

MRS. in a world of misses



By Margaret (Oehmler) McReynolds

A BABY CRIES. IN THE NEXT ROOM HIS young mother awakes with a start and sees by the alarm clock that it is six o'clock. She slowly rises and goes to the kitchen to prepare the baby's bottle. When she has fed, cuddled, and changed the baby she takes him back to the bedroom where her husband lifts him high in the air. The parents laugh together at his squeal of delight.

She dresses quickly and hurries through breakfast so that she will have the beds made when the babysitter arrives at eight. By ten minutes past, she has gathered her books together and is ready to leave for college.

This schedule has become a pattern for a growing number of students each year. Today, in the United States ten per cent of the female college students are married. And the trend is upward.



College marriages became popular when the veterans of World War II were faced with the need to marry and to complete their interrupted educations. Once they proved college marriages could work, others were quick to follow their example. The post-war prosperity made it possible for students to find the means to combine marriage and education, and the trend toward early dating made students feel ready for marriage.

They also found that our intricate world requires a longer span of education than was needed in the past. Thus, girls who started to date at twelve might be twenty-four by the time their fiancés finished school. Rather than wait, they decided to combine the last few years of study with marriage.

At Simmons, about three per cent of the current undergraduates are married. Although it is far below the national average, it is a surprising figure for a college that attracts career-minded women.

Most of the married girls at Simmons are Juniors or Seniors whose husbands are also in college (many in graduate school). Eight of the girls have children.

They think that there are definite advantages to be gained from a college marriage. One girl says that she has a more settled and contented feeling than before marriage. Last year, she wasted a good deal of time daydreaming about her fiancé and about their wedding plans. "Now we're together all the time and that problem doesn't arise. Also living in the dorm always seemed like living in such an artificial and unreal world. Now that I'm married and have adult responsibilities, I find myself much more interested in world events, rather than just school events."

Another girl expresses it this way: "Without the pressures of social life, the student is more interested in her studies. Because sacrifices are involved when a married woman continues her education, the true values of education are taken more seriously."

There are, of course, several disadvantages to marrying while in college. The universal problems are financial ones. Since these are not uncommon, the couple is usually able to anticipate them before the marriage. The difficulties that are not so easily overcome are ones that are not anticipated and have deeper roots.

One girl described these this way: "The college atmosphere enables a student to learn more about herself, to become independent, to grow up. Working furthers this process. A married student becomes immediately dependent on someone else, loses out in the growing up process and in addition loses the close relationship she has had with her friends at college.

It seems impossible to maintain a relationship with the college community when a large area of the student's life is no longer held in common. When this happens, the fun goes out of college life, and she is reduced to going to school, going home, cooking dinner, and cleaning house.

"For the girl whose husband is not a student, there are many conflicts. It is difficult to study in the evening after cooking dinner and washing dishes. This is especially true if your husband is watching TV or listening to the stereo. A man wants his wife's companionship, and no matter how understanding he may be, he gets very lonely."

One of the biggest problems is lack of time. Being a combination wife-housekeeper-student is not an easy task; and, if the girl is also a mother, it sometimes seems impossible. The students agree that organization of their work and study is their only salvation. "You have to decide what is most important and then get that done," says one girl. "I let most of my housework go until the weekends," says another. "My husband is cooperative, thank goodness, and he helps with the dishes, shopping, and other tasks."

The girls often complain that they have little time to spend just being with their husbands. Since most of them haven't been married long, this is doubly hard. They would much prefer planning exotic dinners to preparing an outline for their English term papers. It takes real discipline to turn to the paper and serve spaghetti for dinner. As one girl says: "I saw more of my husband while we were dating than I do now. We did things together then, and now it seems that the only thing we do together is study."

In being both wife and student, these girls have a dual role. They are married women with adult responsibilities. Yet, they are also girls going to college, and "college girl" is a term which suggests a person who has not quite reached maturity. Many of the married girls are aware of the diversity of roles. One girl who is student teaching says: "I have three unrelated roles: student, teacher, and wife. It's hard to change the types of behavior expected in each role without some kind of twinge."

Another girl senses the incompatibility of her roles when she talks with her friends. "On Monday mornings my girlfriends all tell me about the blind dates they had over the weekend while I tell them how I went to dinner at my mother-in-law's."

A humorous, yet true, picture of this diversity of roles is given by a married student who says: "On Fridays, after coming home from my morning classes, I put the laundry in the washing machine, put the soup for lunch on the stove, and open a book to study while the other two things are getting done. And it sometimes seems strange being a student at school one moment and at the next moment being a housewife at the supermarket."

Yet, the girl who is able to combine, successfully, her roles as wife and student feels a deep sense of satisfaction. She finds that if she and her husband are able to contend with the many problems that arise from a college marriage, they will have achieved a maturity in their marriage which makes up for any disadvantages that they might suffer along the way. The college girl who is happy in her marriage shudders at the thought of exchanging all her household tasks for the privilege of being waited on in the dorms.

The trend in college marriages will continue as long as prosperity and early dating experiences continue. Perhaps one day it will reach large enough proportions so that Simmons will find it worthwhile to organize a married student organization to offer aid and assistance to the married students. However, for the most part, the married students want no special attention. They are busy, active girls who are eager to finish school so that they can fully claim their place in society as "Mrs."