Life Styles - What You See In The Year 2001

Thank you for your generous introduction, Charles. This is an occasion of honor to us because MRI is such a significant institution in this country; it is a matter of some pride to me that we are as intimately involved as we are. It is a little like being at home away from home. We have many common interests, although in different areas of activity.

When Charlie asked me to talk about the family in 2001, mostly all I could think of were all the problems that families are having in 1977. It was hard even to imagine that there would be a family in 2001 to talk about. Predictions are hazardous to say the least, on this subject, and my crystal ball is more than unusually cloudy. So I thought the most appropriate thing to do would be to identify some of the trends that are evident already to call attention to the things which many of you may not have thought about, and also to highlight some issues that we ought to be concerned about in the future.

I did take the privilege of asking one of my colleagues, Dr. Cotter Hirschberg, to join me today because families include children, and Cotter is a child psychiatrist. Indeed, he is a child analyst. What is of special importance to me is the fact that he is also the William C. Menninger Professor of Child Psychiatry in our own School of Psychiatry.

When we come to our question period, I will ask Cotter to join me on the podium so that I can hand any of the tough ones to him.

I would suppose that interest in the family reflects in some measure the anxiety that many of us are experiencing with them now. Part of the problem is deciding what is real about the things going on, what are fads and only passing. One can start with some observations. For example: the rising divorce rate – what will that be doing to families in the future when you realize that 35 percent of all marriages will end in divorce; in some parts of the country it is as high as one in two. As a matter of fact, it is estimated that one child in six under the age of 18 now, is living in a single – parent family. That, I am sure, has some impact on family structure now and surely will have in 2001.

A second significant trend is the feminine liberation movement. Whatever chauvinistic feelings I may have about it, the fact is that this movement is changing the ideas that women have about their roles, not only outside the home, but inside as well. It is estimated that some 52 percent of women with school aged children are working now, and that some two-thirds of them are working full-time. As a matter of fact, 37 percent of the women with preschool-aged children (under age five) are also working; that is one-third of the women with children under five. This is
twice as many as were doing so a decade ago, and one might assume that that proportion will continue to increase in future years. It would appear that there is an increasing tendency to reject the exclusive role of wife and mother and to seek additional opportunities outside the home. There are other implications to these changes that I will return to a little later.

A big source of concern now and in the future may be a certain attitude toward marriage and the family that is evident in some of our progeny. More and more young people have elected not to have children – sometimes on a permanent basis. Many young people today are living in what are called LTAs (Living Together Arrangements). Some 70 percent of the under 25-year-old couples in San Francisco are LTAs. Now San Francisco may be unique in a number of respects, including this one, but this also may be a sign of things to come.

There are other trends of significance: the declining birthrate, the disappearance of the extended family, and the consequent absence of grandparents from the lives of many of our children so that they are not so aware of them as we perhaps were in our families.

And perhaps an even greater source of our concern about the future of the family is our individual awareness of stresses that our families and those of people we know are experiencing now. Many of us are aware that our houses have not become the homes we would like them to be, but are launching pads: everyone is off to a different activity, hardly still long enough to say hello, let alone more. We – you, me, our spouses, our children – merely use the house as a place to collect ourselves momentarily before we pass on to some other place. To illustrate, several social scientists sat down one evening in a typical middle-class family household with a stopwatch to determine the length of time between the moment the mother is finally finished preparing the meal, has it served, and is seated – and the moment the first person leaves to go somewhere else. It added up to a grand total of seven minutes!

Now if dinner on the average is a seven-minute experience, it is clear there is not much togetherness in the average American household these days. I think most mothers sense there is even less opportunity now for interaction with one’s children – the sorts of tasks one used to do together are fewer; there aren’t that many tasks to do now. We live in condominiums, and somebody else takes care of the yard, or there simply isn’t any yard; the dishwasher handles the after-dinner chore.

Now it seems that many interactions that we as parents have with our kids have an angry cast to them that partly reflects a frustrating effort on our part to establish contact with people in our family who seem alienated, seem to reject authority, are disdainful and no longer involved in the same process of living that we are, and feel they should be.

Many of these arguments come up over the mechanics of living – who’s going to have the car, how much money can they have, what can they do with their time; in many instances, we are left with an indefinable sense of uneasiness. Somewhere along the line, something is changing the quality of family life; nothing seems simple and straightforward any more. On top of that, many of us have considerable uncertainty about just how good we have been as parents. Perhaps, we wonder, this sense of alienation, of separation, means we have failed.

All together, these pose some ominous implications for families, and it is hard indeed to see how things can hold together, let alone improve, for the 24 years between now and 2001.

When you add this uncomfortable impression to the fact that some six of the seven historical functions of the family are no longer their primary responsibility, one can see that the
role of the family has actually diminished. It used to be that these seven historical functions belonged to the family:

- The function of production which is no longer the family farm; it has shifted to the city office and factory;
- The function of protection, which has shifted to the police and fire departments;
- The function of education – the school system has always had a big hunk of that, but now TV has invaded the remaining family function even further;
- The function of recreation – there are now thousands of other places to go for that rather than finding it at home;
- The function of religion – the church and Sunday School have taken over that function, to the extent it matters; there are not many families left that read the Bible together;
- The function of status – status now is a function of where we work, or whom we work for, rather than what our name is or what town we live in, as was once true.
- The seventh – and perhaps the most important function – remains: that is the provision for affection – the procreation, the child care and rearing, the loving that is the essence of a family.

As I have already suggested, the changes that seem to have occurred in families have produced a singular reduction in the significance of parental wisdom. Knowledge may be important, but somehow wisdom doesn’t seem to be. Along with that goes a diminished appreciation by our children for judgment and for parental experience. It is very possible for our young people to know more than we know about some technical things, but such knowledge seems to leave in them some disdain for our roles as authors of opinions based on wisdom, experience and judgment.

