

1956

# Unmarried mothers and their relationships with their dominating mothers.

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

UNMARRIED MOTHERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS  
WITH THEIR DOMINATING MOTHERS

A Thesis

Submitted by

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(B.A., Brooklyn College, 1952)

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Science in Social Service

1956

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## CHAPTER I

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

#### Purpose of the Study

In this study, an attempt will be made to determine if the relationship an unwed mother has had with her mother played any part in her having a baby out of wedlock. The psychoanalytic theory which is held in the field of social work about the problem of illegitimate pregnancy is fairly new. It has only been since 1941 that agencies which handle this problem have devoted time and effort to research. Since the theory is relatively new it was felt that this study would help to either bear out or disagree with it. The following questions were raised for study:

1. Are there specific emotional patterns which seem to predispose towards illegitimate pregnancy?
2. Are there common trends in their personality?
3. Are there similarities in their backgrounds?
4. Are there any special difficulties which arise for the social worker because of these personalities?

#### Scope of the Study

Thirty applications to the Children's Aid Association of Boston for help with the problem of illegitimate pregnancy during the calendar year 1953 were used. This year was chosen as it was felt the cases would in all likelihood be closed

because of the number of years which had elapsed.

Method and Sources of Data

A survey of the literature pertaining to the subject was made. Discussions and seminars were held with the workers in the field and with the agency's consulting psychiatrist, Dr. Elizabeth Makkay. In applying schedules to the cases, two other caseworkers were asked to read the cases and apply the schedules using their own judgement. A consensus of the three opinions was used so that the figures represent a mean. The cases used were left after the following criteria had been applied. All cases in which the client was below the age of eighteen were not considered for two reasons.

1. Due to the client's age her parent(s) legally had to be brought into the planning.

2. Illegitimate pregnancy in adolescence presents a different psychological pattern, often being a form of delinquent behavior, and is the client's way of trying to emancipate herself from her parent(s), while adult unmarried parenthood is neurotic in character. Clinically the adolescent group of unmarried mothers seems intermediate between neurosis and delinquency. They share with all adolescent girls two major dynamic tasks each involving numerous conflicts and tensions. 1. Emancipation from parental control and protection in developing their own adult outlook and independence. 2. Accelerated reintegration of the suddenly matured and clamorous biologic drives into their psychic economy. Both

are characterized by sudden spurts and retreats, experimental curiosity and quick shifts of emotional position. Ego control is not strong enough to prevent this sort of acting out. An obvious precipitating factor for this group as distinguished from adult unmarried mothers is the recent pubertal maturation. Under the recent sudden impact of puberty sexual pressure pervades existing emotional tension in common struggle for release, lending expression to long-standing non-sexual needs through the behavior pattern of illegitimacy.

Alma, for example, is an attractive, intelligent, musically gifted high school girl, the third of four siblings. The family appears to be closely knit, in comfortable circumstances, well thought of in the community. Alma's dress and mannerisms were somewhat sophisticated for her age and she had been going with an older group, somewhat to the neglect of her school work. She had obviously been feeling the need to fight against parental opposition in order to assert her independence, although the parents seemed normally permissive.

Alma was injured in an automobile accident, suffered a lapse of memory for a few days and required a series of three plastic operations. The driver of the car was not her steady boy friend. Five months after the accident Alma became pregnant by J, with whom she had been going with for a year or two. After the first shock of learning of the pregnancy, her parents were protective, though hurt at her concealing it from them for five months. As the other side of her strong effort to emancipate herself from her parents, Alma also showed great dependence upon them throughout the pregnancy. She knew that she did not want to marry J, having mainly enjoyed his treating her like a grownup, his flattering her and showing her a good time. Her main longing was to be welcomed home as a little girl after giving up her child.

In addition to the underlying typical adolescent conflicts besetting this girl the car accident and ensuing operations seem to have been significant traumas, activating an acute

need for reassuring proof of restored feminine appeal. These seem to have largely prompted the intimacy with J. Without the coincidence of the trauma it seems unlikely that this pregnancy would have occurred.

Needs such as those of defiance, security, prestige, self punishment, etc. often outweigh the current genital or reproductive needs among the older group.

Carol is a twenty-one year old girl, the youngest of two girls. Her oldest sister is in her late thirties and seems retarded, is unable to work and requires a good deal of care. Her father is in his early seventies and her mother ten years younger. The family is well known in the community, her mother is a member of the DAR and bears an illustrious early American name. Carol became pregnant by a Negro and kept her child. She eventually took it home and received ADG. Carol has since married a white man and they are raising the child.

