CHAPTER -5

Men’s Inadequacies
(CHAPTER – 5)

MEN’S INADEQUACIES

This is the reason why I often hate men. They’re all alike. You can’t depend on them… They’re weak . . . we’re the ones who can show these simpletons how to be men because we raised them and for some reason perhaps they . . . apparently forgotten most of the necessary valuable constructive stuff we taught them as young boys which is why most of them are in dire need of a refresher course today. (HSGHGB 106).

The plight of Black men in America has historically posed many perplexing questions. Slavery has stripped the black man of the patriarchal authority he had in Africa. Only a remnant of it is left behind which shows itself in asserting or inflicting physical abuse on his wife. In other words Black men, by virtue of their phallic superiority, have held black women as their scapegoats victimizing them in every conceivable way. The Negro in America has been a victim of socially disorganized existence with no recognizable past. He was brought to America as human cargo, a slave with little awareness of the past. The urge for self – expression brings into existence what are known as slave narratives portraying the experiences of the Negro slaves and the oppressive conditions under which they lived. But the Black American is a Negro as well as an American, therefore a product of a unique American situation. This double consciousness yields him no true self -consciousness and his concept of self is conditioned by that awareness of double self.
Terry McMillan’s *Mama, Disappearing Acts, Waiting to Exhale, How Stella Got Her Groove Back, The Interruption of Everything* and *A Day Late and a Dollar Short* are fundamentally novels on women in the sense that they are concerned with the emotions and conflicts experienced by women and the roles they assume whether by choice or by force. They chronicle the fortunes of women within the black community. The male characters, on the other hand, undergo no development, play no major roles and they are important only because of the reactions they might prompt or provoke from the females. Besides, most of McMillan’s male characters are shallow, immature, untrustworthy and in a sense anonymous. Crook, Mildred’s husband in *Mama*, Franklin, Zora’s live-in partner in *Disappearing Acts*, John, Bernadine’s husband and Russell, Robin’s live-in partner, Charles, Savannah’s lover in *Waiting to Exhale*, Cecil and Lewis, Viola’s husband and son respectively in *A Day Late and a Dollar Short*, Leon and Nathan, Marilyn Grimes’ husband and son-in-law respectively in *The Interruption of Everything* are men who do not live up to their spouses’ or society’s or their own expectations. The negative aspects of these men are more glaring when juxtaposed with the dynamic women characters like Mildred Peacock, Zora Banks, Bernadine, Robin, Marilyn Grimes, Viola Price and so on. The men’s behaviour, far from being heroic is inadequate in every sense.

McMillan is not unsympathetic with regard to the plight of black men in America. In times like 1964, the author concedes that most of the black men couldn’t find jobs, as a result they had so much spare time on their hands, and hence they were bored with themselves all the more because life turned out to be such a disappointment and their frustration results in explosive anger. The artist reveals the same concern that Haki
Madhubuti expresses in his introductory comments to Black man: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?(1990) as he describes “young black men in their late twenties or early thirties living in urban America, lost abandoned, aimlessly walking and hawking the streets with nothing behind their eyes but anger, confusion, disappointment and pain” (ii).

In As I Grew Older, Langston Hughes paints a realistic picture of a Black man, for whom growing up is a painful process. At the end he discovers that he is only a mere shadow of his dream, destined to live in darkness.

It was a long time ago.
I have almost forgotten my dream.
But it was there then.
In front of me.
Bright like a sun—
My dream.
And then the wall rose.
Rose slowly.
Slowly.
Iam black.
Ilie down in the shadow.
No longer the light of my dream before me.
Above me.
Only the thick wall.
Only the shadow. ...
McMillan investigates this theme through the character of Franklin Swift, who at one point in “Disappearing Acts” (1989) bemoans the subway which was full of black men who looked mad at the world. He himself fails to overcome the crippling self-perception that he is little more than a common day laborer.

Daniel Moynihan truly believed that the black community’s major problem was that there were too many female-dominated households. This pattern came into existence because men shirked their responsibilities. But even as Moynihan criticized the overabundance of black matriarchs, he failed to acknowledge the inadequacies of black patriarchy. Their inadequacies are listed in Waiting to Exhale when the four female protagonists Savannah, Bernadine, Gloria and Robin, while enjoying themselves at Gloria’s birthday party, have a discussion on men and their inadequacies in general. They mention that majority of them are ugly, stupid, imprisoned, unemployed, crack-headed, liars, unreliable, irresponsible, too possessive, shallow, boring, arrogant, childish, stubborn and set in their ways. Men’s inadequacies in general have left many female characters in the lurch. “McMillan’s Waiting to Exhale enjoyed tremendous popular success” says Richards, “because it spoke the frustration a whole generation of women felt in their efforts to find a good man” (126)

Most Black men in McMillan’s fiction fail miserably as good partners in these four areas namely emotional, social, financial and sexual. Most of the men leave behind a community of abandoned women which shows them as failures at emotional levels. Consider for instance, the protagonists Mildred Peacock in Mama, Zora Banks in Disappearing Acts and Bernadine, Robin, Gloria and Savannah in Waiting to Exhale, Marilyn Grimes in The Interruption of Everything, and Viola Price and Paris in A Day
Late and a Dollar Short who are all betrayed after being given promises of a good and happy life. This abandonment becomes the impetus for the women characters to bounce back through assertiveness and self-reliance.

McMillan expresses her thought in interview that men pretend to prefer women who are independent and smart but earnestly they favour women who are docile and unassertive or else they tend to feel insecure. McMillan declared in *Essence*, “I’m not tamable”. To a question she replied, “I wouldn’t for a minute give up all that I’ve earned, just to have a man.” Her female characters share the same opinion in this regard.

The men in McMillan’s novels are not in a position to help themselves most of the time. Though they themselves are helpless, they develop extra marital relationships without any feeling of inhibition. For instance Spooky Cooper married Kaye Francis but she had thrown him out because she was vexed with all women ringing her up and claiming Spooky as the father of their new born babes. It is not that a woman wants a family bereft of man, but it is that she wants a family with a man bereft of his inadequacies so that he would fulfill the needs of the family. Crook in *Mama* develops an illicit relationship with Ernestine Jackson and has a child through her. He is a fraudulent person and besides, he assumes that he has been made a cuckold and suspects his wife. Russell in *Waiting to Exhale* pretends to be serious with Robin but later has an affair with another woman which shows him to be fickle-minded. Leon, Marilyn Grimes’ husband in *The Interruption of Everything* blurs out without any qualms that he is bored with his life. Marilyn desires to have an open talk to sort out differences but then Leon overtly tells her that he has decided to leave his job as well as her. This comes to her as a bolt from the blue. His reason to desert his wife and children, as his life has become
monotonous, is flimsy. Besides, he regrets that he has missed out the most exciting time of his life because he got married when he was very young. Now his kids are grown up to fend for themselves. He feels he is overburdened with too many demands and finds a way out of this when he meets a young woman. At this juncture he decides to walk away from Marilyn’s life. Marilyn too understands their life has become stale and wants to turn a new leaf by having an open and honest talk but she could not stomach the fact that he was bored with her.

Paulette, one of Marilyn’s best friends in The Interruption of Everything depreciates men’s behavior when she says many husbands desert their wives and kids without any feeling of guilt. The stories of most of the deserted black wives are identical. Commenting on men’s inadequacies, Paulette says in The Interruption of Everything, “Men are just so predictable. This shit must be their rite of passage to middle age or something because they all seem to go a little nuts after they hit their forties.” (168) According to Marilyn, men going through midlife crisis will become overtly stupid and promiscuous and develop regressive behavior. She affirms Leon showed all these signs which were disgusting to her.

Majority of McMillan’s men characters are unfaithful to their wives and tend to develop extra-marital relationship and Stella, the protagonist of the novel How Stella Got Her Groove Back believes that “The men just need a reprieve. Want to break up the monotony” (HSGHGB 12).

Men portrayed by Terry McMillan are never loyal to their women and in reality they don’t love anybody. As Bernadine says, “You don’t love me, Herbert; you love the chase” (WTE 372) He denies the statement and tries to convince her that he is bored with
his wife and would desert her as soon as his son graduates from high school. Like Herbert, Franklin in *Disappearing Acts* also has an extra marital relationship. Further, Savannah’s father left seventeen years ago and her mother is still bitter and broken-hearted and her sister’s life is such that she “files for divorce on an annual basis” (WTE 1). Commenting on the Black men’s abominable attitude to their women Savannah says, “I don’t hate them. But what kills me more than anything is they usually pick the homeliest ones they can find” (WTE 245) Even there the Black men select the homeliest women so that they can be tamed easily.

McMillan’s men fail miserably on a social level when they fail to fulfill the society’s expectations. Consider for instance Franklin Swift who at the opening of the novel *Disappearing Acts* seems to be vexed of Black women because of their traditional outlook and practice. He says, “I’m tired of women. Black women in particular . . . they’re all the same, that’s for damn sure. Want all your time and energy. Want the world to revolve around them. Once you give them some good lovin’, they go crazy. Start hearing wedding bells. Start thinking about babies and want you to meet their damn family” (DA 1). This very thought opens his mind to the readers that he is not ready for any serious relationship with a woman. This trait becomes even more pronounced when Zora conceives.

Terry McMillan’s portrayal of Black men is realistic in nature in that most men fear commitments. Billy Callahan married Mildred but gradually he started experiencing the pressures of marriage and he felt suffocated by family responsibilities. He started pondering deep about all the mess he had got into. Finally he told Mildred that he loves her but he had second thoughts about married life and all the responsibilities that go
along with it. She boldly sends him saying “May be one day I’ll meet a real man who knows how to handle it”. (Mama 110) Such a deplorable attitude exists amidst men in general and Black men in particular.

