

## PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

### STUDENTS' NEEDS

It would be of great value if a study were to be made among students in our Negro colleges to find out just what, on a scientific basis, these colleges need to do to prepare them adequately for courtship and marriage. This is a rich field of study for persons in the Social Sciences and in the field of Home Economics.

We know that students come to college with varying backgrounds. A few come from homes offering large opportunities for personal instruction in matters relating to courtship and marriage.

Most students have had varying experiences with courtship before entering college. Practically all have had some experience. The majority of students wish to marry. It is desirable that they should.

We come to an important question. Does the college provide proper guidance in the matters of courtship and marriage for young people? What role should it play in correcting, defining and redefining information and attitudes in this regard?

Foster and Wilson in their "Women after College" published by the Columbia University Press in 1942, a study made of 100 women, all graduates from 44 different colleges for the period since 1920 explored the needs and types of problems facing college graduates and tried to determine what contributions their college experience had made to their solution.

The most important finding of the study was that both the parents and the educators of these women from the elementary school through college had almost completely ignored their evident need to be prepared for certain inevitabilities of their lives of which marriage and courtship was one.



These women had many difficult problems that they were not prepared to solve because their college training had given them little on which to draw in helping them with solutions.

There were religious problems. These were mainly conflicts over the religious practices of their family and conflict within themselves over changing religious values. There were health problems. Many had health problems before entering college. These were not discovered by the college authorities. They were then aggravated by four years of neglect, which made many suffer from illnesses that might have been prevented if taken in time.

There were financial problems. Regardless of how much their income was they did not know how to live within it.

They did not know how to meet problems of crisis situations--deaths, illness, premarital and marital relationships. There were problems of sexual adjustment. There were problems arising out of conflict with relatives. There were husband-wife relationship problems, parent-child relationship problems.

Most of these women felt that their college training had contributed nothing to their sex education of a scientific nature that would help them in making proper adjustments.

Lester A. Kirkendall in his "Sex Adjustment of Young Men" collected material over a period of 12 years from men most of whom were college or university students. His study deals only with sex problems, but it is indicative. Kirkendall found that many of the hundreds of young men counselled by him were well informed concerning certain of the physical aspects of sex, but were wholly uninstructed with respect to the most helpful attitudes to assume or the constructive side of sex. These young men were puzzled and experimented to find the most desirable forms of adjustment to follow. Complete sublimation, auto-erotic pr



erotic practices, homosexuality, heterosexuality were some of the adjustments used. For the most part, misconceptions were a part of their education. For some of them the problem of achieving an orderly sex-control, of learning to live with sex, is still unresolved.

These men of Kirkendall's study were far more successful in their academic careers than the average student. In general, they were well adjusted in social and various other activities, and from outward appearances would seem to have escaped the perplexities of the average young man. Yet, they had experienced life's tragedies and had grown up in ignorance and without adequate counsel and advice.

These two studies not only suggest the weaknesses of certain phases of our college curricula, but are suggestive of what might be incorporated into already existent courses to round out certain cultural and vocational intelligences with adequate intelligence on matters relating to courtship and marriage.

It would seem that the college has a real responsibility to the students who come to them beyond what they are already giving them from the point of view of the curricular and the extra-curricular.

#### WHAT ARE THE NEEDS TO BE MET

There are certain needs and problems all students face as they reach the age of active dating, courting becoming engaged and married.

During courtship students' needs usually center around social etiquette and form, personal standards, social and recreational needs, personality development, the growth of the body, family and home relationships.

Certain social forms are supposed to be learned in the family, but we know that many students do not know how to meet, associate with and enjoy social relationships with the opposite sex. Such in-



adequacy often makes them deny themselves social contacts because they are afraid and insecure and do not know how to behave. The student can be taught that mastery of social form and etiquette may be acquired from observing what others do, by asking friends, by reading good books, and articles and above all by active participation in social affairs.

Proper dress and the proper things to do are some <sup>of the</sup> problems. Whether and when to accept gifts from young men, and what kind of gifts; what to do when you disapprove of the conduct of the young man you are dating are also important courtship problems, and the college can give instruction in them.

Personal standards of conduct related to social form and our philosophy of life or values are certainly questions that have to be decided. Should a girl smoke and drink when she is out on a date, or at any time for that matter. How much intimacy is considered proper?

