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# The Unwed Mother: The Psychological and Sociological Factors

Norman Stoppenhagen

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, normstop@att.net

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THE UNWED MOTHER:  
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS

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A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
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in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by  
Norman W. Stoppenhagen

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Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The illegitimacy that has become an integral part of society is not a crisis but a long-term trend,<sup>1</sup> and the handmaid of its presence in the world is the problem of the unwed mother. Social workers, counselors of every variety, and pastors of all denominations have attempted to terminate, or at least to slow down, this stigma on the record of society, but many feel that their efforts have gone to no avail. The evidence of their failure shows itself in a twofold way -- in the extent of the problem of unwed motherhood as it is known in recent years and in the complexity of the malady.

The extent of unwed motherhood in the United States is known, for the most part, only from its inevitable result in the production of an illegitimate child, and even statistics gathered from this point of view are limited. Data on illegitimacy are based on information from thirty-four states and the District of Columbia; however, in order that national statistics might be accessible, figures for the remaining sixteen states are estimated by the United States Census Bureau. The incompleteness of the data further lies in the facts that births to married women are not reported as illegitimate even though the husband is not the father of the child, that the birth record might be falsified, that the legal definition of illegitimacy varies between states, and that some illegitimate births may not be registered at all.<sup>2</sup> White, unwed mothers make a clear definition of the vastness of the trend toward unwed motherhood more difficult by often traveling

to the very states which do not report illegitimacy in order to give birth secretly and place the child for adoption. The move prevents registration of the birth either in the state where the birth took place or in the mother's state of residence. Among the states in this category are New York, California, and Massachusetts, which also rate high in population in the United States.<sup>3</sup> These factors greatly hinder a precise census of illegitimacy.

Despite these restraints on its work, the National Vital Statistics Division, Public Health Service of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare reported in 1960 that there were 224,300 births out of wedlock.<sup>4</sup> Helen Terkelsen in her book, Counseling the Unwed Mother, (page 21), applies the number of illegitimacies to the root of the trouble when she asserts that approximately 250,000 young women are pregnant out of wedlock each year. These pregnancies were responsible for 240,300 illegitimate children in 1961 (5.63 percent of all live births in the United States) and 245,100 in 1962 (5.88 percent).<sup>5</sup> Illegitimacy rose in 1963 to 259,400 births.<sup>6</sup> This increase also implies an increase in the number of pregnancies among unwed mothers. A report issued in 1960 by the Bureau of Family Services of the Department of Health, Welfare, and Education posited that 2.5 million children in the United States under eighteen years of age had been born out of wedlock.<sup>7</sup> The total grew over the next three years so that four percent of the nation's children under eighteen years of age were labelled illegitimate and an estimated seven million people in the United States, four percent of the total population, had no legitimately married mothers.<sup>8</sup> The awesome increase and the enormous impact of the statistical totals indicate the rapidly

expanding extent of unwed motherhood.

Perhaps a breakdown of the sums would delineate the puzzle better and dispel some false opinions with regard to it. Authorities who assign the majority of the difficulty to teenage girls probably base their assumption on the knowledge that teenagers represented forty percent of all unmarried mothers in 1962, the largest proportion of any age group,<sup>9</sup> and that 91,700 illegitimate births were attributed to teenage girls in 1960.<sup>10</sup> However, these statistics must remain in their context. From them it is obvious that the greater portion of unwed mothers were not teenagers -- minus sixty percent, in fact.

Teenagers naturally constitute a majority of unmarried women of child-bearing age. In 1960 they made up sixty-eight percent of that category.<sup>11</sup> Another factor that places the teenage involvement in proper perspective is the point that illegitimacy rates have increased least of all for the teenager since 1938 among all women who are able to bear children.<sup>12</sup> Although fifteen teenage girls per thousand gave birth to illegitimate offspring in 1962, the rate was forty per thousand among the twenty-to-thirty age group.<sup>13</sup> The latter had the highest rate among all age groups and is presently increasing the most. The teenage unwed mother actually distinguished herself by decreasing from 1945 to 1960.<sup>14</sup> The participation of teenagers in unwed motherhood has been greatly exaggerated and abused by many surveyors of the problem. A close look at the data on illicit birth suggests that censure of youthful misbehavior diverts attention from adult misbehavior and ignores the ninety to ninety-five percent of our young people whose sexual behavior is very likely more exemplary than that of the adults whom they are continually admonished to "grow up and

act like."<sup>15</sup>

Due to the estimation and concealment inherent in statistics on unwed motherhood, Leontine Young, Professor in the School of Social Administration at Ohio State University, supplies the most correct picture of the extent of the problem: "No one knows how many girls, yearly, become illegitimately pregnant, but the number is certainly far higher than is generally assumed by the public."<sup>16</sup> It is this conclusion that leads to a confrontation with this enigma that has grown in such proportions in society that its disruptive, immoral influence can no longer be overlooked.

Simply to know the extent of unwed motherhood does not supply a solution to it. Investigators also look at the complexity of the trouble, and its ambiguity certainly does not help. The term "unmarried mother" carries a vagueness in itself. It may include one who has never been married; or one who is now divorced, in the process of being divorced, or is separated from her husband and illegitimately pregnant.<sup>17</sup>

The many factors that make the unwed mother a most difficult case to remedy have stimulated continuous debate about a single cause for its occurrence. Nevertheless, most authorities are too versed on the multiplicity of possible causes to accept this debate as a valid one and concentrate rather on a variety of emotional, social, and environmental factors.<sup>18</sup> The fact that pregnancy before marriage is no longer treated as a social or emotional symptom of the real disorder shows progress toward a greater understanding of the predicament and the people involved.<sup>19</sup> Although advancement is being made, there is no sure answer in the immediate future that will eliminate the unwed

mother as an integral element of our social composition. Bernard L. Busfield, Jr., Staff Psychiatrist of the Massachusetts Mental Health Center in Boston, says of the lack of a solution:

Uncertainty in handling the problem of the unwed mother arises to a large extent from the complexity of the problem which involves prenatal, medical, and emotional care of the mother, a realistic plan for the infant, and financial, legal, and emotional involvement of the alleged father. It is further complicated by the families of the couple, the social climate of the community, and the availability of legal or social resources.<sup>20</sup>

The many elements in each individual case prevents one from compiling the characteristic aspects of the unmarried mother into a unified whole. This study will comprise an examination of two of the general factors which contribute to the dilemma of the unwed mother -- the psychological and the sociological. Through a greater knowledge of the influence which the psychological and the sociological factors exert on young womanhood, the problem of the unwed mother will be better understood.

## FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Herzog, "Unmarried Mothers: Some Questions to be Answered and Some Answers to be Questioned," Child Welfare, October, 1962, p. 341.

<sup>2</sup>Helen E. Martz, "Illegitimacy and Dependency," Abstract from U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Indicators, Washington, D. C., September, 1963, p. XVI.

<sup>3</sup>Herzog, op. cit., pp. 345-346.

<sup>4</sup>Hannah M. Adams and Ursula M. Gallagher, "Some Facts and Observations About Illegitimacy," Children, March-April, 1963, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup>Martz, op. cit., p. XIX.

<sup>6</sup>Statistical Abstract of the U. S.: 1965. U. S. Bureau of the Census; Washington, D. C., 1965, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup>Helen E. Terkelsen, Counseling the Unwed Mother (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., c. 1964), p. 20. <sup>a</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Martz, op. cit., p. XV.

<sup>9</sup>Herzog, op. cit., p. 342.

<sup>10</sup>Adams and Gallagher, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>11</sup>Herzog, op. cit., p. 342.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 342-343.

