obama says, "It had been painful to step away from my work, but there was no choice: My family needed me, and that mattered more" (Obama, 2018, p. 254). The misconception of having it all must be corrected. Every relationship must have a level of shared power as Hurston displays with Tea Cake and Janie. Hurston believes that black writers must expose other cultures to the customs and traditions of African Americans. Rather than burying black culture in exchange for an out-of-reach American dream, Hurston through her example of Tea Cake and Janie emulates two people working side by side to reach one common goal--sharing in power and in love.

The community's role in negotiating difficult relationships

The role of the community in the works of Hurston represents the beliefs, customs, and traditions of black people. According to Malone-Colon (2007), to curtail the marriage crisis today, African Americans need a vision. Malone-Colon (2007) proposes that one vision is to have a healthy black community in which "most African Americans who desire marriage for themselves are able to develop healthy marriages and rear their children in caring communities" (p. 3). Community is important to Hurston; she establishes a multi-point of view on what is referred to as "the village" in many of the

short stories in *Hitting a Straight Lick* to express the various opinions of the people. Many of Hurston's characters are interpreted and judged by the outlook of "the village." Therefore, as it relates to the community's role in negotiating difficult relationships such as love and marriage, Hurston's projections sometimes demonstrate the community's indifference towards improving the situation. Hurston uses the community as a moral compass to identify problems in certain marriages. However, she rarely allows what the community observes to be used for correction. The phrase "everybody's grown" is significant because it dismantles people's ability to chastise adults with the rationale that grown people do not need correction. For example, in "The Eatonville Anthology," Hurston includes 14 brief excerpts that incorporate the people of Eatonville. Frever (2006) claims that "The Eatonville Anthology" is a community text, using the short fictional form to depict the bonding of individuals into a community through spoken narrative. Some of the characters' names and situations in the "Anthology" are familiar to readers because they appear in many of Hurston's later works. Nevertheless, the "Anthology" uncovers some of the strangest behaviors of the towns people, but there are only a few instances where there is true intervention.

In "Village Fiction," a vignette in the "Anthology," Mrs. McDuffy attends church every Sunday, and she always shouts because she "can't squinch the sperritt" (Hurston, 2020, p. 140). "Her husband always sits in the back row and beats her as soon as they get home" because he thinks she is a hypocrite (Hurston, 2020, p. 140). Elijah Mosley, a church member, intervenes. First he asks her, "why she didn't stop shouting, seeing she always got a beating out about it," but she expresses she cannot stop the spirit (Hurston, 2020, p. 149). Therefore, Elijah goes to the husband, Mr. McDuffy, and asks that he stop

beating Mrs. McDuffy. Although Mr. McDuffy justifies his behavior, it is the first time readers see direct intervention.

In comparison to *Their Eyes*, there is no one to intervene for Janie--for the way Joe treats her. Furthermore, when Tea Cake hits Janie, other men praise him. Likewise, in “Sweat,” Sykes’ treatment of Delia is so horrific, that the “village men” discuss intervention. Elijah Mosley is one of the men from “the village” who appears in multiple short stories in the “Anthology” and who discusses Delia and Sykes’ marriage. Elijah says, Sykes “done beat huh [Delia] ’nough tuh kill three women” (Hurstun, 2020, p. 118). “Sweat” and “The Eatonville Anthology” were both written the same year, but as many biographers have figured out, many of Hurston’s characters and storylines are about real people in Eatonville. Hurston’s depictions of men gathering on the porch being the heart of the community is important, especially since Joe Clarke, the mayor of Eatonville, is a part of “the village” and represents the people. “The village” is aware of everything that happens in the community, and in reference to Delia and Sykes, “the village” admits that someone should intervene:

We oughter take Sykes an’ dat stray ‘oman uh his’n down in Lake Howell swamp an’ lay on de rawhide till they cain’t say ‘Lawd a’ mussy.’ He allus wuz uh ovahbearin’ niggah, but since dat whit ‘oman from up north done teached ‘im how to run a automobile, he done got too biggety to live—an’ we oughter kill ‘im. (Hurstun, 2020, p. 119)