In *A Day Late and a Dollar Short* Lewis who belongs to the Price family is a perpetual loser and an alcoholic. He is challenged by his estranged son Jamil to a friendly chess game. Lewis’s condition is so pathetic that he wants to win for a change, be it in a game, because he is exhausted being an eternal loser in life.

Besides, Nathan, Paris’ husband, is another example to show that black men fear commitments. He deserted her after eight years of marriage. Initially, she tried all possible ways to boost his confidence “got tired pumping his ego when he never reciprocated” (ADLDS 100). Besides, he resented her flourishing business and was never happy for her. Paris says, “I hate him for not fighting harder for what he wanted – for not living up to his own expectations. … he bailed out of the airplane before he even knew if it was going to crash” (ADLDS 101).

Joblessness is an eternal problem faced by McMillan’s men characters. They are jobless mainly because they lack the requisites for being decently employed hence they are branded as failures on the financial level too. Money, Mildred’s son, in *Mama* though he tries, he does not get into any job because he does not have a high school diploma. Moreover, Money’s patience is extremely thin. Similarly Franklin Swift in *Disappearing Acts*, works in a construction site but is frequently laid off and he is jobless. His jobless condition worsens his plight day by day. It seems to Zora, “He is dying a little bit every day”. She convinces him of her faith in him and that they would pass through the difficult phase soon but he only says, “You couldn’t possibly understand” (DA 178) meaning how
humiliated he was feeling. When she enquires why so, he bluntly says because she is not a black man. Here he seems to wallow in self-pity which is a sign of weakness. Many instances show how Franklin miserably fails to fulfill Zora’s expectations. Zora’s first birthday with Franklin is awful when she has to lend him fifty dollars to take her out because he is bankrupt. His behavior in the restaurant after walking out of the theatre mid-way explains his frustrated state and how he lacks self-control. Zora enquires,

“You’re acting very strange. Is something going on that I don’t know about that I should know about?”

No. And I ain’t acting strange. You think I’m acting strange? Just because I didn’t wanna see a stupid-ass war movie about a white boy falling in love, you think I’m acting strange? I just had a hard day, and I’m tired. The only reason I’m here is because it’s your birthday. Otherwise I’da stayed home.

Well, why didn’t you just say so? We didn’t have to go out, you know.

You been saying we don’t never go nowhere, so I wanted to take you out.

Yeah, but look what it’s turned into. And if you were all that tired, why didn’t you just sleep through the movie like you’ve done before?

Look why don’t you order something to eat, to keep this celebration going before it goes all the way downhill?

I’m not hungry, I said and leaned back in my chair.

It figures.

Why’d you say that?

You ain’t hungry because you don’t think I got paid today, do you? Tell the truth, Zora.
Earlier, the thought had crossed my mind, but then I thought about it. Maybe he didn’t have time to cash his check. But why would he bring something like this up if there wasn’t any truth in it. Shouldn’t I believe you, Franklin?

His jawbone started twitching. What the hell is going on? I wondered. He’s drunk. That’s it. I’ve never seen him drink like this before, and I don’t like it. And he just keeps picking at me. But why tonight? (DA 117-118)

Lust, rather than love rules the nature of McMillan’s men. Moreover, Christopher B. Booker opines that “Jefferson believed blacks to be an emotional people whose gender relationships lacked tenderness and involved almost pure lust in comparison to whites” (52). Franklin Swift in *Disappearing Acts* fails disgracefully as a life partner when he attempts to define manhood by taking a dominant position of a tyrant over her. When he feels she has outgrown him, he threatens her with physical violence and forces her to have sex against her will.

Mildred in *Mama* has only one thing to appreciate about Crook and that is he has given her five, beautiful and healthy kids. She also feels that most handsome men, did this one thing with dedication and consistency and nothing else in life. It is a great lashing to men and the cream of the Joke is that later they would be proud of it as though they had won the “Kentucky Derby or Something” (Mama 27). This is the height of cynicism and a great blow for men. Historian U.B. Phillips described African American slave laborers as primitive, uncouth, and inconstant, a trait deemed to be characteristic of their race. Besides, Franklin talks in a condescending manner about women when he is denied sex on health grounds. He says, “Women”, Franklin says, “I’m glad I ain’t one. Y’all get more shit wrong with your bodies than any other species
on earth”. (DA 149) Another major inadequacy in men as noted by Savannah is that they wrongly assume that sex is the only prime thing in a relationship. “But when you get right down to it. The majority of them think that’s the only reason we’re interested in them”. (WTE 273)

McMillan’s men are extremely egoistic just as Franklin in *Disappearing Acts* who cannot tolerate any one dictating terms to him. He says, “I ain’t never liked people telling me what to do” (DA 4). Further, his ego is very much hurt when he makes an assessment of his life and his position. He listens to Zora’s songs and discovers her voice capturing hearts. He pictures her on stage and has visions of her being a successful singer. His next thought is about himself. “Where would that leave me? Her man, the construction worker who couldn’t even be sure if he was gon get paid every week or not… Ain’t no sense worrying about my damn ego now.” (DA 96)

Above all, the complex and egoistic character of Franklin prevents him from open talk and does not realize communication is the remedy. Franklin cuts short every effort of Zora’s to have an open talk. And above all, his indifference is seen in a situation of financial crisis when Zora’s father used to help them out. But always an argument would arise between Franklin and Zora regarding the money. Likewise, Money, Mildred Peacock’s son in *Mama* is an egoistic character who dropped out of school when he had only one year to go. He never liked anybody telling him what was best for him.

McMillan’s men are not merely egoistic but are extremely selfish and self-centered. What these men have in common is the ability to live selfishly notwithstanding the fact that their own family depend on them for emotional and financial sustenance. Crook, Mildred’s husband in *Mama* is bereft of love for his family when compared to her. He is
a sanitation worker but never contributed anything in cash or kind whereas Mildred tried her hand at various trades like being a maid, a waitress, a cook, a factory worker, and a caretaker for the elderly, to keep the family afloat.

Franklin in Disappearing Acts is extremely selfish in that he thinks only about his loss, his misery, his disappointments, his needs, his comfort, his feelings, his security and so on. Thus he lives in his world all alone completely cut off from Zora’s. So she says, “The only person you feel sorry for is Franklin, isn’t it?” (DA 287) She also says, “You need, you need. That’s all you think about is what Franklin needs.” (DA 287) Most of the times he acted as if “he didn’t have a care in the damn world” (DA 292). Generally men are known to be selfish and they tend to ignore women in many respects. At times, women as an entity simply do not exist for them. Their ideas, thoughts, achievements, sacrifices, loss, everything is brushed aside. Zora knows very well that: “Some men take more interest in their pets than they do in their women”. (DA 16)

Marilyn Grimes who bore the brunt of men’s selfishness feels her daughter Sabrina was too young for motherhood, for she was just twenty two. She wants Sabrina to fulfill her dreams in life and not defer it like her. Since she knows well about men’s attitude she says, “Men don’t usually give up their plans for us” (TIOE 100).

According to Paulette Richards, “The historical experience of African American men in the United States has challenged them to forge a new definition of manhood- one that cannot rest solely on providing material comfort for the family.” (Paulette Richards 73) For instance, in McMillan’s second novel Disappearing Acts Franklin struggles to meet this challenge- the one on providing basic amenities. He neither contributes to the household expenses nor obtains divorce from his first wife as promised. Zora works
diligently with her voice teacher and secretly hoards money for her demo tape. Thus she
tries to reach her goal but Franklin seems to fall behind in all ways. As far as friends are
concerned, Zora gives importance to the quality of their character rather than their
credentials. When it came to men, she detests men who are selfish, lazy, vulgar, dumb
and the ones who never want to take chances in life.

But unfortunately she falls in love with Franklin who is a bundle of all these negative
qualities put together. He refuses to look for a job and neither does he assist her in the
household chores. He does not find fulfillment in any sense and falls into a depression.
He remains sequestered in their apartment, merely building a book-case and a bed. His
statement sums up his attitude, “I’m a get a job but when I feel like it. She pressuring all
the time, and it seem like the more she get on my case, the less I feel like doing” (DA
332). Franklin is aware of the fact that the only thing he has created is his son. He does
not shoulder any responsibility and he refuses to pick up their child from the day-care
because the world would come to know that he is jobless if he is seen with his child in the
mid-day. All such actions affect Zora’s state of mind tremendously. Franklin reflects on
his flaws but does nothing to rectify them. He merely thinks,

... But what did I do? Fell in love when I didn’t have nothing to offer no woman
of her caliber. … She been to college. She already had accomplished something
with her life, and she was still trying to do more. That was one of the things I
liked about her. But now the shit is backfiring …

And Zora didn’t even try to understand why I didn’t wanna pick Jeremiah up
from the baby-sitter. She didn’t have no … idea how embarrassing that shit
woulda been for me. So I used waiting for a phone call and my woodworking as a
excuse — but that wasn’t it. I couldn’t stand the thought that all the people in that house knew I wasn’t working, knew it was Zora paying her, and I didn’t want to be looked at and see the question in their eyes, like, ‘What do you do all day?’