<sup>13</sup>Terkelsen, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>14</sup>Adams and Gallagher, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>15</sup>Clark E. Vincent, Unmarried Mothers (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., c. 1961), p. 801.

<sup>16</sup>Leontine Young, Out of Wedlock (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., c. 1954), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup>Lucile G. Boole, "The Hospital and Unmarried Mothers," Children, November-December, 1956, p. 208.

<sup>18</sup>Adams and Gallagher, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>19</sup>Jerry L. Kelley, "The School and Unmarried Mothers," Children, March-April, 1963, p. 64.

<sup>20</sup>Terkelsen, op. cit., p. 9.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTOR

Many social workers who have encountered unwed mother cases have advocated the psychological factor in them as the single, most important key to the solution. The psychological factor stems from a denial of that which is considered normal to the female with regard to maternity. Motherhood occupies an acceptable position in the life of most women. Within the context of marriage it has the possibility of solving the psychological conflicts within any girl and of bringing her to a satisfying life goal. Maternity is able to achieve a balance between her contradictory active and passive libidinal strivings. She no longer seems to initiate the sexual relationship with the male and guide it to conclusion but willingly resigns herself to the role of responding to his actions. Taken out of the framework of marriage, however, pregnancy and motherhood inevitably produce more complications and disaster for the girl.<sup>1</sup> They administer a destructive blow to the personality of a great number of young women when the women discover that they are "in a motherly way." Most of these women, no matter how unconsciously they are driven to have out-of-wedlock babies, would not consciously choose this way of solving their emotional conflicts.<sup>2</sup> In addition, unwed mothers find their conflicts heightened instead of reduced because they have separated their urge for babies from its environment as an inextricable part of the love of a man and a woman for each other.<sup>3</sup> Severed and isolated from the security and comfort which the total relationship between two people

in love gives the news of a new addition to the relationship, the presence of a baby or the threat of its inevitable arrival can create a prism of emotions ranging from hate to indifference in the unwed mother.

The psychological factor may apply to the unwed mother from both sides of the pregnancy. "A girl may become an unmarried mother because she has had pre-existing problems, or she may be having problems because she is an unmarried mother."<sup>4</sup> Her psychological or emotional problems may cause the illegitimate pregnancy or may be the result of it. First, an examination of the data will be made from the former point of view.

#### Indirect Motivation

##### The Purposeful Nature of Unwed Motherhood

In general, the development over the last two generations of a widely publicized psychology on relaxed, sexual taboos has made permissiveness, self-expressive sexual adjustment, and freedom from inhibition marks of the well-adjusted American in some quarters.<sup>5</sup> To make premarital sex relations the mark of sanity exerts tremendous, psychological pressure on every female to relinquish her virginity lest she be tagged as emotionally unbalanced and maladjusted. That this pressure is a motivating force toward out-of-wedlock pregnancy with which one must reckon is proven by the prevalent theory among social workers and members of other helping disciplines that such pregnancy is both symptomatic and purposeful, an attempt by the personality to ease an unresolved conflict.<sup>6</sup> Having an out-of-wedlock

child is not accidental but falls into the genus of intentional action. Although a girl does not plan it deliberately, she acts in such a way that this becomes the inevitable result. The girl often does not recognize that she took a definite and decisive action in such a situation, but such a lack of recognition is not a consistent pattern of behavior.<sup>7</sup> Leontine Young, in support of her view that illegitimate pregnancy is an intentional eventuality, declares:

The purposeful nature of the sexual action is further demonstrated by the lack of consideration about contraceptive devices among unwed mothers who were hampered neither by ignorance nor religious scruples in this area. Girls have readily admitted, without hesitation, that they knew that the sexual intercourse might result in pregnancy before they entered into it and yet are confused about their refraining from contraceptives. In those girls who have had only a brief and casual sexual relationship, this indifference toward contraception coincides exactly with the denial of any sexual wish or action. Clearly a girl could not make use of contraceptives without admitting to herself that she had some interest in sexual activity and that she might engage in it in the near future.<sup>8</sup>

The non-use of contraceptives by unwed mothers who were aware of pregnancy as the possible outcome of their illicit sex relations proves the purposeful nature of their actions. Admission of the possibility of illegitimate pregnancy from premarital sex relations by the female partner would usually eliminate the entire problem if preventive measures were employed in accordance with the awareness of the possible consequences, but the very existence of the problem remains only because an unmarried mother acts without conscious volition or awareness of her own purposive behavior. Her blindness and lack of interest even during her pregnancy, when the practical situation for her is most acute, are indispensable components of her problem.<sup>9</sup> The occurrence of out-of-wedlock pregnancy as an

eventuality of purposeful action seems to indicate that a psychological pressure toward premarital sex relations exists and that it potentially holds part of the key to solving the problem of the unwed mother.

#### Normal Childhood Psychological Development

Psychological propulsion toward illegitimate pregnancy does not necessarily emanate from the general, publicized psychology of recent years. It may be housed in the childhood emotional development of the unwed mother. The exploration of that development reveals more clearly the points at which abnormality becomes a later cause of illegitimate pregnancy. The formation of the personality begins with trust or mistrust regulated according to the nature of the mother in infancy. The child has a primary identification with her mother. She exhibits anger impulses which are expressed or repressed in proportion to the limits set in love or anger by the parents. At age two she is able to discriminate between herself and that which is not herself and arrives at the realization of herself as an individual. Preparation is made for conscience formation by an internalization process of oughts and ought-nots imposed by authoritative figures. It is important that an atmosphere of love surrounds the incorporation of these prohibitions and permissions to avoid excessive guilt for transgressions.

When the child becomes four she learns sexual differentiation. At this stage she identifies closely with her mother, but she directs her love more toward her father. The girl establishes an ideal of herself and fills deprivations with fantasies. Her conscience is now fully developed and presents a dangerous force if overdevelopment or

underdevelopment has occurred. By the time she reaches seven years of age the peer group has become an authority in her life. She explores her sexual role through socialization and physical experimentation. From eleven to maturity she searches for her role as a human being and emancipates herself from parental control. Maturity reveals that she has a successfully integrated total being. Style and attitude emerge, and value and future goals have been established. The girl has shed her desire for childish, immediate satisfaction and is able to work toward a future greater good. Her relationships are derived from mutual interdependence.<sup>10</sup> Any weak links in this chain of personality development can result in maladjustment that in turn causes unwed motherhood.

For example, a child who is four to six years old wishes to possess one of the parents in a loving way to the exclusion of the other; once a girl learns that her love for her father does not have to exclude the mother and that she is not in competition with her mother for her father's love but must eventually seek her own man, she will better accept her mother's authority. However, if she should fail to learn, her conscience would rebel against the mother figure as authoritative<sup>11</sup> and, in all likelihood, an adequate sex conscience would not be formulated. Troubles with nurture, the repression of the early anger impulses, poor sexual identification, unnatural attachment to one of the parents, or retarded emancipation could each furnish the single girl with sufficient psychological background for unwed motherhood.

### The Structuring of the Sex Conscience

According to many writers in the field, the structuring of the sex conscience occupies a position of importance in the life of every girl for the prevention, or causation, of illegitimate pregnancy. It can be too lenient or too prohibitive. The underdeveloped sex conscience has one basis in a relationship with an authority figure who allowed too many permissions and offered too few prohibitions or one in which the prohibitions were established by word but removed by the behavior of the authoritative figure herself.

