THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON THE COMMUNICATION OF

ROMANTIC ROLES

by

TONIA N. EAST

(Under the direction of Dr. Tina M. Harris)

ABSTRACT

This study investigates what roles are expected by dating partners for themselves and their partners. In this study race, sex, and commitment level are explored in relation to what role are expected. Roles were found to vary according to the context of the relationship, within committed and casual relationships. Fourteen role categories emerged from a content analysis of the responses. The role categories included: “supporter,” “friend,” “nurturer,” “lover,” “trustee,” “organizer,” “listener,” “communicator,” “provider,” “advisor,” “leader,” “entertainer,” and “religious” roles. African American and European American participants valued companionship, love, and support in their dating relationships. Three themes emerged within the data in regard to role orientation, cultural orientation, and role adoption. Implications for future research in relational communication are also given.

INDEX WORDS: Roles, Cultural Studies, Dating, Gender, Relational Communication, Qualitative Research
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In memory of Wallace M. East. May your writing live on in my words.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Regardless of culture, economic status, or educational level, most people will inevitably face the difficulty of communicating their needs in a romantic relationship, which may be why the scope of studies involving relational communication is vast and varied, stretching across numerous disciplines. Though relational communication goes beyond romantic relationships, this will be the particular area of interest for this research. Previous research on romantic relationships has tried to answer frequently asked questions in regard to relational phenomena, such as why romantic relationships have such a large impact on our lives. Studies have shown that interpersonal relationships can have a considerable affect on our emotional and physical well-being (Reis, 1984; Segrin, 2000). This emotional and physical affect is often romanticized in popular movies, magazines, and talk shows. Within academia, researchers have still yet to uncover the various layers that shape romantic relationships.

Purpose of Research

Research within relational communication has been critiqued for presenting a narrow scope of the broad range of relational communication. In Burgoon and Hale’s (1984) study they comment on how two-dimensional scales may become problematic in encouraging “an unduly narrow, simplistic view of relational communication content” (p. 194). Another limitation of previous research in the area of relational communication has been its inability to encompass cultural and contextual factors. Previous analysis of
romantic roles has primarily analyzed European American marriage relationships and how gender shapes the roles adopted (Acock & Edwards, 1982; Douglas & Wind, 1978; Hendrick, C. & Hendrick, S. 1983; Mirowsky & Ross, 1987). Fewer studies have explored roles within dating relationships, especially with participants of diverse cultural backgrounds.

The purpose of this study is to understand how race, gender, and commitment level may impact the adoption and communication of romantic roles in same-race dating relationships. Diggs and Stafford (1998) comment on the need for research on diverse romantic relationships due to the predominance of research involving “White, middle-class, heterosexual participants” (p. 193). In choosing relational topics, scholars have commented on the difficulty in studying “minority or special relationships” because they are more expensive, less accessible and more complex in nature (Duck, West, and Acitelli, 1997, p. 7). Because both data collection and analysis of studies on minority relationships are more complex, involving multiple layers, a majority of studies only analyze more easily accessible relationships. However, conveniently sampled relationships may not be generalizable to other types of relational contexts. Relational theories that define intimate relationships in terms of easily seen, heterosexual relationships are questionable resources for analysis of more subtle interactions in personal relationships (Duck et al., 1997; Lyons & Meade, 1995; Wood & Duck, 1995). The influence of gender, parental, task, and romantic roles has been explored, but few studies have analyzed how cultural differences impact the adoption of particular roles within the context of dating relationships.
The goal of this study was to understand the communication of roles within dating relationships among European American and African American couples. The African American community provides a unique cultural perspective in regard to relational communication. Hudson (2001) explores the diversity in speech patterns and communication behaviors introduced by African American communication styles, which may have a profound affect on the communication of romantic roles. Though gender roles have been studied, “When race as a socially constructed form of oppression is coupled with gender, additional role expectations and stereotypes emerge” (Harris & Hunt, 1998, p.10). Research pools must include opinions from various racial perspectives, such as that of the African American community, in order for additional role expectations to be revealed.

There are some studies of the roles adopted in African-American marriages, but fewer studies consider these roles within the context of dating relationships (Collins, 1989; McAdoo, 1996; Moyhihan, 1965; Rubin, 1978). Without consideration of “minority” and “special relationships,” there is no way of knowing whether studies based on easily accessible populations of study are truly representative of most romantic relationships (Duck et al., 1997, p.7). The analysis of specific cultural influence on roles may reveal some differences, as well as similarities, in how roles are adopted. Examination of how dating roles, in particular, are established may also reveal some similarities and differences in role expectations and expression of roles. It is important to acknowledge that all relational roles will not be adequately described through one specific context, but greater understanding can emerge as we investigate incongruence as well as commonality within dating relationships.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Roles in Interpersonal Relationships

For the purposes of this analysis, a role is defined as, “a socially defined set of expectations with rules for permissible and obligatory behavior that govern the relationship” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1983, p.18). Roles are often revealed in pairs, such as husband – wife, doctor-patient (Hendrick, 1988). And, according to some scholars every role we assume dictates a pattern of behavior that is expected and enforced by various groups (Coutu, 1949). Canary and Stafford (1994) explain that people engage in routine behaviors with a low level of consciousness. Furthermore, these routine behaviors are often unnoticed until the pattern is broken, which supports the assumption that people may not be conscious of their role in the relationship until there is a conscious or subconscious role exchange by one or between both partners.

Roles, Patterns, and Predictability in Relationships

Capella’s (1998) analysis of personal relationships reveals that research and theory have often ignored the interaction patterns that shape romantic relationships. These interaction patterns are the tools we use to establish, maintain, and violate relational rules. In order to understand if the roles we take on influence the sequence of these interaction patterns, this analysis examined how the roles we enact in romantic relationships establish interaction patterns that allow the relationship to be more predictable. Several studies explore the importance of predictability in relationships
Boon states, “establishing a partner’s dependability is fundamental to proving his or her trustworthiness” (1994, p.97). Predictability helps to alleviate ambivalence and establish trust in a relationship. However, an over abundance of predictability can lead to relational distress (Baxter, 1990). In essence, partners desire a level of predictability in relationships that can be achieved through role maintenance, and roles can be adjusted to meet the needs of the relationship.

Because we are socialized to assume many roles over the course of our lives, we must have a greater understanding of how they are established within our romantic relationships. Capella (1988) reveals how roles in romantic relationships are more intimate in nature and require knowledge of the other person through interaction. For example, task roles that require little knowledge of the other and minimal interaction are considered to be “nonintimate” (Capella, 1988). Satisfaction with intimate roles has been linked to the equality of role distribution.

Race and Role Expectations

Researchers from multiple disciplines have also addressed how integral culture is in shaping our reality (Benedict, 1946; Geertz, 1973; Kamalipour & Carilli, 1998; Wood, 1982). When we come into the world, we are not aware of what roles we should adopt, who to trust, or what faith to practice. Instead, all of these decisions are influenced by the culture in which we partake. Lull also asserts that culture can be “changed in routine communication and social interaction” (1995, p.66). In order to determine the degree to which culture impacts the communication of roles in dating relationships, the current
study specifically explored the degree to which race shapes routine communication of roles within romantic relationships. What communication behaviors are typically associated with these roles? Questions such as these will be explored in this analysis.

Cultural norms serve many functions in our lives, one of which is to reveal appropriate communication behavior. Duncan and Goodall’s (1998) study of communication competence among European Americans and African Americans, found women of both cultures to be more communicatively competent than their male counterparts. African American males displayed slightly less competence than European American males and reported more feelings of being misunderstood. In another analysis of competence in communication, Parks states that, “Rules of social conduct are the mechanism by which people protect their ability to pursue their desires” (1985, 194). In essence, these rules dictate what behavior is acceptable and what is unacceptable in various social contexts. According to Lull (1995), these rules regulate most interpersonal interactions, where equality, accurateness, or competence is desired. Relational communication would be an exemplar where equity and efficiency are desired and rules may be necessary for partners in order to regulate their interactions. Several studies have explored how communication rules are established in interpersonal relationships. Findings demonstrate that both nonverbal and verbal rules are used to regulate such interactions (Burgoon, 1985; Giles & Street, 1985; Parks, 1985; Seibold, Cantrill, & Meyers, 1985). The current study seeks to understand irregularities and regularities, in dating interactions and how roles are communicated in culturally diverse dating relationships.
Studies have shown that cultural influences may affect how roles are adopted in relationships (Harris & Hill, 1998; Lull, 1995; Ross & Davis, 1996). Thus, one might assume that what is appropriate in one romantic relationship may be inappropriate in another. Lull (1995) observes that, "Social actors normalize their experiences by interpreting the world in terms of their structured background expectancies "(p. 48). Therefore, it is safe to assume that the particular cultural setting we are communicating in shapes the words we use to communicate our beliefs.

There are other studies that have found similarities within culturally diverse romantic dating relationships (Sanderson & Kurdek, 1993; Ickes, 1997). A study on relational satisfaction and commitment in dating relationships revealed that interdependence, individual differences, and problem-solving models did not differ between African Americans and European Americans (Sanderson & Kurdek, 1993). Gaines and Ickes (1997) found that participants in interracial relationships commented that, despite their physical differences, they shared a great deal in common.

Gender Role Expectations in African American Marriages

Because many studies have failed to consider the role of culture as a socializing agent for many members of society, some studies that have been conducted to address this misrepresentation of interpersonal relationships as monolithic. Harris and Hill (1998) explain that while there are some commonalities in gender role expectations for all Western women, to fulfill the role of the “wife,” “mother,” “lover,” and “friend,” there are cultural gender roles that are unique to particular cultures. Harris and Hill (1998) explain how additional role expectations exist for African American women who are also expected to adopt the role of “mother” and “wife” but in a much broader sense than
mainstream Western culture. African American women are expected to not only support the man of their house but all black men as a whole. The same notion applies to the role of “mother” as well, in that women are expected to nurture and provide for children other than their own (Harris & Hill, 1998). According to Collins (1990), these gender role expectations demonstrate the Afro-centric view of community maintenance that emphasizes family, community, and faith.

Sex role socialization of African American children is a major factor in predicting gender roles in marriage (Aborampah, 1989; Dickson, 1993). According to Dickson (1993), African American women internalize conflicting role types. Traditional roles of passivity and economic dependence are rejected, yet African American women are simultaneously accepting feminine roles of expressiveness, warmth, and nurturance. Dickson (1993) commented on how African American girls are not encouraged to have a strong dependence on males for support, but taught to survive and excel. Majors (1989) proposed that African American males have adopted the “cool pose”, displaying themselves as aloof, emotionless, and fearless, in response to the oppression of broader society. Dickson (1993) explained how the “cool pose” allows them to maintain male pride, dignity, and respect. While African American men are also socialized to adopt traditional masculine roles of dominance, they must also overcome inadequate resources and opportunities for economic leadership in marriage. Aborampah (1989) stated, “Black men, like any other group of men, are socialized to play the role of the providers, and yet opportunities are unavailable to many of them” (p.330). When African American males are unable to adopt the provider role, both partners become dissatisfied with their roles in the marriage (Aborampah, 1989). Lewis (1989) has also found that African American
women are likely to suffer from “role-strain” if they do receive adequate support from family, particularly their spouse.