The structure and functions of the family are evolving, shaped by these and other trends that are powerful and quite likely to continue. Let us continue our examination of them.

The next trend to note is the increase in varieties of families. What do I mean? Single-parent varieties for example. I’ve already cited impressive statistics on the number of children who are now living in single-parent families. Also, there are large numbers of combined families.

One reason not to be overly concerned about the high divorce rate is the high remarriage rate: some 80 percent of men who get divorced, remarry. So it may not be so much the family that is in disrepute, as it is the marriage to a single partner. We are now practicing something called “serial monogamy.”

Generally speaking, we men have a tougher time making it alone after having lived with somebody – a wife – who took care of us; this dependence on a caring spouse may be the cause of the higher proportion of men than women who remarry. But the fact is, this often brings about a new variety of family called the “yours, mine, and ours, question mark,” which is a source of some strain as the children strive to make relationships with people there are no good names for. They must use awkward labels, like “stepmother,” “stepfather,” and “stepchildren.” Most everyone coughs on that phrase and comes up with some uncomfortable compromise, such as,
“Call me by my first name.” It still bothers many new stepparents to be called by their first name by someone only 12 years old or younger – but that does often end up being the least uncomfortable alternative.

Another variety of family is the childless couple. I have already indicated that a large number of contemporary youth are foregoing children; in fact, at a rate of some 10 times that of a decade ago.

As a result of these trends, only 18 percent of the families in this country are traditional, meaning (1) they still have the original members of the family – mother and father; and (2) it is the husband who works and the wife who stays at home.

That this traditional pattern accounts for less than 20 percent of all the families in this country is astonishing. That fact in itself should show how far our society has gone towards the evolution of new forms of families. One observer has said that the greatest problem affecting the future of the family is the persistence of the notion that there is only one proper model – the traditional mold of mother, father, three children, and a single-family dwelling in Middle America.

Unless we recognize and accept the varieties of arrangements developing under the label “family,” our understanding will be restricted by our conservative notion that there is only one kind of family that we should be striving for – only one kind that is normal and proper. We need, in fact, to change our definition of what a family is.

Another trend that is certainly likely to continue is a change in family size. It is already pretty well accepted that the average number of children in a family is two, not three, as it was a generation ago. This country’s population could well stabilize by the year 2040 at about 270 million if present trends continue.

Why in fact are families changing in size? One obvious reason is the higher proportion of families in urban settings where a large family is a liability. This is in contrast to rural settings where a large family has been, and often still is, an asset – plenty of people to help bring in the hay, feed the chickens, or take care of the farm chores. Those advantages quickly disappear in the city where there is a shortage of room, usually a shortage of money, a shortage of jobs, especially for the children and adolescents, and other problems which are not offset by the advantages of numbers.

Further, smaller families appear to be a cultural response to the need for more streamlined families. The high family mobility in this country – estimated at one family in four or five moving every year – obviously puts a premium on small size. They have fewer goods to move, fewer people involved, etc. Smaller families may also be better able to adapt to changing circumstances and new opportunities.

This trend may also represent an acknowledgement of the financial advantages and social freedoms that are possible with fewer children. That is a presumption, but it does suggest that insofar as these qualities of life continue, families will continue to be small.

Lastly, it may be a response on the part of our younger adults to the awareness of overpopulation pressure that will burden us in the future.

An additional trend is that of the changing roles of women. They are seeking employment at younger and younger ages; in many cases they must, for it is among low income families that
the highest proportion of mothers are working. But it is noteworthy that this trend is gradually extending into middle income groups as well, so that the proportion of working mothers among middle income families now looks very much like the lower income families did a decade ago. It is probable that in 10, 15, or 20 years the dual-work families will be the norm throughout all social levels and not the exception.

I have already suggested that some 50 percent or more mothers of school-aged children are employed. Concomitant with this tendency to move into working environments has been disdain or distaste of many women for what are called the “traditional functions” of women – taking care of the house, preparing the meals, raising the children. One survey of a number of young women between the ages of 14 and 25 revealed that only one-fourth of them found the role of housewife an appealing and attractive role. Three-quarters of them rejected that role as their first choice.

In addition to moving into the work force and out of the home, there have been changes in the level of expectation of many women. Traditionally, many women have accepted subservient roles, and from their liberated perspective, now see the routine tasks of household maintenance in this light. The fact that many women have moved into the work force has produced a new kind of marital equality: the wife as a full partner, and her husband sharing equally in the responsibility of maintaining the household. As a result, there is less and less attention given, especially among younger adults, to the conventional definitions of what is “woman’s” or “man’s” work.

It is now common for the man to change the diaper, for the woman to put the fuse back in the fusebox, for the man to do the carpet sweeping, etc. I have great difficulty thinking of what women do, but my wife is not above reminding me from time-to-time. I have a bit of chauvinist blood remaining, but I am trying to be understanding.

One of the consequences of such sharing is better decisions. That is, more of the significant family and household decisions are made together, combinations of two perspectives in contrast to a more hierarchical marital model of a decade or more ago in which the head of the household made all the decisions. In many instances, he was not as competent as she, and yet culture gave him the responsibility and often forced him to exercise an uncomfortable role, to the detriment of the whole family.

There are additional consequences to shared roles which are both positive and negative. Insofar as they are likely to be prominent characteristics of families in the next century, I think they are worth noting.

The first is simply the fact that as women are now more likely to be co-equal partners in the marriage, for many men they are a real source of competitive threat. For all of our strengths and assumptions of masculine superiority, the fact is that many of us can be undone by having to deal with a competent woman. A number of studies make it very clear, particularly in business, that competent women are threatening to men, not only working under them, but working with them as well. This can also be true at home.

It is quite possible that the dual-role family will have a substantial amount of conflict stemming from this competition. Conflict may well develop simply because it is very hard for any institution to have two bosses; there will have to be negotiated arrangements about who decides what.
In our family, for example, I decide all the important questions – like whether there will be nuclear war and whether or not we will solve the problem in the Middle East; and my wife decides all the unimportant questions – like where the kids will go to school and how we will manage our budget.