A second basis for this pathological structure relates to a weak relationship to the authoritative figure herself. This could be due to a parental figure or a figure of authority which changes because of death or separation and prevents a stable image for prohibitions; sometimes it merely represses conscience demands which remain latent and compel the female to replace conscious guilt with the destructive nature of rebellious activity. If the authoritative figure sexually seduces the girl when she is little, he eliminates support for the conscience, and only another loving figure can repair the damage to the structuring progression.<sup>12</sup>

A third basis of deficient conscience structure appears in psychotic girls at times. Begun by a general inability to relate sufficiently to the authoritative figure in early childhood, the resultant weak or absent conscience may be only part of the disturbance in the functioning of the entire mind and will reinforce after childhood.<sup>13</sup> The overly permissive sex conscience has a counterpart in the exaggerated or cruel and sadistic super-ego. The girl who

owns the latter is not a product of the strict, authoritative figure but suffers a regression when she is between the ages of four and six and views life in the hostile terms of the second and third years of her existence. Sex receives her scorn, and she is not likely to get into trouble because of it. She exhibits obsessive compulsive symptoms and tends to choose suffering as her approach to sexual relations in later life.<sup>14</sup> These pathological developments of the sex conscience can play an important role in the psychological circumstances that end in unwed motherhood. Whether the contributing factor to illegitimate pregnancy is presumed to be a result of the malformation of the whole childhood emotional make-up or of merely the sex conscience, analysts of the problem generally hold that the presence of "Agape" in the childhood of girls especially influences the "Eros" of their maturity.<sup>15</sup>

#### The Sex Desire

The sex desire itself provides indirect motivation toward unwed motherhood. Although the mind-set of man denied the psychological aspect of the sex urge for many years, he now considers that aspect an integral part in conjunction with the biological function. Milton J. Huber, known for his counseling success on sublimating sex desire in the single woman, claims:

For mankind sex desire is not basically a biological "instinct," a "visceral drive," a "physical drive," or a physiological need or whatever term may be employed to describe this type of humanly universal, unlearned and recurrently compulsive behavior. Psychologists and anthropologists are essentially in agreement that the sex impulse is basically a reflective response, not conditioned by any bodily process, but present to effect at any moment the life of men and women.<sup>16</sup>

Huber admits that the sex desire goes beyond a purely biological function. Sex means more for a woman than simply a release of tensions, which is not true of the man. It is a deeper emotion in which love, attention, security, and many other elements are more important than just the physical experience.<sup>17</sup> For this reason premarital sexual relationships can do extremely more damage to the female partner than merely a physical defloration, and yet the instinctive, psychobiological sexual and reproductive urge takes little cognizance of marriage rites.<sup>18</sup> To let the sexual urge get out of hand would allow illegitimate pregnancy to become a live possibility.

The motives for unwed maternity which are listed above are not in a direct cause-and-effect relationship to the occurrence of an illegitimate pregnancy. Those motives which directly effect such results are the subject of the next section of this study.

#### Direct Motivation

Direct emotional causes which set the female in the psychologically unstable role of unwed mother often are buried beneath a maze of other emotions and are difficult to uncover. However, a number of them have been indicated by investigators of the problem.

#### Ego-Insecurity

The frantic quality that characterizes a great deal of sexual expression in society is symptomatic of underlying ego-security. The need for human response in the form of affection and reassurance tempts many unmarried women into the intimate sex relationships.<sup>19</sup>

They see in sexual experience a way of proving that one is a "femme fatale" whom men desire,<sup>20</sup> and they hope to receive through it the required reassurance for their sagging egos. Some unmarried women, alone and aware of their deprivations, disguise their need for reassurance by asserting that they entered into casual affairs with men just for the thrill, to have the experience, or because they are flattered by the suggestion.<sup>21</sup> This type of girl is no longer confined to the lower class background and a poor family environment. Today the girl next door, the wife in the next apartment in the housing project, and the stenographer in the secretarial pool may be the object of men's remarital and extramarital experience if they are made to feel that they are loved for their charm and glamour, that they cannot be resisted, and that the attentions of the propositioning gentleman are honorable (no intention to hurt or degrade), if not serious.<sup>22</sup> Lack of security can drive a single girl to fall into the engulfing web of unmarried motherhood.

#### Wish for a Child

The loneliness of the single woman often expresses itself in a strong craving to mother a child,<sup>23</sup> and this overwhelming urge turns into a major cause of illegitimate pregnancy. The normal psychological wish to become a mother can rise in intensity until it becomes an obsession. The strong desire for an out-of-wedlock baby supplies motivation for extreme sexual behavior, and, at the same time, the strong prohibition against it generates exhaustive efforts to conceal its existence in the female. The conflict concentrates on the need for a child without a husband.<sup>24</sup> If the unmarried woman goes

too far in this direction, it clearly demonstrates her intention to achieve sole possession of the baby. A considerable number of women who are married have never had a legitimate child by their husbands, although they often say that they had tried to do so. Yet a casual acquaintance with another man will result in pregnancy because of continued contact with the father.<sup>25</sup> In the single woman this total disregard for the mating partner and the heavy emphasis upon a child belonging only to her may carry over into the marriage if the relationship reaches that point. She will exclude the father altogether in some cases and show little, if any, continued interest in him, refusing help or support from the father. Even if she pursues the father of her baby for demanded assistance, she usually denies the participation of the father in the planning for and possession of the baby and frequently resents any continuing relationship between the father and the child.<sup>26</sup> The unconscious craving for a child to mother may convert a girl who consciously is unable to make the simplest decision into one who moves directly and decisively toward realizing this wish and counts no cost too great to achieve it.<sup>27</sup> The female who compulsively wants to be a mother will encounter difficulty in attaining that goal, and too frequently she accomplishes it outside the permissive environment of marriage.

#### Abnormal Mother-Daughter Identification

The abnormal relationship with one's mother, or failure to identify in childhood with the parent of her own sex, furnishes another cause of illegitimate pregnancy. Unmarried girls become pregnant because of a neurotic need to bear a child out of wedlock to take it

back home as an effort on the part of the girl to identify with the mother.<sup>28</sup> Some girls substitute fantasy for reality in fulfilling this identification. In their new fantasy they will be the good mother which their mother was not toward them. They will even take their own babies home to their mothers in their fantasy to give them another chance to act as good mothers. The switch from reality to an acting out of the fantasy may be triggered by the loss of someone, or something, she loves. However, when reality interrupts her dream and she finds herself pregnant with a baby which she cannot take home but must give up, her basic need remains unsolved and there can easily be a repetition of the acting out of the fantasy.<sup>29</sup>

#### Desire to be Male

A fourth cause of the problem of the unwed mother stems from the childhood period of sexual differentiation. A female offspring who loves her father in early years may never rid herself of her desire to be like him. The wish for a child then arises originally as a compensation for not having been born a boy.<sup>30</sup> Her feeling of inferiority when she finds through physical experience in childhood that she has no male genital organ seeks a cure in the retention of masculine strivings. The first-born boy has high narcissistic value for the woman, for in him the mother sees herself as she would have been as a male and feels that with his birth her own life has been fully vindicated.<sup>31</sup> Fantasies are again possible symptoms of this causative factor. The acting out of a prostitute fantasy satisfies her masculine strivings because of the aggression it offers to the female partner but keeps her from fulfilling maternal obligations

toward the child.

Another fantasy of this type is one in which the daughter identifies with the devaluated mother because of castration inferiority and rejection by the father. As a condemnation against herself, she attempts to get close to her mother by living the life of the sexually devaluated mother.<sup>32</sup> In reality, motherhood brings not only the reassurance and compensation for which the girl has been longing because of her imagined inferiority but also a gratification of a primitive, feminine, masochistic instinct in the occurrence of menstruation, defloration, and childbirth itself. In addition, the unwed mother will be more willing to accept the passivity that femininity incurs if she has the child as an outlet for a normal and legitimate expression of her active strivings.<sup>33</sup> In some unmarried mothers the guilt for not being a boy establishes pregnancy itself as the goal. The fantasy underlying this type of motherhood is parthogenesis, or immaculate conception. The idea of self-conception implicit in it is an effort to replace the missing penis; the woman is accepting motherhood but denying fatherhood.<sup>34</sup> The hope for a remedy to the feeling of inferiority in an out-of-wedlock child is another reason for which the female has been known to seek illicit sex relationships.