It would not be amiss for the college to teach that a decent courtship is more likely to result in a decent marriage than promiscuous intimacies. Students are vitally interested in questions of courting and marriage relationships and ask questions and are anxious for the right answers. Among questions that some students have recently asked are:

- (1) Why is petting not necessary before marriage
- (2) Why is it that some persons have never had a boy or girl friend and what have they missed out of life.
- (3) What are the disadvantages of marrying a person who does not possess the same amount of college training as you do.
- (4) Where is the proper place for a college girl living in a dormitory to kiss her boy friend.
- (5) In these uncertain days with so many men folk away, what



sh should be the single girl's outlook toward the future in the event she happens not to get a husband.

- (6) Why is it that some girls are not popular among the opposite sex.
- (7) Why is it that many girls have more than one boy friend yet they do not like the idea of their boy friends having other girl friends?
- (8) Does sex have anything to do with a person's temper?
- (9) What are the disadvantages of revealing to the public birth control methods.

All of the questions are interesting and challenging. The one concerning the dormitory is particularly so from the point of view of dormitory construction. Every one wants privacy at some time, even college girls with their dates. The dormitories I have seen <sup>do not</sup> meet the minimum standards for privacy. Most of them provide none at all. Can the college give students self respect so that they will not misuse or abuse privacy? It is almost impossible in dormitory living to furnish the same privacy as the home does, but it would seem well that in future construction of dormitories, college dormitory planners might well keep this factor in mind so that the more matured students could have a situation similar to those provided in some Y. W. C. A.'s <sup>with</sup> ~~which~~ a number of small "beaux parlors."

The social purpose of dating and courting is to allow for a final choice of one person as a marriage partner after having sampled the field of available persons rather extensively. I do not know how it is on other campuses, but on our campus college is now a place to find marriage partners. Courtship is as much a part of the extracurricula



aspect of a student's life as his courses are a part of the curricula. Courtship should be encouraged. Normally and properly conducted, it is a natural outlet for sex drives. Along with this point of view young people should be taught certain controls, inhibitions and re-directions of energies.

In the selection of a mate the student should know what to look for in their prospective marriage partners. They should know whether or not a person is biologically as well as socially of age to marry-- does his educational background qualify him to make a good mate. What is his economic status or future? Will his nationality, racial or religious status be conducive to a happy married life? Does he have good health and physical vigor? What is his occupation or prospective occupation?

There seems to be fear among some young women that the war is taking all of the men and they will not get married. There is the danger of their attitude resulting in their taking on a life partner that they would not even have considered in normal times. A very sensible student said the other day, "These girls ought to go to a Reception Center and see how most of the men look when they arrive there. They would not be so anxious to jump into marriage with the first soldier in uniform they see." There is so much difference between the appearance of the inductee and the man after he has been placed in uniform as to seem to make him two different persons, but inwardly he is the same person with the same background, the same thoughts, the same training or lack of it.

These are all needs that the college might meet from the point of view of the unmarried student. What is the obligation of the college to the married student? There are many problems facing the married student



due to war conditions. As I think of them ~~how~~ they fall into two categories. First those facing the young married student during the time her husband is away; and second, those facing her when he returns.

Many young married women are asking themselves the question-- what shall I do with my time while my husband is in the army? Shall I have dates with other men? If so, how often and what kind of dates. How shall I fill in the time that hangs so heavily on my hands?

There is the problem of meeting the housing needs of married students, both during the time of their husband's furloughs and during the time they are on foreign soil. There are the problems of the married student who lives with her own family or with the family of her husband.

There is the problem of pregnant mothers. How shall the college counsel and guide them? There is the problem of making good housewives and future home makers out of them.

There are financial problems of the war bride. Many are getting money from husbands abroad and often do not know what to do with it. Unless these students are very careful there will be disagreements with their husbands when and if they return as to, ~~what~~ have you done with the money I have sent you? Even if the husbands do not return they need advice about financial matters, ~~for~~ it is generally believed that after the war conditions subside there will be many economic problems. The spendthrift now will be the sufferer tomorrow.

