

21ST CENTURY FORECAST



A 'Morning-After Pill,' 'Segmented Relationships' and a Continuing Rise in Unwed Mothers Are Predicted For The Year 2000

MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

THE forecast for Black male/female relationships in the 21st century is a mixed bag of predictions. Among the "good news" is the projection that there will be a "morning after" birth control pill, that sexually-transmitted diseases will be under control, and that Black women will be viewing men of other ethnic backgrounds as viable options for dating and mating.

In addition, some predict that "segmented relationships" will be much more the norm than "lifetime" relationships because it will become increasingly difficult to find a mate to serve all one's needs.

The bad news is that Black women will continue to outnumber Black men, thereby making it even more difficult for some Black women to find what they consider "suitable" mates. In addition, the number of unmarried Black women having children will have reached an even more alarming high, raising serious questions about the future of the Black family as we have come to know it.

Among the changes we can anticipate by the year 2000 include men and women waiting until their 30s to marry and have children, while at the same time rejecting sex as the "ultimate" in a relationship. People will be seeking mates—whether for marriage or just companionship—who are supportive and share common interests. "Black men and women are realizing that they need each other," says Lorraine Brannon, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in Washington, D.C. "It is—and still will be—a cold, cruel, racist world out there. We are out here dealing every day and when we come home, we want someone in our corner."

Dr. Brannon, who does extensive

counseling of couples, some of whom are not married, says she is finding that the '70s and early '80s trend to be "single and hang out" is leaving most people unfulfilled. "People are now looking for more permanency. They want some security—a supportive person in their lives. We are moving to a point of making commitments, and in our society that generally means marriage."

Audrey B. Chapman, a family therapist at Howard University, agrees. "By the year 2000, we'll be back to traditional mores," she says. "There will be dating with commitment, and while sex will continue to be an important part of a relationship, it will not be *the* relationship."

Ms. Chapman says that during the workshops she conducts nationwide on relationships, people are talking more about finding a "friend" rather than just a mate. "We are going to see relationships lasting for longer periods of time rather than the instant love and quick fixes for loneliness we are experiencing now," she says. "People are getting bored with that."

Experts in the field say both men and women are beginning to seriously assess the sexual revolution of the '60s and '70s. Many agree that the benefits include women being more sexually expressive, thereby finding sex more personally gratifying. At the same time, men have come to appreciate the lack of pressure to "perform." They want to enjoy a woman's company without feeling compelled to make sexual advances. In addition, they say the sexual permissiveness of our society has resulted in a decrease in commitment to relationships.

"People are tired of being taken for

granted," says Ms. Chapman. "Women wanted sexual freedom, and they got it. Now women will be insisting that some things go back the other way, and this will change the times."

IN contrast to those who predict a return to traditional values, there are others who foresee a greater schism than ever between the sexes as women and men place more emphasis on individual needs and goals rather than those of spouse and family. As women and men become more financially and emotionally independent, they find that they can have relationships and companionship without getting married, says Maisha Bennett, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and director of the Bureau of Mental Health for the City of Chicago.

In the future, marriage will be considered just another "option" rather than the ultimate goal in a relationship. There will be what Nathan Hare, Ph.D., a psychologist and sociologist in San Francisco, calls "segmented relationships" because, he says, people will not be able to find one person to fulfill all their needs.

Others agree. "We've gotten past the idea that there is one 'ideal' person for each of us," says Vikki Gregory, a futurist who is director of the policy division of Wider Opportunities for Women, a national women's employment resource organization in Washington, D.C. "We'll be coupled with different people throughout our lives."

Though she views this possibility as "devastating," Dr. Bennett of Chicago concedes that if current trends continue, by the year 2000 divorce will be the first option when things go wrong in a marriage. However, she