Despite these men’s discussion about Sykes, they do nothing, and his behavior worsens. Clearly, the men know Sykes is misbehaving. According to West (2020), “At the same time, the larger community becomes a target for criticism when the men continue to turn

a blind eye to the violence” (p. xxxi). Consequently, “the village” and the larger community are one in the same because they all know but fail to stop Sykes. Someone else says, “There oughter be a law” regarding his behavior, but Joe Clarke responds, “Taint no law on earth dat kin make a man be decent if it aint in ’im (Hurstons, 2020, p. 118). The men’s silence causes Sykes’ behavior to continue. As a result, Sykes dies by his own doing. The refusal of the community to get involved occurs because of their belief that “everybody’s grown.” If “the village” had been willing to confront and intervene, they probably could have prevented Sykes’ death.

In “Spunk” the same group of men, “the village,” introduces readers to the conflict in the story and much of the story is told from their point of view. Elijah Mosely from the previous stories announces, “Looka theah, folkses!” “Theah they go, big as life an’ brassy as tacks” (Hurstons, 2020, p. 54). Elijah is bringing public attention to the affair of Spunk Banks and Lena Kanty. Walter Thomas, another repeating character from “the village,” yells, “Now pee-eople!” “Will you look at ‘em!” Walter adds, “But that’s one thing Ah likes about Spunk Banks—he ain’t skeered of nothin’ on God’s green footstool—*nothin’!* He rides that log down at saw-mill jus’ like he struts ’round wid another man’s wife—jus’ don’t give a kitty” (Hurstons, 2020, p. 55). Joe Kanty in “Spunk,” like Delia in “Sweat,” has a bad spouse, and because of his fear of Spunk Banks, there is little he can do about it. When Joe decides he will confront Spunk with a knife, “the village” is aware of his plans but “laughed boisterously behind Joe’s back” (Hurstons, 2020, p. 57). Walter says, “Tain’t even decent for a man to take and take like he [Joe] do” (p. 57). However, he knows that if Joe confronts Spunk, “Spunk will sho’

kill him” (p. 57). To uphold his manhood, “the village” is silent while Joe challenges Spunk, and predictably things turn fatal for Joe. Spunk kills Joe.

As with the rattlesnake and its symbolism of death and enmity in “Sweat,” Hurston uses a black bob cat to evoke revenge for Joe. In the end, Spunk dies as well. His death is attributed to Joe’s resurrection in the form of the black bob cat. On the one hand, “the village” in “Sweat” shows empathy for Delia, yet they do not interfere. On the other hand, in “Spunk,” “the village” is devoid of empathy for Joe but are very vocal about Spunk’s marital affair. When Joe goes after Spunk, although the men know Joe cannot win, they think “as a man” he must confront Spunk. After Joe’s death, the men discuss how to handle Spunk because Eatonville does not have a sheriff or judicial system in place: “At the general store later on, all talked of locking him up until the sheriff could come from Orlando, but no one did anything but talk” (Hurston, 2020, p. 59). In hindsight--because of the community’s negligence--both men, Joe and Spunk, die unnecessarily while “the village” did nothing but talk.

Hurston’s “village” serves as observers rather than as protesters. By employing this strategy, Hurston shows that “the village” lacks empowerment and leadership which are both needed to improve the community. Without the establishment of laws to govern the town, the community is without structure and guidance and as the fictional Joe in *Their Eyes* contorts, there is not anyone in place to tell them what to do. Therefore, as seen in these short stories the community is at risk.