Role-strain may also be a contributing factor in African American divorce. Economic hardship is also a common cause of divorce, regardless of race, which may explain why divorce rates are even higher in the African American community. The steady decline in available African American men since as early as 1850 also be a contributing factor to lower levels of marriage (Aborampah, 1989; Dickson, 1993). Dickson (1993) reveals that two out of three African American marriages will end in divorce, in comparison to one out of two in European American marriages. Dickson’s (1993) analysis of marriage expectations also examined how increased marriage role expectations of companionship, intimacy, and sexual fulfillment has led to even more dissatisfaction, especially within African American marriages (Dickson, 1993).

Though divorce rates may be high, there are still African American marital partners who have overcome relational challenges and maintained satisfaction. While some studies have looked at the causes of dissolution in African American marriages, other researchers have explored communication strategies used to maintain the relationship. In Diggs and Stafford’s (1998) study, African American respondents described communication strategies they used to maintain their relationship, which include positiveness, openness, and expressions of love and assurance. European American respondents reported similar maintenance strategies, but a greater frequency of task-sharing responses. Based on their study Diggs and Stafford’s (1998) concluded that African Americans lack of responses in favor of task sharing may suggest “a long history of sharing household duties (egalitarian)” (p.197).
Some earlier studies analyzing roles in African American marriages have concluded that partners do not maintain egalitarian roles in romantic relationships. Instead, partners conform to systems of black matriarchy where the woman exerts dominance in most areas of the relationship, while the man is primarily submissive (Moynihan, 1965; Rubin, 1978). In contrast, another earlier study that specifically looked at decision-making roles in African American marriages found that more decisions were made jointly and the wife shared responsibility with her husband (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). More recent studies have also critiqued such studies supporting black matriarchy for not being generalizable to most African-American relationships (Collins, 1989; Davis, Emerson, & Williams, 1997; Staples, 1981a, 1993). Collins (1989) explained the damaging affect of black matriarchy theory in perpetuating the misconception that the inadequacy of African American families stems from the African American females being stronger than African American males. The current study explores if African American females are taking on more leadership roles, within their dating relationships.

**Gender Role Expectations in Black Dating**

Researchers (Davis et al., 1997) have addressed the lack of scholarship exploring dating relationships, in lieu of marriage relationships, which make up a significant proportion of intimate relationships. It has been reported that approximately “two thirds of blacks are single,” and “two thirds of whites are married,” yet analysis of why there are more black singles is lacking (Davis et al., 1997, p. 148). Roles acquired in dating relationships may be another factor contributing to lower levels of marriage in the African American community.
Staples (1981b) suggested that African American relationships may need a “redefinition of roles” in order for dating relationships to progress into long-lasting marriage relationships. According to Chapman (1995), “In many black adults, gender roles are confused or seriously out of balance because of the manner in which children are raised” (p.20). If dating relationships do “set the stage” for marriage then the adoption of effective roles in African American dating relationships may lead to more compatible roles in marriage (Stets, 1993). In analyzing role expectations in romantic relationships, it is important to understand the influences on these roles and how these roles may vary in different contexts.

A study on African American professional dating challenges previous notions of African American women as dominant by exploring perceptions of equity seen by both partners, (Davis et al., 1997). In this study the researchers assumed that African American women would be particularly concerned about equity and fairness, because issues of justice are more pertinent to “members of society who have little power in it [justice concerns]” (Davis et al., 1997, p.151); therefore, equitable roles should be of major concern for African American women who are both women and minorities. Ross and Davis (1996) found African Americans to be more traditional than European Americans in their expectations. In sum, African American males were more likely to initiate and pay for a date than their European American male counterparts, which contradicts Moynihan’s (1964) claim that African American females are more dominant and do not follow traditional roles. Additionally, in Ross and Davis’ (1996) study, European Americans were more flexible in their romantic roles and less concerned with following traditional dating protocol.
A study on relational expectations that college students have of their future partners, found African American daters to have higher expectations for themselves and for their future marriage partners (Ganong, Coleman, Thompson, & Goodwin-Watkins, 1996). African American students expected to have higher incomes at age 35, higher levels of education, and professional success. Though egalitarian roles were evidenced in level of success expectations, some traditional roles were also expected. Both African American and European American females expected their partners to possess a high income, education level, desire for success, and the ability to solve problems. African American expectations of partners were even higher than European Americans, but not at a significant level. In general, men expected less of their own roles in regard to childcare, while women did not expect any differences in childcare responsibilities. Researchers (Ganong et al, 1996) concluded that unrealistic expectations by daters could lead to problematic marriages due to unmet expectations. For example, higher expectations by African Americans of themselves and their future partner may lead to even greater disappointment and progression into marriage. The sex-ratio imbalance favoring African American males has been said to perpetuate greater expectations for their partners (Staples, 1981b; Chapman, 1996). In Staples (1981b) analysis of Black singles and changing patterns within these relationships, one young woman described:

I’ve noticed that many (not all) black males are expecting more and more from women…They have been spoiled by the fact that there are more available women than men (p.60).

Because of this imbalance, some women have taken on various “self-defeating roles” where they support their partners financially, pay for outings and vacations, and co-sign
on their apartments or let them stay with them rent-free (Chapman, 1996). Because of the many advantages of being a single African American male, there is often little incentive to take on a committed role in the relationship.

Gender Role Expectations

Gender Role Expectations in Marriage

In order to understand how romantic roles are communicated between couples, analysis of gender differences in communication of roles may also provide greater understanding. Gender roles are defined as “cultural constructs that emerge in particular social and historical contexts to organize human life” (Hunt & Hunt, 1987, p.193). If gender roles serve to “organize human life,” greater understanding of these roles provides insight into how they help couples categorize their relationship. Several studies involving marriage relationships have analyzed couples’ adoption of traditional roles (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Hendrick, 1988; Hunt & Hunt, 1987; Mirowsky & Ross, 1987). Adoption of such roles occurs through a variety of sources, such as family, friends, society, and the media (Harris & Hill, 1998). Within traditional (gender) roles, power is not distributed equally, instead the husband tends to have greater influence, in the relationship, which potentially leads the male to exert more authority in the relationship. In some instance, these roles are even thought by some to be innate (Mirowsky & Ross, 1987).

The belief that men are born with more drive to be ambitious and successful than women and that women are happiest when making a home and caring for children is a belief in innate sex roles (p. 527).

Mirowsky and Ross (1987) also found that men believed this to be true more so than women, which led them to conclude that the more one spouse believed that sex roles are
innate, the more likely the other would believe sex roles are innate. These findings suggest that both partners have some, but not equal, influence on the roles their partners adopt.

Extending the notion of gender roles further, Hendrick’s (1988) study of gender roles explained that there are other gender differences in how we view our roles. Hendrick’s (1988) does not propose that the gender roles established in relationships are innate. Instead, he posits that roles are reproduced and transformed from generation to generation. According to Hendrick’s (1988) definition of roles, which is understood to be “socially defined set of expectations with rules…that govern the relationship”, it is reasonable to assume that partners are socialized during childhood to take on appropriate gender roles (p.432). The study found that men believed in more romanticized roles, where “love conquers all,” than women who were more cautious in choosing “a provider and protector” (Hendrick, 1988, p.437). Roles do not remain static because relational expectations are continually being transformed. Hendrick’s (1988) observations explains that societal expectations regarding gender roles have changed whereby partners expect fathers to take on more of the child-care responsibilities while mothers are integral parts of the work force.

Other studies have examined which roles produced the most satisfaction for marriage partners (Centers, Raven, & Rodrigues, 1971; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). The focus of earlier analysis was on power roles in marriage relationships (Centers et al., 1971). Within the various relationships, which partner made the final decision varied based on the context of the situation. The least satisfaction was found when the wife made most final decisions. Centers et al. (1971) concluded that wife-dominant
relationships produced the least satisfaction and the greatest satisfaction was attributed to when decisions were made jointly. A subsequent meta-analysis of power roles in marriage relationships also found least satisfaction in wife-dominant marriages and greatest satisfaction among egalitarian couples (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). Egalitarianism was defined as a system where decisions were made jointly or where each partner has control over distinct areas (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). A lower level of satisfaction in wife-dominant relationships was concluded to be the result of role incongruency and husband’s role incapacity. In this context, the wife assumed responsibility because the husband would or could not do so. This role reversal ultimately led to dissatisfaction for both partners (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983).

Previous research (Centers et al., 1971) on roles in marriage relationships has been critiqued by some for assuming that a clear hierarchical structure exists, as in small groups (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). Unfortunately, romantic relationships are relational systems where roles are clearly defined. Douglas and Wind’s (1978) examination of family roles found incongruencies in accounts of roles from husbands and wives when ambiguous measures are used. They state how, “most families do not have clearcut, consistent patterns of authority across different areas, and that investigation of authority patterns should first be conducted relative to specific areas” (p.35). The lack of strict categorization may also apply to dating relationships, but a majority of research on sex-roles is done within the context of marriage relationships (Stets, 1993). Analysis of roles in dating relationships may provide additional insight into how such expectations are upheld within the context of marriage.
As in marriage, it may be difficult to assume what roles dating partners will adopt. Role definition becomes even more complex due to the different expectations that come with each relationship. One study that explored relational expectations in dating relationships explained how neither partner is sure of what the appropriate behaviors are, but they still possess some expectations (Collins, Kennedy, & Francis, 1976). Research on gender roles in dating relationships may reveal patterns that are carried out in marriage relationships. Stets (1993) comments that, “dating relationships may ‘set the stage’ for what occurs in marriage ”(p.673). The female-demand/male-withdraw pattern, where women are more likely to communicate a complaint and men are more likely to avoid discussion of the problem, is found marriage and dating relationships (Vogel, Wester, & Heesacker, 1999). This “gender-linked pattern of communication” is said to have negative affects on relational satisfaction within the dating relationship and if continued in marriage relationship, as well (Vogel et al., 1999).

Negotiation of power roles in dating relationships may also affect how these behaviors are formed in marriage relationships. In her study on the negotiation of power in dating relationships, Stets (1993) found greater perspective taking promoted greater knowledge of the other and less conflict in the relationships. In casual dating relationships, it may be more difficult for one partner to take on the role of the other because the initial interaction is impersonal and guided by gender scripts. As the relationship becomes more serious and there is greater self-disclosure, it is easier for partners to take on the perspective of the other. Stets (1993) also found that women take on the perspective of the other in intimate relationships more frequently than men. As the
couples become more interdependent, men with a lower perspective taking ability may feel as though they are losing control within the relationship.