The clients were of at least average or normal intelligence and seemed to be mentally sound; that is, they were not psychotic or borderline.

In reading the cases, if the dominant figure in the home was the father the case was not used. Many of these women were raised in homes where the old world culture prevailed. Many of the fathers were looked upon as the lord and master and disciplinarian. The women were engaged in a constant battle with these fathers, significantly they chose men very similar to their fathers to be the father of their babies. They very seldom mentioned their mothers except to say that they were pals or that, in small ways, they tried to protect them from their fathers brutality.

### The Sample

In the year 1953, there were 126 applications for service. Sixty of the applicants were over age 18. Five were seen once and were referred elsewhere for service. One baby died at birth and the mother refused any further contact with the agency. Six withdrew without explanation after one or two interviews. Four clients refused to give any information about their families or their relationships with them. In eight cases the dominant parental figure seemed to be the father. Two of the clients were committed to a mental institution and two clients were of limited intelligence. One record was unavailable. This left thirty cases to be used for this study.

### Limitations

As a private agency Children's Aid Association is highly selective in its intake policy. The agency may not be getting a representative group of unmarried, illegitimately pregnant women. The agency at this time only deals with women who are undecided about what disposition they wish to make of their child. If the mother has definitely decided on adoption, she is given service by the Boston Children's Friend Society.

We do not get in our agency those women who mobilize themselves sufficiently to get help from friends, who arrange private placement and adoption, or obtain abortions. We therefore cannot know if they have the same sort of relationships with their mothers as the women in this study. Also to be speculated about are the women who marry when they discover



they are pregnant. Another group of women about whom little is known are those who come from environments in which there is little or no stigma attached to being pregnant out of wedlock. We do not know if the same factors are present in these cases since they do not get to agencies. Due to limitations of time and space, the client's relationship with her mother is being stressed. I do not mean to imply that the father does not contribute to the client's psychological development, but because the mother is a very important figure in our culture, the person with whom the child has the most contact during the formative years, it was decided to concentrate on this aspect.

The Agency

Children's Aid Association is a private non-sectarian agency which offers casework and group work services to the community in behalf of children. The unmarried women who are accepted for casework help have generally been referred by either of the two maternity shelters, or other agencies in the community or their ministers. The client is expected within a pretty definite time with casework help to come to a decision about her baby. Regardless of the mother's decision, casework help is extended for as long as she needs it and can use it.

## CHAPTER II

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE PROBLEM

Today in the social work field, the generally held theory is that the unmarried mother is trying to solve old conflicts and fulfill deep personality needs by having a baby out of wedlock.

One fairly consistent emotional pattern which seems to emerge in working with unmarried mothers is a picture of poor or dislocated relationships with their parent(s). Florence Clothier states:

"The choice of unmarried motherhood as a way out or a solution of unconscious conflicts depends on external environmental factors, including the girl's childhood reality relationships with her parent(s) as well as on the more personal psychological factors. In our culture, unmarried parenthood represents a distorted and unrealistic way out of inner difficulties."<sup>1/</sup>

The normal psycho-sexual development in a female seems to follow this pattern.<sup>2/</sup> Up to age three, the relationships of the female to her mother is not much different from that of a boy. They both have gone through the oral and anal stages. At this point, all their active and passive strivings are attached to the mother. She is the source of most of

<sup>1/</sup>Florence Clothier, "Psychological Implications of Unmarried Parenthood," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, (July, 1943) 13:531-549.

<sup>2/</sup>Elizabeth S. Makkay, Unpublished seminar material. Children's Aid Association, 1956.

their satisfactions. The girl wants to possess her mother completely in the pre-oedipal period. The father is a rival. The child then discovers sexual differences. The mother is seen as a castrated (incomplete) person in that she does not possess a penis. She is also at this age the disciplinarian. The phallic-genital area comes into dominance and a period of intense sexual activity sets in. The girl may continue to insist she possesses a penis. The girl has to give up completely and forever the idea that she will ever possess a penis. She goes through periods of switching back and forth. Due to lack of a penis she can never be to her mother what her father is. She becomes passive and has phantasies of giving her mother a baby. The girl then relinquishes the idea of competing with her father and turns to him and wishes to be loved by him. This is also passive. She sees her mother as a rival now. There is a transfer of the baby wish to "father will give me a baby." This wish places her in competition with her mother and also throws her in conflict because of her still strong dependency needs. Normally, she will give up her father to ease the conflict and fear of losing her mother's love. She incorporates the idea that she will at a later date marry a man like her father. She becomes somewhat like her mother as this is what father loved and married. The female remains here generally. Later in maturity she can have a baby and to her first child are attached a lot of these feelings.

