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The "Amoral" Approach to Sex Counselling of Collegians

Daniel P. Murphy, M.A.

The academic psychologist in a Catholic university is frequently consulted in sexual matters by a unique group of students, those seeking guidelines for premarital sexual behavior with some basis other than that of Christian morality. Some of these students are "instant intellectuals," rebelling against the pablum of Kelley's *Modern Youth and Chastity*, or any traditional view. A few are seeking liberal advice from anyone who will help them justify present sexual behavior. Others are merely disillusioned with years of dogmatic indoctrination. The majority of these students, however, demonstrate genuine concern for the rights of others, and wish to discuss and examine alternatives intellectually rather than emotionally. They are the antithesis of the fun-seeking, free-loving, self indulgent individual so often pictured in this situation. They are attempting to resolve a complicated issue in a mature, intelligent manner.

Why do young people seek non-moral reasons for chastity? While the evidence from sociological and psychological investigations indicate that premarital coital rates have experienced little change in the past few decades, a consolidation and acceptance of sexual attitudes has been occurring.¹¹ The significant change has been the increased *acceptance* of premarital sexual

intercourse, rather than the increased *performance*. Thus, for our young people, guilt for sexual activities is a less frequent and less intense reaction.¹⁰ While guilt was a sufficient deterrent for our parents, the young of today must have other guidelines to supplement the spiritual ones handed down by church and family.

A brief example will demonstrate one approach to such sexual problems which has been successfully employed by this writer. An attempt is made to apply psychological, sociological and statistical considerations to the problem (as well as experiential evidence.) Let us examine one of the most frequently asked questions, one which appears deceptively simple. "We love each other so much that we actually *feel* married, and positively will be married when the situation permits it. Why should we wait for a ceremony to complete our love?"

We always look at the positive side of the behavior first for several reasons. The students anticipate a negative reaction and when the initial statements indicate that the counselor recognizes advantages as well as disadvantages to premarital coitus, the atmosphere is more conducive to

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genuine dialogue. Furthermore, the subject tends to be more relaxed and has confidence that the counselor is willing to look at both sides of the question. On this positive side, the male achieves immediate sexual satisfaction with the woman he loves. He may realize more than ever before the depth of her love for him. The woman may feel a sense of fulfillment as a woman in being physically desired by her man. We know that a woman's sexual response must be both psychological as emotional, not just physically mechanical. The giving of her body to the man of her choice is an important part of her fulfillment. She may feel more secure in as much as intercourse has committed them even more deeply. They may, in fact, find that their love has deepened through sexual expression before marriage.

The evidence indicates, however, that for every possible advantage to premarital intercourse in our society, there exists many disadvantages. We shall examine only a few. First, although attitudes towards premarital coitus have changed in the general population, virginity is still desirable. Few things swell the masculine ego as the knowledge that his bride has held him special above all others. In fact, evidence has shown that the majority of women who had premarital coitus which they did not regret do not want their daughters to experience intercourse before marriage.² While Kinsey indicated that half the college population experienced premarital intercourse, one must consider the norm group from which the estimate was obtained. A more recent estimate has been made that only about 20% of today's college girls are not virgins.⁸ I usually mention that it is surprising how many men who claim that virginity is not important still insist on asking their fiancée about her chastity.

The responses elicited by the students has reassured me that this is a frequent occurrence.

Premarital coitus frequently acts to destroy the thing it was intended to cement, the intimate relationship between two people. Many young couples have a distorted impression of a happy relationship. For them, the perfect physical relationship means mutual and simultaneous orgasm. We know, however, that such mutual orgasm is usually achieved only after a relatively long period of time and that for many couples it may never be attained. When the couple feel they are incompetent (by their standards,) they each become anxious and the sexual relationship becomes a focus of increasing tension instead of a release.

In addition, the sex act often becomes the main part of the relationship, and frequently the woman finds the periods of dialogue lessening and the man's primary interest is to get to bed. Once again the act has tended to separate the couple rather than to bring them together.

