

Shades of grey in black and white relations

By Carol Johnstone

Relations between black men and black women in the nineties are "charged with a lot of emotion"— and much of it was on display earlier this week at the North Branch Library.

About a dozen black men and 40 black women struggled to find common ground during a Black History Month forum Monday evening.

The issue, explained Rev. Ogueri Ohanaka of the Black United Front, which sponsored the panel discussion, "has divided the males and the (females)."

Throughout the two-hour long, sometimes heated debate, the issue of balancing "love doesn't come in any colors" kept coming into conflict with the frustration a black woman feels when a black man "runs" with a white woman.

"The sisters are resenting this man, because of what he's doing," said a woman from the audience.

"I talked to a black male not too long ago," she continued. "For years he had black women and he had black children and then somehow, he had problems within his life. He was gonna switch over because she made it very easy for him, white woman I'm talking about. She sat there and she kept house for him and she never asked anything."

This frustration seemed to intermingle with a perceived lack of respect and understanding on the part of black women for black men and vice versa.

"I find the black women of today saying they know themselves," said another woman from the audience. "The black man isn't sure where he's at, therefore, he's intimidated by a strong black woman. But we are there to stand by you and we have a lot to offer."

"At some point we have to find a common ground," panelist Wendell Thomas from East Preston said. "It should start with respect and it's a two-way street."

"We need to define what constitutes a successful relationship with African people in the context of North America," a black male professor said, adding that it's important for blacks to love themselves as a cultural group, and understand themselves historically, economically and politically, with a focus on the dynamics of what it means to survive as a black man or woman in the Nova Scotia context.