Generally, it is at this period that many things can happen which will interfere with normal development. Some, for example, would be:

1. Loss of the father either physically through death or desertion or psychologically through the father's withdrawal.
2. Birth of a sibling, dependency on the mother is re-awakened. Death wishes towards the sibling persist and make a strong sore of guilt.
3. The mother's attitude toward sexuality, particularly masturbation (clitoral). The mother is anxious about it in proportion to her guilt about it. The guilt is a carry-over from childhood experiences and anxieties.
4. Severe deprivations and frustrations in the early love relationships to one or both of the parents (i.e. rejection, over-protection, or inability of the parents to meet their child's emotional needs).<sup>1/</sup>

Viola Bernard states that:

" . . . with repetitious regularity the case histories show conspicuous maternal and paternal failure to meet the essential lifelong emotional needs of these girls. Gross maternal rejection, parental discord, traumatic early separations from one or both parents and premature imposition of adult responsibilities recur."<sup>2/</sup>

Most of the mothers provide confusion, inconsistent, un-

<sup>1/</sup>LeStine Young, Out of Wedlock, New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1954, p. 55.

<sup>2/</sup>Viola Bernard, "Psychodynamics of Unmarried Motherhood in Early Adolescence," Nervous Child (October, 1944) 4:1, pp.26-45.

predictable, frightening models for the identifications essential to their daughter's healthy personality development. Incomplete, distorted and painful identifications seem important in shaping the girl toward illegitimacy.

In a study by Donnell and Glick<sup>1/</sup> on unmarried mothers, it was found that parental attitudes were of paramount importance, and most cases were marked by considerable rejection, not just at the time of pregnancy but for most of the girl's life. The conflicted attachments of the unmarried mothers to their parents is another major area which presents problems. The death or absence of a parent seems to be a significant factor as the girl forms an idealized picture of the absent parent.

There seems to be evidence<sup>2/</sup> that there is a positive relationship between poor ego development and parental rejection. This poor ego development is characterized by lack of judgement, poorly developed sense of self, feelings of being worthless and no good, poor reality conception, and a tendency to deny or evade unpleasantness.

The terms relationship and attitudes have been used consistently throughout and perhaps it would be best to define what the writer means. Relationship is an interaction or interplay between two people which involves the exchange of subjective feelings, emotions and attitudes. Attitudes involve

<sup>1/</sup>Catherine Donnell and Selma J. Glick, "Background Factors in 100 Cases of Jewish Unmarried Mothers," Jewish Social Service Quarterly, 1952, 29:2.

<sup>2/</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

feelings and moods, emotional tones, toward or about something. There need not be interaction for an attitude to exist (i. e. Hitler was never actually known by most Americans, yet there were a good many feelings toward and about him).

In a study<sup>1/</sup> done in St. Louis it was found that as a group the unmarried mothers were concerned with "getting" and "hanging on to" instead of "give and take." Their appetite for parental love for themselves was insatiable. They lacked a sense of reality. They wanted the world to be as they wished it, not as it is. They are convinced they do not deserve to succeed or to make anything of themselves. The key people in their lives seem to be their mother, father, brother, sister and the baby. The father and mother are the most significant persons. If the mother is unaccepting of her parenthood, and has no love or tenderness for the child, only hatred, cruelty, indifference and unkindness, then the child is unaware that love can exist between people. His relationships to others are branded by mistrust and lack of love that was met in childhood. Deepseated<sup>2/</sup> dependency on, or rejection by the mother is conducive to becoming an unmarried mother. The pregnancy has a neurotic base.<sup>3/</sup> It is frequently a symptom

<sup>1/</sup>Ruth F. Brenner, "Casework Service for Unmarried Mothers," The Family, (November and December 1941) 22:211-219, 269-276.

<sup>2/</sup>Babette Block, "The Unmarried Mother: Is She Different?" The Family, (July, 1945) 26:163-169.

<sup>3/</sup>Frances H. Scherz, "Taking Sides in the Unmarried Mothers Conflict," Journal of Social Casework, (February, 1947) 28:2.

of unresolved love-hate feelings toward parental relationships, originating in early childhood. Early childhood deprivations leave the client with unsatisfied dependency needs which play a significant part in causing unmarried motherhood. The family relationship,<sup>1/</sup> especially the relations with the mother and/or sister are very important. Lack of affection and security make the woman seek it elsewhere. If the relation to the mother is disturbed trouble is likely to ensue. The woman's hostility can often be traced back to childhood frustrations and hurts. The actual situation, however, remains the decisive factor. "Loneliness and emotional starvation or a wish to punish rejecting parents is given as the explanation of unmarried motherhood. Such explanations based on needs and hostilities which a current situation may have mobilized from the girl's childhood are valid. They are not the whole story."<sup>2/</sup>