Examples of the community’s failure to intercede are reoccurring themes in Hurston’s work. When Janie wants to marry Tea Cake, the Eatonville community has a lot to say, but only a few people are willing to get involved. Sam Watson, Pheoby’s

husband, urges her to talk to Janie. He says, “You better sense her intuh things then ’cause Tea Cake can’t do nothin’ but help spend whut she got” (Hurston, 1995, p. 264). Pheoby tries to intervene, but she does not sway Janie’s decision. The advice is still beneficial to Janie because Pheoby cautions her to take money with her to meet Tea Cake in case things go wrong. This small intervention could have been detrimental if the community had been right about Tea Cake’s intentions of being harmful. Hurston’s use of community in both *Their Eyes* and in *Hitting a Straight Lick* serves as an example in displaying how their involvement can be a deterrent to behaviors that tear down or uplift the race. Overall, Hurston believes that the black community plays a role in the betterment of relationships. Hence, “the village” must involve itself in the affairs of black love and marriage.

Community Black-lash

ABC News *Nightline* aired in January 2010 a report showcasing the struggle black women face in finding a man. The interview was composed of four friends, who at the time, were cheerleaders for the Atlanta Falcons while maintaining lucrative careers. The four women were: Jakene Ashford, chemist; Chato Waters at the time, now Chato Waters-Hendrix guidance counselor; Nicole Marchand, District Attorney now Nicole Marchand-Golden; and Melinda Watson, administrator. According to Jakene, a Memphis native but a resident of Atlanta, Nicole Marchand was approached by ABC News in an effort to shed light on why 42 percent of black women are unmarried; thus, she invited the other ladies to participate. However, in a personal interview with Jakene, which was conducted for this research only, she reports that the ABC interview went from a “journalistic feel to an interrogation.” Jakene says that *Nightline* never told them that

author Steve Harvey was going to be a part of the interview. His book, *Act like a Lady, Think like a Man: What Men Really Think about Love, Relationships, Intimacy, and Commitment*, had just debuted, and instead of there being objectivity in the interview, the women became case studies for Harvey's book. Jakene explains that Harvey overtook the interview and began to ask questions regarding the points in his book. To the women's dismay, they were in a confrontational environment where their position conflicted with Harvey's who represented the black man. As a result, the women felt blindsided. Initially, Jakene was proud to do the interview because, as she explains, nobody was talking about such timely issues, but sadly she said the interview and the way it was edited made them look as if their standards were too high and unreasonable. Because of the interview, Jakene says she experienced harassment through her social media accounts and received tons of emails, thus she had to disable her accounts. She adds, "To make matters worse, people were taking clips from the interviews and creating workshops and podcast that took things out of context." At the time, although not married, she was in a serious relationship, but after the interview, the relationship deteriorated. Oddly she says, while she received a slew of criticism from the black community, she received marriage proposals from all over the world—Africa, China, Europe. Although the ABC News *Nightline* interview was not a pleasant experience, Jakene says the topic is still needed because it seems like things are getting worse. When asked what advice she would give regarding black love and marriage she says:

Be content with where you are, and do not allow societal pressures to dictate what you should be doing. Get to know yourself, and love yourself enough to not follow societal trends. Know what you want, and stick to it. My parents never

pressured me to get married or to have kids. Make the best choice for you so that you marry the right person for the right reasons.

Of the four women interviewed for ABC News *Nightline*, two are now married; however, Jakene, one of the women who is still single, is not discouraged, for she contends:

I love—love and I definitely think there is someone for everyone; however, I do regret doing the ABC interview. I've been offered other reality show opportunities and media interviews, but I turned down these offers because the ABC News *Nightline* experience made me realize television is not for me.

duCille (2018) wrote about the “burden of representation,” implying that early Black television stars were expected to carry the image of the race on their backs. The *Nightline* interview for the four women caused a “black-lash.” Some of the biggest critics of the interview were black people. Jakene says they were accused of putting black men down, and many women reached out to them, saying there were plenty of black men available, adding that they were just too picky. *Nightline* successfully divided the black community on the issue, and the show experienced a backlash. Despite the alarming statistics that led to the initial interview, the black community's refusal to collectively acknowledge the decline in marriage only caused the problem to escalate. It also discouraged single black professional women to speak up about not having a mate, causing them to place blame on themselves. Just ten years after the ABC *Nightline* interview, West's (2020) published her book *Black Love, Black Women*, pushing the dilemma of black women not finding a man as a national emergency.