Such divisions of labor as this may well be a pattern which will be played out in various forms, but not without a lot of learning and change on the part of both husbands and wives. A real question for the future that I will return to in a moment is how this learning will be accomplished.

A second consequence that some of our more conservative colleagues like to talk about is the resulting impact on children who are raised in families in which men are not limited to traditional men-type activities, nor women to traditional women-type activities. They ask, “Unless boys have clear and unequivocal role models showing them what it is like to be a man, won’t they grow up to be pansies; and if girls don’t have unequivocal role models of femininity, of lace and frills, won’t they grow up to be tomboys?”

I don’t know the answer to these questions, but I am quite sure it is not sufficient to allow the simple assumption that the answer is yes. It is already clear that many of our teenagers prefer to be relatively sexless in appearance and in behavior. On the KU campus last week we noted how many boys were just with boys, and how many girls were just with girls. I looked at one group of four and said, “Now there’s a situation – a girl with three boys around her.” My wife responded, “You’re wrong; two of them are girls.” Well I went around and looked from the front, and sure enough she was right. They were so similar in appearance that it was difficult to tell at a brief glance which was the boy and which was the girl. They do want to appear alike; they do want to deal with each other on an equal basis.

I am impressed with the consistency now with which adolescents date with the understanding that it will be on a dutch basis. I am surprised at the frequency with which the girls will call the boys to ask for the date. These equalization behaviors are in sharp contrast to those we knew in our youth, but I would hesitate to say that it really represents much difference. It probably makes a difference to many of us who watch these behaviors with some anxiety, because in our minds there is an unrealistic, even irrational, need to make sure that what is masculine, stays masculine, and what is feminine, stays feminine.

For those of us who are particularly strong in those feelings, it can be disturbing to see the extent to which our children say in effect that it doesn’t matter that much to them. I can’t guess what the long-term consequences of this will be. I must say, more as a matter of faith than of fact, however, that I don’t believe it will ultimately matter much.

I think that many of our social customs are highly arbitrary; I cannot believe that a basic sexual identity will be determined by whether you walk on the curbside of the girl on the street or not.

There is another consequence of this tendency to develop an egalitarianism based on the leveling out of roles, without the same power difference between mother and father that there once was.

By extension, this egalitarianism tends to involve children of the family as well, creating a kind of pseudodemocracy. This grows surreptitiously; participation in decision-making extends and you find the family is taking votes or developing a consensus about whether or not the
daughter can stay out after midnight, or whether the son should have the car tonight, or how big the allowances should be.

I think this can be a serious problem. It falsely assumes that children are as competent and experienced and as knowledgeable as their parents. It is a fraudulent kind of democracy for parents to allow, let alone encourage, an assumption of political equality to reign. It is important to distinguish between the important principle of giving children ample opportunity to express their views or feelings on all manner of issues before the family, and the need to limit their decisions to matters they are genuinely competent to decide. Such inappropriate power to decide gives the child a role he cannot exercise effectively, and may encourage a kind of disdain for authority itself.

Paradoxically, the problem of inappropriate permissiveness is that it takes away the functional importance of having someone set limits on behavior. For example, one of the big problems of many parents these days is saying, “No.” This reluctance is often based on an inappropriate fear of being disliked by the child who is told “No.” Many parents avoid this risk by putting the matter to a vote within the family to decide what will be done, burdening the children with a responsibility which is the parents.

We once had quite a struggle with one of our children when she pointed out that we seem to be able to take trips or travel to Kansas City whenever we want – without her. That didn’t seem fair. She wondered why she couldn’t go along. We had only one answer; we said, “Yes, Virginia, there is a double standard, for we can do things at our age that you cannot do at yours.” Acting on the assumption of total equality can give children wholly false ideas about privileges and responsibilities.

It is very hard for those with a kind of egalitarian sense of things to live with the fact that there are important differences between parents and children. Parents who deny these differences are creating serious problems for the character development of their children. Oftentimes these consequences don’t flower until late adolescence when suddenly the young people have mobility, money, free time – and the stimulation of their peers; then their inexperience in living with rules, dealing with restraints, and accepting limits can become a serious problem, often a social problem, but at least a psychological one, often of crisis dimensions.

Although I have stressed the problems of shifting roles and responsibilities, I think there are some distinctly advantageous consequences also. I would like to think that over the long term, these advantages will be ascendant.

Potentially, as the husband and wife develop a true partnership (and this may directly stem from the dual-work situation), it is quite possible that there will be a new sense of mutual regard and appreciation; that is, changing the long established pattern of submission and dominance to one of equality based on mutual respect, altering and potentially improving the way marital partners deal with each other.

In the most positive sense of the word, that kind of mutual respect can spread to the children in that they too can be valued for what they are and for what they are capable of becoming. This respect and value is quite possible without giving them free rein, without limits or controls.

It is worth noting, however, that even the changes change. When I was thinking about the extent to which contemporary women tend to reject traditional female roles, I ran across an
interesting article. It was headed this way: “Long Liberated Kibbutz Women in Israel Increasingly Turn Back to Their Old Female Roles.” This article described how in Israel many of the Kibbutz women are tired of being equal to men, having to work in the fields with them as well as run the machines and stand guard duty when what they really want to do is take care of their children. This trend might well appear in time in this country as well. “The more things change, the more they remain the same.”

There are still other trends that are affecting families now which are harder to read in terms of future consequences. One can already see some advantages and yet, some clear problems arising as well. One problem I would like to focus upon for a moment is the impact of the emphasis on individuals and individualism that is quite strong now. This comes in at least two obvious ways, one is rather positive, and one somewhat negative.