There is still much debate on the issue of control and whether gender roles in dating relationships are more traditional or egalitarian in nature. More research is proposing that relationships are taking an egalitarian turn whereby women are assuming initiation roles that have traditionally been occupied by men (Mongeau, Hale, Johnson, Hillis, 1993; Muehlenhard & Scardino, 1985). One study that specifically examined how likely this phenomenon was for a woman to initiate a date found that nearly all the males (90.8%) stated that they had been asked out and the majority of females (84.5%) admitted they had asked a male out before (Mongeau et al., 1993). Further examination revealed that women were only less likely to ask males on a first date. Though women were more likely to initiate dates than previously believed, they were potentially perceived as being more sexually active and less attractive (Mongeau et al., 1993; Muehlenhard & Scardino, 1985).

Despite evidence of increased egalitarian relationships, other studies of romantic relationships find that partners continue to ascribe to dating scripts and roles that are more traditional than egalitarian in nature (Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Rose & Frieze, 1993). In these relationships the male is more likely to initiate the date, pay for the date, and provide transportation on the date. Laner & Ventrone (2000) were surprised to find gender-stereotypical roles to be enacted more by respondents with the most dating experience. Their analysis concluded that egalitarian marriages are “unlikely to be the outcomes of traditionalist dating and courtship” (Laner & Ventrone, 2000, p.498). It may be problematic to assume that initial dating roles are maintained throughout the duration
of the relationship. Further examination of dating roles beyond the initial date must be conducted before researchers can assume that dating practices are more egalitarian or traditional. More importantly, examination of dating roles among more culturally diverse respondents is needed before generalized terms can be applied to dating relationships as a whole.
CHAPTER 3
CURRENT STUDY

The inconsistencies within research (Ganong et al., 1996; Davis et al., 1997) on how cultural influences effect how relational roles are expressed and maintained in dating relationships, have left many unanswered questions as to what roles dating partners are adopting and whether or not they vary by race. Are roles established more by the larger culture or the micro-culture that one interacts in on a daily basis? Assuming a role is a “socially defined set of expectations” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1983), the current study analyzed the influence of culture on relational rules within the cultural arena. Past research has failed to address and explore the degree to which cultural influences dictate appropriate roles within the context of that culture; therefore, it was the purpose of the current study to extend research on relational expectations within the African-American community.

Research Questions

Because many studies use marriage relationships as the relational context for understanding roles, there is a lack of clarity as to what roles are being taken on in dating relationships. Though there have been studies on initial roles within a relationship (Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Mongeau et al., 1991), less research has been conducted on what roles are expected throughout the duration of the dating relationship. Research has shown that roles that are initially adopted may change as the relationship progresses (Tolhuizen, 1989). Additionally, the level of commitment to the relationship has been shown to
influence the type of expectations people will express to their partner. For example, Toulhuizen (1989) found that, as the relationship progressed from casual to serious, partners adopted behaviors that portrayed themselves in ways that were more pleasing to their partners. Research has explored what expectations daters have of their future marriage partners (Ganong et al., 1996) while those expectations may be somewhat clear, those within the dating relationship itself is more ambiguous. Expectations may differ when relational partners have no expectations to marry or be committed to their partner.

Greater understanding of expectations in casual and committed relationships has lead to the following research question (RQ).

**RQ1: What role expectations do people have of themselves and their partner in dating relationships?**

Studies by Aborampah (1989) and Chapman (1995) have found that cultural socialization may in fact influence expectations in romantic relationships. Data have also shown that race may influence the level of expectations partners have for the relationship (Ganong et al., 1996). In Ganong et al.’s (1996) study, African Americans were found to express greater expectations for themselves and their partner as the relationship progressed towards marriage than European Americans (Ganong et al., 1996). It must be noted, however, that contradictory conclusions regarding the degree to which race influences dating roles. Ross and Davis (1996) find that there are racial differences in the delegation of roles, yet others find that they are similar regardless of race or gender (Sanderson & Kurdek, 1993). The following question seeks to provide greater understanding of the similarities and/or differences in European American and African American role expectations.
RQ2: How may race be associated with role expectations in dating relationships?

Researchers have also explored how gender may affect how roles are adopted in relationships. Some gender differences have been observed in how expectations evolve in committed relationships, where women are more likely to express greater need for commitment and displayed a greater amount of confiding in one another than men (Sabatelli, 1988). Unfortunately, since a majority of studies have analyzed gender roles within marriage relationships greater understanding of the role gender plays within dating relationships is needed. For this purpose, the current study will explore the following query:

RQ3: How may sex be associated with role expectations in dating relationships?

In regard to culture, Burgoon (1985) and Capella (1985) have explored how various cultures adhere to universal nonverbal and verbal communicative behaviors. Differences in communication patterns may influence how roles are communicated within dating relationships. Duncan and Goodall (1998) found women to be more communicatively competent than their male counterparts, which may influence their ability to express their expectations to their partner. Though women may possess a higher level of competence, they may be reluctant to explicitly address their expectations to their partner if they believe it will have a negative impact on the relationship. According to Baxter and Wilmot (1985), explicit discussion of behavior is perceived to be a “taboo” topic. This analysis will seek greater understanding as to whether roles are verbally communicated between dating partners are adopted in another manner.
**RQ4a:** How are role expectations expressed in a “casual” dating relationships?

**RQ4b:** How are role expectations expressed in a “committed” dating relationships?

**Hypotheses**

In regard to the previous research questions, the following assumptions are made. It is assumed that expectations will be more egalitarian than traditional. In their study of routine interactions in relationships, Canary and Stafford (1994) find that equitable roles are most satisfactory. They propose that, “People are more motivated to maintain equitable relationships than inequitable relationships” (Canary & Stafford, 1994, p.7).

Canary and Stafford (1994) maintain the assumptions initially held by the *equity theory*. Equity theory makes the assumption that an equitable relationship exists when both partners have an equal level of investment and returns (Hatfied, Utne, & Traupman, 1979). Applying this theory to dating relationships, daters would be most satisfied in a relationship that has equitable role expectations, which is the case in more egalitarian relationships.

More specifically, research has commented on the desire for equity in African American dating relationships. The Davis et al. (1997) study on African American dating relationships presented these relationships as more concerned with justice and fairness because of the status of African Americans in society. However research is also providing support for the assumption that there is a trend towards more egalitarian roles among European Americans as well (Lemieux & Hale, 1999; Ross & Davis, 1996). Based on
In this research, it will be assumed that both African Americans, as well as European Americans will prefer more egalitarian roles.

**H1: Partners in dating relationships will demonstrate a preference for more egalitarian than traditional roles.**

Researchers have argued that the desire to establish a commitment in a relationship can be affected by the cultural roles each partner has been socialized to expect and enact (Chapman, 1995; Dickson, 1993; Staples, 1981b). More specifically, an argument has been made that African American males are less likely to commit than European American males because they have an abundance of attractive alternatives which may make it more difficult for some men to commit to one woman (Chapman, 1995; Dickson, 1993; Staples, 1981b). Dickson (1993) notes that the impact of the sex-ratio difference within the African American community stretches far beyond lower marriage rates: “When men are in short supply, they become a scarce resource” (p.478) and have greater control of the emotional power in the relationship than their female partners. Staples (1981b) states that, like many men, African American males struggle in their desire to have security in a monogamous relationship or the freedom to explore their sexuality. Staples (1981b) explains that, “The excess number of black women in the eligible pool and the concentration of so many educated, attractive, women… may overwhelm them” (p.77); however, he also makes it clear that men are not the only ones shying away from commitment. African American women are more often raised to be independent, self-reliant, and in control. Thereby making them less dependent on their mates. According to Chapman (1995), “Most black girls grow up seeing their mothers taking care of themselves, even if there is a man present in the home” (p.35). This self-
reliance is not necessarily a negative attribute because it has had a positive affect on the educational and financial success of African American women (Chapman, 1995). However, such self-reliance can also lead to a “take ’em or leave ’em” attitude towards men.

Regardless of race, women have been found to take on additional roles in committed relationships (Sacher & Fine, 1996). Sacher and Fine (1996) reported that over the course of six months the female partner had greater expectations of commitment and were willing to work harder at maintaining their relationship than males. Sacher and Fine’s (1993) analysis utilized the investment model where commitment is determined by three factors – relational satisfaction, poor alternatives, investment. The types of roles that are expected in dating relationships may be influenced by the degree of commitment each partner has to the relationship. If men view themselves as having many attractive relational alternatives, they may be less likely to commit and perhaps more likely to demand greater investment from their partners.

According to Dickson (1993), a sex-ratio imbalance gives men the balance of power in the relationship and increases the likelihood that males will have higher expectations of their relational partner. Because this imbalance exists on many college campuses, college males will most likely have more relational alternatives than females. If previous assumptions are true then it is predicted that women, regardless of race, will take on more roles than their male partners. Because African American women significantly outnumber males, they may be expected to take on more roles than European American women.
H2: Women, in general, will be expected to take on more roles, regardless of race, in a committed dating relationship than men.

H3a: African American women will take on more roles in comparison to European American women.

H3b: African American men will expect their relational partners to take on more roles than European men.

The context of the relationship also affects the level of commitment partners have in the relationship. Tolhuizen (1989) found that partners begin to change the nature of their own roles in the relationship as it progresses from casual dating to serious dating. In this study as feelings evolve respondents reported adapting their behavior to their partner’s expectations, from superficial interactions in casual dating to more intimate emotional and physical displays often found in serious dating. This change included acting more like a “gentleman” or a “lady.” Though Tolhuizen (1989) did not ask participants operationalized their definition of a “gentleman” or a “lady,” the study may have found them characterized their roles in traditional terms. For example, a “gentleman” may pay for dinner or other outings, open the door, drive, and other traditional role expectations.

According to Sabatelli (1988), relational satisfaction exists when a person’s expectations of their partner coincide with their partner’s behavior; however, dating couples might not be satisfied in marriage because they tend to have unrealistic expectations of their partner (Sabatelli, 1988). While both dating and married couples were found to have similar expectations regarding privacy expected and freedom to pursue friendships, unmarried couples had higher expectations and significant gender
differences. Dating males expected a greater amount of sex, while dating females expected a greater amount of confiding in one another. Females also expected their needs to be taken care of more and expected a greater amount of relational commitment from their partners. Therefore, it is assumed that role expectations will differ in the committed and casual relationships, in that role expectations will be fewer regardless of race or sex within casual dating context. Casual dating would have fewer roles because it would require less of an investment, in time, money, and/or commitment. Casual dating would also have fewer expectations because the couple is not concerned with long-term impacts of the relationship, only short-term rewards. African American and European American, males and females are expected to have fewer role expectations within the casual dating context.

