

Survey shows postponing parenthood is popular

By Jonathan Taylor

Though parenthood is still seen as a highly valued aspect of life for both males and females, the young women of today would rather have children after the first years of marriage, according to a survey on parenting published by Deanna Eversoll and Patricia Knaub, associate professors of human development at UNL.

Eversoll said whereas marriage and motherhood used to be the only avenue for "success" for women in the past, there are now more opportunities for women to demonstrate their capabilities by pursuing a career or successfully developing employment-related skills.

Of 214 undergraduate women surveyed at UNL in 1979, nine of 10 women said they were opposed to having children early in a marriage. Less than one in 20 said they thought that married couples with a mature love are eager to have children as soon as possible, according to the survey.

Eversoll said parenthood is still considered important to women's sense of fulfillment but "self-fulfillment can also be attained from a wider arena of roles" and affects the timing in which things are done in a person's life. Only 8 percent of the women surveyed said they think married women lack self-fulfillment until they have a child.

Eversoll said women today have to make a choice between marriage, having children, or preparing for a career, and whether to establish themselves in their profession before they have children. With males having to make the same kind of choices, young couples today have "timing decisions" to make that couples did not have in the past. She said most couples eventually decide to have children, but sometimes delay the start of parenthood.

Eversoll said because women are much more aware of the aspects and

responsibilities of parenting, more than half surveyed said they were not prepared to take on the parental role. She said with the larger families of the past, a daughter growing up was able to be around babies and help with the parenting. Now, she said, smaller families have children two to three years apart and this day-to-day experience is lost.

Economics is the major reason why 46 percent said the ideal family size was two children and another 46 percent said three or more, Eversoll said. Couples today look ahead at how they want to live and since they want a high standard of living for their children, they only have as many children as they can afford, she said.

Forty percent of those surveyed said they think men are "generally tied closer to the marriage when children are in the home," but 45 percent disagreed and 15 percent were undecided. The study also indicated that both men and women think the other wants to have children early in marriage, but the study does not support this because of role changes men and women have gone through in the past 10 years, Eversoll said. When men and women had specifically defined roles, it was easy to form expectations of what each aspired to be, with today's more individualistic expectations, she said, one sex cannot be sure of what the other plans to do. Both men and women expect to delay having children but perceive the other not wanting to wait. This stereotypical thinking usually occurs from a lack of discussion, Eversoll said.

Eversoll also began a study in 1975 dealing with the role of the father. She surveyed 221 males when they were juniors and seniors at UNL to compare them with their own parents to study the generational difference. She will conduct a follow-up survey next year to reassess the males' views of fatherhood.

Correction

A front-page story in the Nov. 23 Daily Nebraskan about precautions for holiday travelers incorrectly listed a phone number motorists could call for state road conditions. The Lincoln number given was 477-4533. The number should have been 471-4533. The Daily Nebraskan apologizes for any inconvenience caused by this mistake.

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