The positive effect is a new emphasis on individual growth and individual development. This reflects the fact that a society as affluent as ours has passed the point where most of its energies must go into sheer survival, worrying about where the next meal is going to come from; we now have the time and the money to engage in more abstract questions: what is the meaning of my life? what am I trying to accomplish? what is maturity? and am I getting there?

Widespread interest in such questions has led to a tremendous rise of Zen, of transcendental meditation, and a variety of other activities focused on helping people to enhance the satisfaction and fulfillment of living. Where these trends are leading is not so clear. Certainly the strong emphasis on individualism can, and does, leave some people so focused on their individual pleasures and their individual satisfactions that they are indifferent to the needs or interests of others. One sees this pointedly put in the adolescent phrase, “Doing your own thing.” The implication is that it doesn’t matter what you do, and shouldn’t matter to anyone else when you “do your thing.”

It is obvious that this sort of narcissism, of self-focused interest, can have quite an impact on the family. In effect, it confronts families with ongoing conflict between what is good for the family as a whole versus what is good for the individual, as exemplified by the contemporary adolescent who has time and money and wheels and minimal responsibility. Such behavior expresses this opportunism in brazen form, emphasizing pleasure for pleasure’s sake, of personal gratification to the exclusion of concern for anyone else.

A strong culturally-encouraged emphasis on indulgent individualism tends to justify the preoccupation that people have for more fun and more individual satisfaction, to the exclusion of joint activities with the family. This is very often expressed by these adolescents who don’t want to stick around to do something with the family for the weekend; they would much rather go do their thing. They have lost, to some extent, a commitment to the whole – to the family itself. But in this regard, they are not different from a great many of their elders whose attention is also focused on personal satisfaction first.

This is likely to be worse as families get smaller because by their very nature, small families teach less about the need to share. Look at the one-child family, where there is no need for them to share at all with any siblings; there is no problem about having first choice with everything since there is no conflict about having to take turns. Small families will, in fact, probably teach their children less about the importance of a helpful and collaborative attitude, and tend to exaggerate this tendency to seek first for one’s self, whether it is for pleasure, or gratification, or achievement or whatever.
Now a second emphasis on this individualism emerges in the dual-work families. No doubt this pattern provides some economic advantage, but at the cost of setting the stage for conflict. Which comes first, one’s job or the family? This is an issue that already affects many families in which only the father is working. There are many mothers and many children who have seen, and who have experienced, the consequences of living with a man who is married to his job and not to his family.

But what will happen when the wife gets into the same bag, so that both parents are pursuing their own careers? Who then is primarily responsible for the care of the family? Or put another way, how are the interests of the family to be met if both parents are pulled in diverging directions, losing contact with each other, to say nothing about losing contact with the centrum called the family? That, I think, is a serious possibility for the future, and one that has to be anticipated in terms of developing some approach to deal with it.

There is already a third consequence to this emphasis on individualism, and that is the tendency for people to seek their thrills, their stimulation, excitement, outside the family. This is compounded by the fact that there are so many exciting things to do outside the family. There are an infinite number of ways to spend one’s time or one’s money or one’s energy; one can pursue most of them without thinking the word “family” once. This, of course, is in considerable contrast to families of 50 years ago when there was no place to go and few sources of amusement, so the family generated its own excitement at home: a musical evening, a slide show of works of art, or popping corn. There was no television; there was no corner theater; there was perhaps not even a local parking lot to hang out in, but the result was a far stronger sense of being a part of a significant small group.

An emphasis on individualism reduces the effectiveness of family authority as well. When the importance of the family itself, and the psychological significance of its being the primary group, is gradually sacrificed on the altar of individualism, both father and mother lose a great deal of influence. They must more commonly use guilt or threat to influence children who are less involved with them, and less dependent upon them for information, for guidance or direction.

This conflict between the individual and the family has some serious implications which are already evident. It represents a real conflict between two “goods” – individual rights, and the rights and sanctity of the family. This is a persistent dilemma, and one which will not be solved quickly. It has some significant legal aspects, legal decisions which now affect the family, and will certainly become more prominent. This trend partly reflects some new ideas about individual rights; it reflects some broadening ideas about responsibility of the state for children at risk. But these rights for special children, such as the battered or neglected child, valuable as they are, also threaten the family’s rights and its ability to settle its own affairs.

More and more legal decisions are saying that society can step into the family and exert its wishes. This not only applies to battered children; it also may include mentally ill children. There is, for example, a challenge before the Supreme Court now regarding the rights of children who have been hospitalized in psychiatric hospitals by their parents against their will.

At issue is the view that these children have a right to counsel in order to contest the authority of their parents to hospitalize them. Think what that possibility suggests: a precedent permitting a legal battle between the child and his parents over whether or not the parent has the
authority to act on the child’s behalf by hospitalizing him for treatment – an authority that has hardly seemed in question.

There are already changes that affect custodianship in the process of divorce. Probably soon there will be child advocates serving on behalf of the children in contested cases so that children cannot be made pawns of the angry divorcing parents, or a kind of property to be fought over.

There is every prospect of a continuing tug-of-war in the struggle between society on the one hand, and the rights of the individual on the other. Generally speaking, I think most of us have this attitude: when we think about those neglected poverty stricken children who are not getting the opportunities that they should have, we say society should intervene to help and protect them – but not in my family. This little psychological split – that it is right for anyone else’s family but not mine – will be highlighted in many of the struggles – legal, moral, psychological – that lie ahead of us.

What are the conclusions? One conclusion I think is fairly clear. The family will continue to evolve; it will unquestionably develop new forms, some of which may surprise us. Instead of LTAs, we may have something else. But I think there are other influences already evident that suggest further changes lie ahead. One is that as our resources diminish, and we shift away from an indulgent consumer-oriented society, there will be a reduction in the number of labor-saving devices we depend so heavily upon now, with a return to a greater emphasis on self-reliance and a turning back to the basic unit of the family and an increase in its social, psychological and material significance.

