Walter Williams on “The Relationship Between Male-Male Friendship and Male-Female Marriage (Disch, chapter 44)

Some cultures (e.g., American Indian, Andalusian, Javanese) place a greater emphasis on male-male friendships than American culture does, resulting in different expectations about marriage.

In these cultures, marriage is not “the center of a person’s emotional life.” Men spent most of their time with other men. Marriage is an economic relationship.

Sometimes strong male-male friendships are institutionalized in a “marriage”-type ceremony. These relationships may last longer than male-female marriages do.

In these cultures, masculinity and heterosexuality are not closely connected as in American culture. Men may or may not have sexual relationships with their best friends.

Williams wants to reconstruct American marriage along similar lines so that less is expected of the husband-wife relationship.

“In modern America, a person’s ‘significant other’ has now become practically the sole person with whom he or she can be intimate. For many couples, this is too much to ask of their relationships, as the significant other is expected simultaneously to be sexual playmate, economic partner, kinship system, best friend, and everything else. Because of the dictatorship of the emotional ideal, many Americans expect their spouse to meet all their emotional needs.” (p. 357)

“Perhaps it is time to begin a more fundamental public discourse questioning the primacy of the male-female romantic ideal (i.e., ‘the traditional family’) as sufficient for meeting human intimacy needs by itself. Many Americans know that something is wrong with their lives, but the only solution they hear is popular music’s refrain that they should fall in love, and the allied heterosexist ‘pro-family’ rhetoric. Perhaps a new rhetoric of friendship needs to be emphasized. It is not an exaggeration to say that there has been a denigration of friendship in the United States. The pro-heterosexual, pro-marriage discourse has almost obliterated intense same-sex friendships. This is not to suggest that people should abandon their sexual partners, but that they should expect less of such a partner that his or her total emotional support.” (p. 359)