#### Desire for Freedom

Emancipation from parental authority articulates a different approach to unwed motherhood. Having a baby out of wedlock, and a result of an effort to prove herself grown up, is sometimes merely a climax of the series of attempts by the single girl to show

independence and defiance of family restrictions in the struggle for adult freedom.<sup>35</sup> Physiological motherhood puts into the hands of the restricted daughter the primitive and most direct natural route to feminine maturity.<sup>36</sup> She looks at childbirth as a panacea for imposed prohibitions and restraints upon her liberty. Occasionally, the bondage is self-imposed in the form of a compulsive necessity to act out an infantile fantasy before she can be free to be herself as an adult.<sup>37</sup> The fantasy itself may range from conscious rape to prostitution and usually occurs in puberty. The unwed mother wears the robe of the ideal liberator for the girl who is seeking freedom.

#### Less Frequent Causes

The extensive vista of psychological factors responsible for illegitimate pregnancy include many others than those examined above. A woman may find herself pregnant out of wedlock because of an other-directed search for approval. She believes that her success and acceptance in interpersonal relationships depend primarily on discovering and doing what other people want her to do, and there will inevitably be a man who will demand her as his partner in sexual intercourse.<sup>38</sup>

A second, ripe prospect for the title of the unwed mother is the girl who considers the physical giving of herself a sacrifice through which she is helping the "lonely, unappreciated, and misunderstood" married man.<sup>39</sup>

Another candidate is the girl whose ego or sense of reality is poorly developed, and she manifests it in a rape fantasy. By acting out the fantasy she puts herself into situations that lead to sexual

assault. She endures the pregnancy that results from this for the sake of the masochistic glorification inherent in it but with protest. The illegitimate child is used to contribute to the mother's need to suffer and to expiate her guilt and will receive very little love from the mother, although she is insistent on keeping him.<sup>40</sup> Some unmarried are forced into illicit sex relations with male family members because they live in fear of greater harm.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, a girl who reaches adolescence without resolving her basic conflicts and who is unable to make the necessary sex differentiation at the appropriate age level may now turn to men for the kind of maternal love which she missed from her mother and previously received from her father in the past.<sup>42</sup> She wants to be held, cuddled, and loved, and the price may be her virginity and an illegitimate child.

A final cause of unwed motherhood is the common characteristic of passive dependency. These women express their reliance on a sexual relationship with men by claiming that someone else would have catered to the male needs if they had not done it.<sup>43</sup>

This wide assortment of psychological causes for the problem of the unmarried mother reveal to a greater degree the complexity of the total situation. One, or any combination of more than one, of these causes can be responsible for the unwed mother. They serve to support the statement that illegitimate pregnancy is a purposeful action. However, just as psychological, or emotional, problems may compose the basis for the existence of the unwed mother, so the illegitimate pregnancy may have a profound, psychological effect on the female who suffers through it.

## Reactions to the Illegitimate Pregnancy

Emotional reactions accompanying the pregnancy of the unwed mother are connected inseparably with her total personality,<sup>44</sup> and, as a result, can have a profound effect on that personality. However, in a crisis situation such as that presented by a pregnancy out of wedlock current functioning of the human being may be disrupted, past vulnerabilities exposed, and hitherto manageable conflicts stirred up. Analysts of the problem cannot assume that the reactions of the unmarried mother will represent her characteristic mode of adaptation to reality.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, for more complete understanding of the problem these reactions will be examined. One can detect a pattern within each girl of alternating periods of stress and well-being.<sup>46</sup> The anticipation of motherhood adds duration to the time of contentment. Unless reality problems such as need for shelter, finances, an acutely unpleasant living environment, and similar difficulties intervene, the expectant, single mothers are peaceful, satisfied, and sometimes happy.<sup>47</sup>

## Casualness

In fact, the first reaction to the pregnancy is that they do not critically evaluate the conditions that culminate in their pregnancy at all. The women who react in this way accept their pregnancy casually as risk involved in enjoying extramarital sexual relations and show emotional indifference toward their sexual mate and sexual experiences.<sup>48</sup> The critical evaluations that are made focus on the fact that they should be more careful to avoid pregnancy in the

future.<sup>49</sup> This reaction evolves from the "fun morality" of our day which postulates that anything goes as long as the person is having fun.

### Guilt

Most reactions are not the nonchalant type like the one listed above. They are often manifestations of a history of deprivation in the primary relationships of the pregnant girl and may burst out into the open as guilt, panic, suspicion, or denial.<sup>50</sup> The unwed mother with a normal conscience does become aware of feelings of guilt and shame about her sexual transgression, but these do not become overwhelming or chronically prolonged.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, the female with an overdeveloped conscience may endure sharp and continuing pangs of guilt. Guilt in the unwed mother situation often follows the latter pattern and is resolved to a great extent by suffering either consciously or unconsciously. Sacrifices such as giving up the illegitimate child for adoption and putting off the joys of motherhood pay considerably for normal demands for punishment for the sexual transgression and abandoning the child.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, guilt as a reaction to the illegitimate pregnancy can be resolved if the unwed mother offers sacrifices to the demands of her conscience.

### Denial

A reaction which appears to be more difficult to eliminate is denial of the occurrence altogether. Aided by such things as choosing never to see the baby, this reaction makes the demands for separation become subconscious. Helene Deutsch advocates that this

subconscious need may be the primary motive for a second illegitimate pregnancy.<sup>53</sup> This sublimation of conscience demands can alter the personality of the unmarried mother greatly. Investigators of this aspect declare that the degree of emotional health in any unmarried mother may be accurately measured by the extent to which she can acknowledge, with or without help, her own part in creating the pregnancy.<sup>54</sup> Denial on the part of the unwed mother of any wish, initiative, or responsibility for the sexual relationship leads frequently to stories of rape and amnesia under the influence of alcohol or "knockout drops," and the context of the stories represents differences in the degree of strength in the denial. The manufacturer of these tales does not purpose to deceive other people but to obliterate for herself any knowledge of her own wishes and urges.<sup>55</sup>

Leontine Young has stipulated that the girl who has had a longer relationship with a man is better able to acknowledge her own physical participation in the sexual activity, but as a total person she was not present. She can be compared to a person in a trance who goes through all the motions but has neither awareness nor understanding of their meaning and is oblivious to self-protection and the possible consequences.<sup>56</sup> From this girl the cry of seduction is seldom heard, and yet she has the same quality of blindness toward possible consequences and reacts to the non-use of contraceptives with the same bewilderment as the unmarried mother who engaged in casual relationships with men. The girl who has had a longer relationship merely accepts her pregnancy as the result of a sexual act that has occurred. She sees no reason to question or explain her participation in the act, and in her discussion of the man she displays the same

indifference as to why he attracted her; the same lack of awareness of him as a person, the same disinterest as to why she had a sexual relationship with him as the girl in the brief, casual relationship.<sup>51</sup>

An attitude of denial toward the pregnancy also affects the actions which the unmarried woman takes to deal with it. She may delay her request for admission into a maternity home or remain in ordinary clothing beyond the appropriate time. She may be reluctant to discuss plans for the baby or simply be unwilling to talk about the incident. Studies of this defense mechanism called "denial" reveal that the unwed mother is not denying the fact of her pregnancy unless she is seriously disturbed. She may be hoping that the diagnosis was in error or trying to minimize the implications of her abandonment of the baby's father; she may be trying to protect herself psychologically from a growing interest in a baby that she will possibly have to give up. Therefore, to interpret denial as pathology may remove the girl's valid use of a healthy mechanism to protect herself in crisis from a threatening reality.<sup>58</sup> Further symptomatic actions of denial by the unmarried mother include a quick request for adoption of the child, an inability to bring the putative father into the situation, and an endeavor to escape the circumstances and repress her feelings as soon as possible. Her anxiety is often acute before and immediately after delivery.<sup>59</sup> While denial of involvement in the pregnancy by the unwed mother has an element of hope that the child in her womb is not real, hope can have a positive side with regard to the pregnancy out of wedlock.