**H4: Males and females will have fewer role expectations in casual dating relationships.**

It is expected that African American participants will self-report more cultural or racial influences on their roles than European Americans. Helms and Carter (1990) have found that because European Americans are in the majority they are less likely to identify with race because whiteness is perceived as “normal”. Contrary to racial identity for African Americans, European American identity is not defined by participation with other European Americans. Helms (1990) asserts that European Americans do not acknowledge their whiteness until they are confronted with another person of color.

The final assumption applies Helms and Carter’s research to how cultural influences will be expressed by participants. According Helms and Carter’s (1990) findings, African Americans, when asked how cultural influences have impacted the roles
they have adopted, will express more references to race than their European American counterparts.

**H5: Influences of racial identity will be communicated more strongly in African American relationships.**

**Study Design**

A majority of studies regarding relational roles have been conducted within the context of marriage relationships and provide scales measuring roles within the context of marriage relationships. These scales measure such roles as to who pays the bills or who is responsible for childcare or household duties. Such scales are not suitable for analysis of dating roles. A contributing factor in the inadequacy of scales to measure dating relationships may be due to the lack of research of what roles dating partners maintain and establish within the relationship. The current analysis seeks to understand what roles dating partners have adopted and how these roles are established. Since in-depth knowledge of how roles are adopted is sought, a more qualitative approach is best suited for this analysis, though some quantitative analysis will also be used in the description of data. A qualitative design will allow participants to openly and fully express what roles participants expect in their dating relationships. The richness of qualitative research is needed to understand a phenomenon that has been narrowly researched within the context of dating relationships. An emic perspective that seeks to understand a phenomenon through the voices of the participants, is sought in this research (Benett deMarrais, 1998).

Participants were asked open-ended questions in order to attain greater knowledge of the roles partners adopt in their relationships and how these roles may vary across race, sex, and commitment level. The advantages of using an open-ended format are that the
level of knowledge about the topic, salience of the topic, and frames of references are revealed (Foddy, 1993). Foddy also suggests that open-ended questions are most effective when the researcher is interested in discovering frames of reference. A major goal of this research was to understand how assumptions of appropriate roles are established and whether one’s race or gender may influence those assumptions. An additional goal was to understand the roles deemed most salient roles for dating partners and their understanding of their roles.
METHODS

Participants

Data was collected from 105 participants. Subjects for this study were unmarried, college students. Undergraduate participants were recruited from upper and lower level Speech Communication classes. Speech communication students received course credit for participation in the study. Data was collected from 45 African American students (22 female and 23 males) and 60 European American (30 female and 30 males) students from a large Southeastern university. Participants’ age ranged from 18-29 years old, with a mode of 21 for all groups. The mean age breakdown is as follows: African American (AA) males ($M=21.9$); African American females ($M=21.27$); European American (EA) males ($M=20.7$); and European American females ($M=20.5$). All except three AA participants indicated that they had been in a dating relationship. The mean breakdown for participants’ longest dating relationship, in months, is as follows: AA males ($M=18.9$); AA females ($M=29$); EA males ($M=15.78$); EA females ($M=35$). As for current dating status, 47% ($N=49$) of participants were dating and 53% ($N=56$) were single. A nonrandom technique of sampling was used to ensure an adequate number of African Americans. For example, additional participants were recruited from a predominantly African American graduate organization and fraternity. Overall, participants were excluded from the research pool if they self-reported that they were married or of a race other than African American or European American.
Procedures

Respondents for this study were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire as part of a study on male-female romantic relationships. Participants were informed of their voluntary role in participating in this study and any potential risks. After informed consent forms were received (See Appendix A) participants received a questionnaire that began with demographic questions, followed by free-response questions. After completing the survey, respondents received a debriefing form about the study (See Appendix C).

Open-ended Questions

In order to obtain more descriptive accounts of what and how roles are adopted (RQ: 1), participants were asked to provide free-response written answers to 16 questions (See Appendix B). In the open-ended section, respondents were asked about general interactions on a date, such as who initiates, pays for, and plans the date. The next set of questions asked them to describe a “committed” and a “casual” relationship. The ordering of questions was varied in order to minimize formatting effects. Two versions of the questionnaire were equally distributed; one began with questions on a “committed” relationship and then a “casual” relationship. The other began with questions on “casual” relationship and ended with questions on a “committed” relationship. The next set of questions then asked participants to list, from 1 (most important) to 10 (least important), what roles both they and their partner take on in this type of relationship. Participants were also asked to explain why they ranked them in that particular order. To understand how roles are expressed, participants were then asked to describe how these roles were taken on and if the were communicated or adopted in another way. The next set of
questions asked respondents to report what influence, if any, their cultural background may have on the roles they adopt in their relationship. After answering the series of questions for one type of relationship, participants answered the same questions for the other relationship type. All questions were repeated in either a “casual” or “committed” context, depending on which situation they received first. Finally, participants were asked for any additional comments they would like to provide on this topic.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was the methodology used in order to analyze and codify possible themes among roles chosen. According to Hoslti (1968), content analysis is defined as “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages” (p. 608). Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) analytic induction method was also used to categorize initial themes from the free-response data. Analytic induction is a method used to establish initial categories of themes and, through additional revision; a final set of categories is obtained (Baxter, 1986). Babbie (1998) states that analytic induction initially begins with observation, as it not only describes but also discovers themes and relationships within the data.

In order to both describe and discover themes within the data, both manifest and latent content analysis were utilized. Berg (2001) describes manifest content as limited to items that are physically present, countable, and are a part of the “surface structure,” while latent content is the “deep structural meaning” within the message. In sum, manifest items were found within the text and latent through analysis of the text. Thereby, to increase the richness of the data, it is recommended both manifest and latent content be used to interpret the data. Berg (2001), states that both methods are valid and
reliable on their own, but when used together they provide depth and breadth to the data. Manifest content is used to report the frequency of a theme or concept in the text; however, it may not reveal underlying themes or characteristics of the data.

The participants provided the units of analysis in their responses to each question. A total of 1050 items (responses) were analyzed for themes in roles chosen and overarching themes to analyze the data completely. Manifest analysis was used to categorize specific roles adopted by participants and their partners. A role was operationally defined as “a socially defined set of expectations with rules for permissible and obligatory behavior that govern the relationship” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1983, p.18). Therefore, only expectations of behaviors (not characteristics) were classified as exemplars of roles. For example, “smart” or “kind” was not classified as a role. The final 14 categories of roles were all contained in the manifest data. Roget’s International Thesaurus was used to determine synonyms for roles included in the manifest data. For example, synonyms for “friend” include, “companion,” “mate,” “sidekick,” “acquaintance,” and “confidante.” If a synonym for friend was used, it was also included in the “friend” category. Analysis of the data was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Demographic questions were analyzed quantitatively, while free-response measures were analyzed by use of both methodologies. Quantitative analysis involved determining percentages of how frequently themes and roles were found in the manifest data.

When establishing coding themes within content analysis, Holsti (1969) recommends that five criteria be met. The coding themes should (1) reflect the purpose of the research, (2) be exhaustive, (3) mutually exclusive, (4) allow independence, and (5)
should all reflect a single classification principle. In accordance with these guidelines three final categories emerged as a means for analyzing the complete data set. The themes were Role Orientation, Cultural Orientation, and Role Adoption, which were used to open code all 1050 items. Open coding involves close contextual analysis of each line of the item, and is also referred to as “microanalysis” (Straus & Corbin, 1994).

**Theme Analysis**

After analysis of all roles, three themes were found. The three themes consisted of additional subcategories that were then coded. The following themes and subcategories guided the open coding analysis. The complete coder training manual contains additional coding examples (See Appendix D). Definitions for each role orientation follows below.

**Theme 1: Role Orientation**

In this category the subcategories were Traditional (T), Nontraditional (N), Combined (C), or Absent (A).

**Traditional (T).** Traditional roles emerged from the coding and represent those roles where the male ascribes to more dominant roles, such as the “leader,” “initiator,” “financial provider,” or “decision-maker.” If a recurring pattern was found that reflected relational roles adopted by males or females that promoted male dominance, it could be coded as traditional. If the female is given less leadership roles and the female is described in roles such as nurturer/comforter, “lover,” “nondominant,” “cook,” and “friend” roles, it would also be coded as traditional. An example of a traditional item is a participant’s statement that, “He would initiate, decide place.”

**Nontraditional (N).** Items were coded as non-traditional when participants described roles that did not conform to traditional roles and traditional role reversal...
occurred. Role reversal occurred if the male took on traditionally female roles and female
took on traditionally male roles. An example of a nontraditional item would be a female
participant who states that, “I usually initiate and pay.”

**Combined (C).** When participants described relational roles that were both
traditional and non-traditional, the item was coded as combined. An example of a
combination item would be, “Either of us could decide or pay.”

**Absent (A).** For those participants who failed to describe relational roles or
described personality characteristics, their item was coded as “absent.” This code was
only used when the item did not mention role orientation in any way or the question did
not apply to role orientation. Coded when roles were mentioned that are neither
traditional nor non-traditional. For example, an item would be coded as (A) if it was
defining a “casual” relationship and did not mention any role orientation.

**Theme 2: Cultural Orientation**

For this category the sub-categories were Cultural Identification (C), Racial Identification
(R), Family Identification (F), or (A) Absent.

**Cultural Identification (C).** This code was used when participants reported that
their culture influenced the roles they adopt and expectations they hold for their partner.
An example of an item coded that would be coded as (C): “My cultural background has a
lot to do with the roles I play.”

**Racial Identification (R).** When a literal reference to race was mentioned, the item
would be coded (R). An example of an item coded as (R) is, “Support is an important role
in African-American relationships.”
Family Identification (F). When an item indicated that their family has had the greatest effect on the roles they adopted it would be coded as (F). An example of an item coded as (F) would be, “I base my roles on what roles I saw my mother portray.”

Absent (A). When the item did not mention racial, cultural, or family orientation in any way or the survey question did not refer to cultural or any other orientation, it was coded as “A.”

Theme 3: Role Adoption

For this category, items were coded based on how roles were adopted in the relationship. The subcategories include Implicit (I), Explicit (E), Combined (C), or Absent (A). Respondents were asked how they would communicate their expectations to their partner and the following three categories emerged.

Implicit (I). When a participant stated that roles were not communicated verbally, but simply “understood” by partners, it would be coded as (I). Participants were asked how he or she would communicate his or her expectations to their partner. An example of an implicit item was the response, "I would hint to my partner."

Explicit (E). An item was coded as (E) when indicated that partners verbally communicated roles to one another in their relationship. An example of an item coded as explicit was, “We are very upfront about our expectations.”

Combined (C). When roles are implied and expectations are also discussed, the item was coded as (C). An example of an item coded as (C) was a participant’s comment that "Some roles are communicated and some are just understood."