The argument that premarital coitus will relax the tensions between two promised people can be discussed in many other ways. First, sex is not a strong bond. As Saltzman has said,⁹ of all the human physiological functions which can be studied by objective techniques, sex is the only function which requires the involvement of another person for its fullest biological expression. Procreation only requires physical intimacy, but a full understanding of one's sexuality can only be obtained by studying both people involved. Second, guilt and anxiety usually accompany such activities. These feelings do not necessarily develop because of

personal moral beliefs but feelings of inadequacy, the frequent feeling of the girl that she is being exploited, fear of discovery, and the usual uneven commitment on the part of the girl do develop. These often lead to haste in the sexual act, coupled with furtive attempts at concealment. Together, these events tend to create an atmosphere not conducive to the rich development of love between two individuals.

The possibility of venereal disease must be discussed, together with rates of incidence. Pregnancy is always a possibility. If you become pregnant and get married, will there always exist a doubt as to whether he would have married you under normal circumstances? How will this affect the stability of the marriage?

Many young people have the impression that success in marriage is primarily a question of success in bed. Therefore, they wonder, will we be compatible? The argument is that unless you engage in premarital coitus you cannot possibly know whether you are sexually compatible or not. This is identified by Duvall as the "Try before you buy" fallacy.³ The sex relationship, as Mace⁷ sees it, is, in the last analysis, a function of the love relationship and not the other way around. While a mutually satisfactory sex relationship is important, a lasting satisfaction is the *result*, rather than the *cause*, of a sufficient interpersonal adjustment. In addition, numerous studies over the last quarter century have indicated that premarital sexual experience of a woman is no help to her in making a good sexual adjustment in her marriage.^{1,5} While the sexually experienced woman makes a more rapid sexual adjustment after marriage, within a short time the premarital virgins are equally sexually

responsive. In addition, recent studies indicate that premarital non-virgins tend to be unstable and neurotic. If this is the case, such factors may influence the stability of marriage and later adjustment.

One more factor deserves mention. I asked the students to consider this question: what will you tell your children when they ask (a) whether premarital intercourse is right, or (b) whether you, their parent, have experienced such coital behavior? McCary⁸ indicates that many women who have defied the sexual prohibitions of her generation by engaging in premarital coitus, may now carry a residual of repressed guilt. This guilt can break through in the form of disapproval of any premarital sexual participation of her daughter. The disparity between a woman's past behavior and her present position perpetuates a vicious cycle. The daughter may be raised with a sexual ethic which is steeped in guilt and shame due to the mother's restrictive admonishments. Thus another problem in sexual adjustment is fostered.

The conclusion is that premarital testing of love and sexual adjustment is not necessarily a good way to start a solid married life together. It is important for the counselor of today to realize that our young people want something other than the princess-prostitute answer, that is that "good" girls don't and "bad" girls do. It is up to us to furnish them with as much solid information as possible. I would suggest that every counselor have available for loan Duvall's *Why Wait Till Marriage*. This book is a must for counselor, parent, or student. Dr. Duvall demolishes the popular fallacies surrounding premarital sexual activities without every utilizing an-

authoritarian approach. At the same time the book does not contain a single line that is inapplicable to a Christian approach to sexual morality. In addition, I would recommend Max Levin's article entitled *The Physician and The Sexual Revolt*,⁶ as well as the more scholarly work of McCary's.⁸

CONCLUSION

We as counselors have little to do with the formation of attitudes regarding sexual behavior. Our purpose is to support an existing belief, as well as to clarify misconceptions held by the students. It is extremely important that we acknowledge the advantages of premarital behavior as well as the disadvantages. Unless the student has both arguments before him at one time, he cannot be expected to draw the most propitious conclusions. Finally, we should recognize that the student is present to accomplish the one purpose he disclaims: he actually desires support for his present moral holding. Thus we are facing a basically moral individual who is seeking every available reason to maintain his morality. We owe it to his generation, as well as future generations, to furnish the reality of sex and interpersonal relationships. Let us teach morality in every possible manner, including the "no-moral" method.

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