### Disillusionment

Hope for a pregnancy is more prevalent in longer relationships between the unwed mother and the putative father which cannot be consummated in marriage due to parental prohibition. The female party wishes that she would become pregnant, for it would force her parents to consent to her marriage. Premarital sex relations lose their taboo for the hopeful girl because she finds security if she becomes pregnant in the assurance that she could just marry her boy friend sooner than both had planned.<sup>60</sup> However, hope can turn to disappointment for the mother who expected marriage when the boy friend withdraws from the relationship upon the discovery of her pregnancy. Coupled with her emotional unreadiness for the withdrawal, this disappointment can trigger total disillusionment with marriage, marriage with another man to provide the baby with a name, and an eventual fear of sex relations in marriage.<sup>61</sup> The girl who hoped for the illegitimate pregnancy and saw her wish fulfilled suffers disillusionment to such an extent that it mars any future marriage.

### Other Reactions

Other reactions stretch from extreme helplessness and a longing for dependence to attitudes of hostility and suspiciousness.<sup>62</sup> The unwed mother may regard her pregnancy as a representation of a love relationship which gave her a sense of fulfillment and may feel that she was part of something transcending herself.<sup>63</sup> Or she may see herself as a passive victim either of the putative father's aggressiveness or of an impersonal act of fate.<sup>64</sup> If she takes the former

stance, the unmarried mother may project blame and need for punishment on the man even to the point of tracking him down for justice.<sup>65</sup> In the latter reaction, she may express her reaction in the words, "Everything happens to me!" The unwed mother related to her illegitimate pregnancy with many attitudes beyond these mentioned, but these occur frequently. No matter what the reaction of the illegitimate woman is, it is apt to be an intensification of the reactions of a married, normally pregnant woman.<sup>66</sup> Its basis is derived from the psychological make-up of the unwed mother.

In the preceding pages an examination has been made of the psychological factor in unwed motherhood in its various aspects as causes of, and reactions to, unwed motherhood. In the following chapter the sociological factor in the problems of the unmarried mother will be assessed.

## FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>Florence Clothier, "Psychological Implications of Unmarried Parenthood," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, XIII (July, 1943), 541-542.

<sup>2</sup>Helen E. Terkelsen, Counseling the Unwed Mother (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 47.

<sup>3</sup>Leontine Young, "Why Does a Girl Become an Unmarried Mother?", Pastoral Psychology (April, 1958), p. 48.

<sup>4</sup>Rose Bernstein, "Are We Still Stereotyping the Unmarried Mother?", Social Work (July, 1960), p. 22.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>7</sup>Young, pp. 42-43.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-44.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>10</sup>Terkelsen, pp. 50-60.

<sup>11</sup>Paul H. Gray, "Conscience, Guilt, and the Unwed Mother," Journal of Pastoral Care, XIII (Fall 1959), p. 170.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., XIII, 167-168.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., XIII, 168.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., XIII, 168-169.

<sup>15</sup>Terkelsen, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup>Milton J. Huber, "Counseling the Single Woman," Pastoral Psychology, X (April, 1959), 13.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., X, 14.

<sup>18</sup>Clothier, XIII, 531.

<sup>19</sup>Huber, X, 13-14.

<sup>20</sup>Terkelsen, p. 27.

- <sup>21</sup>Huber, X, 14.
- <sup>22</sup>Terkelsen, p. 26.
- <sup>23</sup>Huber, X, 15.
- <sup>24</sup>Young, p. 45.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-46.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 47.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 45.
- <sup>28</sup>Terkelsen, p. 39.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 59.
- <sup>30</sup>Clothier, XIII, 538.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., XIII, 540.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., XIII, 543.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., XIII, 540.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., XIII, 547.
- <sup>35</sup>Lola Bowman, "The Unwed Mother Who Is a Minor," Child Welfare (October, 1958), p. 14.
- <sup>36</sup>Clothier, XIII, 532.
- <sup>37</sup>Young, pp. 47-48.
- <sup>38</sup>Clark E. Vincent, Unmarried Mothers (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961), p. 45.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 41.
- <sup>40</sup>Clothier, XIII, 542-543.
- <sup>41</sup>Terkelsen, pp. 38-39.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 59.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 43.
- <sup>44</sup>Gray, XIII, 165.
- <sup>45</sup>Bernstein, p. 24.
- <sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

- 47Young, p. 47.
- 48Vincent, p. 33.
- 49Ibid., p. 31.
- 50Bernstein, p. 24.
- 51Gray, XIII, 166.
- 52Ibid., XIII, 166.
- 53Ibid., XIII, 167.
- 54Young, p. 43.
- 55Ibid., p. 43.
- 56Ibid., p. 45.
- 57Ibid., p. 44.
- 58Bernstein, p. 27.
- 59Federal Security Agency, Children's Bureau, "Casework Treatment of the Unmarried Mother," (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1947), p. 4.
- 60Terkelsen, p. 31.
- 61FSA, Children's Bureau, p. 4.
- 62T. M. French, "The Importance of the First Interview with Unwed Mothers," (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 1.
- 63Vincent, p. 34.
- 64Young, pp. 42-43.
- 65FSA, Children's Bureau, p. 4.
- 66Terkelsen, p. 31.
- 67Bernstein, pp. 25-26.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SOCIOLOGICAL FACTOR

The sociological factor in the problem of the unwed mother is the sum of her various social inter-relationships. Since it parallels, or is inextricably bound to, the psychological factor in many instances, those instances will not be reported in great detail.

The division of the sociological factor into the many social relationships of the unwed mother receives validation from a statement by Leontine Young:

. . .when a girl becomes pregnant outside of wedlock, every person brings to his attitude toward her, the baby, and the baby's father all of his own emotions about sex, about having a baby, about reproducing himself, and hence about himself . . . the birth of an out-of-wedlock child becomes to every person a peculiarly personal problem, and its objective existence becomes colored by the emotions and problems of the observer. Considering how diverse and how strong these emotions are, their sum total welded into public opinion represents a potent and complex instrument. As a protective force it could be invaluable, but unfortunately, it has operated more as a smoke screen to obscure the reality of the problem and to distort it into a thousand dubious refractions.<sup>1</sup>

This statement offers a readily adaptable format for this portion of the study by pointing out that the attitude of society toward the problem of the unwed mother is really a compilation of the attitudes of individuals toward it. The subsequent sections, therefore, will comprise an analysis of the individual inter-relationships of the unmarried mother with those people who are close to her as described by investigators who studied the relationships and a study of the total view of the society of individuals toward the unwed mother.