What I do all day is drink and stare at the walls and listen to music. (DA 340)

Likewise Viola’s husband, Cecil in A Day Late and a Dollar Short, deserts his wife after thirty eight years of marriage and settles with Brenda. He learns of her death over phone from Loretta, Viola’s best friend. Loretta informs him about how Viola could have survived if she fought with all her might as she did many times before. He is extremely remorseful and breaks down:

I wonder if this is how Viola felt. Like she wanted to but couldn’t. This my wife she talking about. My wife of almost thirty nine years. The woman who had my babies. The woman who raised ‘em. The woman who tried to help me to be a better man but I was just too damn hardheaded and too lazy and, later on, just too proud to listen. Didn’t wanna admit that she knew what was best for me, when I knew all along she did. This is the same woman who snatched my heart right out my chest and put it on top a hers and then pressed down hard. So hard it felt soft. I loved Viola more than she ever knew. But I never knew how to show a woman how much you loved her. Nobody ever showed me how to be tender. Nobody ever taught me how to relax, and then, just surrender. Is it too late to ask, ‘How you do that, Vy? (ADLDS 390)

McMillan’s male characters are undependable and unreliable to the extent that in Mama, Mildred has to depend on somebody outside the family for help. Crook has never fixed anything in the house, therefore she wonders, why on earth should she have a man in her
life giving him the place of the head of the family. She also recalls the vain promise he had given her, that when he gets back on his feet, after recovering from tuberculosis, he would take care of her and the kids like a husband is supposed to do. So finally she decides “I’m twenty seven years old, and I’m sick and tired of this. ... And I don’t care if I gotta turn tricks or work ten jobs - you getting out of here this time for good”. (Mama 17) When the realization dawns on her that her husband is inadequate in all respects she wants to do away with him.

Men in general, have some wrong notions about women but they seriously believe them to be true. For instance, Franklin assumes, “Women aint used to men just being nice; they always think we want something in return. (DA 50-51) Franklin seems to entertain wrong notions about women psychology which he firmly believes in. For instance, he says, “But one thing I do know is that when one woman aint got no man and their girlfriend do, they can’t stand it”. (DA 155)

McMillan’s men are unreliable through and through which is a proven fact in her novels. Zora’s fear about her getting seriously involved with Franklin proves true in the end. She said, “I’m scared that if I get involved with you and it doesn’t work out then I’ll be right back where I started lonely and alone again”. (DA 64) We see her trust betrayed as she remains lonely. Franklin is unsteady, wavering and vacillates often from his own options. This dilemma seems dangerous and proves him to be a character who cannot be trusted. All his sincerity, his passion, his promises are thrown to the wind when he says,

All of a sudden, I wished she wasn’t pregnant. All of a sudden, I realized that I wasn’t married to this woman, that here she was carrying my baby, another woman controlling my destiny ....I was trying to figure out how I talked her into
she had this shit all planned. (DA 274-275)

The black men who are inadequate in many aspects as these, have no idea of the destruction they bring upon themselves, their family and on those around them. McMillan conveys her fears and the African American men’s inadequacies through her characters like Stella. Stella says “I mean African men scare me because I’ve heard ... besides they want to marry you and then expect you to stay in the kitchen and cook and clean and to be a passive, obedient child ... ” (HSGHGB 173). Stella says, “... Because men - and I don’t care how old or young they are – coerce you, get you to trust them, and then you start acting like a fool” (HSGHGB 285). Stella in *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* dwells on the inadequacies of men, being dubious of Winston’s steadfast nature.

Men in McMillan’s novels are portrayed as people who trifle with women’s affections and desert them when there are bills to be paid and kids to be reared. Crook, Franklin, John, Russell, Bill Callahan, Spooky Cooper and Charles are all apt examples of inadequate men. Paulette Richards says, “Bernadine ... is the only one of the four friends who has ever been married, the failure of her marriage represents the failure of a common dream. Despite their strongest wishes and expectations, all four women find themselves facing the prospect of a life that may never include a male partner.” (Paulette Richards 110)

McMillan’s male characters never learn to respect their spouse and her ties with her family. They are never alive to their partner’s feelings and most important of all is that they never feel, let alone demonstrate how important and precious their spouse is to them.
Zora in *Disappearing Acts* pours out her mental agony about how awful and burdened she feels about her life. Franklin turns a deaf ear to everything. She tells him that she is eight months pregnant, living with a man who is not only unemployed but who is not even her husband. At the initial stage both of them had dreams about their future. He made vain promises about going back to school, getting his divorce and starting his business. Now she has to remind him of the rent which is due, the phone bills to be paid and the credit card payments. He simply ignores all this talk and asks, “What about dinner” (DA 296). This clearly speaks of Franklin’s character. Neither does he share Zora’s enthusiasm when she was invited for audition and refuses to accompany her.

The Black male characters of McMillan never participate in their spouse’s interest or recognize their needs. As in *Disappearing Acts* Zora realizes that she has conceived and she tries to convince Franklin that it is not the apt time to have a baby. Since he is not divorced as yet, they are not married as yet and she is on the verge of going to the studio. She tries her best to explain that they are not in the position to have a baby at that point of time. But Franklin is stubborn and cuts short the talk and says, “Okay. It is your body. Do whatever you want with it. Be selfish. Don’t think about me”. (DA 253) Franklin exhibits not only stupidity but total insensitivity when he says, “You’re just trying to find a way to justify not going through with it. You’re good at justifying things you can’t deal with, are not you, Zora?” (DA 254). Lack of understanding brings about a strained relationship in course of time.

Robin in *Waiting to Exhale* openly admits men’s appalling treatment of women which makes her say, “I would be content being a housewife if I could find the kind of man who wouldn’t treat me like one” (WTE 74). She cannot stand the fact that they look
down upon housewives. Another lapse on the part of men is highlighted when Savannah says women can’t be themselves when they are with men because of the treatment meted out to them. She says, “I mean, don’t you find yourself being extra careful about what you say and how you say it?” especially in the company of men. Women don’t feel half as comfortable around men as they do with their girl friends.

Leon, Marilyn Grimes’ husband in The Interruption of Everything shows himself as a partner who lacks all understanding of human emotions. To add to her misery, she discovers she is pregnant at forty four with the child of Leon, the most inadequate person who tries to evade every issue. He never attempts to understand his wife Marilyn Grimes especially when she is greatly embarrassed when she knows of her pregnancy at forty four. Finally she has a miscarriage as fate would have it but she never wanted to reveal this to the world. But Leon, merely to draw the attention of the crowd in the party, gives out this news of Marilyn’s pregnancy. Marilyn feels, “He isn’t even thinking about me standing here centre stage, surrounded by a crowd of onlookers who are probably waiting to hear what melody will come out of my mouth.” (TIOE 138). In reality, Marilyn Grimes is choked to death by her living conditions at home. She is bogged down with too many responsibilities piled on her. The Black men neither appreciate their spouses’ strengths nor admit their own weaknesses.

Expecting the partner’s undivided attention is another great lapse on the part of Black men. Franklin Swift in Disappearing Acts resents the fact that Zora gives more importance to art than him. He is also caught by a jealous fear that Zora will love the baby more than she loves him. His possessive nature is obvious when he says, “Now it seem like whenever you get a invitation to do anything- and especially without me- you
jump at the... opportunity” (DA 155). Franklin earnestly believes that Zora’s friends are desperately trying to tear her away from him. His fear makes him all the more bitter and hateful.

The Black men’s unemployed state gives them enough spare time and they get bored with themselves and thus life becomes a great disappointment to them. The result is that the feelings of dissatisfaction and rage which seeth in them and explodes at any point of time. This rage is often misconstrued as masculinity and quite often wives, girl friends or whores bear the brunt of this negative feeling and ravaging discontent.

Most of the black men fall into this category like Crook in Mama. At one point Crook physically abuses Mildred, “You my wife, you understand me? My woman and I don’t want nobody talking to you like you ain’t got no man.” (Mama 5) She struggles to gulp down the insult and so she retaliated in words. He hollered at her “Didn’t I tell you was getting too grown. Don’t know your place yet girl.” (Mama 9) Crook gets the belt handy and starts lashing her with it, shouting, “Don’t you know nothing about respect?” “Girl, you gon learn “I’m a man not no toy”. “You understand me?” “Make me look like no fool” (Mama 9). Children are so scared though they are used to this episode. They huddle together like little birds helplessly waiting to see the outcome. McMillan’s men suffer from many inadequacies, and exertion of physical power is the most common one.

On the whole, Franklin fails miserably as a human being. All that Zora yearned for in life was steady love and security which she does not receive from Franklin. Her ideas of a romantic kinship do not succeed because of Franklin’s inadequacies and his lack of commitment towards her and his child and that leads to their separation. Zora used to feel annoyed to see him planted before the T.V when she comes home from work completely
worn out. There are instances when he used to forget to pick Jeremiah up from the babysitter. Franklin at times acts as if he did not know how to change the dirtied clothes of Jeremiah and he used to leave him dirty on the bed. Franklin states flimsy excuses to avoid taking care of Jeremiah, or taking the baby to the day-care and picking him up, though he was home all day. After a few weeks Zora realizes that Franklin does not want to go back to work and does not want to be accountable for his actions. He wants to run away from unfavourable situations because he does not want to shoulder any responsibility. He says pretending innocence, “Everything was happening too fast. Me and Zora. This baby”. (DA 275) He evades many responsibilities like paying the rent of his room for which he was two months behind and clearing debts apart from paying Pam, his wife to meet her expenses. And his justification is that, “I Gotta do things in my own way and in my own time frame. Right now the timing just aint right”. (DA 93)

Savannah, one of the four protagonists in *Waiting to Exhale* expresses her opinions about men in her life, “As a matter of fact most of the men I’ve met over the last few years have been boring, selfish, manipulative or weak” (WTE 17). Besides, McMillan’s male characters do not hold themselves accountable to anybody for anything. They easily get involved in a relationship and midway they cry that they are not ready to make a commitment yet.

