

PSYCHIATRY

# Averting Disaster in College

## Troubled Students Ask the Psychiatrist To Chart a Safe Course Through Many Kinds of Threatening Difficulties

By JANE STAFFORD

THE co-ed who has a date every night in the week is not the girl who needs advice in solving her problems. Nor is the athlete and fraternity leader, so busy with student activities that he fails to give enough time to his studies, in danger of serious failure, though both of these may cause their anxious parents many an uneasy moment.

Problems of sex and social relations do loom high in the list of student difficulties, but it is not the "flaming youth" element in the colleges that has serious trouble with these problems.

Strangely enough, the college girl who "hates men" and devotes herself exclusively to her roommate or some other girl needs to be rescued by the college psychiatrist from a much graver predicament than faces the co-ed of the proms and rumble-seat petting parties.

Likewise, the quiet boy who shuns girls and parties and leads a solitary life with no apparent outside distractions is the one who needs expert help to save him from failing both at college and throughout the rest of his life.

The story of one such lad, typical of hundreds of others, and the steps by which he was saved from the unhappy fate in store for him were told, at a recent meeting of psychiatrists, by Dr. Sidney Kinnear Smith of the psychiatric service of the University of California. Sex was a feature of this student's difficulties, though it was not the whole problem.

### Reputed "High-Brow"

Although he had had the reputation of being a "high-brow," this boy was sent to the psychiatrist by the college authorities because he was failing miserably in his studies. Actually, he was suffering from unsuspected mental aberration which might have led him to an insane asylum.

He himself explained his failures in studies by saying that he "hated the whole business." That was at his first interview with the psychiatrist. Then it turned out that he was leading a very

solitary life. He had made no friends among his college mates, did not go to parties and have dates in the usual college way, but deliberately avoided contacts with other people and particularly shunned girls. Instead of entering into the college life, he was living in a dream world of his own, peopled with creatures of his imagination. Occasionally he had hallucinations.

Eventually even his studies gave way to this internal world, taking second place in his attention and getting less and less of his time. Naturally he "hated the whole business," by which he meant the demands of university life, because it interfered with the dream world from which he got his emotional satisfaction.

However, he was still sane enough to appreciate that he was living an abnormal life.

Going back into his past history, the psychiatrist learned that since early childhood there had been friction between the boy and his family, particularly his father, who ridiculed him as a "high-brow" when he was in his teens.

### Not Helped on Problems

Important problems which arose at this growing-up age were poorly handled and without the aid of a healthy point of view. As a result, he began to shun girls just at the age when he should have naturally sought their society, and all interest of that sort became to him a thing of filth and disgust.

This was the situation which had caused him to withdraw from the usual contacts of his age and to create for himself a world of day dreams to satisfy newly-developed needs and cravings.

The first efforts of the psychiatrists were to show this nineteen-year-old youth the steps by which he had built up this dream world.

They explained how his love of his mother made him jealous of his father and other members of the family and made him resent any attention given them by his mother. This led to the feeling of antagonism between himself and the others in the family and was the basic cause of the constant friction

and conflict. He was shown how, to escape this unpleasant situation, he began to build up an imaginary world in which everything was just as he wished it to be.

"We tried to show this young man the basis for his attitude toward girls," Dr. Smith related, "and finally something as to his reason for shutting himself off from normal contacts. Supplementary to this procedure we worked out with him a reasonable but cautious plan for wider association."

As a result, the home relationship has improved. He has no more hallucinations and very little of the imagining and day dreaming which the psychiatrists term "phantasy production." Last semester, he secured a minor position on one of the university publications.

### Sex Problems More Difficult

The problems of the students whose sexual adjustment is abnormal are not so easy to solve. Some of these involve only the student himself, sometimes his roommate or a close friend is involved. Formerly, as soon as a student was found involved in this latter type of difficulty, he or she was immediately dropped from the university. Now the psychiatrist tries to improve the situation, first by psychoanalysis to discover any underlying cause of the difficulty; then by teaching the student to have a better understanding of the problem and a different attitude toward his mates; and finally by getting him to take more interest in and devote more energy to athletics, studies, or some healthful hobby or outside activity.

Besides rescuing many students from dangerous situations of this type, the psychiatrists were able to save many more from being overwhelmed by other difficulties of college life.

Some of these students seek the psychiatrist of their own accord, to get help with their problems. Others are sent by the health department of the university. Here are a few of the reasons given for seeking advice from the psychiatrist:

Student No. 1 had influenza in 1925 and since then has been "nervous" and having occasional "dizzy spells." University work is of a poor grade.

Student No. 2 complains of a variety of pains without (*Turn to Page 237*)

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# Guidance of Psychiatrist Turns Student Failure Into Success

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any apparent disease condition to account for them. There is insanity in the family and the student shows signs of having periods of mild depression. (Depression to the psychiatrist means something considerably more severe and serious than the discouragement you may experience at the end of a disappointing day or the low feeling that hits you the morning after a big party.)

Student No. 3 has many ideas of persecution, dating back to his childhood. He has been referred to the psychiatric department on account of numerous very unpleasant contacts with the doctors and nurses of the University Health Service.

Student No. 4 has periods of blushing and profuse sweating at casual contacts with other students.

Student No. 5 complains of a depression of three months' duration. He is failing in the last semester of his senior year. He is eating one meal a day and at the time first seen had only seventy-five cents.

While this last student was a senior, the majority coming for aid with their problems are freshmen and sophomores. Financial problems and actual nervous or mental disease, such as epilepsy, are among the difficulties the university students have to face.

