GETTING MARRIED 1986

Marriage Counselling in the Black Community

By Paula Wagner

As black Americans progress and move further into the "mainstream" mainstream, ideas of family living are constantly being altered. The once extended family setting is now being replaced by the more urbanized nuclear setting, as the "nuclear" family becomes idealized.

Black parents [illegible] from [illegible] children, have [illegible] in the lives of their children. Furthermore, their input is [illegible] to be viewed more and more in terms of importance. And their advice and guidance [illegible] given by old lages are now [illegible] responsibilities of the psychotherapist.

Professional marriage counselling, in particular, is viewed as an objective intervention for guidance, is becoming more and more influential and accepted in the black community.

Dr. Norma Jones, Professor of Social Work, at Howard University, and psycho-therapist at the Baltimore Family Life Center (located at 101 W. Read St.), says that, in the past, blacks avoided therapy, not because they did not believe in its effectiveness, but because they often felt that admittance to therapy meant something was grossly wrong with them."

However, with the increasing acceptance of "public" counseling, blacks are moving away from obsolete ideas of not wanting to admit to a need for help or "taking one's business in the street" to more proficient ideas that meet the pressures of a complex society.

"The impact of today's society weighs more heavily on the institution of marriage," says Dr. Jones, because of the economic demands today, it is necessary that women work outside the home, and consequently men are responsible for household chores. The husbands and wives are constantly placed in "non-traditional roles."

The decision to visit a marriage counselor is not a sign of weakness, says Dr. Jones. The role of a marriage counselor is to "help couples in identifying problems areas, getting them to express honestly how they feel, outlining consequences, and to salvage that marriage, if possible."

Many patients or clients, as they are also called, initially come to therapists with one said problem. However, in discussing situations, it is frequent that therapists will uncover other problems, in getting to the heart of one's anxieties. "Dysfunctional communication" says Dr. Jones, is the major cause for problems.

"Dysfunctional communication" is when one person believes the other person should readily understand his expectations, even though he has never actually expressed it.

Too often married people, in particular, do not discuss "expectations," says Dr. Jones. There is need for realistic objectivity, after the initial intense romance; there is a great need for couples (married and otherwise) "to talk about perceptions, discuss wishes, desires and expectations."

The approach to marriage is constantly changing. Pre-marital counselling is becoming more and more popular, as young couples seek guidance beforehand, in handling marriage.

Another aspect of changes in marriage, is the desire to maintain one's own identity in marriage. This idea is growing, as women become less dependent on husbands, and more financially independent.

Economics, says Dr. Jones, "has a lot to do with decisions that are being made," as people are now deciding to marry for economic gain.

The divorce rate in the black community is decreasing. However, experts say there will always be weddings, for marriage is an institution of Time

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The Groom's Checklist

Draw up your wedding guest list and see that your family makes out theirs. Check with your bride for duplications. If there are any on both lists, decide whose guests they'll be.

Decide on your best man and the number of ushers you will need (generally, you should have one usher for every fifty guests). Be sure to invite your ushers as soon as possible.

Select gifts for your groomsmen. An initialed wallet, key case, or pocket secretary is nice. Other ideas are cuff links, the clasp, key chain, pen or pencil. The gift for your best man is usually slightly more expensive and personal than the ushers' gifts.

Select a gift for your bride. A watch, pearl necklace, pin, or a set of earrings are some solid suggestions.

Have the wedding ring engraved: first your initials, then her initials followed by the date of your wedding.

Check on the degree of formality of the wedding, then make a date for you and your fiancee to go to a local formal wear specialist about outfitting all the men.

Plan the honeymoon.

Check state rules about the time required to get the marriage license. Get the blood test. Assuming test is okay, go with your bride to apply for the license.

Rest up for the bachelor dinner. Traditionally, the groom gives this for his best man and ushers, but other close friends may be invited. However, more often than not, the men in the wedding party give the bash for the groom. It's best to give it early in the week before the wedding, allowing time for all — especially the groom — to recuperate.

Know when and where the wedding rehearsal will take place. Notify your attendants and be sure you are all there to take part. Ask the clergyman whether or not you kiss your bride. If yes, be sure you know when in the ceremony.

Have the clergyman's fee ready and give it to your best man for the day of the wedding, either in bills or a check in an envelope. Fee ranges from $10 to $50 depending on your circumstances and the size of the wedding.

Make insurance provisions for your new status as head of household. Your wedding gifts should be covered by personal property and fire insurance. You and your bride should have adequate life insurance protection plans and a medical plan that includes both of you.

Be sure that you and your bride sign the wedding certificate and put it safely away before leaving on your wedding trip. Have it photostated soon after returning.

Send a telegram to your bride's parents thanking them for giving you such a beautiful wedding day to remember.

The Wedding Rehearsal

One of the most important functions in the pre-wedding planning is the running of the wedding rehearsal. Each participant should have a typed list of his responsibilities.

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