

FEATURES

Educational differences put Black couples at odds

By GREG CLAY
Staff Writer

First in a three-part series

Many of the young blacks who have reaped the benefits of the civil rights movement now have college degrees and rewarding salaries. But right along with these economic and educational gains has come a friction between black spouses known as the black male-black female power struggle.

The tension between the sexes occurs often when there is an educational difference between the spouses. . . . "Whenever I say I have a meeting with professionals, my husband feels threatened," says Barbara who is a research assistant at UNC. . . . "He's considered a service technician which is a skilled job, but he feels intimidated when I'm around black professionals."

The struggle that's so visible now was not a problem several years ago, says Dr. Hortense McClinton of the School of Social Work. "I don't remember that it (power struggle) was a big issue in my time. Many years ago there was a unified struggle to attain the goals the family set. This tension that's present between the younger couples now wasn't a big problem several years ago. I think the more alike people are economically, the more apt they'll be able to get along.

"I wouldn't marry a man who worked in the steel mills. We probably wouldn't have the same interests. But if you're having a struggle, you may put it on something else. For instance, if the husband is making less money than the wife, the husband could blame the problem on that. It may be silly, but it's a fact of life."

But one black professional male named George said the rift between the sexes hasn't affected him. "My wife and I have an understanding. There was a time when I was in graduate school that my wife made more money than I did, but it didn't bother me. If she still made more money than me, I don't think it would affect me. You have to recognize the problem instead of just dealing with the symptoms. Most folks who are overcome by it (the tension) don't recognize what's happening to them. If they don't recognize it they can't realize they are having troubles. If they are perceptive enough one spouse can say, 'Hey, why are we fighting?'"

George thought that education shouldn't be as much of a factor in compatibility as many people play it up to be. "It's stupid for education to be the sole determinant in knowing whether two people are compatible. Hopefully couples grow together once they're married. If they both like chess, golf, tennis and everything else they'll be like twins."

Education is of the utmost importance in a relationship says Robert Staples, a sociologist at the University of California at San Francisco and author of a forthcoming book on black singles. "More black women graduate from college than men, and they want a man with comparable achievement," says Staples. "That man simply doesn't exist within the black community."

But a female Public Health graduate student named Ann doesn't think education is such an important factor in a relationship. "I don't think education is important in determining whether a man and woman will make it," she says. "I want to leave my options open and not have a narrowed picture of what my man should be like. I don't necessarily want a Ph.D. male who is good looking but has nothing else.

"He could be a carpenter or a sanitary worker or a maintenance man. And if he's got his head in the right place, education does not make any difference.

"I've met many black males who come on thinking they're 'something' because they have a Ph.D. I tell them I'm a science teacher and a Ph.D. candidate and they look at me and frown like it's not possible. They say, 'not that many black women in science.'"

In an effort to help couples solve their domestic problems many "black love" workshops have been springing up in many parts of the country. For the past five years, Yale University psychologist Robert Tucker and his wife, Leota, have been running a series of these workshops. Black psychologists throughout the country are conducting male-female relationship groups for blacks. And the UCLA extension program, for example, has a special section for black couples who want to spend time with trained professionals.

George is not so sure love workshops are necessary in the South since it generally lags behind western and northern areas of the country in developing trends and setting national tendencies. He thought racism and societal pressures were responsible for much of the tension between the sexes. "Society has kept a thumb down on black males for a



long time," said George. "But the thumb has been let off the black females by society. Black women had better education and more opportunities to achieve. Many black males feel inherently that they have to be the main breadwinner. It's expected of them. It hurts your self-esteem if you don't. We're victims of what we've been taught and we have to live with it."

'Tragic Magic'

(Continued from page 4)

the lonely, seemingly helpless prison inmates. With the exception of Otis and Alice, the minor characters are not developed as fully as they might have been in a longer novel (Let me make it clear that I'm not complaining. We should all pray for more short, to-the-point books such as *Tragic Magic*).

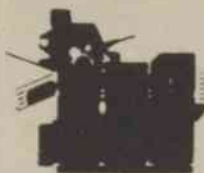
More important is that each character, no matter how secondary, presents to us a variation of a different human emotion, which is part of life's tragic magic.

Although a moving and sometimes gloomy book, *Tragic Magic* scores best with its biting wit and cynicism, combined with sarcasm, philosophical humor and

poetic prose, if you will. A particular militant group doesn't "believe in history because it's his story, meaning white folks," says Geneva to Melvin.

Alice assures Melvin that most men have never experienced the other side of "Wham Bam, Thank You Mam," which is "The Bang Bump, Thank You Chump." A verbal exchange between Norma and Otis reminds one of a high school hall fight, and their choice of words and expressions guarantees a good laugh.

The relationship between identity and life is what *Tragic Magic* is about and Wesley Brown offers his view on that subject with a freshness of style, language and perspective that makes his first novel enjoyable and worth the price tag.



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