A point to remember in dealing with this problem is that the illegitimate pregnancy in adult women is a neurotic symptom. These women have resorted to this distorted means of solution of various psychological ills for diverse reasons. Culturally, this symptom is unacceptable to the woman's family and neighbors. It is used as a weapon against her family and herself. As a symptom is an indication of existing pathology, and we

<sup>1/</sup>Melitta Schmeberg, "Psychiatric-Social Factors in Young Unmarried Mothers," Journal of Social Casework, (January, 1951), 32:1.

<sup>2/</sup>Florence Clothier, "Psychological Implications of Unmarried Parenthood," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, (July, 1943), pp. 531-549.

must look for the disease itself and attempt to treat it.  
This study is an attempt to understand part of the disease.



## CHAPTER III

RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTITUDES BETWEEN THE  
UNWED MOTHERS AND THEIR MOTHERS

All of the thirty cases included in this study were read and evaluated by applying the schedules to be found in the appendix. These schedules tried to evaluate the degree of rejection and to get at other attitudes which the mothers of the women in the study might exhibit which could possibly play a part in predisposing toward an illegitimate pregnancy. Race, religion and education were considered because they might be factors which would affect the problem. However, later they did not seem to be of much significance. The important thing seemed to be that the woman needed to have a certain given set of circumstances present (i. e. a rejecting, hostile, managing mother along with certain home conditions) in order to be predisposed towards becoming an unwed mother.

These thirty cases seem to be from varied backgrounds. On a racial and religious basis they broke down this way: Protestant -- 19 of whom one was Negro; Catholic, white -- 10; Jewish -- 1.

Their ages ranged from 19 to 37 years. The actual distribution appears in the following table.

TABLE 1.  
AGE OF UNWED MOTHERS AT THE TIME OF REFERRAL

Age	Number in Group
19 -- 23	16
24 -- 28	5
29 -- 33	6
34 -- 38	3
Total	30

There was little variation in educational achievement, the actual breakdown being:

Grade school only -- 1  
 One and a half to two and a half years of high school -- 7  
 Graduated from high school -- 22  
 Graduated from college -- 4  
 Had graduate degrees -- 1

It was interesting to note that those women who had completed college were among the oldest, their ages being 27, 30, 32 and 34 years.

#### The Mothers

One feature which most of these cases seem to present is peer or negative relationships with the mothers.<sup>1/</sup> Twenty-six of the clients said their mothers were very dominant and aggressive. They variously described their fathers as being quiet, alcoholic, henpecked, withdrawn men, or else their

<sup>1/</sup>See Schedule A in appendix.

fathers were not in the home at all. Most of the clients expressed some resentment toward their mothers. Twenty-three felt their mothers rejected them and said they could not remember ever feeling loved and wanted. Others felt they were replaced in the parents affection by a sibling. Eighteen felt their mothers were hostile. The mothers criticized them and some felt it was the things which the parent neglected to do rather than the things they did which left an indelible impression. Thirteen felt their mothers were sadistic. This ranged from actually putting their daughters out of the home to telling them they were no good, they hated them and they were crazy. Nine felt their mothers were indifferent. They would farm them out among the relatives and neighbors and work when it was not necessary to. Others said they received good physical care but their mothers were never psychologically available to their children. Seven of the mothers were possessive. They resented every relationship their daughters made with other people and tried to keep them tied to them. Four of the mothers were seductive. This ranged from putting the father out of the bedroom and taking the daughter in the room in his stead, to actually putting the husband out of the home because he made adverse comments about the daughter's pregnancy. Fifteen of the mothers were managing, controlling women. They would make appointments for their daughter, handle her money, pick her friends, and made the decision about disposition of the baby.

There is little if any evidence of warmth and affection between the mothers and their daughters. Their reaction to the pregnancy was one of two things:

1. They refused to have anything to do with the baby and insisted the client give it up for adoption.
2. They wanted the child and took over completely.

### The Unmarried Mother<sup>1/</sup>

Twenty-seven of the clients were very dependent on their mothers. This seems to fit in with the number of dominant mothers.

"The strength and pervasiveness of the role of the mothers who controlled the lives and emotional development of their daughters to such an extent that there was damage to the whole personality structure. The degree of damage seemed in direct proportion to the power and destructive quality of that control."<sup>2/</sup>

This statement gives meaning to the next statement that seventeen of the clients were overly submissive, compliant, and passive. These were the clients whose mothers made their appointments for them, told them what to do and handled their pay. The clients could not and would not break away from this sort of destructive relationships although a number expressed resentment about being so managed. Nineteen were unable to make decisions and express themselves. These clients

<sup>1/</sup>See Schedule B in the appendix.