But this decrease in available energy and resources may also increase possibilities of conflict. Without much understanding of the management of conflict, a retrenching society will have mounting frustrations which can spill over into a variety of very difficult and unpleasant situations. There is a very real need for families to learn and teach its members more about conflict management.

Another possibility promoting change in the family is the very real prospect of more leisure time. This, too, could be either an opportunity or a curse, depending on our collective skills in managing it. On the one hand, we may simply squander it with excessive self-indulgence and wasteful consumption of our ever-diminishing resources, as many do now.

On the other hand, more leisure time could provide that very thing many of us complain about having too little of – time to spend with the family. It could be an occasion for sharing, for learning, for study, for reflection, for growth that is important both in the lives of the parents as well as the children.

Another change that will undoubtedly affect the future for all of us is that as we continue to examine our child-rearing practices and discover the relationship of these practices to the mental health of our children, there will be some major opportunities for preventive interventions, or preventive activities that will improve the health of the family and the strength and stability of the children.

These possibilities ahead could be unequivocally positive given one important qualification. It is sadly true that most parents get into the business of raising families without knowing the first thing about it – even the biology of it, let alone the psychology and sociology of it.
The schools are here to train us cognitively – the three Rs, geography, and all those other good things. But most of us have no systematic means of learning about feelings and behavior, what I would call “emotional education.” Most of us have no systematic way of learning how to deal with our negative feelings – with jealousy, with feelings of anger, sadness, or isolation. We deal with them in what is kind of a seat-of-the-pants way. As parents we try our best, but we are operating largely on the basis of intuitive notions – and some of us are a lot better at this than others.

As roles change, as structures within families change, as new family forms evolve, it seems to me that it would be terribly helpful if family members acquired a good working knowledge of how to negotiate differences, how to handle conflict and disagreement in constructive ways.

What are we to do if more and more mothers take on outside responsibilities? That will make it very important for them to negotiate what it is they expect from their spouses, and vice versa – who will do what and when? As these changes that I described progress, and as the roles continue to shift, there will be more and more premium placed on having effective skills for dealing with each other – skills that are uncommon, not widely practiced, and not to be acquired without time and effort.

In addition, families of the future will have the need that normal families have now for advice and counsel in the management of the many standard crises of normal families – advice and help that few families get, and most don’t know where to find.

What kind of help? I have in mind something called, for lack of a better name, Family Communication Clinics. I think it would be valuable if ordinary, normal families could go to a neighborhood family counselor once a week, or maybe once a month, to have a session of talking together with him. His task would be to assist the members to better understand and communicate with each other, and help them learn techniques of managing difference, conflict, and strong feelings.

Unfortunately, such help is sought now only when somebody becomes sick, develops a crisis, or otherwise becomes seriously handicapped and has something called “illness.” Then we consider this kind of intervention to be appropriate. It seems to me that we would be far healthier if we all had had more guided experience as growing families, in learning to communicate better, to understand better and thus to manage the emotional life of the family better. Such learning could do much to prevent family difficulties and perhaps even mental illness.

My colleague, Dr. Cotter Hirschberg, has made an interesting suggestion. He said, “Wouldn’t it be interesting if public television, or maybe commercial television, would transmit a continuing education course on being a parent, with a test for the parents at the end. If they pass the test, they would get a tax deduction.” As an idea, that is something to think about. I’m not sure how we would be sure that they actually took the test, but there might be other ways of encouraging families to learn how to deal more effectively with its members – how to deal with the feelings that living together inevitably generates, instead of having to wait until sickness makes a trip to a psychiatrist necessary.

In short, I would say that the prospect for the year 2001 is that families will survive. It seems clear to me that the tremendous affiliative drive which we all have – the need to give and receive love and care, to nurture, to allow others to grow – is so strong that if something
happened tomorrow and families were done away with, they would be recreated the next day simply to meet this strong affiliative, nurturing need. It is only by having a family that most of us will ever achieve immortality, through the kinship and connectedness with our children. You can’t do that without having a family, and I don’t simply mean the carrying on of a name. A woman marries and loses her name but because there is a connection of kinship, the sense of relatedness carries on.

I think nothing was so powerful about the recent TV presentation of “Roots” as this emphasis of a connectedness from one generation to another, a sense of heritage, of continuity, something that so many of us feel we have lost.

I think that the task of emotional education has to be done in and by the family. It is not conceivable to me that any social agency can mold and develop a strong personality, nor create the conditions for trust and love that ultimately make all the difference in the lives of growing children.

To demonstrate this concept of connectedness, as it were, not only to others, but to the past and to the future, and as a way of emphasizing some of these moral values that I think are so central to the life of the family, I want to conclude with a favorite quotation of mine from Reinhold Niebuhr’s writings. He wrote this 25 years ago, but I think it will be equally appropriate 25 years from now, in the year 2001. To me, it summarizes in an eloquent way some of the things I have been talking about. This is what he said:

\[
\text{Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we must be saved by love.}
\]

I have already introduced Dr. Cotter Hirschberg who will come up and assist me with all of your tough questions.

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**QUESTION:** You spoke of growth of individualism and the trends toward a false sense of authority in adolescents as a result of inappropriate equality. How would you foresee that affecting the matter of drug abuse in the future?

**HIRSCHBERG:** To start us off, I would say that the problem of various kinds of addictive abuses is not new. It has taken some fairly drastic forms although it has become a more socially acceptable alternative than it used to be. But adolescents always had various kinds of addictive drugs that they made use of, primarily alcohol, as you all well know.

To specifically address your question, I think the reason for the increase in addictive use by adolescents has to do very much with the issue that Doctor Roy was talking about regarding family structure. Too many families in our culture today lack a sense of positive conviction; they lack an ethic around which they function. As a result, they fail to communicate a sense of responsibility to the children who grow up within the family.

I think various functions of the family have been turned over to the church. What I believe is going to come, and probably will be part of the family in 2001, is a very, very old
concept, a return to the family itself as the locus in which ethics and values are constructed. The values will come out of interactions within the family.