Absent (A): When an item did not mention role adoption in any way or question did not apply to role adoption it would be coded as (A).
Coders

Within content analysis, there is always the potential for a single researcher to have difficulty reliably coding categories. In an effort to ensure that the participants’ responses were not tainted by the researcher’s bias, additional coders were utilized. Strauss (1987) suggests that the lead author code but with the assistance of additional coders who code the data independently. Two coders were trained with the use of a training manual (See Appendix D). Both the researcher and coder coded 150 items of the 1050 items (14%), for all three themes. When necessary, a third coder resolved differences between two coders. Reliability of the themes was assessed using Cohen’s Kappa. Reliability for all themes were almost perfect, according to Landis & Koch’s (1977) ranges for agreement; (< .00= poor; .00-.20= fair; .21-.40=fair; .41-.60=moderate;.61-.80=substantial; .81-1.00= almost perfect). Themes were coded with the following reliability: role orientation (kappa= .90); cultural orientation (kappa= .99); and role adoption (kappa = .85).

Limitations

One complication with Cohen’s Kappa inter-rater reliability is often underestimated when skewed data is present. If there are many empty cells even within agreement, then the coefficient Kappa will indicate more inconsistencies than are actually present.

As with any methodology, using content analysis does present some limitations. There is always the threat that the researcher will misinterpret data to support existing hypotheses or assumptions (Babbie, 1998). In order to strengthen the validity and reliability of the research and ensure that the data represents the participant’s own
statements, additional coders were utilized to support interpretations (Berg, 2001). A “single serious weakness” of content analysis is in collecting data that is relevant to the research questions, which was avoided by the use of content analysis as a method and not a as a full research strategy (Berg, 2001). For example, “if researchers use content analysis to analyze interview data or responses to open-ended questions (on written questionnaires), this weakness is virtually nonexistent” (Berg, 2001, p. 259).
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Research Question 1

In answer to the first research question, the initial analysis produced fourteen roles that participants reported that they or their partner occupied in the relationship, in regard to roles in committed and casual dating relationships: “supporter,” “friend,” “lover,” “nurturer,” “listener,” “organizer,” “communicator,” “trustee,” “provider,” “leader,” “entertainer,” “advisor,” and “religious.” These role categories emerged within the manifest data analysis of following questions: “What do you feel your roles are in a ‘committed’/’casual’ relationship?” and “What would your partner’s roles be in a ‘committed’/’casual’ relationship?” The data set yielded a total of 1675 roles in committed and casual relationships.

Of all the roles “supporter” had the largest total number of responses reported in committed relationships and casual relationships ($n = 290$) (See Appendix E). A moderately higher percentage of “supporter” roles were found for committed relationships ($n = 179; 62\%$). Another synonym used in the supporter role was “helper.” For each list of roles, participants were asked to indicate why they ranked the roles in that order. A European American female (EAF) and an African American male (AAM) gave the following reasons for choosing “supporter” as their number one role in a committed relationship by:

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I feel that the most important thing you need from a relationship is support, in that I want my boyfriend to know that I’ll support him in all things that he does and I expect the same from him. [EAF 001]

Your mate supports you through everything. Friends really don’t support you. [AAM 096]

“Friend” had the second highest total number of responses in committed and casual dating relationships (n = 270). Almost equal total responses were given for “friend” roles in committed (n = 132) and casual relationships (n = 138). When asked to rank roles from 1-10, “friend” was given most often as the number one choice of all participants in casual and committed relationships. Other synonyms that were included in the “friend” category were “best friend,” “companion,” “partner,” “sister,” “brother,” “acquaintance.” These synonyms were not used in a majority of the items coded. Some participants described the importance of the “friend” role as follows:

Above all you must be a friend [in] your committed relationship, without friendship you have nothing. [EAM 036]

I believe that friendship is the most important role in any relationship because it lays a foundation that is strong enough to stand, even when the romance is gone. [AAF 067]

“Lover” was the third most reported role in all cases for committed and casual relationships (n = 188). A majority of these responses, however, were for a committed relationship (n =127; 68%). Though the actual term “lover” was present in the manifest data, other synonyms that reflected this role were “adorer,” “adorer,” “admirer,” “romantic,” and “sexual”. A few participants (n = 6) commented that this was the most important role in a
casual relationship. “In a casual relationship there is no desire to be monogamous, therefore sex is key” [AAM 100]. Another respondent stated that in a casual relationship, “I think lover would be the main role for both of us” [EAM 049]. In contrast, more respondents (n =17) thought the exact opposite, whereby lover would be the least important role in a casual dating relationship.

Participants also listed “nurturer” roles (n = 145), which were fourth most commonly mentioned role in both relationships; however a larger majority of responses were given in the context of a committed relationship (n = 102; 70%). Other synonyms included as “nurturer” roles were, “comforter,” “caretaker,” “encourager,” “mother,” “doctor,” “caregiver,” and “motivator.” In regard to this role, one participant stated, “I would want her to be comforting and kind in times of need” [EAM 056]. Another respondent stated, “As a girlfriend I try to always be there to take care of my boyfriend” [EAF 028].

Being a good listener was yet another role that was deemed important in both casual and committed relationships. In all relationship cases, “listener” was fifth most reported (n = 132). Slightly larger percentages of accounts were given for “listener” roles in committed relationships (n = 73; 55%) in comparison to casual relationships (n = 59; 45%). The only other synonym that was included in this category was “sounding board.” When asked to explain why they chose “listener” as their most important role, two participants stated:

I think it’s important to first listen to someone, then contribute what you think about the situation, opinion, etc. [EAF 006]
Some people might have put “lover” as #1… I have to listen to my partner to understand him. [AAF 068]

Participants also mentioned the importance of possessing a role where they would organize the activities of the relationship and also expect this role from their partners. “Organizer” was reported sixth in role responses for both committed and casual relationships ($n = 122$). A larger percentage of participants listed “organizer” as a role expectation in a committed relationship ($n = 72; 59\%$) The only other synonym included in this category was “planner.” In reference to her partner’s “planner” role, one woman commented, “First and foremost, his roles would involve planning every excursion” [EAF 023].

“Communicator” is also mentioned as an important role in committed and casual dating relationships ($n = 111$). Similar frequencies of “communicator” roles are given for committed ($n = 60$) and casual relationships ($n = 51$). Some participants ($n = 30$) indicated that their role as a “communicator” is the most vital role in the success of the relationship. Respondents commented:

I believe that in order to have a committed relationship there has to be an open line of communication. If people don’t talk about what’s on their mind, they won’t get anywhere because they’re too busy trying to second guess what the other is thinking. [AAF 080]

I think the main purpose of a casual relationship is to communicate with someone you are interested in. Everything else comes after. [EAM 045]

Participants also mentioned the importance of being and having a partner they could trust and confide in which was labeled a “trustee” role. “Trustee” was mentioned in
roles for committed and casual relationships ($n = 110$). A majority of the trustee roles reported were in the committed dating context ($n = 75; 68\%$). Other synonyms included in this category were “confidante,” “loyal,” “faithful,” and “monogamous.” In describing the importance of the “trustee” role, one participant stated that, “They need to be able to tell you what they can’t tell others” [EAF 009]. According to another respondent, “It is very difficult to maintain this type of friendship if you can’t trust the other person to be honest” [AAM 092].

Participants also expected “provider” or monetary roles in a dating relationship. The “provider” role accounted for a larger majority of roles in committed relationship expectations of self and partner ($n = 55; 69\%$) than in casual relationship expectations ($n = 24; 31\%$). Other synonyms included in this role were “breadwinner,” “payer,” “worker,” and “financier.” One respondent described the “provider” as “sharing finances and belongings” [EAM 040].

Participants also shared how they felt it was important for at least one partner to take on a leadership role in the relationship. The “leader” role was found in a larger percentage of committed relationships ($55\%; n = 37$) in comparison to casual relationships ($45\%; n = 30$). This category also included the following synonyms: “decision-maker,” “initiator,” “aggressor,” and “dictator.” Participants expressed “leader” roles in the following responses:

- Usually I have to be the initiator in a casual dating relationship because he doesn’t know when or how. [EAF 021]
- He likes to be in control, when I am more laid back. [EAF 023]
Participants also mentioned roles where they felt they or their partner would participate in recreational activities together and were labeled as “entertainer” roles \((n = 66)\). The “entertainer” role was the only role reported at a much higher percentage for casual roles \((n = 48; 73\%)\). “Entertainer” roles were also comprised of roles such as “comedian,” “party partner,” and “fun partner.” Participants who indicated “entertainer” roles to be most important in a casual dating relationship, gave the following reasons:

In a non-serious relationship, I for the most part just want to relax and have some fun. [EA 002]

I don’t want my casual dating partner to think that we are in a committed relationship. Usually, for the moment, it’s just clean fun. My sharing of deep emotions would not be applied. [EA 051]

Respondents also expected their partner to counsel and advise them, as they also gave their partner advice. “Advisor” roles were reported in a smaller frequency \((n = 44)\) of all roles. Of the “advisor” roles reported, more responses were given in the committed relationship context \((n = 31; 70\%)\) than in casual relationship context \((n = 13; 30\%)\). The “advisor” role category also included roles such as “counselor,” “problem-solver,” and “consultant.” Other roles such as “protector” and “religious” roles were also found in smaller percentages (2%) of all roles for committed and casual relationships. However, percentages of these roles increased when categorized by race and/or sex. “protector” also included the synonym “security” and “religious” roles included synonym, “Spiritual”. Both “protector” and “religious” roles had greater frequencies in the committed relationship context. Committed roles accounted for 65% \((n = 20)\) of “protector” roles, when compared to committed roles at 35% \((n = 11)\). A larger
percentage of “religious” roles were found in committed relationships (80%; \(n = 16\)), than casual relationships (\(n = 4\)).

**Thematic Analysis**

Analysis of roles yielded three themes for further analysis: Role Orientation, Cultural Orientation, and Role Adoption. Role orientation included three subcategories, Traditional (T), Nontraditional (N), and Combined (C) roles. Additional understanding of roles was provided through analysis of the following subcategories.

