Are Black Women Scaring Off Their Men?
(A Fighting Spirit Is Important, But Not At Home)

The Washington Post By: Joy Jones

Have you met this woman? She has a good job, works hard, and earns a good salary. She went to college, she got her master's degree; she is intelligent. She is personable, articulate, well read, interested in everybody and everything. Yet, she's single.

Or maybe you know this one. Active in the church. Faithful, committed, sings in the choir, serves on the usher board, and attends every committee meeting. Loves the Lord and knows the Word. You'd think that with her command of the Scriptures and the respect of her church members, she'd have a marriage as solid as a rock. But again, no husband.

Or perhaps you recognize the community activist. She's a black lady, or, as she prefers, an African American woman, on the move. She sports A short natural; sometimes cornrow braids, or even dreadlocks. She's an organizer, a motivator, a dynamo. Her work for her people speaks for itself--organizing women for a self-help, raising funds for A community cause, educating others around a new issue in South Africa. Black folks look up to her, and white folks know she's a force to be reckoned with. Yet once again, the men leave her alone.

What do these women have in common? They have so much; what is it they lack? Why is it they may be able to hook a man but can't hold him? The women puzzle over this quandary themselves. They gather at professional clubs, at sorority meetings or over coffee at the office and wonder what's wrong with black men? They hold special prayer vigils and fast and pray and beg Jesus to send the men back to church. They find the brothers attending political strategizing sessions or participating in protests but when it comes time to go home, the brothers go home to someone else.

I know these women because I am all of these women. And after asking over and over again "What's wrong with these men?", it finally dawned on me to ask the question, "What's wrong with us women?" What I have found, and what many of these women have yet to discover, is that the skills that make one successful in the church, community or workplace are not the skills that make one successful in a relationship.

Linear thinking, self-reliance, structured goals and direct action assist one in getting assignments done, in organizing church or club activities or in positioning oneself for a raise, but relationship-building requires different skills. It requires making decisions that not only gratify you, but satisfy others. It means doing things that will keep the peace rather than achieve the goal, and sometimes it means creating the peace in the first place. Maintaining a harmonious relationship will not always allow you to take the straight line between two points. You may have to stoop to conquer or yield to win.

In too many cases, when dealing with men, you will have to sacrifice being right in order to enjoy being loved. Being acknowledged as the head of the household is an especially important thing for many black men, since their manhood is so often actively challenged everywhere.
else. Many modern women are so independent, so self-sufficient, so committed to the cause, to the church, to career or their narrow concepts that their entire personalities project an "I don't need a man" message. So they end up without one. An interested man may be attracted but he soon discovers that this sister makes very little space for him in her life. Going to graduate school is a good goal and an option that previous generations of blacks have not had. But sometimes the achieving woman will place her boyfriend so low on her list of priorities that his interest wanes. Between work, school and homework, she's seldom "there" for him, for the preliminaries that might develop a commitment to a woman. She's too busy to prepare him a home-cooked meal or to be a listening ear for his concerns because she is so occupied with her own.

Soon he uses her only for uncommitted sex since to him she appears unavailable for anything else. Blind to the part she's playing in the problem, she ends up thinking, "Men only want one thing." And she decides she's better off with the degree than the friendship. When she's 45, she may wish she'd set different priorities while she was younger. It's not just the busy career girl who can't see the forest for the trees.

A couple I know were having marital troubles. During one argument, the husband confronted the wife and asked what she thought they should do about the marriage, what direction they should take. She reached for her Bible and turned to Ephesians. "I know what Paul says and I know what Jesus says about marriage," he told her, "What do you say about our marriage?" Dumbfounded, she could not say anything. Like so many of us, she could recite the Scriptures but could not apply them to everyday living. Before the year was out, the husband had filed for divorce. Women who focus on civil rights or community activism have vigorous, fighting spirits and are prepared to do whatever, whenever, to benefit black people. That's good. That's necessary. But it needs to be kept in perspective. It's too easy to save the world and lose your man.

A fighting spirit is important on the battlefield, but a gentler spirit is wanted on the home front. Too many women are winning the battle and losing the home. Sometimes in our determined efforts to be strong believers and hard workers, we contemporary women downplay, denigrate or simply forget our more traditional feminine attributes. Men value women best for the ways we are different from them, not the ways we are the same. Men appreciate us for our grace and beauty. Men enjoy our softness and see it as a way to be in touch with their tender side, a side they dare not show to other men. A hard-working woman is good to have on your committee. But when a man goes home, he'd prefer a loving partner to a hard worker.

It's not an easy transition for the modern black woman to make. It sounds submissive, reactionary, outmoded, and oppressive. We have fought so hard for so many things, and rightfully so. We have known so many men who were shaky, jive and untrustworthy. Yet we must admit that we are shaky, jive and willful in our own ways. Not having a husband allows us to do whatever we want, when and how we want to do it. Having one means we have to share the power and certain points will have to be surrendered. We are terrified of marriage and commitment, yet dread the prospect of being single and alone.

Throwing ourselves into work seems to fill the void without posing a threat. But like any other drug, the escape eventually becomes the cage. To make the break, we need to do less and "be" more. I am learning to "be still and know," to be trusting. I am learning to stop competing with black men and to collaborate with them, to temper my assertive and aggressive energy with softness and serenity. I'm not preaching a philosophy of "women be seen and not heard." But I have
come to realize that I, and many of my smart and independent sisters are out of touch with our feminine center and Therefore out of touch with our men. About a year ago, I was at an oldies-but-goodies club.

As a Washingtonian, I love to do the bop and to hand dance styles that were popular when I was a teen. In those dances, the man has his set of steps and the woman has hers, but the couple is still two partners and must move together. On this evening, I was sitting out a record when a thought came to me. If a man were to say, "I'm going to be in charge and you're going to follow. I want you to adjust your ways to fit in with mine" I'd dismiss him as a Neanderthal. With my hand on my hip, I'd tell him that I have just as much sense as he does and that he can't tell me what to do. Yet, on the dance floor, I love following a man's lead. I don't feel inferior because my part is different from his, and I don't feel I have to prove that I'm just as able to lead as he is. I simply allow him to take my hand, and I go with the flow.

I am still single. I am over 30 and scared. I am still a member of my church, have no plans to quit my good government job and will continue to do what I can for my people. I think that I have a healthy relationship with a good man. But today, I know that I have to bring some of that spirit of the dance into my relationship. Dancing solo, I've mastered that. Now I'm learning how to accept his lead, and to go with the flow.