<sup>2/</sup>Leontine Young, "Personality Patterns in Unmarried Mothers," The Family, (December, 1945) 26:296-303.

were waiting for their mothers to tell them to bring the baby home and could see no other solution to their problem. Twenty-two of the clients were masochistic. The literature talks of the masochistic component <sup>1/</sup> found normally in women and this trait is found to a much larger degree in unmarried mothers. As a group they felt that menial, hard, unrewarding jobs, far below what their educational level and ability indicated, were all that was good enough for them. "Almost none of the cases were completely free of self-punishment and with many of them it represented the major force in their lives. The unmarried mother would allow nothing and no one to interfere with her self-destructive progress." <sup>2/</sup> Twenty-five were self-absorbed. This basic narcissism is indicative of poor ego-development. The unmarried mother with this extreme narcissism is unable to see her child as an individual with its own emotional needs. The child is seen as an extension of themselves and they hope to relive their lives through this baby and get the love and satisfactions they were denied. Needless to say they do not and cannot give their children love and affection.

Six had enough ego-strength and could use casework effectively enough to make their own decisions. This did not necessarily mean giving the child up for adoption. They had enough emotional stability to be able to give a child a fairly

<sup>1/</sup> Helene Deutsch, Psychology of Women, New York: Grune and Stratton, 1944, Volume I, Chapter 3.

<sup>2/</sup> Young, op. cit., p. 301.

secure life.

The Homes<sup>1/</sup>

"The degree of deviation from the social and developmental norm of sexual behavior seems to correspond to the degree of manifest family disorganization and socio-economic deprivation."<sup>2/</sup> Eight of the clients came from broken homes where the father had either deserted or died. Two of the mothers later deserted their daughters. Ten came from homes where there was open hostility between the parents. Physical and mental abuse were everyday occurrences. Twelve were from homes where there was no overt expression of hostility, but there were many underlying tensions which the child felt and responded to. No one came from a relatively normal, happy home. None of the clients had much experience with loving, concerned parents.

These deprivations many times are not deliberate on the parent (s') part. They are often themselves psychologically unable to give love. The daughters tend to repeat their parent(s') pattern and are themselves inadequate. You can not give what you have never known or experienced.

1/See schedule C in the appendix.

2/Bernard, op. cit., pp. 26-45.

## CHAPTER IV

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN UNWED MOTHERS AND THEIR MOTHERS  
AS SEEN IN THE CASE RECORDS

Five summaries will be presented which will illustrate some of the feelings and relationships which existed between the clients and their mothers. These cases are representative of the range of relationships between the unwed mothers and their mothers, all of which are characterized to some degree by maternal rejection and the reactions of the child to this rejection. Schedules A, B, and C were applied to all thirty cases of which these five are a sample. Each case is followed by a brief analysis of the situation.

Case I

Barbara M., white, Protestant, was thirty at the time of application. She described her mother as a domineering person and said there had never been a good relationship between them. Her father was thirty-two when he married her mother who was twenty-one. They had a far from tranquil life. The mother was a driving aggressive woman who was dissatisfied with the father's income and occupation. She considered her husband a failure. The husband developed ulcers and never played an important role in the family.

Miss M. felt her mother rejected her when her sister was born. She says that her mother began to approve of her when she obtained a very good position involving quite a bit of responsibility and carrying with it a lot of prestige. This position was commensurate with her training in college. Her mother keeps telling her that now that she has had the baby "all is ruined for everyone."

Miss M. discovered her mother had had to marry her father because of being illegitimately pregnant herself.

Miss M. returned to the home and while unhappy could not separate herself from her mother. Her excuse for remaining at home where she was not happy was that her mother rendered her personal service which she liked such as cooking, sewing, laundering, etc. for her. Miss M. then tried to get her mother to go to a psychiatrist, even offering to pay the cost. She could express the hope that through some sort of magic he could change her mother, and that the mother would take her child into her home. The mother refused to do either. Miss M.'s mother wanted her to give the baby up for adoption. The client kept expressing tremendous guilt over not doing what her mother wanted her to. Finally the agency, seeing that Miss M. was no nearer a solution to her problem than at the time she came to us insisted that she take her child. Miss M. took her child, obtained an apartment, and is still waiting for her mother to change her mind.