A Call to Action

As stated in Chapter 2, Harvey's controversial *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* became a number one bestseller. However, from Jakene's point of view, the book did little to bridge the gap between black men and women in terms of love and marriage. Yet, the book did open the door to much-needed dialogue about the subject. The conversation just needed to be steered in the right direction. Steadily, the topic of black love and marriage became a rising concern, and the black community began to look for ways to combat negative reports about black love, especially reports from mainstream media.

By 2017, the OWN network debuted the docu-series "Black Love" and 1.2 million total viewers tuned in, proving that the network had tapped into an area of interest. According to the network (2017), the series became OWN's most-watched and highest-rated unscripted series. In addition, the network reported that the premiere also was number 2 in the time period across all cable for women ages 25-54 and number 2 for the most social primetime episode on national cable ("Black Love", 2017). *The New York Times* reports that "the documentary-style reality series maintains its focus on Black lives and relationships while avoiding typical reality TV stunts" (Jackson, 2020, par. 1). The creators of "Black Love," Codie Elaine Oliver and Tommy Oliver, highlight love stories from black couples to expose audiences to positive examples of black love. As a result, the popular docu-series is successfully in its fifth season. The network president, Tina Perry, told *The New York Times* that the show is "a unicorn in the TV universe," and she said the Olivers capture stories that are typically found only in scripted fare (Jackson, 2020). Ann duCille, a professor emerita of English at Wesleyan University, says in the same article, "Part of what makes the show special is an 'aura of authenticity' that sets it

apart from other televised fare, because real people — even though many of them are actors and entertainers — talk candidly about their real lives and loves” (Jackson, 2020, par 25). Codie explains the origin of the show:

The concept had originated in Codie’s mind several years before she met Tommy, when she was single and a graduate student in 2008 at the University of Southern California. Bleak headlines at the time, noting that high-achieving Black women were less likely to marry and that marriage among Black people was in decline, left her fearful of her prospects for a lasting relationship. But as she watched then-Senator Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, ascend into the national spotlight, she regained hope. That was the thing that allowed me to understand how important it was that Black love be visible...That’s when I decided that I wanted to create a space where Black love lives. (Jackson, 2020, par 17)

In the latest episode, “Terri and Charles Share Their Love Story,” (Season 5 Episode 506), Terri McFaddin-Solomon agreed to share her experience regarding that episode exclusively for this research. Charles Solomon and Terri McFaddin-Solomon³ met in an unorthodox way. According to Terri, Charles had been married for 29 years when he found his wife had cancer. Terri, a widower for 25 years, had become friends with Charles and his wife as she closely followed Terri’s ministry. When the wife realized her cancer was terminal, her last wish to Terri and Charles was that they become a couple, but the idea was too far-fetched for either of them to conceive. A year after Charles lost his wife, he and Terri connected and ultimately married. Charles and Terri have been

³ Minister Terri McFaddin-Solomon is an ordained minister, author of four books, and a two-time Grammy-winning songwriter.

married for 15 years. For this research, Terri was asked what OWN producers had shared with her about the importance of the show.

She explains that the show is part of Oprah Winfrey's agenda to promote social consciousness along with entertainment that addresses the most pressing issues in the African American community, and love and marriage is among those issues. Terri says, "We were told to freestyle and talk about our love story; thus, my husband and I talked about the divine purpose of a Godly marriage and what's behind the heart connection." For this research, Terri provides an example of a friend who had not had a marriage in her family for four generations. Consequently, as Terri articulates, "there is not an expectation of marriage in that family because they have not seen an example of one." She adds "that marriage is easy to quit, but what you have to do is prove that marriage works and that is the challenge a lot of people struggle with. Someone has to prove that we have the strength to build strong families." In another example, she says that she was invited to conduct the graduation speech for the black cadets at West Point. As a result, they thought that she was going to center the speech around something about the country and success. Instead, she chose to tell them: "The greatest thing you can do for your country is to marry well and raise strong children." Terri's overall sentiment about black love and marriage is that it is not about us but about generations. Unlike Jakene's, Terri's experience with black love was positive, but both women have stories that need to be heard.