**Traditional**

Items were coded Traditional (T) if dominant roles were given to men, such as “leader,” “initiator,” “decision-maker,” and/or “financial provider.” Traditional (T) was also coded if females were ascribed to “non-dominant” roles such as “friend,” “nurturer/comforter,” “lover,” and “cook.” Traditional was coded in a total of 35% (\(n = 183\)) of the items. For males, European Americans reported traditional roles frequently at 49% (\(n = 74\)), were coded (T). In regard to African American males 35% (\(n = 38\)) of the items were found to have traditional orientations. For European American women 31% (\(n = 46\)) were coded as (T) and 23% (\(n = 25\)) were coded as (T) for African American females. An example of a traditional coding is as follows:

A man who knows his role as strong, dominant, and powerful is the kind of man that can lead a woman to romantic and sexual interest. [EAM 031]

**Non-traditional**

Items were coded as non-traditional if traditional role reversal occurred, where males took on traditionally female roles or females took on traditionally male roles. For example, an item would be coded as (N) if the female was given roles such as “provider,”
“initiator,” or “decision-maker” in that item. Non-traditional items were reported the least, comprising 10% \((n = 48)\) of all items coded. Among African American participants, 14% \((n =15)\) of female response items possessed nontraditional themes, while 9% \((n =10)\) of male items were coded as \((N)\). Nontraditional orientations were found in 4% \((n =7)\) of European American male items and in 11% \((n =16)\) of items for European American females. One female provided the following non-traditional coding: “I would probably decide the place and pay for the date” [AAF 073]. Also, if a participant listed roles that were primarily nontraditional in orientation, they were coded as \((N)\). For example, one female participant listed roles such as “initiator,” “aggressor,” and “giver,” which were coded as nontraditional.

Combined

Of the 520 items coded as traditional, nontraditional, or combination, regardless of race or sex of the participants, combination \((C)\) was the most commonly coded theme \((n =284; 55\%)\) for all participants regardless of race or sex. Combined \((C)\) was coded to reflect items that possessed both traditional and nontraditional roles. The percentages of items coded as Combination Orientation (by race and sex) are as follows: African American females \((n =64; 58\%)\); European American females \((n =85; 57\%)\); African American males \((n =57; 52\%)\); and European American males \((n =78; 52\%)\). Here is an example of an item coded as \((C)\):

We both initiate dates every once in a while. Usually whoever initiates the date decides on the place. Usually we split the cost since neither of us have much money as we are both students. [EAF 001]
Research Question 2

Race and Dating Roles

There was some variation by race found in the analysis of roles and themes that emerged for the data. Role choices were similar within all groups; however, the frequency and percentage of those roles varied in some roles but only to a significant level for partner expectations of the “leader” role. Overall, data revealed similarities in more role expectations for self and partner, regardless of race. Thematic analysis also revealed similar themes in role orientation and expression. However, themes varied more in regard to cultural influences.

Both European American and African Americans reported roles of “supporter,” “friend,” “lover,” “communicator,” and “listener” frequently. The only significant difference between these groups was found in expectations of “leader” roles in regard to their partners ($p = .04$) (See Appendix F). European Americans listed a greater total of “leader” roles ($n = 45$) when compared to African American ($n = 22$). European American males reported “leader” roles at a greater percentage for their roles in a committed relationship (40%; $n = 12$), than did African American males (26%; $n = 6$). European American males also reported a higher percentage of “leader” roles for themselves in a casual relationship (40%; $n = 12$) than African American males (13%; $n = 3$). “Leader” roles did not vary significantly in regard to self-expectations, but in regard to partner expectations. African American females had greater expectations of “leader” roles from their partners in a committed relationship ($n = 5$; 23%), than European American females ($n = 1$; <1%). European American males expected more “leader” roles from their partners in a committed relationship ($n = 5$; 17%) than African American
males ($n = 2; < 1\%)$. In casual relationships, both male and female European Americans expected more “leader” roles from their partners at 13\% than did male and female African Americans who expected less leader roles at 1\%, for both sexes.

**Thematic Analysis**

Role orientations were similar across sex and race, with the majority of items being coded as a combination of traditional and nontraditional roles. European males were coded as having the highest frequency of traditional items at 46\% ($n = 74$) and the lowest frequency of nontraditional items at 4\% ($n = 7$). African American males had the second highest frequency of traditional items at 35\% ($n = 38$) and the second lowest frequency of nontraditional items at 9\% ($n = 10$).

In participants’ descriptions of how roles were expressed in the relationship, African American females were more explicit about their roles with their partners than European American females. (It must be noted that there were fewer African American participants than European American participants.) African American females used explicit methods in 45\% ($n = 20$) and implicit means for 11\% ($n = 5$) of their responses, while European American females reported using explicit communication in 25\% ($n = 15$) and implicit means for 48\% ($n = 29$) of their responses. European males communicated roles more explicitly in 47\% ($n = 28$) of their responses, than African American males who used explicit communication in 34\% ($n = 15$) of their responses.

The last theme to be analyzed is Cultural Orientation. Items that mentioned the influence of culture, race, or their family as the major influence on how participants chose their roles were coded as (C), (R), or (F). The majority of European American respondents referred to their families as having the most influence on their roles. Items
were coded as (F) for European American males at 47% \((n = 14)\) and at 63% \((n = 19)\) females. European Americans attributed most of their roles to socialization within their family. One European American female shared how important her family’s influence on her roles stating, “Those are the roles I see in my parents, grandparents, which seem pretty standard to me” [EAF 006]. European Americans also revealed cultural and racial influences, but with lesser frequency than African Americans, stating:

In the South, it is still typical for the male to approach, show interest, call and arrange a “date.” So in this case HE must decide on the place. [EAM 031]

I come from Italian descent and all of my ancestors have never been divorced. I have been taught that you can work through your problems no matter what if you really love someone. If you’re not in love then you shouldn’t even be in that situation. [EAF 013]

African Americans also mentioned familial influences as having an impact on the roles they adopted, but the most frequent themes were references to culture and race. A majority of their responses, males were coded for cultural influences at 32% \((n = 7)\), racial influence at 27% \((n = 6)\), and familial influences at 17% \((n = 5)\). Examples of racial influence items are as follows:

I believe that my race does have an effect on my role in a relationship. Society imposes different stresses on different ethnicities and that is why my main role is a comforter. [AAM 097]

As a black woman, I have to be there to support my partner on any decisions and situations that may come to him. [AAF 082]
Some African Americans, however, did indicate that their race or culture had little to no influence in some (24%) of their responses.

Research Question 3

Gender and Role Expectations

Respondents were initially asked to discuss initiation, decision-making, and financial roles on a date. This question was instrumental in analysis of male and female roles, in addition to lists provided by participants. Respondents were initially asked to describe general interactions on the date, such as who pays, initiates, and/or decides the location. In response to these questions, 539 “leader” and “provider” roles were observed. As for “leader” roles, which include “initiator” and “decision-maker,” 24% ($n = 127$) roles given by all respondents were in regard to female roles in the relationship and a larger percent 42% ($n = 226$) “leader” roles were attributed to male roles. While fifty-one (9%) roles were ascribed to women in “provider” or financial roles and 135 (25%) roles were ascribed to men.

Males and females provided similar responses for most frequent responses were similar. Both males and females listed “friend,” “supporter,” “lover,” “nurturer,” and “trustee” roles commonly in regard to their own roles as well as their partner’s roles. However, some variance in roles reported was found in regard to “lover” roles in a casual relationship, but not significantly. Women had slightly greater frequencies for their “lover” role in a committed relationship ($n = 35$), in comparison to men ($n = 32$). In a casual relationship however, males reported more “lover” roles ($n = 22$) for themselves, than did females ($n = 10$). Two female respondents commented that,
Men view casual relationships differently. It’s probably just a sex thing with them. [AAF 071]

Casual daters normally put more emphasis on the physicality of the relationship than a committed dater would… I know I wouldn’t feel comfortable in a ‘no strings attached’ relationship. I would feel like I was cheapening myself and that the relationship would not last long. [AAF 068]

Though males and females did not differ significantly in how often they reported “lover” on their list, but females often listed “lover” last and provided qualifying statements.

I feel the role of lover is last because the physical aspects of a relationship are less important to me that the emotional aspects. [EAF 027]

The only statistically significant difference was found in “listener” role expectations for partners (See Appendix G). Overall, females reported a greater expectation of their partner to be a good “listener” \((n = 28)\) in committed relationships than did males \((n = 14)\). Males reported more “listener” expectations \((n = 16)\) in a casual relationship than did females \((n = 12)\). In total, participant reported 67 “listener” roles and a larger percentage of reports were for females \((60\%, n = 40)\), than males \((40\%; n = 27)\).

Interesting findings were also found in the content analysis of overarching themes for males and females.

**Thematic Analysis**

In general, all respondents revealed a combination of traditional and nontraditional roles for a majority of responses; however, African American and European American males reported more traditional gender role responses than their female counterparts. European American males accounted for 49% \((n = 74)\) of these
traditional responses and European American females had 31% \((n = 46)\) of their items coded as traditional. Similarly, African American male items were also more traditional at 35% \((n = 38)\) when compared to African American female items were 23% \((n =25)\) traditional in orientation.

Research Question 4

In response to how roles were communicated by partners European American male and female responses were contradictory. In 47% \((n =28)\) of their responses European American males reported that they would communicate their roles to their partner explicitly, which was the highest percentage of items coded as explicit (E) for all groups. In contrast, European American females had the highest percentage of implicit (I) responses coded, at 48% \((n =29)\). European American males reported they would use implicit means to communicate their expectations in only 5% \((n =16)\) of their responses. European American females were least likely to use an explicit style, with 25% \((n =15)\) of their responses coded as explicit (E). European American males also were more likely to expect themselves and their partner to use a combined style at 22% \((n =15)\). European American females reported use of both implicit and explicit methods in 13% \((n = 8)\) of their items.

As for African Americans, females revealed more explicit themes than males. African American men reported that they would use implicit communication in 34% \((n = 15)\) of their responses and explicit methods in 34% \((n = 15)\) of their items. Females reported that they would use implicit methods in only 11% \((n = 5)\) of their items. Females were more likely to use explicit communication to express role expectations, as coded in 45% \((n =20)\) of their items. Males used explicit communication in 34% \((n =15)\) of their
responses. Similarly, males would use a combination of implicit and explicit strategies, according to 23% \((n = 10)\) of their responses, while females reported that they would use a combination of strategies in 27% \((n = 12)\) of their items.

Interestingly, two European American females mentioned that such discussion of roles was “taboo” and might negatively impact the relationship. They were also the only group to mention that roles would be “hinted,” but there was no discussion of how they are hinted. Some examples that demonstrate the “taboo” nature of this topic are provided below.