Miss M., from her statements, felt that her relationship with her mother had not been all that she thought it should have been. Perhaps her mother rejected her because of what she reminded her of, namely her illegitimate pregnancy, and also the kinds of feelings which were attached to her which were mentioned in chapter two. She could only approve of her daughter when she achieved the kind of success which she thought very important.

This pregnancy of Miss M.'s was an attempt to make her mother suffer for all the rebuffs and hurts she had given to Miss M. That she suffered also as well as the child Miss M. could not see. When she returned to the home she equated the services her mother rendered her with love and affection for her. The attempts to get her mother to take the baby are tied up with the baby being an extension of herself. (My child is me, and if you take my child then you must love me). Up to this time the mother has steadfastly refused to have



anything to do with the child.

### Case II

Rita H., white, Catholic, was twenty-one at the time she was referred to the agency by a family service agency. The family had been known to the referring agency for many years. The father was an alcoholic and never a strong figure in the home. He died in 1951.

The mother was a very domineering, punishing woman. She showered affection and love on her sons and constantly referred to Miss H. as a bad girl who would have many babies she should not have. After the birth of Miss H.'s child her mother took it home to care for it. The mother left the home suddenly without leaving any address. Miss H. turned to the family agency and was very dependent upon their worker. She had to be told how to do everything. She placed her child in the home of a woman who was very much like her mother. This woman was very punishing and sadistic. The family agency referred Miss H. to us at this point as they felt a better foster home was needed. It was discovered at the time of the client's pregnancy that her mother had been illegitimately pregnant at the same age. She pushed this pattern on to her daughter, even making it convenient for her to have relations with the father of the child.

In the casework situation Miss H. was found to be very immature and narcissistic. Miss H. is still hoping that her mother will change and be nice to her. She did not visit the child in the foster home which she had done when the child was in a poor home, and admitted never thinking of the child from one visit to the next. Her expressed hope was that her mother would come back and announce dramatically that she now loved Miss H. and was sorry for the way in which she had treated her. The mother contacted Miss H. once after leaving the home and in that letter she told Miss H. she was "no good."

In working with Miss H. it became pretty clear that she had been so deprived as a child that she never actually reached the oedipal period. She was infantile in her responses and could think only of herself. She only visited her

child when she was in a home similar to her own. This was an attempt on her part to work out her problem by seeking out someone like her mother. In fact, she practically lived in the foster home. When the child was placed in a home where the foster parents were accepting and warm Miss H. stopped visiting as she no longer found that her need to suffer was being met. Miss H. was so infantile that she could not even see her child as an extension of herself. Miss H. was encouraged to give up her child as she so obviously would never have anything to offer this child. Over and over she would insist that the worker tell her what to do and would ask that they rehearse before she would move into a new situation. This even extended to the making of telephone calls.

Psychiatric consultation was sought and it was felt that Miss H. was too damaged to grow. This case seems to bear out the statement made previously about the effect that a controlling mother has on the whole personality structure. The degree of damage being in proportion to the destructive quality of that control. Miss H.'s mother seems to have had a very adverse effect upon her emotional development.

### Case III

Mrs. K., white, Protestant, was thirty-seven at the time she came to our agency. She had been married twice and divorced both times. There was a child by each marriage. During both marriages Mrs. K. never left her mother's home. The mother cared for the children and supported the older girl. It was she who urged Mrs. K. to go to court with Mr. K. for support for his son. She was urging the client to

keep the child and said that she would care for it. Mrs. K. picked a hospital near her home to have her baby. This upset her mother as she knew a lot of the hospital personnel. Mrs. K. said that she would like to please her mother as she had supported her daughter and is sending her to school. She would like to leave her mother's home but is afraid of what her mother would say. If she did give up the child her mother would put her out. After Mrs. K. gave birth she became very upset and said that she felt her mother had let her down.

Her father is returning to the home just as she will be coming back from the hospital. Yet Mrs. K. changed the name she had given the baby because it did not please her mother. Mrs. K. expressed resentment at the way her mother controlled her yet she could not leave her mother. She eventually took her child from placement and gave it to her mother to raise.

Mrs. K. is a very dependent woman. The illegitimate pregnancy seems to have been a rebellion against her mother's control. Her original plan was to give the baby up for adoption which would have hurt her mother. However, she could not break the tie which bound her to her mother. This abortive attempt on her part to separate herself from her mother seemed to prove to Mrs. K. that her mother knew best.

Mrs. K. seems to have picked men for husbands who were fairly weak in that they could not separate her from her mother. Mrs. K. said nothing about her father, and the role he played in the family; and one could speculate about whether her husbands were like her father. Mrs. K.'s mother seemed to have a strong need to control everyone about her. She let nothing and no one escape her.

