

Expert sees hope for marriage

The shortcomings of marriage are being spelled out on magazine covers, railed at on television and whispered about at weddings.

However, Dr. Vera Borosage, Michigan State University specialist in family and child sciences believes marriage in America is not a dying institution despite highly publicized and often contrary statistics.

Ms. Borosage spoke at the recent College Week, a program sponsored by the MSU Cooperative Extension Service on the MSU campus.

For most people courtship is a time of excitement, of discovery, new understanding and warmth, she said, but adjusting to and living with the everyday real person "in your mate is seldom easy."

"There is no secret formula for marital bliss. Every person is different, so every relationship is different," she said, "but the mental attitude of spouses toward marriage has a tremendous influence upon whether their partnership continues successfully or fails."

People often accept as truth certain myths about marriage which persist in our society, and these myths influence attitudes. Too often people marry with the wrong ideas about what marriage will or will not do for them.

IS MARRIAGE really problems galore? According to Ms. Borosage that attitude breeds problems. "A marriage doesn't need crepe-hangers. Negative attitudes have broken more marriages than money, she observed."

The myth that marriage is "no bed of roses" has been processed into our brain since childhood, according to Ms. Borosage. "The American educational system is missing the boat. Children should be given a realistic picture of marriage in school," she said.

Though gloomy statistics indicate one of every three marriages will fail, Borosage pointed out that America is a "marrying society" anyway.

"Marriage can't be all that unpleasant - 60 per cent of divorced people remarry, and there are six out of three marriages which don't end in divorce," she stated.

THE SPEAKER predicted that the divorce rate will probably stop rising and stabilize. One reason may be that today, the average person marries at an older age, and an older-age person will probably have a more realistic picture of what to expect from marriage.

Too many people believe the myth that marriage is a downhill experience, according to Ms. Borosage. Most certainly, the honeymoon ends, but there's no reason why a marital relationship should be downhill, boring or empty. Couples can keep a marriage alive. If two people strive to grow as individuals, there is a much better chance that they will continue to grow as a couple, she predicted.

A Cornell University study shows that when couples reach middle age and older, marriages are happier.

The unhappiest years of marriage are when couples are young - during the first 10 years. Financial problems are most likely to occur during the early stages of marriage, and children often lead to marital conflict. "Once children go off to lead their own lives, the marriage usually gets better depending, of course, upon the quality of the marriage from the beginning," Ms. Borosage said.

SHE DOES NOT recommend that spouses give up their own individuality and goals. She called to mind the classic case of a wife who sacrifices her time and educational pursuits to work and support the family while her husband finishes school.

The wife becomes isolated in a menial job where she has no opportunity for growth, and suddenly, she doesn't measure up to her spouse's standards. So, he divorces her, and she's left with no fruits for her efforts.

"Women should not allow this to happen," she asserted. "Let your husband work part-time. Even if it takes him a year longer to get through school, it will be better for the marriage," she said.

Another myth that should be exploded is the one that contends men are different from women, according to Ms. Borosage. Men are physically stronger, but most women are perfectly capable of doing most jobs that men can do, she said.

Except for biological differences, any other differences are learned, not inherent. "People are individuals and can't be stereotyped. We need to respond to the person - it doesn't matter what sex it is," Borosage said. Can children cure an ailing marriage? "That's another silly myth," said the speaker. If the marriage is, wavering, a child is likely to totally destroy what little stability is left.

IS MARRIAGE a solution for problems and unhappiness? No, it is not, according to the specialist. Marriage does not change basic personality traits. If people tend to be unhappy or negative, they bring these attitudes with them into the marriage.

Marriage cannot fulfill all of a person's needs either, she said. No couple should expect everything from each other.

Each spouse will have needs the other cannot fulfill. For example, one may want to see a football game while the other wants to see a play. There is no reason why either should give up those individual pursuits, according to Borosage. "Find a friend who shares your interests to fill the gap," she suggested.

Another legend perpetuated by our society contends that successful marriages have no conflict. Perhaps if two sheep got married, that might be true," said Ms. Borosage. "But good marriages between human beings do have conflicts."

Successfully married people try to solve their differences; they don't internalize problems. They will com-

promise or agree to disagree, and after the conflict has been discussed, it is forgotten.

"Couples must have the ability to overcome anger and put disagreements in the past. Part of forgiving is forgetting," she added.

IS GOOD communication the cure-all for marital conflict? Not always, according to the specialist. All the talking in the world can't resolve some conflicts or make them any easier to live with. Furthermore, there are times when "telling all" can make things worse. Spouses should exercise self-control and think about how what they are about to say might affect their mate.

"A lot of marriages have been destroyed because people can't keep their mouths shut and say horrible things to each other," Borosage asserted.

Another common myth maintains that marriage is more important to women than to men. "That's bunk," Borosage said. In the old days, women were eager to marry for economic security. Nowadays, women are better educated, have more career opportunities and can earn a substantial living on their own.

Furthermore, research has shown that married men are happier, live longer and have fewer psychosomatic illnesses than single men.

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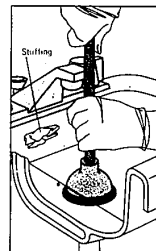
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