Very little communication of roles in casual relationships—it is very taboo especially to guys. Therefore lots of potential confusion. [EAF 012]

The roles would more than likely not be communicated unless there was a problem. I think most of the time they are just understood or hinted at. [EAF 017]

Another interesting finding is that, for African Americans, roles “must,” “definitely be communicated” in a dating relationship, in order to avoid misunderstanding. This is particularly the case for casual relationships. Participants stated that it is especially important in a casual relationship because neither partner should assume they are in a committed relationship. Two African American women gave examples, which support the importance of open communication in a relationship:

Discussion would be essential to determine roles on the date and/or relationship. [AAF 065]

The roles are more communicated here [in a casual relationship]. You don’t want one person in the relationship to blow up when the other is seen with someone
else romantically. When you don’t claim a particular person as your boy/girlfriend, that has to be communicated and understood. [AAF 068]

In summary, African American and European American participants reported similar roles as a whole. The fourteen role categories: “supporter,” “friend,” “lover,” “nurturer,” “trustee,” “organizer,” “leader,” “listener,” “communicator,” “provider,” “protector,” “advisor,” “entertainer,” and “religious” were reported by both African American and European American participants. Thematic analysis also revealed similar results in role orientation and adoption of roles for the most part and differing results regarding cultural orientation. Items were not strictly defined in terms of traditional or nontraditional, but were more often coded as including both traditional and nontraditional roles. Roles were most commonly adopted through explicit communication, except in the case of European American females, and cultural and racial influences were most frequently found among African Americans.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION

Expectations and rules govern almost every interaction in sports, government, as well as romantic relationships. Though there has been much research on roles in the marital context, few studies have analyzed roles that relational partners assume in dating relationships. Analysis of roles beyond initial interactions and within committed dating relationships is sparse, especially in regard to roles in other cultural contexts. The goal of this research was to gain a greater understanding of expectations men and women have in dating relationships and how those roles are expressed. Analysis of role categories and themes was also used to understand how roles might be impacted by variables such as race and sex. In order to explore this phenomenon, there were several research questions guiding this study.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

In answer to Research Question One, which asked what role expectations do people have of themselves and their partner in dating relationships, as a whole, participants reported similar roles for themselves and their partners in a committed relationship. The roles of “supporter,” “lover,” “nurturer,” “organizer,” “listener,” “trustee,” “provider,” “advisor,” “protector,” and “religious” were all reported more frequently for themselves and their partner in the context of committed dating relationships. “Nurturer” roles were not as commonly expected of themselves or their
partners in a casual relationship. Participants shared how the role of a “friend” was very important in both casual and committed relationships. In general, “friend” was most often listed as participant’s most important role. It was more common that “best friend” was mentioned within a committed relationship revealing that the level of friendship would be deeper in a committed relationship. Also when considering that more “trustee” roles were found within committed relationships, the friendship in a committed relationship would be trusted and loyal.

Research Questions 2 and 3

Research Questions Two and Three asked if race and gender might be associated with role expectations. Interesting findings were revealed when roles were analyzed by race. Studies on African American gender roles demonstrate that there is a common cultural expectation for the African American woman to assume the role of the “nurturer” in her family, friend, and community relationships (Harris & Hill, 1998; Collins, 1990). The current study, however, reveals an expectation for “nurturer” roles by both African American and European American males and females. Most roles did not differ significantly by race, except for expectations of “leader” roles for partners. European American males reported “leader” roles more frequently for their partners in a committed relationship while African American females reported more “leader” roles for their partners than did European American females in a committed relationship. This finding contradicts previous gender role research on African American females (Moynihan, 1965; Rubin, 1978). Moynihan’s (1965) and Rubin’s (1978) research asserted that African American females took on more leadership roles than their partners.
This assumption was not supported by the current research. The majority of role categories were not significantly different by sex or race.

Research Question 4a and b

Research Questions 4a and b asked how roles are expressed in casual/committed relationships. Interesting findings were found within the thematic analysis regarding how roles are expressed in dating relationships. Most groups reported using explicit communication to express such roles, with the exception of European American females. They were the only group to mention that such discussion of roles was “taboo” and might negatively impact the relationship. Baxter and Wilmot’s (1985) finding that “relationship norms” as a taboo topic received additional support, but only in regard to European American females. They describe “relationship norms” as “explicit discussion of the rules and behavior in the relationship, e.g., how parties were to treat one another” (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985, p.257). European American females recognized that implicit expression of roles could lead to misinterpretation, but perhaps they are more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty in the relationship. Other groups commonly revealed the importance of communication, to avoid misunderstanding.

Regarding gender and racial trends in how expectations were communicated by partners, European American males expressed the highest percentage (47%) of explicit communication for all groups and used implicit communication strategies the least (5%). This assumption is supported to some degree, in that women used explicit strategies for 45% and males used explicit methods in 34% of their responses in the context of African American relationships.
Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

The current study predicted that role expectations reflect a preference for more egalitarian roles than traditional roles. This assumption was supported, as role expectations were similar regardless of sex. Respondents often commented on how “provider” roles must be shared because neither partner had adequate resources to financially support the other. Respondents did state that it was very important to emotionally support ones mate, because of societal stresses or lack of support from friends. Traditional roles were commonly taken on initially and therefore more prevalent in casual dating relationships. As the relationships progress from casual to committed, traditional and nontraditional roles were shared more often. Also, roles commonly thought to be traditionally feminine in nature were most popular for both males and females. “Friend,” “nurturer,” and “lover” were ranked highly by all participants regardless of race or sex.

Though there has been some study college students that maintain traditional roles (Lanier & Ventrone, 2000) it was assumed that role expectations beyond casual dating would not be solely traditional. Earlier studies on satisfaction in marriage found the greatest satisfaction in egalitarian relationships, where decisions were made jointly (Centers, Raven, Rodrigues, 1971; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). Canary and Stafford (1994) also found that equitable roles are most satisfactory. They propose, “People are more motivated to maintain equitable relationships than inequitable relationships” (Canary & Stafford, 1994, p.7).
The current study also supported other research on the desire for equity in African American dating relationships. Particularly, Davis et al.’s (1997) study of African American dating relationships that stated how African Americans are concerned with justice and fairness in their relationships, because of African American status in society. The current study did not reveal significant variations by gender in support of traditional relationships. Thematic analysis and the similarities of role categories support research that concluded that partners prefer egalitarian roles in dating relationships.

Hypotheses 2

It was also assumed that women would be expected to take on more roles than males in a committed relationship, regardless of race. This assumption was not supported. Dickson (1993) stated how sex-ratio imbalance gives men the balance of power in the relationship and that they will have higher expectations of their relational partner. According to Dickson (1993) and Chapman (1996) when men have more attractive alternatives their partner is more likely to take on additional roles to prevent their partner from pursuing other alternatives. Other research has also commented on how imbalances in sex ratios may perpetuate greater expectations for the lesser sex (Staples, 1981b; Chapman, 1996).

According to previous research (Davis, 1993) European American males are advantaged by being less populated on campus, however; in the current study they expected more roles of themselves than their partners. In comparison to other groups, they reported more roles for themselves and their partner than any other group, listing a total of 297 roles for themselves and 244 roles for their partner. The total roles attributed
to men and women did not indicate an imbalance of power, but perhaps the roles men chose may be indicative of greater expectations.

**Hypothesis 3a and 3b**

Based on the previous findings of Davis (1994) and Chapman (1996) the current study hypothesized that African American women would take on more roles in comparison to European American women. This hypothesis was not supported. European American and African American listed an average of six roles for themselves in a committed relationship and an average of four roles in a casual relationship. It was also predicted that African American men would expect their relational partners to take on more roles than European American men. The current study revealed that European American men expected more roles to be taken on by their partner and themselves than other groups. European American males reported an average of seven roles for themselves and six roles for their partner in a committed relationship, while African American males reported an average of five roles for themselves and their partner in a committed relationship. In a casual relationship, European American males reported an average of six roles for themselves and five roles for their partner, while African American males reported three roles on average for themselves and their partner in a casual relationship.

One similarity that emerged for all women was that they would not necessarily fulfill all the expectations of their male partners, especially in regard to the “lover” role. Both African American and European American women discussed the importance of supporting their partner and displayed fewer leadership roles in relation to male
participants. Overall, this analysis did not support the assumption made in prior studies that African American relationships are more matriarchal in nature.

**Hypothesis 4**

The hypothesis that participants would have fewer role expectations in casual relationships was supported. All participants listed fewer roles for themselves and their partners in a casual relationship. Also, their roles in a casual relationship indicated that this relationship is less serious and more relaxed. For example, for European Americans, a common role mentioned in casual dating was “entertainer,” just someone to have fun with. A few participants only put one or two roles for themselves and their partner in a casual relationship. The average number of roles was also smaller for casual relationships that ranged from 5.26-3.23, than for committed relationships, which ranged from 7.27-5.21.

The current study supports research findings stating that roles change within the context of the relationship. Tolhuizen (1989) found that partners begin to change the nature of their own roles in the relationship as it progresses from casual dating to serious dating. As feelings evolved from superficial interactions in casual dating to more intimate emotional and physical displays often found in serious dating, respondents reported adapting their behavior to their partner’s expectations. A majority of role categories revealed higher percentages in the committed context and lower percentages in the casual dating context, except in regard to “entertainer” roles where a higher percentage of roles (73%) was reported in the casual context. Suggesting that role expectations are higher in the committed context.
Hypothesis 5

Lastly, the prediction that racial identity would be communicated more strongly in African American relationships was also supported. Race was coded most frequently within African American items. In congruence with Helms and Carter’s (1990) findings that European American are less likely to identify with race or culture. African Americans self-reported of how their racial identity influenced the roles they expected. European Americans also reported cultural influences, but few actually mentioned their race. More references were made in regard to culture in terms of “American” culture or “Southern” culture. Most items coded by European Americans indicated familial influences as having the greatest impact. African Americans also indicated how their parent’s or families roles have influenced the roles their own roles, but with less frequency in comparison to European Americans.

Conclusion: Limitations and Strengths of Research

Limitations

One limitation of the current study is that it was perhaps too broad in design. Though the current design provided rich data in regard to this phenomenon; however, the study attempted to address a variety of relational phenomena, which may have made data analysis more difficult. An initial analysis of roles could have been done to determine what roles participants expected. Participants could provide initial lists of what roles they expect in a committed relationship and casual relationship. In the initial study a scale could be constructed from the roles provided for further analysis of what roles are the most important in which context. In the second study, participants could rank their roles on a scale from (1) most important to (2) least important. Lastly, a third study with a
more in-depth analysis of the most important roles could be pursued through interviews or focus groups. In the last analysis, participants could more thoroughly address communication of roles and cultural influences.

Another limitation of the current study may be within the generalizability of the findings. The fact that this study was conducted in a Southeastern university may have lead to less nontraditional roles than may have been found in other regions. Southern students may be influenced by more religious socialization than, students in other areas of the country. Southern culture itself may promote more traditional beliefs. For example male participants mentioned how their parents raised them to be a “southern gentleman”. Generalizability may also be affected by student’s knowledge of gender roles and communication within interpersonal relationships. A majority of the students that participated in this study did so in fulfillment of a requirement for Speech Communication class. Perhaps students are more likely to communicate their roles when they have taken more classes on communication in interpersonal relationships.

A third, final, limitation was that the definition of what a role is was not provided for participants. Some responses that mentioned characteristics such as “kind” indicated that participants might not have been clear about what their role or their partner’s roles are in a dating relationship. Though examples of possible roles were given, an explanation of what a role is may have produced stronger findings.

**Strengths**

The qualitative nature of this analysis was most appropriate for understanding the foundational question of this research: “What roles are expected by dating partners?” Whether these expectations vary by race or sex, data revealed similar types of role
expectations and themes for African American and European American males and females.