In her review, Harriet Goldhor Lerner quotes the words of Arlene Dahl in *Always Ask a Man* which was written at a time when women were encouraged to offer men narcissistic protection by feigning weakness. Zora tries to emulate the female as portrayed by Arlene Dahl at the initial stage of her love affair. She feigns weakness to offer Franklin a chance to love himself and protect his ego. She compromises on his
education, his status and his unemployed state. Yet her affair does not work out successfully. According to Arlene Dahl,

… the successful female never lets her competence compete with her femininity. Never upstage a man. Don’t top his jokes even if you have to bite your tongue to keep from doing it. Never launch loudly into your own opinions on the subject … Instead draw out his ideas to which you can gracefully add your footnotes from time to time. If you smoke don’t carry matches. In a restaurant let your mate or date do the ordering. You may know more about vintage wine than the wine steward but if you are smart you’ll let your man do the choosing and be ecstatic over his selection even if it tastes like shampoo.”

Further, Harriet Goldhor Lerner makes a shocking revelation that she was brought up by the paradoxical notion that women should strengthen men by relinquishing their own strength. If they refuse doing so or if they continue to be their normal selves full of confidence, it was considered unfeminine, unlovable, destructive and even life-threatening to men. Therefore, all these facts prove that women have to stoop so low to feed the ego of men.

McMillan has partially developed the male character in *Disappearing Acts* but in *Waiting to Exhale* she has not developed any of the male characters. In her fervent search for a good man, Robin meets Russell but her relationship with him does not last long. When she raised the question of marriage he said, “That marriage was a scary thing and he still wasn’t ready to “Make that move” yet (WTE 55). He also says, “I do Wanna marry you, Robin. But it’s a big commitment and I’m just trying to get used to the whole idea” (WTE 56) Robin meets many men but when she revealed to them that she was
interested in having a serious relationship, “they ran mice” (WTE 62) This is the general attitude of McMillan’s male characters.

Robin’s fantasies about married life, as in movies with a houseful of kids and she being a model mother, having occasional fight with her man but reconciling fast, vanished into thin air. Her hankering for a life where their love intensifies with every passing year and a life where they would be all be faithful to each other and live 40 years of love-filled life beating all the odds, remains unfulfilled. All these fantasies are shattered when the truth dawns on her that most of the men are inadequate and don’t want to make commitments in life. When Robin and Savannah in Disappearing Acts were discussing men, Robin makes the point very clear that men are scared to make the first move in a relationship because they are worried about growing up and acting like men.

McMillan’s male characters are lethargic by nature. They are mere dreamers and they never work to fulfill their dreams. Franklin’s lethargic attitude to life and lack of commitment drives Zora to take a drastic step in her life. The most abominable thing was that Franklin had many talents but he was not honing his skills or utilizing it except for making furniture. Zora wanted him to do something worthwhile. She says, “I wanted to be proud of him again. I wanted him to give me more reasons to look forward to spending the rest of my life with him”. (DA 329) When Zora brings up the topic for discussion, Franklin evades it deliberately and gives baseless excuses like his knee is not in good condition. He says, “Not another one of these deep conversations. I know it’s about my working, ain’t it?” (DA 329)

Owing to all these inadequacies Zora takes a resolution that if he does not take up a job by Thanksgiving Day, he deserves to be sent out of her home and her life as well. She
Zora begins to feel weary of this life style - just eat and go to work. She decides: “This wasn’t part of my dream, and I’m not settling for this bullshit. Jeremiah and I deserve better”. (DA 336)

Initially, Zora’s entry into Franklin’s life boosts up his confidence. He always wanted to prove to this world and his family, “Show’em I’m capable of meeting a decent woman”. (DA 109) But he does not take any effort to maintain that relationship.

Franklin stops with thinking but does not do anything beyond the very process of thinking. Zora indirectly gives a dig at Franklin when she says “Thinking and planning how you want to get something accomplished, then setting out and doing it. I think too many of us give up when we don’t see instant results. But like Confucius said, “Everything takes longer than you think”. (DA 163) But since his patience is extremely thin, he shuns responsibilities. It is very evident from the conversation that takes place between Zora Banks and Franklin Swift:

How was your day?

Just like that. Like he didn’t have a care in the damn world.

Fine, I said.

What’s for dinner, baby? He asked, lighting a cigarette. I am starving.

I hadn’t even hung up my coat yet. Your guess is as good as mine. I don’t feel like cooking tonight. Just what’ve you been doing all day, Franklin? I asked, looking
around. The bedroom was a mess too. His socks ... and cigarette ashes were at the foot of the bed. I saw his empty glass but didn’t say anything.

Why?

I just wanted to know if you looked for work today.

It’s too cold.

Yesterday it was too cold.

And it’s too cold today. Probably be too cold tomorrow too.

What about the rent?

What about it?

You think I can pay seven hundred and fifty dollars by myself?

You’re superwoman. You’ll think of something.

Franklin, what’s happening to you?

Nothing. What makes you think something is happening to me?

For the past three and a half weeks, I’ve been trying to be patient. Ever since you got laid off you’ve spent exactly three days looking for work. This isn’t right.

I am just taking a little vacation. I’m tired.

Tired?

Yeah, tired.

What about me?

What about you?

I’m having a baby, in case you haven’t noticed.

Ain’t nobody noticed more than me.
Aren’t you the least bit concerned about it? And what about the bills and the rent? Don’t you care?

Yeah, I care, but it just ain’t nothing I can do about it right now. (DA 292-293)

Men in McMillan’s fiction are not honest about their whereabouts since they feel women are incapable of sharing their day today problems and understanding them. They are deceitful and unscrupulous in their actions. Franklin, for instance does not divorce his wife until the end. He never reveals this information to Zora until after they have become lovers which show him to be despicably dishonest.

Besides, Franklin does not reveal the truth to Zora, that he is laid off. When she enquires how his day was, he casually says that he visited his sister after work. He says, “I didn’t feel like telling her the truth, ‘cause then she’d probably start feeling sorry for me……….the last thing I needed right now was pity”. (DA 111) Franklin continues to remain secretive about his job lay off but Zora comes to know about Franklin being laid off from his friend Jimmy. Zora felt very disturbed by the betrayal. She was pained beyond words. “Why’d he have to lie? He could’ve given me some credit for wanting to understand.” (DA 120) His devious ways shocks Zora beyond words.

Men’s dominance is seen throughout McMillan’s fiction if not felt. For instance, Russell confides to Robin about his first marriage that he married Carolyn on a whim and he regrets ever marrying her because she is too bossy. This attitude reflects his character and it speaks volumes about his inadequate nature that he cannot stand strong women with independent thinking.

Franklin had been a witness to his mother’s domination in the family. He was all sympathy for his father, but simultaneously had an aversion for him. “And that’s why I
made up my mind a long time ago that I wasn’t ever gon’ let no woman run me. Never”. (DA 295) Zora decides to leave for Ohio for a week along with baby Jeremiah as per her father’s suggestion. Franklin is annoyed and expects her to get his permission. She retorts, “What do you mean, “ask you”? Since when did I have to get your permission to go somewhere?” (DA 319) In another instance, Zora had to walk out of the theatre because Franklin did not like the war movie about a white man. His pride stands as a stumbling block between Zora and him and he picks up a fight with her for every silly matter. He feels she ought to, not just inform but seek permission from him for everything. For instance, Zora gets her hair braided for 80 dollars which annoys him. Above all, Franklin disapproves Zora hanging out late hours with Portia, her best friend. His words, “You Know, if your girlfriends had a man of their own, they wouldn’t be trying so hard to drag you out in the streets all the time” (DA 154) are characteristic of a male chauvinist. Eventually Zora notices that he has become unbelievably bossy and interfering. McMillan’s male characters are extremely domineering and authoritative, and they never allow their spouses freedom to spend nor do they approve of enterprise in women. For instance, John in Waiting to Exhale does not approve Bernadine starting her own catering business.

Owing to his historical past the Black man suffers from myriad complexes which make his life all the more burdensome. Franklin is a man of diverse complexes. He believes in the world’s opinion and comments: “That money and status and education and all that shit counts more than what people feel about each other, right?” (DA 91) But Zora does not measure Franklin’s worth by that yardstick which was used by the world. She felt the world measured people in a wrong manner so she gauged him by his
character, though it is not possible to fathom anyone’s character. She valued him for his honesty and his openness, but unfortunately he was always skeptical about Zora’s love for him, thanks to his inferiority complex.

Franklin is initially happy to be in possession of a woman who is doing something concrete and constructive in life. He feels, “her future is planted in cement. But look at her man”. (DA 105) He is ridden with complexes and does not act in time to change his sad lot. For example, when he visits Zora’s room and finds that it was like a fabulous picture in a women’s magazine where everything was intact and in place. “Except me... I don’t belong here. Wasn’t nothing in here mine. And aint no place in here for no saw dust”. (DA 106)

Even in the restaurant they have an awful time and finally Franklin tried stopping a Cab to get home. But the cabs drove past him. Franklin mutters, “If you big and black in America that’s two strikes against you... They think all black men is killers and robbers and that we gon’ cut their throats, then take all their ... money”. (DA 119) He gives vent to his rage in these words whenever she paid. Every time they go out for dinner Franklin says, “And she’d whip out one of those cards. I ain’t never had no kind of credit cards, and it’s embarrassing that every time you go somewhere, your woman is paying for it”. (DA 135)

Further, Franklin feels humiliated when Zora would approach her dad for financial help. Besides he feels all the more insulting to stay in a woman’s apartment without contributing to the rent. At this juncture Zora comes out with a suggestion that he take up some other job. Franklin was good at so many other things too and could depend on other alternatives. But, “I already knew I didn’t wanna hear this. I hate anybody doing my
Franklin does not like any one dictating terms to him and he has his own way of handling things. He does not understand the good intention behind Zora’s suggestion. He deliberately misunderstands her and says instead, “Why don’t you just go ahead and tell me to leave, Zora?” Franklin is haunted by the thought that he is “her damn answering service” when he attends phone calls for her because nobody ever calls him. His feelings of bitterness and frustration have made him an extremely touchy person that he takes everything as a personal attack.