To take a very prosaic example: If families can demonstrate to their children how conflict is handled within the family, the children will not need to be defeated by a failure to manage conflict outside. How to manage such feelings as anger ought to be learned in the family interaction.

In the face of trying to deal with angry feelings either to them or from them, adolescents often resort to various kinds of drugs. There is constructive use of anger that can be very well exemplified and learned within the family. If father and mother can differ, if father and mother can conflict, if father and mother can quarrel safely, if father and mother can get angry without damage or destruction, if the whole family can get angry with each other without losing touch or breaking off from each other, families by 2001 will be able to convey, I hope, a sense of what really is the essence of democracy. In this case, democracy being the ability of a group of people to differ, to quarrel, to conflict to challenge, and still end up safe, and end up healthy.

MENNINGER: One other response occurs to me, and that is that many teenagers get into difficulty because they have such a feeling of disconnectedness. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the life of a typical 15-year-old. At that age, there is only one thing he can do that is legal, and that is go to school. He can’t drink, he can’t drive, he can’t work, he can’t smoke, he can’t gamble, he can’t join the Army, he can’t vote, he can’t do most of the activities that TV, the mass media, and our culture say in a thousand ways, “Come ahead, enjoy! Do! This is living!” All we say to him is, “You have to go to school.”

I think that many of the 15-year-olds find that too irrelevant and too passive a form of participation in contemporary social living at a time in life and a time in our culture when activity is encouraged and rewarded.

A part of the drug activity may simply relate to the frustration at having no better role in life than to sit still and wait until age 18.

QUESTION: I would like your comments on another type of connectedness that I don’t think you mentioned. You mentioned the loss of the extended family in that many of the children of this generation don’t know their grandparents like we knew ours.

You also mentioned that 80 percent of men who were divorced, remarried. With the divorce rate at 35 percent, many of the women whom they remarry have themselves been divorced. So from the child’s point of view, another form of connectedness might emerge in that children from reconstituted families find themselves with four parents. And despite the guardianship that the court gives at the time of divorce, from the child’s point of view, he still moves into a situation where he doubles his number of parents.

Can you comment on this.

HENNINGER: It adds a sense of connectedness I suspect, but at a price of diffusion. In fact, if the mother remarries to somebody who is also remarrying, one can conceivably get 8 parents; 6 stepparents and 2 parents. By that time, I think the possibility of having a lineal sense has been severely threatened, replaced with a sense of dilution and reduction.
There is one other way that is worth noting. It is very clear that we are fast becoming an elderly nation. This may allow us to develop new relationships with our youth – as foster-grandparents.

Margaret Mead is fond of emphasizing this notion: If every person in an old folks home could spend half a day each week in the schools becoming acquainted with, or friendly with, one or two children and vice versa, and if at periodic intervals these children could visit their grandparents and other elderly people, wouldn’t they develop a significant cross-generational connection?

Such an exchange might give the child a sense of continuity with the past, and help to make up in a small way for some of the confusion that this multiple intermarrying that you refer to produces. It would certainly give the elderly a new sense of being needed, of being a part of the social fabric again.

QUESTION: I agree with your idea about tasks of the local education belonging to the family, and yet the family is ill-prepared to carry out that task. Is there any significant work going on to address that problem, that is, preparing families to handle that task?

MENNINGER: It’s hard to know how to answer that accurately. One of the most prominent right now is, unfortunately, motivated by a great deal of commercialism which may dilute its effectiveness. I refer to Parent Effectiveness Training, which is essentially applying a learning theory approach to parenthood. It does have the benefit of teaching parents more effective ways of dealing with problems than they might know otherwise.

Perhaps one of the most exciting possibilities coming along now is the growth of family therapy. This approach does both teach and treat. It does assist in managing family sickness, but it is clear that already much of what has been learned from that experience is relevant to helping families learn to manage “normal” hang-ups of family living, but there are real logistical problems in trying to make such help widely available to the many families who could use it.

Cotter, do you know of any other ways that are developing to teach this?

HIRSCHBERG: The only other answer which I think is very relevant is that President and Mrs. Carter are currently in the process of forming a Presidential Commission on Youth, part of which will be directed toward the whole question of family education.

The other part of the answer is practiced by certain church groups; that is, where the family is encouraged to have a communication hour, a family evening in which the family is asked to share their problems, struggles, feelings, and dilemmas. Some effort is made to make this a united issue, not just one child’s issue or a mother’s issue.

MENNINGER: That is a very good point to be reminded of. Maybe one of the resurgences in the future will be through the agency of the church. Many of you may have spent a weekend at a marriage retreat, a weekend-long activity under the aegis of one of the many church groups which have developed such programs. This may be an increasingly important role that churches can effectively take; they have both the means and the opportunity to reestablish a sense of religious connectedness that very closely relates to some of the psychological issues that I have touched upon.
QUESTION: Is there something that the people in America could learn by studying the cultures of other nations which are perhaps more aggressive in this respect than we are? Or are there any nations more aggressive in that sense?

MENNINGER: I think there is much to be learned from other cultures. The trouble with studying other cultures is the tendency to draw the wrong conclusions. If you take a look at family relationships in Sweden, for example, you may very well conclude that this is only possible because of their very heavily subsidized welfare system.

These are contradictory trends. Families may do very well in Sweden, but that country also has the highest suicide rate of any country in the world. I don’t know whether one is related to the other. Certainly there are enough variations in the way people organize their lives together that a lot can be learned. I think one has to be cautious about the meanings we may attach to the observations we make about other cultures.

QUESTION: You talked about trends and projections. It strikes me that there is a certain irony in the area of causes. Could you elaborate at all on the causes you see, or the threats, or challenges that families face. The one thing you have emphasized is technology, and at an MRI forum of this type, I’d like you to elaborate a little on that.