### The Unwed Mother and Her Parents

As was already evident in the psychological factor of unwed motherhood, the girl's relationship with her parents exerts great influence on her sexual behavior. In the fun-morality notion of the 1940's and the 1950's parental permissiveness confused the needs and wants of the daughter in her quest for fulfillment in pleasure. This made it easier for the male who was looking for a sexual experience to find a partner because it minimized the risk of an initial rebuff by the female.<sup>2</sup> However, the degree of sexual permissiveness in any society is governed somewhat by the relationship between the mother and her daughter. In a study of eleven North Carolina Negro unmarried mothers, the segment that came from matriarchial families where the mother retained her hold over the girl until adolescence or longer were older than other unmarried mothers at the time of their first conception. This conception usually occurred only after the mother's control was broken by separation.<sup>3</sup>

The mother-daughter relationship does not only serve to prohibit sexual promiscuity but also has a positive side to it. A healthy relationship will result in an exchange of instruction about sexual matters and will also give the daughter the vitally important emotional help in finding a way of dealing with her impulses so that the intensity of the girl's sexual urges is reduced and in order that she is able to find a solution to her maturational problems.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the mother helps her daughter to solve the conflict between allegiance to the mother through sexual restraint and the desire for freedom in sexual matters. By assisting her daughter the mother demonstrates

her willingness to have the girl grow up and become independent. This sound relationship has frequently been interrupted in the case of the unmarried mother.<sup>5</sup>

The mother-daughter relationship can provide motivation for an illegitimate pregnancy. Although the mother is strict and prohibitive on a verbal, conscious level, the child senses implicit permission to act out the mother's unconscious, forbidden impulses and often has a baby on behalf of the mother.<sup>6</sup> This transference of the desire for a child has a strong psychological element in it.

The reactions of some mothers to the news of the illegitimate pregnancies of their daughters indicate their relationship with their daughters. Some lower-income mothers pray for boys as marriage partners in order to avoid "trouble" for their daughters, and when trouble comes there is grief and anger, even though there is also the strong conviction that you stick to your own and never turn them away. There is also a revulsion against forcing a marriage between a girl pregnant out of wedlock and the putative father unless they really love each other.<sup>7</sup> Such a reaction demonstrates the genuine concern which the mother has for the welfare of her daughter. The other side of the coin is the mother who instills a wrong set of sex values in her daughter. She teaches that physical love is a commodity, to be sold only in marriage and feels cheated when her daughter becomes pregnant out of wedlock.<sup>8</sup> The lack of love for her daughter and the mother's selfish motives are evident in this instance.

The effects of the illegitimacy do not escape the father of the unwed mother. Both parents can do danger to their daughter if they only try to be helpful by avoiding mention of the incident and ignore

the trauma of the daughter's experience. This outlook toward the pregnant offspring often erupts into another pregnancy out of wedlock.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, parents of the unwed, adolescent mother are apt to be defensive, feeling that they are guilty for this happening and considering themselves failures as parents. They even react to the real or imagined blame for their daughter's behavior; and their guilt, shame, and need to punish may drive them either to the decision to "get rid of" the baby or to keep him, with little regard for their daughter's feelings on the matter.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the problem of the unwed mother involves her entire family and furnishes a clue to helping the woman who finds herself in this situation. ✓

The effectiveness of the help given to adolescent unwed mothers very much depends on the help given the parents. Decisions concerning help for the pregnant adolescent particularly and for the resulting baby are often imposed by the parents and without the consent of the unmarried mother. The return to the home by the daughter after giving birth can lead to an unhealthy suppression of independent ~~and aggressive~~ ~~strivings~~ strivings in an effort to atone to the parents for the disgrace brought on the family. A modification of parental attitudes can prevent this.<sup>11</sup> More knowledge on the part of the parents of some of the influences of conscience formation on the daughter in its crucial period might reduce certain types of illegitimacy.<sup>12</sup> Much of the time, lack of communication between parents and offspring lies at the bottom of the trouble. Many times the very crisis which is created by the illegitimate pregnancy of the unwed mother provides the opportunity for solution, for both she and her parents are led to examine their respective roles and to see how better communication can take place ✓

among the three of them.<sup>13</sup> Help for the unwed mother is most successful if it includes assistance for her parents. The environmental relationship which the parents of the unmarried daughter form with her is instrumental in the acceptance of, and attitudes toward, the illegitimate pregnancy. It supplies part of the sociological factor of unwed maternity. ✓✓

#### The Unwed Mother and the Putative Father

Another vital segment of the sociological factor comes from the relationship between the unwed mother and the putative father. Too often the putative father is a forgotten man in society because attention is focused on the unwed mother by her tangible problems. She requires financial aid for prenatal care, maternity homes, and possible child support. Her altered appearance threatens traditional sex mores. Her need for medical care during pregnancy and delivery makes her available for study and identifiable for censure.<sup>14</sup> The putative father has none of these attention-getting difficulties. However, he does not merely plant the seed and then withdraw from the situation. He has definite social interaction with the unwed mother.

Very few unmarried mothers are interested in the men who become the fathers of their babies. For many, the relationship which results in pregnancy is the first sexual experience and is an unhappy one.<sup>15</sup> A number of unmarried mothers meet the fathers of their babies in casual, unconventional fashions such as pick-ups and blind dates.<sup>16</sup> The man or boy in such cases may be ignorant of the female's pregnancy, but he may still flee so that he will not be held morally or financially responsible for his act. His flight may also be to avoid a charge ✓

of statutory rape.<sup>17</sup> The casual relationship of long or short duration between the unwed mother and the putative father has marriage as a potentiality; but very seldom does this become a reality. The man usually plays the role of a father or brother in these relationships.<sup>18</sup> The casual affair with a man that results in illegitimate pregnancy has very few social bonds between the sex partners. ✓

The social relationship between the putative father and the unmarried mother may be forced by the girl who pursues and seduces the man, hoping to trap him with a baby.<sup>19</sup> If this occurs within a betrothal relationship that already exists between the male and female, the putative father may feel trapped and may be open to suggestions that perhaps his fiancée would "go all the way" sexually with other males. He may search for an escape from the relationship by raising a question with regard to his part in this pregnancy.<sup>20</sup> Such rejection by the putative father may not affect the love of the unwed mother for him and may entice her to keep his child. However, it may generate hate for the father that is exhibited by the fact that she wants nothing to do with his baby or uses it to taunt and punish the father.<sup>21</sup> Marriage is unlikely to be the culmination of this forced relationship. ✕

Sometimes the established relationship between the man and woman is one which will not be legalized because one partner is accepting personal nonconformity to existent social standards in order to carry on the relationship. Such is the case of the married man and the single woman.<sup>22</sup> The interaction between the two can be very meaningful, but marriage is not possible without disrupting another social relationship. The pregnancy is accidental and threatens the

relationship.<sup>23</sup> The unwed mother often carries a heavy burden of bitterness toward the wife of her child's father, for he convincingly describes his wife as a cold, mean, unappreciative woman who refuses to grant him a divorce.<sup>24</sup> At any rate, the unwed mother is left with an illegitimate child and social censure.

Few of the social relationships between the unwed mother and the putative father are strengthened by the pregnancy out of wedlock. However, knowledge of this relationship will reveal an additional phase of the problem of unwed maternity and will give insight into the attitudes of the unmarried mother toward her child.

#### The Unwed Mother and Her Offspring

The social relationship between the unwed mother and her child does not support the outward appearance of naturalness that it gives to the viewer. In spite of its biological basis in cherishing activities, maternal behavior is largely learned.<sup>25</sup> The time for education in this area is greatly reduced for the single girl who suddenly discovers that she is illegitimately pregnant. Yet the suddenness of the pregnancy belies its meaning for the background of the unwed mother. The out-of-wedlock baby is a symbol that serves a purpose which can only be determined from the girl's attitude toward him or what she does with him.<sup>26</sup> The mother's relationship with the objective reality of the baby has a special subjective reality to it and hides a multitude of personal and social problems that can only be detected through a study of that relationship.