At times one feels men themselves are the best judges of males. For instance, James wheeler, a Black man whom Bernadine meets on the night of her divorce, in Waiting to Exhale remarks about John, her husband, “John was a damn fool, like so many men.” He highlights the weakness of Black men in general. He includes himself in the whole community of men and says, “We take entirely too much for granted when we shouldn’t. We abuse what we should be doing our damnest to protect. We hurt the people who love us and wonder why our lives are so . . . .” (WTH 390).

Another instance can be seen in The Interruption of Everything when Marilyn Grimes reveals to Gordon, her first husband that she is in low spirits because she feels unappreciated in life and that her marriage might be off the course. At this Gordon pacifies her saying, “Sometimes men go through some weird stuff when we’re in our forties. So whatever it is, might not even be under his control” (TIOE 235). But Marilyn can’t stomach this justification when she refutes this statement and argues that he is not the only one in his forties ‘nor does he have a cap on being emotionally frazzled or overly sensitive’(TIOE 235). Jimmy, Zora’s neighbor comments about Franklin, in
Disappearing Acts “I hate to be around that dude when he is laid off, don’t you? He is like a big baby, aint he?” (DA 120) This comment aptly describes Franklin because he frets and fumes and blames everyone around for his plight except himself.

African American men as portrayed by McMillan, do not realize that women are capable of extreme flexibility, understanding, trust, loyalty and sacrifice. They are blind to these qualities. In Waiting to Exhale Bernadine puts her heart and soul in building John’s business but all that goes unrecognized. Far from appreciating it, he rewards her ironically, in the best way possible – he betrays her trust and breaks her heart. Franklin is also blind to all the virtues possessed by Zora in Disappearing Acts. Similarly Leon closes his eyes to the sacrifices made by his wife, Marilyn Grimes in The Interruption of Everything like Cecil Price does to Viola Price in A Day Late and a Dollar Short.

According to Thomas Jefferson, black men were the kind “who felt, did not reflect.” In his Notes on Virginia, Jefferson wrote unfavorably of “black intellect.” (9) Black Men always try to hide their flaws and shift the blame onto their women and accuse them for their miserable lives. McMillan’s men characters lack self-control which makes them impulsive in nature. Franklin is unable to deal with his disappointment and so the only alternative is to take his frustrations out on Zora. His inability to cope with this unfavourable situation makes him ill tempered and aggressive. This explains his behaviour in the theatre, restaurant and in the Cab. Franklin Swift who goes through such an emotion is completely broke and miserable and is unable to hold his feelings and thoughts and slaps Zora over a heated argument. Later he apologises to her and even cries ... “most of the women said after they hit you, they’ll do anything to get you to forgive
According to Author Bell Hooks, many black men who express the greatest hostility toward the white male power structure are often eager to gain access to that power. Their expressions of rage and anger are more a reaction against the fact that they have not been allowed full participation in the power game. It is not a mere criticism of the white male patriarchal social order. In the past as in the present, these black men have been champions of male subjugation of women. They hoped to gain public recognition of their ‘manhood’ by demonstration that they were the dominant figure in their black family by their brutal and selfish exploitation of their women and family.

Young Black men suffer from a misconception that the Whites are the root cause for their problems. Franklin always had a deep feeling of aversion for the whites as such and blamed the whites for his own lapses and shortcomings. He blamed the whites for the frequent layoffs in his jobs. He blamed the whites when he was detained for a long time at the Hospital for getting stitches. One can see Franklin extremely bitter. His bitterness reaches the peak when he listens to Billie Holiday Song sung by Zora. He says, “Yeah, You can sing about disappointment, baby, but I’m the one standing Knee-deep in it, and I’m sinking by the day. I wish I could tell you that but all I got left is my pride”. (DA 152) Franklin is in a fury because she sought the help of the white man to remove him out of her life. This provokes him all the more and he destroys all the furniture that he had made and disappears for months. Franklin’s aversion for the whites can be felt in these words. He does not approve of the white’s ways. He says, “The only reason you all
Mama, holds the whites responsible for all his travails and Mildred replies that the white man did not force anyone to indulge in drugs and go to prison. Zora’s words echo the same sentiment, “I just wish that black people wouldn’t harp so much on the past and stop blaming white folks for everything . . . I mean we’ve got more opportunities now than we’ve ever had before. Some of us are just too lackadaisical” (DA 162). This is a flaw found in Black men in general.

McMillan’s men are never steadfast in their words or deeds. Franklin’s indecisive and inconsistent nature led to a strained relationship between him and Zora. He vacillates even in the selection of his clothes, “The decisions seemed so difficult for him to make” (DA 177). After turning the table against Zora, he announces that he is going to leave her but he makes no arrangements to leave.

Haik Madhubuti in his “Introduction on Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous” calls out to the Black men to arise and act out their part in this world.

This book is a call for serious
African American men to
Stand tall and dare to be great
dare to move beyond the limited idea of others,
dare to think for yourselves,
for the future
dare to conceive a world where you
are more than a consumer,
The male characters of McMillan are overtly diffident. When Zora says anything to encourage Franklin, it undermines his confidence and loses his balance. This trait is obvious in the character of Franklin Swift when Zora’s father has an open talk with him and advises him to go ahead ignoring all odds and be a man. He specifically says that being laid off at times need not make him feel less than a man. Franklin is inspired by his words and was yearning to hear this from another man but is annoyed when it comes from a woman. Zora’s father instills confidence in him and tells him never to yield himself and accept defeat.

McMillan’s male characters make confessions on rare occasions but do nothing to overcome their shortcomings. Franklin understands a few of his own inadequacies and admits it for the first time in a moment of weakness but he does not make amends for it. He says, “But what I didn’t realize was that I used every woman I ever had, trying to get them to make up for what my moms never gave me” (DA 364). When Zora reveals her plan to move out of New York for Toledo Franklin seems helpless. He understands his own inadequacy and says, “You can’t ask a woman to put her love on hold, though, can you? You can’t ask her to wait until you finish growing up”. (DA 368) He is aware of his lapse that he has to grow up but he does not take up any conscious remedial measures to correct himself. Something makes Franklin conceal the fact that he has got his divorce
from Pam, his wife which reflects his character. The divorce would have been a turning point in his relationship with Zora. But he prefers not to disclose it to her because he does not want to mend his ways. Likewise in *The Interruption of Everything* Leon confesses to Marilyn and apologizes for his actions and wonders “how I stopped participating in our marriage. But it wasn’t because of you. It was me” (TIOE 380). However, at the end Leon takes measures to keep his marriage going and such a move is a rare one in the Black men.

Franklin compares Zora with his own mother whom he despises. At a time of heated argument he says, “You know, you women are all alike.” (DA 294) He entertains some pre-conceived notions about women which are absolutely wrong. This gets on Zora’s nerves and she cautions him. “I’m about sick of you blaming everything that happens to you on your mother and I’m sick of being compared to her every time I do or say something you don’t like” (DA 294). Franklin despises his mother from his childhood and the reason he quotes is that she “stripped him of his manhood before he was a man” (DA 294). Zora does not approve of this fact and she retorts instantly saying, “No one can strip you of anything unless you let them” (DA 294). She wished he would stop resorting to these lame excuses and start shouldering responsibilities and start being accountable for something in life. In short, she wanted to tell him “to just grow up”.

At another instance, Franklin says without any sense of remorse, “Since you been doing everything around here anyway . . . and since I don’t feel needed or necessary and since you probably had it planned on being a single mother all along, I’m a give you the opportunity to do just that”. (DA 337) Here he remorselessly shifts the blame on to Zora and decides to desert her. It seems ridiculous when Franklin turns the table against Zora
and says, “I need a break from you. From this kid. From everything … I need to be by myself for a while”. (DA 337) To this Zora enquires, “Oh, so you’re leaving us?” (DA 337) She says that would be fine with her and even to that he says, “I figured you’d say that”. (DA 337) So Franklin decides to leave them on the Thanksgiving Day. Zora is unable to contain herself for awhile since she feels deceived and humiliated. She checks if she heard right that he was leaving them. Gradually the mental agony transforms into a kind of relief- an incredible feeling of relief at the thought of Franklin leaving them.

Most of McMillan’s men characters are unfaithful to their women hence they suspect their women of being faithless and fickle-minded. Franklin begins to grow suspicious about Zora’s moves and he adds insult to injury by enquiring if another man would be moving in on the Thanksgiving Day. He opens her mail and becomes so aggressive and hostile that he wants to slay her. Zora senses danger and keeps a butcher-knife handy for self defence. She realizes, “The man downstairs was not the same man I fell in love with”. Men undergo drastic changes after the first few years of intimacy. Zora wonders “When did all this happen? And where was I?” (DA 343) In The Interruption of Everything McMillan portrays how black men casually desert their women for flimsy reasons. This is discussed in the telephonic conversation between Marilyn Grimes and Paulette:

... What’s wrong? You haven’t gotten an infection or anything, have you?
No. It would be nice if it was that simple.
Is it Leon?
You always were clairvoyant, Paulette.
What’s he gone and done? Wait. Let me guess: told you he’s leaving because he’s bored and now that the kids are all grown-up he realizes he’s missed out on the most exciting time of his life because he got married so young and has been overburdened with the demands of it all and now here’s his one chance to get it back and have some damn fun before he dies an old man and of course he has met some sweet young thang completely by accident because of course he had no intention of cheating on you but she was the one who put the radar out and came after him and he couldn’t believe it when he didn’t resist her advances but he was even more surprised when he had to repeat the shit over and over because boy oh boy, she put no demands on him what so ever, none and she just appreciates him for who he is and what he does and she makes him feel interesting and smart and desirable and he’d forgotten what this felt like with you and hell, she makes him feel him twenty five again and even though he doesn’t think this little interlude is anything serious or if it is going anywhere but all he knows is that he has to leave to see for himself, to fill in the blanks, and he’s sorry for hurting you because of course he still loves you. Is that about right?