Conclusion

When looking at the trajectory of Hurston's writings, and comparing the personal interviews of Jakene Ashford and Terri McFaddin-Solomon, one can see the issues that

Hurston highlights from 1937 until now. As Hurston recognizes the importance of shared responsibility, Jakene did not experience any of that when she decided to speak about her opinion as a black woman in America regarding love and marriage. Although many black women were having the same experience, they did not rally around Jakene or support her story. Harvey's presence in the interview should have added the component of shared responsibility between black men and women. Instead, his presence created division and resentment leading to a classic case of power imbalance. In addition, as Hurston teaches, it matters who is narrating the story. While one cannot fault ABC News *Nightline* for reporting the crisis, their attempt to control the narrative proved harmful to the black community. As shown in the series "Black Love," the interviewees control the narrative and can freely tell their stories as they see fit, thereby giving the black community the opportunity and responsibility to depict their own examples of love. The show's reception was just as impactful as the republishing of *Their Eyes* because black people are hungry for a love story that *they* headline. Hurston offers insight that she really wants the black community to recognize. She wants black men and women to work in partnership, "giving in love," so they can have fulfilling relationships. Second, she wants "the village" to be proactive in correcting wrong behaviors. How couples navigate and share power and the community's role in negotiating difficult relationships can only be steered through positive examples from the black community. It is only when the community holds its members accountable that one can proclaim that "everybody's grown!"

Conclusion

While the topic of black love and marriage is now a current social concern, the issue has been popular for quite some time, and in recent years, it has escalated to crisis mode. Historically, African Americans have been vocal about discrimination, so much so that they have been conditioned to ignore personal matters, especially when it comes to the structure of family, marriage, and love. While I partially agree with Stewart (2020) that black love for black women is in a state of emergency, I disagree that black women should bear this emergency singularly. Without acknowledging black men, black women are left to carry the burden, coinciding with Hurston's famous words that the black woman is the "mule uh de world." However, the state of black love is communal as it affects all black people.

Although it was not my intention to conduct research on black love, the subject found me, and it must have been needed because I discovered that the study of black love is heavily flawed: "Scholars still lack a comprehensive understanding of the consequences of marriage for African Americans specifically" (Blackman et al., 2006, p. 4). Blackman and other writers sought to change the lack of research about black marriage publishing in 2006 a comprehensive literature review entitled, *The Consequences of Marriage for African Americans*. At the time, Blackman et. al, (2006) said they were unaware of any systematic scholarly review on black marriage (p. 4). Since that time, black love has become a sought after topic, and many scholarly studies have been conducted, but sometimes the focus is too narrow. Traditionally, scholars of black love only studied married couples. In addition, researchers are not in agreement regarding the root cause for the steady decline in black marriage, although most critics

blame slavery and racism. Unfortunately, there do not seem to be solid solutions to curtail the decline in marriage. I found the research consistent, but the approaches to the topic are limited. Only two things seem absolute, the effects of slavery and the crisis for black women. Most critics agree that for the black community, marriage is deteriorating and so is black love.

I entered the conversation about black love from a literary point of view to give new perspective on black love and marriage through Hurston's eyes. Through her prophetic words I was able to demonstrate how black love materializes throughout generations. Spencer (2004) says:

In a period when many African-American artists and intellectuals viewed literature as an occasion for direct confrontation with white America's racial practices and its effects on African Americans, much of Zora Neale Hurston's work seemed out of step with the time. (p.17)

However, Hurston's words find relevance now, and as we have learned that her recurring themes never seem to expire. Collectively, her works provide one of the most profound, in-depth cultural studies of black love and marriage for African Americans. This study proves that "Hurston's formal education provided a way to view her lived experience from a position of scientific objectivity" (Spencer, 2004, p. 17). Thus, this research also gives balance between the male and female points of view.

