

Finding a Perfect Mate Starts With Self

The online world is negatively affecting the American dating scene. If you didn't suspect that already, an experience recorded by Villanova professor Anna Bonta Moreland over at [*First Things*](#) will make that clear.

Moreland explains how she gave her students an online discussion assignment to share their dating experiences. The results were very moving and revealed how tired these young people were of what's known as the hook-up culture. Yet when she got them into class to discuss, they clammed up. It was too personal to utter these things face to face, even though her students were used to barraging all in online dating relationships (sometimes literally!).

"What have these dating apps done to young people like my students?" she asks. I would expand that question further, for I don't believe it is just dating apps that have made it so difficult for young people to settle down and raise a traditional family. Instead, it is the idea that perfection is necessary in order to achieve marriage.

The quest for perfection is undoubtedly fostered by our need for instant gratification in a materialistic society. As Moreland says of her students, "they settle for a quick fix, a temporary satiation of a deep, human desire to love and be loved, to know and be known," always thinking that eventually they will find the perfect mate...but just not right now. The online world reinforces this idea by presenting too many options—one potential spouse offers great charisma, but then another one offers great kindness, while a third has an intelligent mind. If only a person could find every perfect quality in one package, a package where the chemistry explodes when it finally interacts with the one who receives it!

The quest for perfection is also fostered by fear of repeating the mistakes of past generations, namely the divorce mentality that permeates American culture. Because so many of today's young people were raised in broken homes, they are scared to even try marriage. So they engage in a number of short-term relationships, hooking-up with first this one, then that one, then moving on to another when the last one disappoints, always seeking that soul mate who will satisfy all their needs and never leave them.

Unfortunately, the quest for perfection in a mate and marriage is futile, a fact which [Alexander Riley explores in a review](#) of Jordan Peterson's latest book, *Beyond Order*, in the October issue of *Chronicles Magazine*. Instead of wasting effort on imagining and searching for perfection in others, Riley agrees with Peterson's suggestion that individuals cultivate their own character, seeking to prepare and refine themselves to take on the responsibility of marriage:

Contrary to the dominant message in this culture, one does not find the perfect partner and marriage. One makes a good match by constant effort and the steadfast will to persevere in the relationship. People waiting for perfect matches will find their idealism getting in the way of the practical work on self that is necessary to become the kind of person capable of being married to one other person for a lifetime.

In essence, those who want to marry and marry well will work on themselves first. They won't waste time swiping left and right or hooking up with this one or that one to test if perfection is there. In rejecting this quest for their ideal and focusing on improving self instead, they will learn to deny themselves, an all-important quality which will actually make a relationship and then marriage between two imperfect people work.

It is good and right that young people should be careful about whom they choose to marry. But in that caution, they should be

the ones doing the work to ensure that their future spouse marries a selfless person.

—

Image Credit:

Pxfuel