I want to cry but I’m laughing too hard. You’ve got it just about right. Anyway first this … tells me over coffee this morning that he might need a change of scenery from his job, and I basically tell him that I understand how things can get a little stale, but then when he tells me he thinks he may have to leave, of course I’m thinking he’s talking about his job, which he is, but then as a little … he tacks me on, too.(TIOE 167)
McMillan’s male characters are driven by the feelings of jealousy when they see themselves stagnated and their own women climbing the ladder of success. The fact that Zora derived inner harmony by means of her music maddened Franklin all the more because he could not attain the same by means of his art and feels inadequate in all ways and starts drinking heavily.

Franklin becomes envious when Zora talks to her friends over the phone. He says, “You ain’t gotta call none of your girlfriends and blab all our business”. (DA 294) Franklin becomes incorrigible when he uses physical violence and finally Zora gets a restraining order. She seeks the help of police to move him out if he detains himself in her house beyond the Thanksgiving Day.

McMillan’s men characters do not possess healthy and steady minds. In the light of the historic pressures the Black men have suffered in America, his state of mind can be justified to some extent. Franklin’s state of mind accurately expresses the sentiment of many men in his generation.

His (Franklin’s) imprisonment symbolizes the plight of all black men in America, just as Franklin’s inability to hold a job symbolizes the economic pressures that all black men face in America. Both Baldwin and McMillan detail how the impact of these external pressures affects relationships between African American men and women. (Paulette Richards 89)

Terry McMillan’s male characters are always portrayed as alcoholics. Franklin in Disappearing Acts gets drunk and pleads Zora not to abort his baby. He makes vain promises as to how he would take up three jobs to take care of the family and he also made his wish known to Zora by means of a note; “I want us to be a family”. (DA 255)
In *Mama*, after Mildred’s marriage to Rufus she finds that he is extremely addicted to drinks that he would go into a rage and cry over his own pitiful state, his own worthlessness and powerlessness. He begins to show it out on Mildred which makes her threaten him that she would go for divorce. He threatens her in return that he would kill her first, before she leaves him. He yells and says that he cannot survive without her and the kids and that they were his world. Most of the black men create such scenes and they tend to give vent to their feelings on their women. This shows how these black men are morally and emotionally dependent on women. Nevertheless women would never appreciate such expression of weakness and Mildred has no sympathy for him. On the contrary, she has an aversion for him which ends up in a scuffle between her and Rufus and she stabs him. Furthermore, Money, Mildred’s son himself uses drugs despite the poverty and suffering at home.

McMillan’s men pretend to be flawless though deep within they are quite aware of their inadequacies. Such an awareness makes them feel insecure for they know the women are too good and may desert them. Franklin experiences nightmares of losing Zora and this haunting fear dwells in him. Hence when she conceives his baby, he considers it as an opportunity to keep her in his possession. He feels, “I didn’t really plan on having no more kids, but I love Zora and I wanna keep her. I guess this was one way of guaranteeing it”. (DA 266)

At the same time Franklin blames Zora for the baby and thinks it was a trap laid for him deliberately. Actually he was the one who pleaded to have the baby and now without an iota of conscience he accuses her of having hatched a plan to trap him. In a resentful tone he says “Whatever Zora wants to do, we do it. Even that baby was your big … idea
… I’m tired of you telling me what to do” (DA 276). Franklin is never seen in a psychologically composed and relaxed condition for he is thoroughly scared and so he turns things around and accuses Zora. Richard Wright says in his autobiography *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth*, “Held at bay by the hate of others, preoccupied with his own feelings, he was continuously at war with reality.” This is true of Franklin’s character.

In McMillan’s first novel *Mama* this particular theme of male inadequacy is played out to its fullest extent. Crook, Mildred’s husband was suspicious and never trusted his wife for which he slapped her for having a two minute conversation with Percy Russell. He despised Percy because he surmised and believed in the rumour that the first child Freda was Percy’s. Unfortunately as fate had it, both his and Percy’s skin had the same colour and they both had soft wavy hair and high chiseled cheeks and Freda had inherited these features from Crook.

McMillan’s men characters aim to have a relationship with women with an ulterior motive since financially, they are insecure. Angela, Stella’s sister in *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* is scandalized by her sister’s affair and she warns her that Winston is probably targeting her because of her money. Initially Angela’s recriminations echo Stella’s own fear, though later it undergoes a change. This is because majority of Black men aim to have a relationship with a woman just for financial benefit. Russell, Robin’s lover, is another example of the inadequate male. Russell takes advantage of Robin’s gullible nature and lives at her expense for two years giving her hopes that he would marry her but finally he has an affair with another woman and leaves Robin pregnant with his child.
*Waiting to Exhale* reflects the dire shortage of eligible African–American men and the major transition in the institution of marriage in the black community. Paulette Richards affirms, “*Waiting to Exhale* turns on the reality that there are more women than men in the world, as well as on the female perception that there is a shortage of eligible men, particularly in the African American community” (117).

Writing in the Washington Post Book World, David Nicholson pointed out the complaint of the professional black women that the number of eligible black men was on the decline. He cited statistics to show the number of black men in prison was on the rise and the number of black men in college was on the decline. Hence articles on the different alternatives for women from celibacy to sharing of men, to relationships with blue-collar workers like Franklin have long been the main topic of black general interest. Commenting on the unavailability of eligible African American men, Rose M. Brewer opines in her *Family and Health*:

> The resulting ratio of approximately 86 males to every 100 females makes the matching of every African American female with a same race male for the traditionally valued lifetime monogamous marriage a numerical impossibility—ther simply are not enough African American men alive. When one also removes from consideration those males who are gay, the proportion of eligible African American men for African American women dwindles even more. Further, when one counts the number of African American males who are poorly educated and therefore educationally mismatched for marriage to their relatively more highly educated African American female counterparts, the pool of eligible men shrinks even smaller. High African American male unemployment rates further
compound the problem. These factors help to explain the increasing numbers of never-married African American females. (Brewer 671)

In this social context of extreme shortage of eligible men, a change in the definition of eligible man is essential. Paulette Richards says,

McMillan also explores the changing definition of what constitutes ‘an eligible man’ in the eyes of upwardly mobile African American women. For most, this means a man from a similar socio-economic background. In other words, an eligible man should have at least as much education as the woman, should earn at least as much but preferably more money than she does, and should be somewhat older than she is. … black women earned more college degrees than black men. … The more education an African–American woman obtained, the less likely she was to find a male with a comparable level of educational attainment.(119)

The Black men deserting Black women for white women is the worst stigma attached to McMillan’s male characters. Waiting to Exhale provides several examples of what McMillan means by men’s inadequacies because in this novel she presents us with a wide variety of men who lack dedication to wife and children and desert them at any moment escaping from all responsibilities. In Waiting to Exhale, the four protagonists Savannah, Bernadine, Robin and Gloria are all around the same age and face similar frustration in their relationship with men. Bernadine lives a luxurious life for many years but eventually she is caught up in a struggle with her husband John. He bluntly announces one day after eleven years that he is divorcing Bernadine for a white woman. Thus he not only betrays Bernadine but his children and also the institution called
marriage. This is an assault on her honour, in particular and black females in general. His desertion and preference for a white woman is the ultimate betrayal. John becomes a loathsome character, a wrong example and a stigma to the racial honour by deserting Bernadine for a white woman.

Even more than by the loss of potential spouses due to homosexuality or imprisonment, many black women have been deeply hurt by the fact that an increasing number of black men choose to marry outside the race, another real-life heartache that McMillan acknowledges. … McMillan taps into the pain and anger interracial marriage provokes for many black women when she portrays Bernadine’s husband leaving her to marry a white woman. (Richards 120)

Despite the fact that the Black men had an aversion for the whites most of them desert their women for white women. This is because of their wrong notion that white is beauty. This attitude of Black Men, earns them the hatred of black women. Robin says, “I hate the fact that they think white girls epitomize beauty and femininity” (WTE 245). Robin states that women will have to put up with all the inadequacies of men and be tolerant. She says, “I think life is one long introductory course in tolerance but in order for a woman to get her Ph.D, she’s gotta pass men 101” (WTE 276).

According to Paulette Richards,

… while definitions of ‘eligible’ may be revised to include men of lower socio-economic status or even men who have a primary attachment to another woman, seeking a mate outside the African – American community is a less popular solution. … The Michigan study reflects the fact that marrying outside
the race especially marrying white men has remained a strong taboo for African American women, despite the shortage of African American men: ... (121).

Among many other inadequacies McMillan’s male characters are never transparent about their financial dealings. Bernadine in *Waiting to Exhale* finds that her husband John had fraudulently hidden all his assets from her and also closed his account. She says “What kind of man would stoop this low to avoid paying for his kids” (WTH 175) The male characters in her fiction lie to their women without a conscience. John’s betrayal proves all the more cruel when he closes their bank account and leaves her with no money to pay the mortgage. He handled the financial matters in the past and kept her in the dark about the transactions. Besides he sells his share of the business to his partner at a low price without informing her. He shows his income much lower than it really is so as to escape paying an exorbitant amount as child support in the settlement when filing for divorce. Thus John is extremely selfish and devoid of feelings and affection for his children and wife which makes him a contemptible character. Bernadine struggles throughout the novel to cope with being alone and tries to get a just settlement from John.