The length of the unwed mother-child relationship is determined by the mother's decision on the future of the child. The need to

make plans for the baby is one of her most pressing problems.<sup>27</sup> If the girl decides to keep her baby, money becomes a prime consideration. If she works, care of the child is a problem and there are few facilities for assisting her. If she stays at home and applies for public support, she is faced with the restrictions and inadequacy of that support. If she decides to place the child in foster care, support of the child usually becomes a lengthy problem for public and private agencies.<sup>28</sup> The other alternative is to relinquish the child before the relationship becomes too involved. Very few unmarried mothers consider the possibility of abortion. They refuse it with pride even if it is available to them. If forced to abort by their parents, it is likely that they will become pregnant again and insist upon delivery of the child.<sup>29</sup> The usual decision for terminating the relationship with the illegitimate child is to place the child for adoption. Hence, the duration of the social relationship between the unmarried mother and her child may be extremely short. However, the ties that hold them together are strong, and when the baby is born the mother is apt to change the plan she had made for him during pregnancy and keep the child.<sup>30</sup> The majority of unmarried mothers who keep their children continue to manage in some way through subsequent marriage, employment, or support of their children by relatives, friends, or other means, but very little is known about the kinds of homes in which their children are growing up.<sup>31</sup> The tenacity that the unwed mother shows for keeping the child indicates her desire to continue the relationship that marks her for the criticism of society but one that may be her only source of joy in a situation which predominantly exudes sadness.

This concludes an investigation of the sociological factor in the problem of the unwed mother with regard to the relationships that she has with those who are involved in the situation with her. The sociological factor in the social relationships that the unmarried mother shares with all the people she contacts in her daily life, those people who by combining their opinions toward maternity formulate the attitudes of society toward the problem, will not be the subject matter of this study.

#### The Relationship of Society to the Unwed Mother

##### The History of Attitudes of Society Toward Unwed Motherhood

Society has always expressed opinions on unwed maternity. The Victorian Era defended the honor of the unwed mother. It postulated the theory that an unmarried mother was an innocent and trusting maiden seduced by an unscrupulous fiend. This was applicable only to the young and sheltered and took for granted that the girl was without sexual interests of her own.<sup>32</sup> Other mythical reasons for illegitimacy that were popular in the late nineteenth century were that the girl was oversexed and could not control her sexual urges and that she was mentally retarded or dull and easy prey for the conniving male.<sup>33</sup> Between the 1920's and the middle 1950's the bourgeois-oriented theories concerning illegitimacy fostered the belief that "bad illegitimacy" is the result of such "bad causes" as poverty, broken homes, minority group membership and psychological disturbances. This has since been tagged as the "bad causes bad" theory.<sup>34</sup> An early explanation for the unwed mother which made her

the victim of being from the "wrong side of the tracks" was proven to be unreal and the judgment of poorly informed or misinformed people.<sup>35</sup> A survey of the attitudes of societies in different ages and cultures toward the unmarried mother highlights the fact that there has been a consistency of condemnation against both her and her child through many ages and cultures.<sup>36</sup> Consistently, popular sentiment has regarded an unmarried mother as a girl who, despite her awareness of wrongdoing, violates the moral code and is punished by bearing an out-of-wedlock child. All the explanations of her conduct have seen the baby as merely a by-product, an unwanted and accidental result of her sexual misbehavior. The child is thus one and the same time the confirmation of her "sin" and her punishment for that "sin."<sup>37</sup> There was never a period in history where attitudes toward the unwed mother were not formed by society and openly stated.

The historically consistent condemnation of society on the unwed mother varies in accordance with certain strongly embedded social and cultural influences and institutions. Evoking the strongest censure are those who are young, poor, non-white, and dependent on taxpayers' support. Censure of white mothers was tempered in the 1940's and 1950's because they represented the largest single source of adoptable infants and thereby served a useful social function at that time.<sup>38</sup> This preference exists today as long as white, middle-class families want to adopt babies. Then the unwed mothers of white, middle-class babies will be regarded with compassion.<sup>39</sup> But the adoptability of the illegitimate child does not regulate society's view of the unmarried mother by itself. It has also been altered by social and cultural influences, religious principles, and specific

traditions and customs with respect to marriage in particular societies.<sup>40</sup>

A case in point is the effect of the interpretation of marriage on social attitudes. When marriage, historically speaking, was considered chiefly of social and economic importance and a means for communicating wealth and property from generation to generation, it made illegitimacy a non-existent problem for the majority of people. When marriage took on moral and religious significance and became synonymous with marriage as an institution -- that is, when the family became the basic social unit and Christianity spread its influence throughout the "Western world" -- then the problem of illegitimacy came into existence.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the condemnation of society on the unwed mother can fluctuate in intensity because of the influence of sociological aspects upon it.

In the present day, all of the attitudes toward the unwed mother and her child that were held in earlier ages are still retained in their original or in some derivative form. Society is still alternately punitive and sentimental<sup>42</sup> and regards the unmarried mother in a social environment that could bring either alternative to bear on its judgment at any moment. But, for the most part, the weight of threatened punishment and enforced secrecy is added to the heavy, personal problems of the unmarried mother.<sup>43</sup> Today society is consistent with other periods of history in condemning the unwed mother.

#### The Influence of Economics on Social Opinion of the Unwed Mother

One of the major influences that shape the opinion of society

on the subject is the economic aspect. The assumption that public indignation results partly from the lack of protection provided for the child by the mother might be allowed if it were not for the fact that society itself fails to provide such protection.<sup>44</sup> However, this shortcoming does not seem to derail public condemnation. Punishment for unwed maternity actually takes the form of withholding public assistance from both mother and child.<sup>45</sup> Unmarried mothers who are in need of financial assistance because they move away from homes in small communities for secrecy and automatically become non-residents, because they are unable to work and because they are cut off from the usual sources of financial aid, find little help. Financial assistance for unwed mothers is condemned by those who condemn the mothers as moral delinquents, and public programs which offer such aid also stand under fire.<sup>46</sup> The effort to give a girl protection and security at public expense has met with a cold response and the immediate conviction that the man in question should under any and all circumstances be held financially responsible.<sup>47</sup> The economic argument has increased the intensity of society's feelings against adolescent unwed mothers. The fact that this group is most dependent on parents and taxpayers for support offends the public sense of morality more than independent, older unmarried mothers.<sup>48</sup> The average man is indifferent to social problems until they make demands on his pocketbook, and unwed motherhood has dared to make that demand. As a result, the unmarried mother is still condemned instead of helped.

#### The Double Standard of Society

To those who place the problem of unwed motherhood in the realm

of the psychological, some interpreters of the problem answer that it is an act of social irresponsibility.<sup>49</sup> Yet, the irresponsibility of the happening comes into question when there is confusion over what constitutes a responsible, sexual act. Society feels the pangs of its own guilt for its double standard even as it denies responsibility and involvement with the unwed mother. It punishes the young woman who makes it obvious to the society that chastity is not the common ideal.<sup>50</sup> The double standard of tolerance for premarital sex relations but prohibition against illegitimate pregnancy is not confused only by public proclamation but also by the personal, social relationships of the unwed mother. When those from whom her standards are to be derived are operating on more than one set of values, it is not surprising that she herself should question the validity of the professed code.<sup>51</sup> The unmarried mother lives in a social environment in which love ranging from frenzied passion to professional tender loving care is the goal of all relationships.<sup>52</sup> She is well within public sanction when she indulges in premarital sexual experiences. For society to continue to support a matrix of social practices which serve to instill permissive attitudes toward illicit sexual behavior and at the same time to intensify efforts to decrease illicit pregnancies is highly illogical.<sup>53</sup>

The fundamental mistake of the double standard on premarital sex and illegitimacy has been its fallacious judgment that an unmarried mother represented a deliberate and actual menace to the security of the family.<sup>54</sup> However, unwed maternity has not proven to be a destructive element to the family unit nor an undue motivation toward illicit sex relations. Rather, its grief and anxiety have served as

a deterrent from these and a preservative for sex within marriage.