Case IV

Barbara N., white, Protestant, was twenty-one at the time she became known to our agency. Miss N. lived at home with her mother and two brothers. Miss N. expressed surprise that her mother had taken the news of her pregnancy so well though she did maintain a silence about the baby and plans for it. Miss N.'s sister had had an out-of-wedlock child some years before. Miss N. returned to her mother's home after giving birth.

Her mother never talked with the client about the child. Miss N. hoped that since her mother had taken care of her sister's child until she married that her mother would do the same for her. Miss N. did not visit the child and in five months had three different jobs. She maintained that her mother prevented her from visiting the child. She said that she could not bring up the subject of the baby but was waiting for her mother to offer to take the child home. She said that she and her mother had not been very close. She had been her father's favorite.

At no time in our contact with the client was she ever able to talk with her mother about the baby. She worked long, hard hours and turned over all her pay to her mother, who managed it for her. Miss N. resents the fact that her mother gives her money to her sister and brother-in-law. This sister can get whatever she needs and wants from the mother while she cannot. Miss N. named her child after her mother.

The agency finally told Miss N. that since she could make no decision she would have to take her child. Miss N. and her mother came to the office and they decided that adoption was the answer. When Miss N. signed the surrender papers she was quite pleased about the fact that her mother had been inconvenienced because she had had to work for Miss N. while she came into Boston to sign the release.

There seemed to exist a very masochistic relationship between Miss N. and her mother. The mother had a strong hold on her daughter. Miss N. resents her mother's relationship with her sister and keeps trying to get some of her mother's love. She duplicated a situation in which her sister

got love and understanding from the mother, but this failed because the mother rejected this girl and could only use her. The fact that the baby was only a tool to be used to get love for herself is shown by Miss N.'s reaction to the child when it failed to serve its purpose. She visited in the foster home only three times. When Miss N. realized that her mother had no intentions of caring for the child she could give it up with no apparent feeling at all and, in fact, she seemed quite relieved.

#### Case V

Carolyn P., white, Protestant, was twenty-one years old at the time of agency contact. She had planned to take the child home but her mother refused to allow this. Miss P. was the youngest of four children, the three oldest being in their thirties. She said that she was lonely as a child, she was not close to her siblings and her parents were out a good deal and did not have time to be bothered with her. She said that her family did not want her. She said that at the time she was born she was supposed to have been a boy. She tried for her parents' love by doing boys' things. However, she never got much from either parent and was not close to them.

She had had a previous out-of-wedlock child and had given it up for adoption because her mother had also refused to allow her to bring it home. She insisted that she would want the child to be raised Catholic. Her family was strongly Protestant and she knew they would be upset by this.

After giving birth Miss P. returned home and kept trying to persuade her mother to allow her to bring the child home. She kept expressing jealousy about the relationship her mother had with her sister. Miss P.'s mother refused to have the baby in her home. Miss P. then married a Catholic man and took the baby home with her. In a later contact, Miss P. said that her mother and sister were more accepting of her since her marriage.

Miss P. tried to gain love and acceptance by being a boy and then by being a woman and giving her mother a baby. The mother, however, spurned the gift twice. Also, the older sister was unmarried and could not give this sort of gift to the mother. This was a carrying out of the infantile wish to give mother a baby. The desire to hold onto the second child was tied up with several different feelings. Probably one of real grief and loss over the first child, wanting to punish her mother by flaunting the child in her face, and also to hurt them by raising it Catholic. The marriage to a man of different faith, whom she did not know well at all, could be seen as a wish to punish. Even after her marriage, Miss P. could not seem to free herself from her mother.

All the unwed mothers used the baby as a tool. It was never seen by them as an individual with its own needs and emotions and potential for growth. It was the means by which they hoped to gain love and acceptance from their mothers. In many cases the baby was a gift to the mother and yet, proof also of the hostility they had for their mothers.

The extreme tenacity with which these women wish to retain their children is not so much evidence of their affection, as the fact that the children are the actual physical projection of these women. <sup>1/</sup> This statement points out the basic

1/M. Kasanin and Sieglinde Handschin, "Psychodynamic Factors in Illegitimacy," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, (January, 1941), 11:1.

narcissism of these women. They were all so damaged that they were concerned with "getting," "having" and being "given to." They themselves were incapable of giving to another individual.

Involved in their self-punishment would be the feeling inherent with rejection that I must be "no good or bad." "If I am "no good" then I deserve to suffer, to be punished." Situations are set up so that their masochistic needs are met. They meet rejection from parents, family members, church and community because of the illegitimate pregnancy. Each act of the woman just serves to play into and reinforces the existing pattern. Nothing is really solved by the pregnancy. Even when the woman becomes aware that this suffering is not necessary, and that the situation can be changed she rarely moves herself to break away from the situation.