MENNINGER: If I had to pick one cause, I would not pick technology. I would pick affluence. Sure, technology is significant because, among other things, it makes possible the high information input that overwhelms some families, whether it is large numbers of magazines, or the television. It makes possible the high mobility patterns which increase the separateness family members develop. But I think it is wrong to put technology up as the scapegoat and say it is because of all these things that we are in the trouble we are in.

I think it would be more accurate to say that our failures are the result of our successes. That is to say, simply because we have been so effective at overcoming time and space and information-transfer, we have now created a whole new generation of consequences which are in turn our problems.

I think that the matter is not to be a Luddite, trying to turn the clock back by saying we want to do away with technology. It is instead a matter of putting emphasis on something which has lagged behind; namely, our understanding of human emotions and behavior.

If I had a criticism to make of our public school system, it would be that it has put cognitive learning at the top at all costs, treating emotions and behavior as a kind of extraneous by-product of thought that should be suppressed, if not amputated altogether. And the result of the suppression and denial of the role of emotions has given all of us a rather accurate impression that we don’t know how to handle our feelings very well. I would prefer to see a new emphasis on effective or emotional learning, rather than blaming technology and urging that we turn back the clock to a simpler life.

QUESTION: With the changes you are predicting for the family, what changes do you foresee in the role of the family physician?

MENNINGER: A major change in the role of the family physician is that he has become nonexistent. So the question really is what can reestablish this role.
I am a severe critic of the tendency toward high specialization that has split medicine into a thousand fragments, and has placed great value on high technology and teaching to the exclusion of some concern for the patient.

As a medical student I, and I expect Cotter too, was asked to go into a hospital ward and told to examine the third liver on the right – as if it occupied a bed all its own. It so happened that that liver was in a body belonging to a person, but that fact was, unfortunately, irrelevant to the task of teaching medicine to the medical student.

To address your question more specifically, I am encouraged by a new emphasis on developing something called the primary physician who will, I hope, accept as his responsibility the whole family. Just as medicine has split up the body, it has also split up the family. You have to go to a gynecologist if you are a woman with “female” problems, and go to a urologist for problems in another organ system right next door. You may have to go to a lung specialist or a heart specialist, or an ENT specialist or, for that matter, even a psychiatrist, no one of whom is looking at the whole body, let alone the whole family. Not yet do we have a single family physician who will put it all together for us, for our spouses or for our children.

Hopefully, the primary physician will keep the family as his focus for attention rather than the single patient. I hope this new approach will succeed, although the economics and politics of medicine are formidable problems which may defeat it.

QUESTION: You said that 80 percent of the divorced men were getting remarried. What percentage of women are getting remarried?

MENNINGER: Seventy-five percent, although that may be a little high.

QUESTION: Why do you feel that way? Is there a special reason why you think women aren’t getting remarried?

MENNINGER: I can think of two obvious reasons. Men have considerably greater mobility to meet new prospective mates, and the social sanction that goes with that. They have a freedom to move easily and much more aggressively than is possible for most women. It would be very hard for a woman to go in search of a husband without being called names that would simply not be applied to a man in the same position.

But I think there is another reason, and that is the man’s outlook is based on and dedicated to an outward view, to an attack on the environment. As a result, men are not very good at taking care of themselves. They need a mate who accepts that responsibility. Consequently, when they are mateless as a result of divorce, men have serious problems in adjusting to taking care of themselves. They have been used to being taken care of by a wife. Hence, I think there is a strong psychological need for remarriage.

That may increase their search for a new partner. Now I think women have such needs, too, but they have a different way of dealing with that because much of their taking care of is done in relation to children. And much of their reward system comes from children as well.

QUESTION: Earlier you referred to the fact that in the two-career family there may be minimal parenting going on. Have you ideas about how that could be made more effective rather than diminished?

MENNINGER: If one had the power to do so, it would be helpful to have a consciousness-raising device, which emphasized repeatedly the importance of a family and what
it is. My impression is that the requirement of the two-job world – and I have nothing against the economic need for it – is that once one is locked into that kind of system, it is very easy to forget about one’s secondary responsibilities to the family, unless there is something emphatically reminding one that there must be plans or provisions made for the family as a whole.

It is possible that the four-day work week will become prevalent. It appears to be increasing after a lapse of some years when it was not regarded so highly. This may provide some new opportunities for joint family activities.

I don’t think I have a very good answer to that question. The most I can say is that I see it as something that is a real problem to be addressed and one for which answers are not very easy or very obvious.

QUESTION: In the 18 percent of the families that are still in the traditional mode, do you suspect that some of them are that way simply because they are not up with the times, as it were, but are people who could be? That is, both parties could be professionals, and yet they have children and stick with the traditional mode precisely in order to provide a protection from many of the things you are talking about. What do you think the possibilities are that there are a significant number of settings that permit them to do that?

MENNINGER: I doubt that the 18 percent still following a traditional pattern are doing so primarily out of deference to their children.

I think that is a secondary benefit from a way of living that is both possible and compatible with the psychological styles of husband and wife, and they prefer those problems to the alternative. Take for example the wife who is a physician and is married to a physician. It may simply be too stressful for their relationship if both of them pursue their individual, and perhaps their preferred, worlds of each being a physician, so they elect a compromise: the traditional form, wife remaining at home, where she accepts the responsibility of caring for the children.

I am not sure that the fact that one gives up a profession and stays at home is automatically beneficial for the children, especially if resentfully done. It is the kind of choice that has no simple solution. This is one of those difficult issues that every married couple has to negotiate. That is, who is going to do what, when.

One of the reasons that marriages of adolescents fare so poorly is that each of them comes into the marriage on the assumption, an immature or even infantile one, that the purpose of the marriage is for one to be given to by the other. When both of them have that point of view, conflict is inevitable, and often destructive of the marriage.