The double standard also presents a dual attitude toward the male and the female. Unmarried mothers are condemned and stigmatized far more harshly than unmarried fathers. Greater indignation is expressed over wives involved in extramarital affairs than over husbands. Society blames wives more frequently than husbands for unwanted pregnancies occurring within marriage. State legislators frequently consider requiring litigations for habitual unmarried mothers, but never vasectomies for unmarried fathers.<sup>55</sup>

In general, society inadvertently condones the unmarried father by ignoring him and publicizing the unmarried mother. Since women bear the children and are more directly concerned with the maintenance of the family, there has always been more pressure upon them to conform to the sexual code. Society might be said to assume that since women have the greater stake in the protection of the family structure, theirs is the great responsibility to provide that protection.<sup>56</sup> The acceptance of this assumption has made illegitimacy an act of social irresponsibility by the unwed mother, but the assumption neglects to place any responsibility for preservation of chastity outside marriage or of the family unit on the man.

The attitudes of society toward the unwed mother do little to solve the problem and much to prolong it. Every effective measure or method for reducing the occurrence of illegitimacy will entail changes in some social attitudes and practices which some people prefer not to change.<sup>57</sup> It is a task of major proportions.

This examination of the social relationships between the unwed mother and others who are involved intimately in the problem with her

and of society's attitudes toward the unwed mother demonstrates that a sociological factor does exist in the problem of unwed maternity. Combined with the psychological factor investigated in Chapter II, the sociological factor contributes a major portion to the complexity of the problem of the unwed mother.

## FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>Leontine Young, Out of Wedlock (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., c. 1954), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Clark E. Vincent, "Illegitimacy and Value Dilemmas," Christian Century (July 19, 1963), pp. 803-804.

<sup>3</sup>Hilda Hertz and Sue Warren Little, "Unmarried Negro Mothers in a Southern Urban Community," Social Forces (October, 1944), p. 76.

<sup>4</sup>Jane K. Goldsmith, "The Unmarried Mother's Search for Standards," Social Casework, XXXVIII (February, 1957), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>6</sup>Lola Bowman, "The Unmarried Mother Who is a Minor," Child Welfare (October, 1958), p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>Elizabeth Herzog, "Unmarried Mothers: Some Questions to Be Answered and Some Answers to be Questioned," Child Welfare (October, 1962), p. 349.

<sup>8</sup>Helen E. Terkelsen, Counseling the Unwed Mother (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 27.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>10</sup>Bowman, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>12</sup>Paul H. Gray, "Conscience, Guilt, and the Unwed Mother," Journal of Pastoral Care, XIII (Fall 1959), 169.

<sup>13</sup>Terkelsen, pp. 59-60.

<sup>14</sup>Vincent, p. 803.

<sup>15</sup>Leontine Young, "Why Does a Girl Become an Unmarried Mother?," Pastoral Psychology (April, 1958), p. 43.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>17</sup>Terkelsen, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup>Federal Security Agency, Children's Bureau, "Casework Treatment of the Unmarried Mother," (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government

Printing Office, 1947), p. 3.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>20</sup>Terkelsen, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup>FSA, "Casework," p. 5.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>T. M. French, "The Importance of the First Interview with Unwed Mothers," (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 4.

<sup>24</sup>Terkelsen, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup>Milton J. Huber, "Counseling the Single Woman," Pastoral Psychology, X (April, 1959), 15.

<sup>26</sup>Young, "Why," p. 49.

<sup>27</sup>Goldsmith, XXXVIII, 69.

<sup>28</sup>Leontine Young, "The Unmarried Mother: Problems of Financial Support," Social Casework, XXXV, 101-102.

<sup>29</sup>Young, "Why," p. 46.

<sup>30</sup>Hester B. Curtis and Alberta De Ronge, "Medical and Social Care for Unmarried Mothers," Children (September-October, 1957), p. 177.

<sup>31</sup>Hannah M. Adams and Ursula M. Gallagher, "Some Facts and Observations About Illegitimacy," Children (March-April, 1963), p. 47. 44

<sup>32</sup>Young, "Out," p. 6.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>34</sup>Vincent, p. 802.

<sup>35</sup>Young, "Out," p. 5.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>38</sup>Vincent, p. 802.

<sup>39</sup>Terkelsen, p. 28.

<sup>40</sup>Adams and Gallagher, p. 45.

<sup>41</sup>Young, "Out," p. 3.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>45</sup>Adams and Gallagher, p. 44.

<sup>46</sup>Young, "The Unmarried," pp. 100-101.

<sup>47</sup>Young, "Out," p. 8.

<sup>48</sup>Vincent, pp. 801-802.

<sup>49</sup>William Rashbaum and Others, "Use of Social Services by Unmarried Mothers," Children (January-February, 1963), p. 11.

<sup>50</sup>Terkelsen, p. 28.

<sup>51</sup>Rose Bernstein, "Are We Still Stereotyping the Unmarried Mother?," Social Work (July, 1960), p. 23.

<sup>52</sup>Terkelsen, p. 27.

<sup>53</sup>Vincent, p. 804.

<sup>54</sup>Young, "Out," p. 7.

<sup>55</sup>Vincent, p. 803.

<sup>56</sup>Young, "Out," p. 4.

<sup>57</sup>Vincent, p. 804.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Certain conclusions can be drawn from the sociological and psychological standpoints about the problem of unwed maternity. First, the causes of illegitimate pregnancy can be traced to either one or the other of these two areas, or to a combination of the two, and yet cannot be restricted to only these areas. Unmarried mothers are not decisively the result of low intelligence, broken homes, geographic mobility, or intrapersonal and interpersonal problems conforming to a regular pattern.<sup>1</sup> The multiplicity of possible causes eludes a categorical determination. However, the seed which blossoms into unwed motherhood is discovered most frequently in the childhood psychological formation of the female. It may be fostered or prevented from development by close, social contacts which the girl experiences, especially those which she has with her parents.

Secondly, psychological causes of unwed maternity do not have to lie in an immediate cause-and-effect relationship, but motivation may come indirectly from normal personality development that is interrupted or malformed. A psychological environment that is conducive to illicit sex behavior as the mark of psychological normality, or saneness, and the presentation of unwed motherhood as a panacea for all psychological ills can exert influence toward the eventuality of becoming an unwed mother.

Thirdly, the psychological abnormalities of the unwed mother are often made even worse by the occurrence of the illegitimate pregnancy,

and new emotional problems may be added to her original ones.

In the fourth place, unmarried motherhood is not a problem but merely a symptom of a deeper psychological trouble in the female until society makes it a problem by condemning it. The attitudes of society toward the unwed mother frequently prevent the association of the unwed mother with someone who can help her and prolong the problem instead of reducing it by making the opportunity for cure an improbability.

Finally, it has been noted that the psychological and the sociological factors are integral parts of the problem of the unwed mother, and a greater understanding of them will aid the solution of the problem of unwed maternity.

From the research involved in this investigation it is evident that there is much in the areas of the psychological and sociological factors that is yet unknown or not understood and that these are fields for continued research on the problem of the unwed mother.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Herzog, "Unmarried Mothers: Some Questions To Be Answered and Some Answers To Be Questioned, Child Welfare (October, 1962), p. 344.

## APPENDIX

### Recommended Additional Reading

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