

Black women

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men are three times as likely as black women to marry someone of another race.

Another, more radical solution is "man-sharing" (see related article on page A2).

"What black women shouldn't do, Mrs. Williams said, is despair.

"Before seeking any relationship, black women need to define themselves, she said.

"That's one thing I urge people to do, particularly women," she said. "Women might find a relationship if they are more interested in working on ... being the best person they can, so they can give much in a relationship.

"Relationships are real important, especially to women," Mrs. Williams said. But having a man and being happy, she warned, do not necessarily go hand in hand.

"Before divorce and before the single life were acceptable, women were more likely to remain in abusive situations," she said.

Something to consider

Difficulty in finding suitable mates seems especially prevalent among professional women, who often look for men with comparable educations and salaries.

There just aren't enough such men to go around.

For instance, roughly 60 percent of the blacks who have MBA degrees are women.

Some professional women, therefore, may have to lower their expectations, which may mean cross-class relationships with blue-collar workers whose income is less than theirs.

Carolyn Green, a marketing executive at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., said black women should definitely consider dating men of other classes.

"There are guys who are pretty sharp and don't have a college degree," she said. "There are good qualities in those guys, too."

Making adjustments

But cross-class relationships take adjustments, by both women and men.

"Some black men in relationships where women make more money have problems with that," Mrs. Williams said. Problems may arise from the perception some black men have that they should be the breadwinners, she said.

Zeus Johnson, 22, would consider a woman whose salary is higher, but he still would insist on paying for dates.

A radical alternative: Women sharing men

By HENRY DUVALL
Special To The Chronicle

In 1982 Audrey B. Chapman, a Howard University family therapist, began to wonder whether the phenomenon of American women sharing men with other women was becoming a growing reality.

She had been hearing stories for several years about married and single women — black and white — who were facing this dilemma. Many of the unwitting victims thought that they had one-on-one relationships.

Then one day a dejected 28-year-old single woman walked into the Howard University Counseling Service so distraught that she was on the verge of committing suicide. "For me, this was a major turning point," Ms. Chapman recalls.

The young woman's cry for help prompted the therapist to launch a "man-sharing" workshop in 1983 to find out how widespread and extensive these relationships were. More than 100 women, representing a diversity of ethnic groups, showed up.

Now the nationally known figure on male-female relationships has written a book, "Man-

"If I date a woman who makes more money than me, then I make sure she's not paying," said Johnson, a dishwasher at a local restaurant. "I was brought up in the fashion that if you want to be a man and call yourself a man, even though you might not be able to do it financially, you give it your best shot."

However, one 26-year-old, who wanted to be referred to as Charles C., feels differently.

"I have no problems with her being the breadwinner because I'll be working, too," said the man, who is an orderly at a local nursing facility. "It wouldn't bother me, but it bothers a whole lot of them (men). I'm a man of the '80s. It would make me work harder to better myself."

Going below the surface

Communication and openness are important in cross-class relationships, Mrs. Williams said; couples must get past the superficial.

"They also have to realize that what they're looking for and what they're living with may be totally different," she said.

Rosalyn Wagner, a financial analyst at RJR Nabisco Inc., agrees.

"Many guys feel professional black women are too independent and self-sufficient," said Miss Wagner, who is single and earned her MBA degree from the University of Wisconsin. "Many black men feel they are not needed by black women."

Annette Beatty, a single elementary school teacher, said women need to look at who a man is and not what he does.

"Sometimes women's expectations of men are unrealistic and misguided," she said. "They're cutting themselves short, and it's their own fault."

But a local computer specialist feels she has realistic expectations.

"I just want someone who's down-to-earth," she said.

Great expectations

But high expectations may not be such a bad idea, said the Rev. Carlton A.G. Eversley, pastor of Dellabrook Presbyterian Church.

"I think high expectations are good," he said. "But women need to be clear about what they want. Many times men feel that they get mixed messages about what women really want."

But whatever women want, they shouldn't take just anyone who comes along, Eversley said.

"Even though the numbers are bad, women still need to be discriminating," he said. "The tendency is to think that any man is better than no man."