Secondly, the current research illuminated how roles may vary within casual and committed relationships and generalizations about the nature of dating relationships, as a whole, is difficult to determine within only one context. Greater understanding of expectations in romantic relationships can be reached from the inconsistencies and commonalities found within the roles reported in committed and casual relationships. Knowledge of “appropriate” role expectations within committed and casual relationships is needed for mutual agreement and understanding in such relationships. The major goal of this research was to provide increased understanding in the context of dating relationships. Analysis within the exclusive arena of dating relationships is more needed, especially with more sensitivity to the cultural influences that impact romantic relationships in a variety of ways.

Lastly, findings reveal that, regardless of race or sex, friendship and support are expected within both casual and committed relationships. A major strength of the open-ended questions allowed students to express why they ranked the roles as they did a committed relationship. They were also asked to explain why certain roles were more important and how cultural influences may have impacted their role expectations. It also revealed importance of roles as well as additional topics for future research.

Statements provided by participants reveal a richness regarding future research on dating relationships. Female students commonly revealed their dislike of casual relationships. Some students revealed that they believed “dating” was becoming a lost art and “hook-ups” were more common. One African American female stated that dating
was not appropriate terminology for casual daters, but “talking” was more popular in the African American community. Although these issues were not pertinent to the particular research goals of this study they provide possible areas for future research. Future research could be conducted exploring current terminology used as a reference for casual and committed relationships and understand how relational status is communicated to one’s partner. Future research could also be done in regard to the 14 categories of roles mentioned by participants. Common themes that are applicable to the dating context could be used in the formation of scales examining roles occupied within the context of dating relationships. For a deeper understanding of these roles, in-depth interviews could be conducted, which would allow respondents to describe and explain expectations required of a “friend” role in a committed or casual relationship.

No one analysis would be able to encapsulate all the many variables that affect dating relationships. However, this analysis did provide greater understanding of the roles within dating relationships, particularly looking at variables of race, gender, and commitment level. Such variables have often been neglected especially in regard to dating relationships. Common themes were found in regard to role orientation and adoption, however some variation emerged in regard to race and sex. It appears that romantic relationships will always reveal new phenomena to be researched or explained. Some respondents reveal confusion and uncertainty in regard to dating relationships, particularly in regard to roles. In any context, roles are likely to be fluid and changing according personal, societal, and cultural impacts. Research in the field should always present new lenses in which to view such phenomena and address underlying issues.
within dating relationships. One student’s statement captures the complex nature of romantic relationships:

I think dating is as consistent as “Georgia weather” You don’t know what to expect. All you can do is play it day by day, and make the best out of every day. [EAM 090]

The current study has provided increased understanding of the phenomena known as dating relationships. While there is still much future research needed within the area of relational communication, the current study has revealed that regardless of race or sex, companionship, love, and support are highly sought after commodities most partners seek in the dating relationship.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

I agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Tonia East, under the direction of Dr. Tina M. Harris in the Speech Communication Department, 706-542-4753. I understand participation is voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I understand that participation in this research fulfills a research requirement for some SPCM classes, but that if I choose not to participate in this study, another will be available to me and alternative means for fulfilling this requirement are made available to me.

**Purpose**
The purpose of this research project is to explore how roles are established in dating relationships.

**Benefits**
Though no direct benefits are guaranteed from my participation in this research project. However I may gain increased knowledge of regarding romantic roles. The findings from this research may help the researcher to learn more about how romantic roles are established in dating relationships.

**Procedures**
In this study I will be asked several open-ended questions about dating relationships. I will take the time to consider my expectations of my partner and myself in a dating relationship. The questions will take an hour or less to complete.

**Discomforts/Risks**
No discomforts or stress is anticipated.

**Confidentiality**
The data resulting from my participation will be treated confidentially. That is, my responses will not be directly tied to you. The researcher will not know my name or what materials I completed.

**Further questions**
The researcher will answer any questions I have now, or after I complete the project. If I have further questions or concerns, I can contact the researcher at (706) 542-4893.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given two copies of this form. Please sign both copies, keep one copy and return one to the researcher.

Date: __________

Signature of researcher: _______________ Signature of participant: _______________

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write Chris A. Joseph Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone: (706) 542-6514; E-mail: IRB@uga.edu.
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please circle best response or fill in the blank.

1. My sex is: MALE          FEMALE

2. My age is: _______ years old

3. My race is: ________________.

4. My current relationship status: SINGLE    DATING    MARRIED

5. Have you ever been in a dating relationship?: YES       NO

6. If yes: The longest relationship you have been in lasted___________(mos./yrs).
**Questionnaire**: After thoughtful consideration of each question, please provide a written response.

1. If you were on a date, how would the interaction take place? Who would initiate the date? Who would decide on the place? Who would pay?

2. Describe what you would consider to be a “committed” dating relationship?
3a. In general, what do you feel your roles are in a “committed” dating relationship? In order of importance rank the roles you most identify with. An example of these roles could be, but is not limited to: organizer, supporter, etc.

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3b. Please explain how you decided to rank your roles. For example, why did you choose role number 1 as more important than role number 3?

4. What do you feel your partner would expect your roles to be in a “committed” dating relationship and do you agree with these expectations?
5a. What would your partner’s roles be in a “committed” dating relationship?

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5b. Please explain how you decided to rank their roles. For example, why did you choose role number 1 as more important than role number 3?
6. Describe in depth how you and your partner would take on such roles? For example, are they communicated between you and your partner or adopted in some other way?

7. What influence, if any, do you think your cultural background may have had on the roles you adopted?
8. What influence, if any, do you think their cultural background may have had on the roles they adopted?

9. Describe what you would consider to be a “casual” dating relationship?
10a. Describe what roles you play in a “casual” dating relationship.
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10b. Please explain how you decided to rank your roles. For example, why did you choose role number 1 as more important than role number 3?

11. What do you feel your partner would expect your roles to be in a “casual” dating relationship and do you agree with these expectations?
12a. What would your partner’s roles be in a “casual” dating relationship?
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12b. Please explain how you decided to rank their roles. For example, why did you choose role number 1 as more important than role number 3?
13. Describe in depth how you and your partner would take on such roles? For example, are they communicated between you and your partner or adopted in some other way?

14. What influence, if any, do you think your cultural background may have had on the roles you adopted?

15. What influence, if any, do you think their cultural background may have had on the roles they adopted?

16. Is there anything else you would like to mention on this topic?

Thank you for taking the time to fill-out this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated.
APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING FORM

Thank you very much for participating in this study on roles in dating relationships. Your responses will be very valuable in examining how roles are established in dating relationships. Specifically, you have helped the researcher in examining how roles are established in regard to race, sex, and commitment level.

You received one of two surveys. You were either asked about committed relationships first and then casual relationships or you were asked about casual relationships and then committed relationships. The information you provided will help the researcher to understand what dating partners expect of their partners and of themselves. As well as what roles may have greatest importance in committed or casual relationships.

Overall, it is important to understand expected roles in dating relationships in various interpersonal situations. Greater knowledge in this area would provide insight to understanding roles in marriages, families, and other contexts. Again your comments are greatly appreciated. Feel free to contact the researcher if you would like a copy of the results when they are available.

Tonia East (tneast@arches.uga.edu)
**Coding Rules**

Unit of Analysis. Each item contains one response to one question. Each item makes up one unit of analysis. You will code each response according to the themes listed below.

**Theme 1: Role Orientation**

For this section you will code Traditional (T), Nontraditional (N), Combination(C), or (A) Absent. Circle the letter that represents the items most completely.

**Traditional (T):**

Traditional roles are coded by analyzing what roles are given to men and what roles are given to women. If the male is shown in dominant roles, such as the “leader”, “initiator”, “financial provider” or “decision-maker” in the majority of the item, it could be coded as traditional. Also if the woman is given less leadership roles and their roles mostly supported males roles. Female is portrayed in roles such as nurturer/comforter, “lover”, “nondominant”, “cook”, and “friend” roles.

Examples:

- “He would initiate, decide place.”
- “I would prefer that he pay and pick the place.”
Nontraditional (N):

   Code items as non-traditional when traditional role reversal occurs. Male takes on traditionally female roles and female takes on traditionally male roles.

   Examples:
      - Female states, “I usually initiate and pay.”
      - Male states, “I don’t like initiating date or deciding.”

Combination (C):

   Code when participant states both traditional and non-traditional roles exist in one item.

   Examples:
      - “Either of us could decide or pay.”
      - “We take turns on paying.”

Absent (A):

   Code only when the item does not mention role orientation in any way or question does not apply to role orientation. For example, an item giving a defining a “casual” relationship and does not mention any role orientation. Code when roles were mentioned that are neither traditional nor non-traditional.

   Examples of roles:
      - “Comedian”
      - “Listener”
Theme 2: Cultural Orientation

For this section, you will code Cultural Identification (C), Racial Identification (R), Family Identification (F), or (A) Absent.

**Cultural Identification (C):**

Code when participant indicates that their cultural background did influence roles.

Examples:
- “My cultural background has a lot to do with the roles I play.”
- “Cultural background will have a large influence.”

**Racial Identification (R):**

Code only when a literal reference to race is mentioned.

Examples:
- “…you learn what is expected of a black man in a relationship.”
- “Support is an important role in the African-American family.”

**Family Identification (F):**

Code only when item indicates that the roles that their parents have portrayed have had the most effect on the roles adopted.

Examples:
- “I base my roles on what roles I saw my mother portray.”
- “My family taught me not to believe in the homemaker type of woman.”

**Absent (A):**

Code only when the item did not mention racial, cultural or family orientation in any way or question does not refer to cultural or any other orientation.
Theme 3: Role Adoption

For this category code items indicating how roles were adopted in the relationship. You will code for Implicit (I), Explicit (E), Combination (C), or (A) Absent.

Implicit (I):

Code when roles are not communicated verbally, but understood by both partners.

Examples:
- "Roles are natural."
- “Roles emerge in time of need.”

Explicit (E):

Code when roles are clearly communicated by partners and expectations are discussed.

Examples:
- "Communication is key to successful role adoption."
- “We are very upfront about our expectations.

Combination (C):

Code when roles are implied, but expectations are also discussed.

Examples:
- "Some roles are communicated and some are just understood."
- “Financial roles are discussed but support roles are just expected.”

Absent (A):

Code only when the item does not mention role adoption in any way or question does not apply to role adoption.
## Coder Sheet

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* Naa = African American participants.

** Nea = European American participants.
## APPENDIX F

**ANALYSIS OF ROLE FREQUENCIES BY RACE**

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* p <.05; chi-square violation contained with one frequency less than 5.
APPENDIX G

ANALYSIS OF ROLE FREQUENCIES BY GENDER

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* p<.05; all chi-square tests had 1 degree of freedom.