I have in mind a specific student whose husband sent her \$100. She was elated over the matter. When asked what was she going to do with it, she said, "I am going to pay back some girls who loaned me money, I am going to buy <sup>some</sup> ~~books~~ <sup>books</sup>; I am going to get some dresses from



from the cleaners and then I and my friends are going to splurge the rest." Upon further inquiry it was found that her real expenses were less than \$10.00. (She was persuaded to buy two bonds with the remainder instead of "splurging" all of it.)

Ofttimes men abroad do not themselves have much foresight. Another young husband sent his wife \$100 just to spend. He wrote that he did not want her to work and requested her parents not to let her work. He was not particularly interested in her remaining in college. In cases like these, the role of the college is obvious.

The college has a definite role to play in helping these married students prepare for the changes they will find in their husbands when they return and for the maturity of their returned husbands. Most of these men will be different persons when they <sup>Come back</sup> ~~return~~. Many will be better persons. Others may not be so good. The wife should be prepared to play whatever role is required of her.

The factors that I have been talking about are matters of a personal nature; that is, what can the college do for the individual student in personal development from the point of view of courting and marriage while in college.

From the vocational point of view students need guidance also in matters of courtship and marriage. There are many problems that they will have to face as teachers in graded schools, high schools, as <sup>and social</sup> community/workers .

Problems of family living have faced all groups of Americans in their adjustment to the American environment. They have been most acute in the Negro family. Under slavery, since slavery, through the first World War and up to the present time, the impact of changing conditions have been acutely felt in the Negro family. The family plays a significant role in social organization. "One of the chief



handicaps from which the Negro suffers is the persistence of an unorganized and disorganized family life among the masses.\* This family disorganization results in illegitimacy in rural and urban centers, in juvenile delinquency, in desertion, in non-support, divorce. If ~~our~~ students in our colleges can be given a sincere and deep appreciation for well ordered and stable homes, for the sanctity of the marriage vows, obligation of parents to children and to each other, this would be a great contribution to their education both as individuals who will themselves set up homes; and ~~will give them~~ <sup>by</sup> proper perspective <sup>in</sup> ~~for~~ their vocations. Proper and adequate preparation by the college of students for courtship and marriage would be a real start to stability of home and family life. Never was that more true than now when families and members of families are in a state of flux.

From the community point of view, there will be the problem of the married and of the unmarried mother. They will have to be helped to find a satisfying place for themselves in the community, both from the point of view of making a living and of establishing homes, ~~for themselves and families~~ <sup>to be made</sup>. For young couples there will be adjustments/in the old community community or in the new one. There will be problems arising out of the breaking up of marriages after the war is over. It is believed that the divorce rate will be very high due to the rush <sup>with</sup> which many young people hurried into marriage when war <sup>was</sup> was declared.

The matter of employment for members of the family especially the father will be a factor in family stability. There will be many replacements of men by machines due to new developments. There will be new patterns of <sup>employment</sup>, with soldiers receiving first preference. These and many others factors will affect family life.



## HOW SHALL THE COLLEGE GO ABOUT MEETING THESE PROBLEMS

In the beginning it was suggested that colleges could make studies to discover students' needs. In many respects the home and community have failed to give students many important essentials for satisfactory living. These studies would ~~find~~ indicate where the weaknesses lie and build their curricula on them.

At the present stage, however, in a number of cases the colleges need only to correlate or integrate existing courses with changed or added emphasis. In other cases, specific courses need to be instituted. For example, in most colleges the following subjects are taught: Economics, Sociology, including courses on the ~~family~~ family, Psychology, Biology, Religion, either formally or informally, Mental Hygiene, ~~and in~~ Anatomy, Physical Education; Home Economics, Child Development and Nursery School Education; Health and Home Making and Consumer Education. All <sup>of these</sup> most important in education for courtship and marriage.

The form the course should take whether as a lecture series, in seminar groupings or in classroom would have to be left to the situation in individual colleges. In any case, such a course would have to be entirely practical.

In conclusion, may I say that society has placed great emphasis on the role of the woman in courtship and marriage. This is important. She does have a great responsibility, but I feel that we have been negligent in the matter of instructing young men as to what is their role in the important sphere of courtship and marriage. Many engagements and marriages have been broken because young men have not been educated to know or to appreciate the niceties that women think of when plan-



ning for ~~a home~~, equipping and maintaining a home. The young man is a neglected person in this respect. His needs are very great.

The problems involved in courtship and marriage are real. The needs are at hand. The college should do its utmost to meet the needs.

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