Unpopular option

Besides dating men of different races and classes, other options for single black women include focusing more on their careers to fill the void, pursuing short-term relationships and joining singles networks.

Apparently, an earlier mentioned alternative, man-sharing, is not particularly popular here.

"Personally, I don't like man-sharing," Mrs. Williams said. "I know it happens, but I don't think it happens with everybody being honest with each other. I don't think this would be a good solution."

The East Winston Branch Library will sponsor a panel discussion on "Black Male-Female Relationships in the '80s" on Thursday, Nov. 13, at 7 p.m.

On the whole, said a Winston-Salem State University employee, black females don't believe in sharing their men.

"From my time on up to now, we have never been a race of people to share," said the woman, who has been married 42 years. "Three things you don't mess with: my money, my man and my meal."

A better choice

An alternative that receives kinder local reviews is the singles network. Even some churches have gotten into the act and started singles ministries.

The Rev. Wendell Johnson, pastor of First Baptist Church, heads such a ministry, which he said serves as a fellowship support group for single people.

Johnson said that women who attend the sessions are usually looking for emotional and spiritual stability — not men.

"All are not looking for permanent mates," he said. "Most are very comfortable being single. The ones who have ex-

pressed an interest in looking for mates want someone who is compatible and emotionally and spiritually sound."

Most of the women in the ministry are professionals, Johnson said.

He also said he foresees more and more singles ministries.

"A lot of folks are saying, 'I want to be single,'" Johnson said. "And for the church to be effective, it has to reach out to singles as well as the total family."

An Ebony Affair is a local singles network.

Founded in 1985 by Pat Degraffinreidt of Winston-Salem, it helps singles to meet potential mates and professionals to meet new clients.

Still other options for single women are to marry someone who is substantially younger or older, to choose a mate who has been married before, or to choose not to get married at all.

A long-term approach

Eversley suggests another, more long-term approach to the problem.

"Part of our job as black men is to redefine what manhood is," he said.

Eversley and a group of about 25 others hope to achieve this with a 1-year-old organization called "100 Black Men."

Black men have to realize that they are responsible for the conditions in which they live, Eversley said, and that blaming whites for those problems only gives whites more power.

You undo negative self-images with positive images, Eversley said.

The group plans to take young black males on Saturday excursions, including visits to area black businesses.

"We will mainly just be with them and be honest with them," Eversley said. "We will expose them to things they haven't seen. 'We will show them there are alternative lifestyles,'" he said.

Eversley said the group also plans to incorporate a for-profit wing and become involved in profit-making ventures.

In the meantime ...

But what can black women do

in the meantime to help? Eversley said they can "lift up their black men," publicly and privately.

In addition, black men who are married can reach out to single black women, he said.

"It's important for us to be platonic, for us to reach out and develop some sense of companionship, so a woman who is single doesn't have to feel so alone even if she doesn't get the sexual part," he said.

Meanwhile, the numbers mount. Not only is there a shortage of available black men, but middle-class blacks who do marry are having fewer babies than their lower-income counterparts, widening the economic gap.

"The black middle class is not reproducing itself," said Walter Farrell, a communication education professor at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. "Given the growing imbalance of all black men to black women in general, and the professional imbalance in particular, blacks may be headed toward gender conflicts at a significant level in the 21st century."

Crisis or transition?

In the CBS documentary "The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America," host Bill Moyers predicted that, by the year 2000, 70 percent of all black children will be born to single parents.

What does all of this mean for the black family? Can it survive yet another blow?

Yes, say Mrs. Williams, Johnson and Eversley.

"The black family is in crisis, so everybody says," Mrs. Williams said. "I don't necessarily know that that's true. I feel we're in transition."

Yet, the transition may involve even fewer male role models in the home, among other psychological hurdles, she conceded.

But the black family has survived before, Mrs. Williams said. And it'll survive again.


Staff writers Robin Barksdale and John Hinton also contributed to this story.

Next week: An editorial reaction.

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Now the nationally known figure on male-female relationships has written a book, "Man-

Ms. Chapman, who claims she was a victim of man-sharing herself, proclaims in an interview, "I know what their pain is! I've been there."

"This book is about self-empowerment for American women," she said at a recent

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