

ABSTRACT

Title of Document:

**THE LOVE AND MARRIAGE PLAYBOOK:
CONTEMPORARY GUIDELINES FOR BLACK
WOMEN IN RELATIONSHIP ADVICE
LITERATURE**

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Self-help has long been a tradition in the black community. Relationship advice within this genre has gained popularity with books such as Steve Harvey's *Act Like A Lady Think Like a Man: What Men Really Think About Love, Relationships, Intimacy, and Commitment* and Tyrese Gibson and Rev. Run's *Manology: Secrets to Your Man's Mind Revealed*, to name a few. However, few social and cultural history works focus on the culturally embedded linkages between worthiness for respect to sexual propriety, behavioral decorum, and the gate-keeping function they serve for black women's right to full citizenship.*

Through an analysis of self-help relationship advice literature, this dissertation explores the gendered politics within the black community that contribute to the construction of black womanhood. While drawing parallels between contemporary

* I define citizenship as membership in a democratic institution, nation, and community.

messages of black womanhood and historic notions of respectability, the fundamental question to be addressed is: How and why have views of racial uplift ideology framed the construction of representations that bracket black womanhood? This dissertation analyzes these constructions beginning in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, with the creation of the politics of respectability, to current debates about black women's marital status and relationship challenges. Critical contributions of this work include: defining a demographic of black women that are invisible in the self-help genre, the exploration of contemporary hegemonic dating scripts in the black community and their consequences, and suggests a re-working of relationship advice literature – one that includes empowering women and men to ensure both partners' needs are met.