## Troubles Concern Other Students

Most of their troubles, however, arise over questions of their relations with other students, either of the same or the opposite sex. Sexual aspects of life appear to be given more consideration and speculation at the college age than at any other time. Worry over these problems causes sleepless nights and unhappy, wasted days. It leads to failure on the part of even the best-prepared students, the "sharks" of the high school graduating class.

The psychiatrists were able to see the greatest improvement from their treatment and advice in the cases of college boys and girls who were worried over sex or whose abnormal attitude toward it was leading them into trouble of a grave nature. But they were nearly as successful in helping those students who were unhappy and even on the way to nervous breakdown over their in-

ability to fit themselves into the new life they found at college.

"This group of students is of necessity large, and probably larger in an institution like the University of California, than in a smaller school," Dr. Smith explained in a report to the American Psychiatric Association. "In this group are many students, mostly freshmen, who bring maladjustment problems to the University Health Service because of the friendly feeling between physician and student.

"We find that the boy who comes from a small high school is often over-

whelmed by the environment of a large university. His home situation has been suddenly changed; even his food is different; he doesn't know the university geography, doesn't know what is expected of him, and doesn't know how to study. It takes him six months or a year to come to any comfortable and reasonable balance. Such students need supervision and bolstering to tide them over this period, and need primarily someone to talk to. They are lonesome and out of their depth. Assistance at this stage may well mean that the boy can go on to a well-rounded, healthy university life, instead of becoming discontented and shut-in.

"The procedure instituted for such boys varies. First, we attempt to see that they are in a proper boarding house, or if they are in fraternities, that the upper classmen of the house cooperate in

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handling the situation. Well-balanced programs of work, sleep and recreation are suggested. Some kind of recreational extracurricular activity is urged, even in their first year. These students are advised to go in for glee-club work, dramatics, or activity among students in the local churches, since most of the Berkeley churches have student pastors who cooperate closely with us in handling such problems. The statistics that have been compiled show that the bulk of these students are non-fraternity men."

Typical of this situation was the case of a nineteen-year-old boy who might be called Tom. He came to the psychiatrist complaining that he could not sleep.

**Curing Insomnia**

Tom had had an excellent school record and had been a "big man" of his year at the rural high school he had attended. He came to the university without enough money to see him through his course, so he got himself a job washing dishes for his room and board in a fraternity house. He was barely passing in his classes and the first mid-term examinations worried him greatly. He was given a "cinch" notice in chemistry. He didn't go out for any of the teams, and limited his exercise to the least possible amount of work in the gymnasium. He had not been to a single party or student gathering since coming to the university, and did not know more than twenty-five students on the campus, and not any of them well.

Feeling that he was out of his depth he began looking around for help and so came to the psychiatrist. The first thing that was done to arrange a change of work, so that he could meet other students at meal times and gain more acquaintances in that way.

Next he was put in contact with an understanding member of the faculty in the department in which he expected to major. He was given a note to the student pastor of his church affiliation.

Then he was helped to get a minor part in one of the university dramatic productions.

Finally, he was given advice and help in planning for himself a well-balanced program of study, exercise, food and recreation. In this way Tom was helped to find friends and a place for himself in the complicated university life.

Tom's problem was apparent, even to himself, and the treatment consisted largely in practical advice and bolstering of his self-esteem. The causes of some of the other students' difficulties were not so easy to find, and required more elaborate psychiatric treatment.

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Science News Letter, October 7, 1933

**Giant Cactus Afflicted With Plant Tumors**

**T**HE SOUTHWEST'S giant tree cactus, or sahuaro, is susceptible to crown gall, a tumorous growth caused by bacteria, that afflicts many species of plants. Some of the growths on the cacti become very large, Prof. J. G. Brown and M. M. Evans of the University of Arizona, have reported to *Science*. One, found attached to the root of a huge cactus by a short stalk, had a diameter of ten inches and weighed eight and one-half pounds.

The discovery of these gall-afflicted cacti in areas far from any human cultivation, present or past, is taken by Prof. Brown as evidence against the theory that crown gall was introduced by pioneer Spanish missionaries.

Science News Letter, October 7, 1933

**ZOOLOGY**

**Scientists to Probe Private Life of Hibernating Bear**

**T**HE PRIVATE life of a black bear during the period of hibernation is to be the object of study next winter by Frank Childs, district ranger of the Old Faithful District of Yellowstone National Park, with the assistance of Ranger Ed O'Donnell.

Mr. Childs says one of the favorite questions of Yellowstone visitors is "What do the bears do in the winter?" So he plans to lure a yearling bear into an artificial den in which, like the gold-

fish of publicity fame, he will be under observation. The hibernating period in the Yellowstone usually is from November to March.

To make possible this study, Ranger Childs is burying a 50-gallon barrel in the ground, putting straw and hay in it to make an inviting bed, and completely closing it except for a den leading into the barrel. Into this the yearling black bear will be enticed.

From the top of the barrel nearest the surface an oblong slit has been cut which will be accessible from the surface. Throughout the winter Ranger Childs plans to make regular trips to the artificial bear den to observe his sleeping protégé. He believes that in this way he will get material regarding bears in their native state which can not be obtained from a study of the hibernating habits of bears in captivity.

Ranger Childs also has rigged up two smaller barrels in similar fashion for the prospective use of a male and a female marmot so that the hibernating habits of these animals also may be studied. He used two barrels as he says is not sure that Mrs. Woodchuck allows company during the winter.

Science News Letter, October 7, 1933

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