Likewise Mildred tolerates her irresponsible and disloyal husband, Crook for many years. What angers her more was the fact that he never even made up a decent excuse about what he did with his money. He just gives her two Dollars to take care of the kids and the house. For the past nine Christmases Mildred had to hustle to buy things for kids and Crook hardly helped her. She was anxious about how she was going to manage the forthcoming year. She regrets having let him come back after he got out of the Sanatorium. She also feels she could have let him go with Ernestine because Crook contributes nothing to the family by way of financial assistance or moral support.
Men portrayed in McMillan’s novels go astray in one way or the other and most of them have a prison record. Generally men with a prison record are considered disqualified for marriage. Since it was difficult to find many men without such a past, several publications came out with articles targeting African–American women,

... like Essence Magazine, (which) frequently ran articles on ‘the black man shortage’ ... and advised their upwardly mobile readers to change their expectations of what constituted an acceptable mate. Among the solutions proposed was ‘man sharing’ or a revival of African polygynous marriage, but most often readers were urged to consider working class men who made less money and had less education than they did. ... Even more than by the loss of potential spouses due to homosexuality or imprisonment, many black men choose to marry outside the race, another real-life headache that McMillan acknowledges. ... McMillan taps into the pain and anger inter racial marriage provokes for many black women when she portrays Bernadine’s husband leaving her to marry a white woman" (Paulette Richards 120).

One of Savannah’s brothers is in jail and the other one is “a lifer in the Marine Corps” (WTE 2). Lewis, Viola’s son in A Day Late and a Dollar Short is in and out of jail owing to his wayward life. Most of the black men drive their women to the edge of their lives. They get depressed with their lot and blame everything and everybody for their problems. Money, Mildred’s son is one such character who, like most of the black men never tries to find a job in Los Angeles. He feels lost and also comes to a conclusion that Los Angeles is too sophisticated for him. Moreover Money had been a jailbird several times in the past and was convicted of felony which directly hindered his upward
movement. Money is the black sheep of the family and the contrast is evident when we look at the siblings of Money. Mildred as a mother feels proud of her daughters but her son Money is always in trouble and makes a mess of his life and those around him. When Freda comes back from Los Angeles after a year she finds him in Jail for having stolen a lawn mower.

Besides taking into account the harsh realities that more number of African – American men are in prison than outside, it is a proven fact that there is an acute shortage of eligible African–American men. Most of the young black guys seemed to spend all their waking hours drinking wine or nodding over Cigarettes. Money too easily takes to such a reckless way of life. As Paulette Richards puts it,

> In Mama, Money, the only male in the Peacock brood, bounces in and out of prison for years before he kicks his heroin addiction; When *Waiting to Exhale* opens, Savannah’s brother is doing time for passing counterfeit money. … Thus McMillan’s representation of black male incarceration as a fact that touches the families of even the most ambitious African American women rings true to life. (120)

In view of these inadequacies in the Black men, the women characters are always on the guard and vigilant. Many novels of McMillan feature emotionally detached heroes like Crook, Franklin, John, Lewis and so on. Above all, most of her heroines have been betrayed by the men they loved in the past, hence are wary of trusting another man in their lives.

Men’s inadequacies create conflicts at home and in society and these conflicts escalate into great crisis but women in such situations are helpless witnesses who suffer the brunt
of men’s lapses. In the beginning, they are meek spectators who are unable to find a solution to the problem though they do not succumb to it. One typical feature of McMillan’s work is that her plot does not follow a traditional pattern: conflict-crisis-resolution. In *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* the central conflict is one which Stella suffers to overcome— all her fears and doubts about having a serious relationship with a man who is half her age. It is because she is aware of all the inadequacies of men in general. One of her statements sums up her fears, “What I do know deep down although I keep it secretly secret is that I’m terrified at the thought of losing myself again wholeheartedly to any man” (HSGHGB 93).

Almost all the men in McMillan’s novels are afraid of trusting themselves as they doubt their own ability to choose a partner and maintain a relationship. They lack confidence in their ability to attract and hold the interest of their partner apart from being tormented by a sense of unworthiness and they themselves believe they do not deserve to be happy and be loved.

Most of McMillan’s men characters fail miserably as husbands and fathers in particular. Crook as a father is a terror to his children because they have been a witness to many brutal scenes and his horrendous treatment of their mother. Because of these and many more inadequacies seen in her father, Freda hopes that by her thirteenth birthday her daddy would be dead or divorced. She starts to despise him to a great extent and wonders why Mildred did not just leave him. This was the kind of feeling Crook creates in the family as a husband and father. Besides, Crook is never sober and so Mildred could not rely on him even in crucial situations. Money, their only son is indifferent to his father especially when his father dies he never shows any remorse because Crook never
had that attachment to Money. Never had he taken him out or shaken hands with him or patted him on his back for anything and never had a father-to-son talk.

In The Interruption of Everything Arthurian, Leon’s mother indulges in a long sermon about men’s inadequacies in general and her son’s failings in particular thus becoming a mouthpiece for all women. She hints at their pride, selfish nature and lethargy when she says, “You young men make me sick with your lack of respect and appreciation for the people around you that do the most for you. You take so much for granted and it is a very ugly trait and I’m glad most women don’t possess it.” (TIOE 370). She adds, “And you, Leon Grimes, you should learn how to cook and do laundry and a little cleaning wouldn’t kill you.” (TIOE 371). She gives certain tips like having an open talk especially when he is confused and depressed, for keeping the marriage going. “She lives right here in this same house with you. You wouldn’t have to catch a plane to nowhere that was five thousand miles away” (TIOE 371).

Arthurine opines that when women in men’s lives do so much for them they should be creative in innovating ways to keep them happy. Here Leon Grimes seems to be inadequate in this regard and almost gives up making attempts. Arthurine’s husband Prezelle puts it into Leon’s head that he must not close his eyes to the fact that “If all women ever did was what we wanted to do, men would be ... Out of luck” (TIOE 372). Prezelle unravels the secret of a happy marriage which is compromise. He says, “... a good marriage requires something folks just don’t seem to like to do, and that is compromise. Not sacrifice ... And if you want to have a healthy strong thriving marriage, like me and your mother intend to here, then put your wife’s need’s first whenever you can. If she is willing to do the same, then you two might have a much
brighter future” (TIOE 373). Arthurine concludes her sermon on the topic and says, “Be the man me and your daddy tried to raise you to be son. And keep your promises. As many of them as you can” (TIOE 374).

Lewis, Viola’s son is a pathetic character portrayed in A Day Late and a Dollar Short which is about a dysfunctional family. He has no money and lives in a small apartment depending on drinks for happiness. His wife Donnetta leaves him for a white man, Todd and that adds to his miserable state which is evident from the telephonic conversation that ensues between Lewis and his eldest sister, Paris.

Okay. Stop, Lewis. I’m not about to listen to you …

How do you think this makes me feel? First hearing from my own mama that my ex-wife has married some stranger I don’t even know, and then a few hours later I find out that he is white and he wants to adopt my son?

Somebody needs to be the father to the boy. When was the last time that you saw Jamil?

It ain’t been that lo-

When was the last time you did anything for him, Lewis? You need to get a …

grip and join the real world. I’m so sick of men like you I don’t know what to do?

You know, all you women think alike …

Put Mama back on the phone, would you?

I’m not finished.

I’m hanging up this phone if you don’t put her back on.

Hold on a minute. A man can’t get his own sister to listen to him anymore. Hear what I feel. (ADLDS 110-111)
Terry McMillan never intended her novel to be an attempt on “Male bashing”. She has attempted to create a few positive male characters simultaneously created many negative ones. Consider Mildred Peacock’s father, Buster in Mama, who is extremely caring and loving to his daughter especially when she suffers from a short stint of insanity. He takes her home to offer her complete rest from all the household chores, notwithstanding her stepmother Acquilla. Another positive male character created by McMillan is Zora’s daddy, Harvey in Disappearing Acts who counsels Franklin to be a man and tries to boost his confidence, apart from helping him financially during trying times. Another positive male character created by McMillan is Prezelle, the lover of Arthurine, the mother of Leon. He sums up the qualities which a Black man must uphold that will make him proud. He says, “All a man needs to do to prove he’s a man is work hard. Take care of his family. Pay his bills on time and try to be a good father. A good husband. That’s all there is to it. You don’t have to go nowhere if you already doing right where you are” (TIOE 132). This speaks of his own character and highlights the general inadequacies of Black men. Another male who can be called a positive character is Winston Shakespeare, Stella’s lover is a decent man who reciprocates her true love and finally settles down with her.

McMillan’s women find many basic qualities lacking in men which proves them inadequate. But, Stella finds these qualities in her man and appreciates Winston’s honesty. “This kind of honesty is exactly what a woman wants to hear from a man” (HSHHGB 132). These are a few positive male portraits created by McMillan who can be seen as adequate characters. On the other hand a throng of negative male characters are seen in her novels. Lewis, Viola’s son in A Day Late and a Dollar Short, is the black sheep of the
family who is alienated from others because he is a failure in life. Bill Callahan, Mildred’s second husband in *Mama* flees from her because he feels that he would get choked with responsibilities. Charles in *Waiting to Exhale* gets intimate with Savannah and gives her the hope of a happy life together but he never returns. Besides, Crook, Money, Franklin, Rufus, Spooky Cooper, Leon, Cecil are apt examples of negative male characters.

