
SOCIETY

Does Dating Work?

"Choosing Mates—The American Way" by Martin King Whyte, in *Society* (Mar.-Apr. 1992), Rutgers—The State Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

The history of courtship in America begins with the Puritans (enough said), proceeds to the modest sexual revolution of the 18th century and the counter-revolution of the 19th, and then arrives, around the turn of the century, at the familiar practice called "dating." According to University of Michigan sociologist Martin King Whyte, however, all those centuries of romantic evolution may not have done much to improve one's chances of finding a good mate.

Dating was born among middle and upper-middle-class students, and by the 1920s, the earlier custom of "calling"—in which a young man, if invited, would call on a nubile maiden at her home, with her mother hovering protectively nearby—had largely disappeared. Not incidentally, Whyte says, more of the initiative in courtship shifted to the men.

America's prosperity had a great deal to do with the rise of dating. The expansion of secondary schooling and higher education provided "an arena in which females and males could get to know one another informally over many years," he notes. "Schools also organized athletic, social, and other activities in which adult supervision was minimal." Colleges provided an almost complete escape from parental supervision.

Increased affluence freed young people from the necessity of helping to put bread on the family table, and gave them the money and leisure to date. Whole industries sprang up to serve them. Youths could visit an ice cream parlor or an amusement park, dance to popular music recordings, or go to the movies. Automobiles not only got young people away from home but "provided a semi-private space with abundant romantic and sexual possibilities."

By contrast with "calling," Whyte points out, the main purpose of dating, at least in its initial stages, was not the selection of a spouse but the pursuit of pleasure, and perhaps romance. Eventually, of course, dating often led to "going steady," and from there to engagement and marriage.

In the popular mind, dating became the rough equivalent of shopping. Youths would make modest purchases in a variety of stores, have a good time doing so, and eventually find the best available "product" for them—a Mr. or Miss Right. A happy and enduring marriage would ensue.

The problem, Whyte says, is that things do not seem to work out so neatly. It's not that avid players of the dating game never find marital bliss, but that their playing the game doesn't seem to help. A survey of 459 women in the Detroit area Whyte conducted in 1984 revealed no clear connection between dating experience and a successful marriage. "Women who had married their first sweethearts were just as likely to have enduring and satisfying marriages as women who had married only after considering many alternatives." Nor was there any discernible difference between the marriages of women who were virgins when they wed and those of women who were not. One thing did seem to make a difference. Those women who recalled being "head over heels in love" when they wed had more successful marriages. Their memories were probably colored by subsequent experience, Whyte acknowledges, but nothing they said contradicted the familiar wisdom of poets and songwriters. Dating may not work, he concludes, but perhaps love really does conquer all.

Getting Ahead at Community Colleges

"Community Colleges and Baccalaureate Attainment" by Kevin J. Dougherty, in *Journal of Higher Education* (Mar.-Apr. 1992), Ohio State Univ. Press, 1070 Carmack Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43210; "The Community College at the Crossroads: The Need for Structural Reform" by Kevin J. Dougherty, in *Harvard Educational Review* (Aug. 1991), Gutman Library, Ste. 349, 6 Appian Way, Cambridge, Mass. 02138-3752.

Students who enter community colleges hoping to go on eventually to earn a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution may find themselves facing an unexpected obstacle: the

community college itself.

Although community colleges stress vocational education, some 30-40 percent of entering students have visions of going on to obtain

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baccalaureate degrees, reports Manhattan College sociologist Kevin Dougherty. These students tend to be less academically skilled, less ambitious, and from poorer families than students entering four-year institutions. But several studies have found that even students with similar disadvantages who begin at four-year schools are more likely to wind up receiving bachelor's degrees than their counterparts at community colleges.

The reason for the difference, according to Dougherty, is that community-college students encounter "institutional obstacles" all along the way. They rarely have the opportunity to live on campus—and thus have a weaker commitment to staying the course during the often-difficult early college years. Entering community-college students are 10–18 percent more likely to drop out than their counterparts at four-year schools. The next hurdle is transferring to a four-year institution. Many of these institutions are reluctant to take transfer students. Only half the baccalaureate aspirants manage to make the move—often without much help from community-college faculty or advisers, whose efforts are concentrated on vocational education. The students who do transfer then face further obstacles. They are often

denied financial aid and credits for community-college courses. The transfer students also frequently find themselves poorly prepared to meet the new academic demands, and often find it hard to fit into college social life. Eventually, several studies show, about one-third of the transferees drop out.

What is to be done? Clark Kerr and other prominent educators have recommended that community colleges more or less stop trying to do what they are not doing well and instead concentrate on what they do best: vocational education, adult and community education, and remedial education. But that, Dougherty says, "would leave many baccalaureate aspirants homeless." He proposes a different solution: Turn the community colleges into two-year branches of state universities. Nine states already have such arrangements. "Because of [the branches'] strong connections to the universities," he says, "[they] apparently make it much easier for students to transfer than do community colleges." And once they have transferred, the students encounter fewer difficulties. This would be good news for working-class and minority students, for whom the community college has become a gateway to higher education.

PRESS & MEDIA

Invisible News

"Black on Black" by Jim Strader, in *Washington Journalism Review* (Mar. 1992), 4716 Pontiac St., College Park, Md. 20740.

In its prime during the late 1940s, the *Pittsburgh Courier* claimed more than 400,000 readers and wielded enormous influence among blacks—not only in Pittsburgh but throughout the nation. Today the *Courier*, along with most other black newspapers across the country, is suffering from dwindling circulation, sagging advertising revenues, and diminishing prominence in the black community.

The basic problem, notes Strader, a wire service reporter, is that black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, the *Atlanta Daily World*, and the *New York Amsterdam News* are no longer, in one editor's words, "the only place blacks [can] read about blacks. Now there's competition everywhere." National black magazines such as *Ebony* and *Emerge* have cut into the newspapers' readership. And the presence of blacks at many mainstream papers and in television news has made the "mainstream" press more attentive to the desires of black

readers and viewers, lessening the need for all-black news.

The black newspapers' audience has also changed. Many middle-class blacks have moved to the suburbs, where they are far removed from the newspapers' urban concerns. "There is a portion of the black community that is indifferent to the black press," asserts Roland Wolseley, author of *The Black Press, U.S.A.* "Editors don't like to be told this. They have a tough job holding the interest of middle-class blacks."

It wasn't always so hard. During the civil-rights movement, black newspapers (some with national distribution) were considered by many blacks their only reliable source of news and the newspapers helped reinforce a sense of collective identity. The papers publicized the goals of civil rights and equality, and had large circulations closely tied to political advocacy. In recent years, however, the *Chicago Defend-*