Spencer (2004) helpfully says:

Hurston, as both educated observer and one of the folk, saw in her study of anthropology a way to merge the bifurcated aspects of her life—her rural upbringing in the South and her urban education— to form a complex racial

philosophy. These two aspects of Hurston's life experience influenced her fiction and set her apart from her contemporaries, leading her to develop a complex racial philosophy more in keeping with current notions of race than with the ideas of her own time. (p.17-18)

Spencer's assertions speak to the core of this study, as my work extends, amplifies, and contextualizes key examples of Hurston comments on black love and marriage. West's (2020) questions, listed below, from her introduction to *Hitting a Straight Lick* form the framework for Chapters 3-5:

- What is the purpose and function of marriage? What does it mean to be a woman, particularly a married woman?
- How should men behave? What are his responsibilities?
- How do couples navigate or share power? What is the community's role in negotiating difficult or abusive relationships?

West's questions are beneficial as they perfectly align with my overall argument, which is Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and other works are the catalyst for understanding issues and imbalances of black love.

“Free, Single, Disengaged”

In Chapter 5 of *Their Eyes*, one of the minor characters introduces himself. He says, “Mighty glad tuh have yuh. Hicks is the name. Gov'nor Amos Hicks from Buford, South Carolina. Free, single, disengaged” (Hurston, 1995, p. 201). Hicks' statement is one of the many phrases in Hurston's work that makes me laugh. Yet, it accurately describes my personal journey with the topic of black love and marriage. As readers digest this research, I can proudly say, “Mighty glad tuh have yuh,” I am a black female

“free, single, disengaged,” but like all of Hurston’s characters and even Hurston herself, I want to imagine what love looks like while sitting under the Chinaberry tree. However, the search for a loving relationship would be complex and difficult to find. As Hurston exemplifies in *Their Eyes*, Janie is thinking about love as soon as puberty hits, and like Janie, I would come up short each time, believing in a sense love did not exist. I had not considered the effects of slavery or systematic racism whatsoever. All I knew is another year passed, and I was alone. Like Hurston, I had to go back to the very beginning of my journey to understand the possible obstacles that were in my path. Like many people, my parents were married and in love, but divorce would find them with an unexpected surprise. My mother was expecting when she decided to divorce my father. I, in the womb, could not hold them together. Her pregnancy was complicated, so much so I came into the world in just six months. Like Hurston, I have been fighting to be here ever since. I did not bond much with my parents; I spent more time away from them than I spent with them. I grew up with my great-grandmother Mozella Marrs Vaughn in a town very much like Eatonville called Jericho, Arkansas (population, today--99), where no white people lived, so you can imagine how much Hurston’s work resonates with me. I stayed there until it was time to enter grade school. Then, I returned to Memphis with my mother, who eventually moved the family to Houston, Texas. At 15 years of age, I moved back to Memphis to live with my grandmother, Odessa S. Boyd.

Throughout my life, I did okay, but I had never experienced deep love, and I was curious about it. I waited and waited, but love would always elude me. Like Hurston, there would be times when my career consumed me, but for the most part, I just could not identify with that type of love. However, what Hurston teaches is what one misses in life one can create and share through the gift of writing. Consequently, I am sure Hurston would appreciate

all the love and admiration she now posthumously receives because of her work. Who would she have been if she had received such honors while she was still here? I believe that Hurston wants black people to have the fullness of love while they are still here. She wants black people to understand the love that they have within that can supersede all of the unfortunate struggles life brings. We must operate in that love, but sometimes because we got so little of it, there is little left to give. I hope for the reader this journey opens "*Their Eyes*" to enlighten and provide understanding of black love and marriage. Then, the black community can freely experience what Hurston calls "self-crushing love," and close the gap on disparaging reports about black love and marriage. Today, I am "free, single, disengaged," but who knows, tomorrow--I could be "marrying and giving in marriage" for I have learned through this journey with Hurston, that with black love anything is possible.

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