In older marriages where there has been a decision reached, it is often because they feel that is the least stressful of various alternatives. My complaint is that very often those arrangements, and some of them are “arrangements,” are arrived at passively or in desperation without the benefit of the kind of thoughtful discussion that would really examine the prices and the benefits, the alternatives really available to them. Here again, this often reflects the fact that very few couples know how to talk to each other.

QUESTION: With regard to emotional education by and for the family, and with regard to transactional analysis, do you believe that TA is a concept that can be more easily learned by the members of the family?
MENNINGER: I think TA could be learned by the family. TA is, after all, a Freudian psychoanalytic theory, translated into common parts. So I am not so alienated from it as you might think.

My experience with it, however, is that the theoretical base for it is so thin in the minds of many of the people who use it that it tends to have a gimmicky quality. It often deteriorates into a kind of word magic. You utter little phrases, “Ah, that’s the child in you talking, isn’t it,” and you think you are supposed to be flooded with insight at that moment and say, “I shall forever change.” Oddly enough, you don’t!

In the hands of self-taught dispensers of TA who are not trained as clinicians, who do not have a thoughtful understanding of the complexity of human behavior, it can be a superficial, manipulative approach that lacks sensitivity and tends to substitute intellectualism for understanding.

On the other hand, were those provisos in the hands of someone who really understands what he is doing, I see no reason why it cannot be an effective approach, even as parent effectiveness training can for somewhat the same reasons and with somewhat the same handicaps.

HIRSCHBERG: The only thing I want to add is that Doctor Roy can say the same thing for psychiatrists. In the hands of a well-trained, competent psychiatrist, good therapy gets done. In the hands of a poorly trained, incompetent psychiatrist, less good therapy gets done.

MENNINGER: And as it so often turns out, the significant element is the relationship between the helper and the helpee.

QUESTION: Are you indicating that it is not exactly a hopeless situation, but that emotional education is a very complex matter and there is hardly any way for family members to learn it and apply it?

MENNINGER: No, I think I have overstated something. I was asked specifically about how well TA worked for emotional education. I say that if it is done well, it can be useful. I think if there were some easy answers on acquiring emotional learning I wouldn’t have to be raising the question about how we accomplish it. But, I don’t want to imply that it is an impossible task.

I think the reason we don’t have very good answers to this is that it really has not been considered particularly important by most people. There is a strong tendency for most of us to regard emotions as something in the way, much as schooling has taught us. What I am suggesting is that if we would give our attention to understanding emotions as a legitimate task and then ask the question of how we could go about solving this, we could develop TA; we could develop more systematic ways of teaching; we could employ a number of other methods. My pessimism comes from the resistance people have in acknowledging the importance of the issue more than from the lack of useful approaches.

HIRSCHBERG: There is another part to this we really haven’t touched upon because of the focus we have taken.

A lot of emotional learning needs to take place in the early months of life. An enormous amount can be done to bring about genuinely effective emotional education by supporting the interactions between infant and mother during the first six months of life - the sense of a basic
trust, the sense of faith, the sense of a belief in the security and the values that wants can be met. All of these lessons are learned very early in life.

I think very good answers come out of many of the programs that provide not only for education in how to be a good mother, but expectant parents’ classes and social legislation that provides for well-baby clinics and provide for opportunities for mothers and young babies to be able to interact and learn.

Young mothers need to learn something about what to expect from babies. It is the infant who cues the mother, not the mother who provokes a response from the baby. That mother can look for very real and important signs – the kinds of mothering a young infant will need. The kinds of support we give to unwed mothers, to young families and to early childhood education is a very important part of emotional education, and a very positive part of it.

QUESTION: In view of the broad spectrum of new ideas coming out amongst children particularly, how do you distinguish normal from abnormal behavior?

HIRSCHBERG: Perhaps something that both Roy and I should have said at the beginning is that there are no fundamental truths on what is normality and what is illness in families. Families and children probably differ more than they have items in common. They differ religiously, in economic status, in subcultures, in geography, and what is normal within one particular subculture is looked upon as deviant within another.

In the Hispanic subculture the maternal grandmother is a very revered figure in most families. I would say to you that probably in most white, Protestant families, the grandmother-in-law is the most feared figure that exists, even more than mother-in-law. So one has to ask the question of normality always within context.

There is no such thing as an abstract normality. You give me a particular individual or child in a particular contextual family social setting, and I might be able to tell you whether in that setting, with that family, in that subculture, with that particular child and his background, the behavior is normal.

I think in all fairness, I should tell you that Roy and I were in a discussion the other night and came to a conclusion as to what we were going to have as our epitaph. So that you can really sense our theory, we are going to have engraved on our tombstone when we die: “Straightened Out At Last.”
ROY W. MENNINGER is president of The Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas, and a leading authority in psychiatry, neurology, and human relations.

The Menninger Foundation is an institution dedicated to treatment, education, application, and research in psychiatry. It is recognized as one of the world’s leading psychiatric institutions.

Dr. Menninger earned an M.D. from Cornell University Medical College in 1951 and was certified in the specialty of psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology in 1959. After several years of residency and practice in Massachusetts, and service with the U.S. Army in Austria, he joined the staff of the Menninger Foundation in 1961, becoming president in 1967.

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MIDCONTINENT PERSPECTIVES was a lecture series sponsored by the Midwest Research Institute as a public service to the midcontinent region. Its purpose was to present new viewpoints on economic, political, social, and scientific issues that affect the Midwest and the nation.

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Initiated in 1974 and continuing until 1994, the sessions of the Midcontinent Perspectives were arranged and convened by Dr. Kimball at four- to six-week intervals. Attendance was by invitation, and the audience consisted of leaders in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The lectures, in monograph form, were later distributed to several thousand individuals and institutions throughout the country who were interested in MRI and in the topics addressed.

The Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, in cooperation with MRI, has reissued the Midcontinent Perspectives Lectures in electronic format in order to make the valuable information which they contain newly accessible and to honor the creator of the series, Dr. Charles N. Kimball.