Terry McMillan’s men suffer from low self-esteem and consequently they internalize their feelings and pretend being calm outside, by repressing their emotions. They say, what they don’t mean and feel, what they don’t say. Moreover, they don’t act according to the white man’s ideal of perfect manhood. Black men’s ideal of manhood indicates power, toughness, detachment, involving in physical abuse, taking to alcohol and drugs. They are known to be detached even in emotionally charged situations. For them, masculine pride is unattainable, hence they indulge in sexual promiscuity and crime. And these activities relegate them to the streets.

Black males face chronic unemployment and they get frustrated but pretend to be in control. They suffer from social stress and lack commitment to family, race and community. They seem to put up an unconscious protest against dominant society. The Black male as portrayed by McMillan perpetuates a negative image. The black men do not get engaged in their children’s lives. They feel they have little materially or financially to offer but what they don’t realize is that the emotional dividends of merely giving their children love and affection counts more. The Black men end up becoming absentee fathers and fail to stand up and be accountable. Many black men are missing from too many lives and too many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities
acting like immature boys instead of matured men. This makes the foundation of African American Families weak. One can get a glimpse of the pang of frustration suffered by Lewis, Viola’s son in *A Day Late and a Dollar Short* from his very reflections.

As a man, I don’t care if I’m handicapped, I still want to maintain some level of dignity. **Have to set standards for myself, even if I don’t live up to ‘em.** Which is all I’m trying to do. It’s just hard. A part of my mind knows exactly what I need to do to get on track, and another part wants to do it. ... There’s another part—and sadly enough, a very small part but it’s the piece that seems to have the most power—that says: It’s too hard. You’re too scared. You ain’t never going to amount to nothing no matter how hard you try, no matter what you do. You ain’t never going to know what real success feels like. Won’t be able to inhale it. Exhale it. That little section screams the loudest.... You just thought you was moving, but you been standing still. I know I ain’t been making much progress, so, to stop all them red-hot wires from short circuiting my whole mind, I shut it up with a drink. (ADLDS 184)

Franklin in *Disappearing Acts* is left with the notion that he is a man because he has fathered a child. This is a negative influence which he has received from his community and he earnestly feels that he has done his part to achieve manhood. This does not excuse him from the responsibility of guiding his son to manhood. With a responsible father figure, his son would become a better father.

The far-reaching consequences of the men’s inadequacies on the family and the individual are very appalling. Owing to men’s inadequacies the divorce rate begins to
skyrocket and many women who took up traditional roles in the past, find themselves raising children all by themselves. They struggle to balance work and family and so they set out searching for a suitable partner. For instance, Bernadine who acquiesced to her husband’s desires is finally cast aside after eleven years of marriage. Eventually she decides to tread her own way cautiously and independently. Commenting on the single parent households Rose M. Brewer says, “The growth in the numbers of single parent families headed by women has been called one of the most startling social developments of the past quarter century.” (Brewer 665)

Mildred tolerates her abusive husband for years but never regrets leaving him. His violent and abusive nature drives her to a divorce and she has to lead the family all by herself. To pull on life she has to depend on many survival strategies like opting for a series of marriages, trying a short stint of prostitution as well as drug and alcohol addiction.

It is a general belief that children in the family without fathers would go astray, drop out of school and college and get involved in deconstructive actions. But McMillan’s fiction counteracts this belief to some extent in a few novels and conveys that children are also offered possibilities of moving in positive directions. By way of illustration Freda in Mama at the end of the novel overcomes her addiction to alcoholism. In Waiting to Exhale Gloria’s adolescent son Tarik, joins the “up with people” brigade and involves in constructive actions. In Disappearing Acts Zora is seeking a stable and secure house to raise her son. Similarly Robin and Bernadine too find ways leading to a secure future for their children. There are ways for a secure and intimate and supportive family even if men desert them. In Waiting to Exhale the women unite into a family, based on
loyalty, trust and enduring concern which is more resilient than their heterosexual relationships.

Simultaneously, most of Terry McMillan’s fiction, explores the negative impact of the black men. One of the major problems of black contemporary society is the absence of fathers and a strong family life to nurture the younger generation. The Black boys without positive male role-models run a serious risk of becoming the same kind of men who fathered them, abandoned them and are unaccountable to them. McMillan has written her *Waiting to Exhale* and many other novels focusing on the sisterhood of educated, articulate and independent black women who are very successful in their professions but frustrated of the fact that there are very few black men they consider their equals.

Harriet Goldhor Lerner offers a feminist perspective on self help books aimed predominantly at women. There are numerous aspects of men’s attitude and behavior to be altered but the Patriarchal society sets its eyes always on women. According to Lerner,

> Although the content of the advice-giving industry changes with the socio-economic climate of the times, what does not change is the relentless, unabashed focus on improving and perfecting women. If only women would do more (Enter Superwoman!), or want less (Mother stay home!), or solve our personal problems- then men and their institutions would not have to change.

Kathy J Whitson in her *Encyclopedia of Feminism Literature* states that Valerie Solanas’s 1967 ‘Scum Manifesto’ advocated the complete destruction of men, in fact, arguing that “to be male is to be deficient, emotionally limited; maleness is a deficiency disease and males are emotional cripples.” Solanas predicted that “[m]any
women will for a while continue to think … , but as they become accustomed to female society and become absorbed in their projects, they will eventually come to see the utter uselessness and banality of the male.” (170)

Black masculinity continues to evolve, impacted by new forces in a rapidly changing global environment. Black men have to perform useful, moral and socially redeeming roles instead of unleashing the world with their crime, idleness and violence. McMillan’s portrayal of black male characters as incompetent and unreliable in her novels like the men in *Mama* and *Waiting to Exhale* has drawn much attention. In an interview in 1992 Terry McMillan was asked about what men have to learn from her plays. Her response was that they need to understand something about passion and that a lot of men don’t have enough convictions about things.

Racism has badly affected the well-being, potential and self-image of black men. They show lack of desire, interest and attachment in relationships and family and thereby choose not to play the role they should as adults in relationships. Consequently, they fail to realize that they should be present emotionally in the lives of their children. Black Manhood refers to a code of behavior and attitude that form a disregarded image. This shapes the conception of manhood among young black boys. Living and surviving in an inhospitable environment have become their way of life. Recommending and seeing a possibility of social change in the African American community, Rose M. Brewer says, “Within the African American community itself, certain attitudinal and behavioral changes are essential. Most significant is economic fairness across racial lines since many problems confronting the African American community stem from poverty. There is also the need for gender justice…” (Brewer 681)
On the whole, the contemporary condition of African-American males remains grim. In order to understand the Black men’s inadequacies as portrayed by Terry McMillan, an acquaintance of centuries – old history of African American male is inevitable for it will foster insight into their present dilemma. The main challenge faced by them is to surmount the legacy of slavery. They seeth within themselves at the thought of, lack of legitimate career opportunities. In the past they responded to slavery with complete obeisance, servility, docility, humility and acquiescence but now their patience is at an end. Now they express complete disobedience, rebelliousness and contempt for authority. According to Thomas Jefferson, ... the African’s capacity for courage was found to stem from “a want of forethought, which prevents their seeing a danger till it be present” (51).

Black men are unable to fulfill the ideal male gender role because they do face many barriers to advancement and confront many unjust conditions. Christopher Brian Booker in his introduction in *I will wear no chain* says,

Today, as in the past, among African American the ability to earn a decent living is perhaps the most important component of manhood. This is seen as critical to the fulfillment of a man’s responsibilities to his family and his loved ones. As a value, its influence impacts other personality characteristics critical to the achievement of manhood, such as independence. These manhood values while seemingly neutral acquire a special significance within the context of today’s rampant materialism, family configuration and increasingly globalised economy. Within an environment of scarcity and competition, a world where the family has shattered into small pieces of what once was a more cohesive unit, these manhood
values became the key factors in an explosion of both rational and irrational violence.

A multitude of the inadequacies of Black men are related to the Black man’s past tradition of slavery, hence they are a legacy of the past. Consequently, they lead to inner and outer conflicts, further leading to crucial and unresolved problems. These inadequacies manifest in various ways like feeling inhibited, being obstinate and self-centered, shunning responsibilities, being inconsistent and skeptical about everything, abusing the spouse physically and mentally, having extra marital relationships, not being transparent about the financial dealings, deserting the Black woman for a white, being addicted to drugs and drinks, indulging in crimes and violence, and so on.

Owing to inadequacies in their male counterparts, the Black women have to carry the cross for the sake of family. This situation cannot be straightened out unless Black men consciously shake off the influence of the past- the impact of Slavery which is a herculean task. Black men have to elude the past to liberate themselves thus overcoming the inadequacies without which they cannot make their families cohesive units. However Terry McMillan does not express hope for such a possibility in the near future. Terry McMillan has expressed her view categorically that a woman’s happiness should not depend on having a man. It can be so only if he enriches the life of the woman and adds to her happiness. If not, she should have the gumption to traverse alone in complete peace and joy. Her female characters are committed to living their lives happily.

In an interview Terry McMillan says that women deserve much more and that they should treat themselves better. Their whole lives should not revolve around stupid and irresponsible men. There are too many other things they can do for themselves to rejoice
and enjoy their original selves and their work. McMillan does not advocate that women should live stoical lives, compensating and counterbalancing for all the inadequacies of men and lead their lives, resigning to fate. She is categorically against women accommodating themselves to the ways of men and leading a life of suffering. On the other hand, she urges her female characters to tread alone the road of life and govern their families and exhorts them to be happy, notwithstanding men.