CHAPTER X  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study of thirty illegitimately pregnant women, who were over eighteen years of age, of average or better intelligence and who applied to Children's Aid Association in 1953 for help with their problem, was an attempt to discover if the relationships which the client had with her mother played any role, or predisposed her towards illegitimate pregnancy.

The questions which were raised for study or exploration were:

1. Are there specific emotional patterns which seem to predispose towards illegitimate pregnancy?
2. Are there common trends in their personality?
3. Are there similarities in their backgrounds?
4. Are there any specific difficulties which arise for the social worker because of these personalities.

It was found that almost all of the mothers were the dominant, aggressive person in the marriage and home. Almost all of the mothers rejected their daughters and did not have the usual warm, loving, mother-daughter relationship which seems necessary for the female's normal psychological development. To varying degrees the mothers were either indifferent, which is another form of rejection, or were controlling, sadistic and hostile.



These attitudes which the mothers had seemed to lead to hostile dependent relationships between them and their daughters. The daughters resented this extreme dependency state in which their mothers kept them, yet because of poor ego development and infantile narcissistic needs were unable to break the tie. The poor ego development and dependency is shown clearly in the cases. Almost all of the clients were dependent to some extent on their mothers. More than half were so submissive and compliant that they were unable to make any move without their mother's permission. Two-thirds were masochistic, that is, showed a need to suffer and punish themselves. Most of them were quite narcissistic, so self-absorbed that they were unable to distinguish the child from themselves. They felt that what is good for me is good for the child because he is me, and so were often unable to make decisions for the child's best interest.

Only six of the women had enough free ego to make a decision which was based on reality and after giving due consideration to their feelings. The backgrounds of these women were similar in the sense that none of them came from families which were psychologically warm and loving. The mothers involved in this study did not present their daughters with a figure for a successful identification but there developed a spiteful rivalry which became associated with guilt. Eight were from broken homes. One or both parents were missing, either through death, divorce, or desertion. Ten were from

homes in which the parents were openly hostile, abusive and cruel to each other. Twelve were raised in homes which on the surface seemed stable, but the underlying tensions between parents and their negative feelings toward the woman boded ill for the future. None of the clients ever remembered being happy in their homes.

Educational achievements were varied. There were no cases of economic deprivation.

One point which was not looked for in this study, but which came up over and over again in more than twenty of the cases was the role that sibling rivalry played. Most of the women talked of hating or disliking a sibling. Usually this was in connection with what the client felt was the parents' <sup>preference</sup> preferment of the sibling to herself.

Another point about which there could be a good deal of speculation would be the fact that the largest number of women fell into the age group from nineteen to twenty-three with the largest number (9) being age twenty-one. Is there any reason why this should be? One reason could be that at this age, if the woman isn't married, she is still generally living at home. There is a tendency still to want to control the women on the families' part even though legally and physically she is of age. This age could be just as crucial as adolescence, as the woman is usually actively involved in earning her own living, seeking a mate, etc., as demonstrated by the young mothers in this study. Attempts by the family to control her

would be resented and this would play into already existing neurotic needs and result in an illegitimate pregnancy.

### Conclusions

From this limited study it would seem fairly clear that in those cases where the client is overly involved with her mother that if it is at all possible the mother be brought into the situation so that a more effective job can be done. The purpose here would be to help prevent a recurrence of the incident and help not only the client but her mother if possible. It is agency practice that only the client is worked with and perhaps this is wrong. The involvement of the client's mother would also provide the worker with the opportunity to assess the strength of the tie between mother and daughter and so evaluate whether or not the client will ever be able to benefit from casework help. It will help the worker in determining what to stress and what goals and time limits to set. If the worker felt that the client would never be able to make a decision then a definite time limit could be set up and this would in a way cause the client to do something concrete.

The study seems to agree with the findings already mentioned in chapter two that maternal rejection, refusal or inability to give the daughter a positive figure with which to identify seems to predispose towards illegitimate pregnancy.

The home situation within which the clients were raised was not a healthy one, broken homes, battling, bickering

forms of pathology seemed to exist in the evidences of this early emotional personalities; they were narcissistic, aggressive, and submissive. They had being worthless and no good. They utilize themselves and showed an inability based on those women who have the same rejection and poor object identification. It is possible for the researcher to note if any precipitating incidents will send them into illegitimate pregnancy, or if it were just certain types of precipitating incidents which led to pregnancy, or perhaps other facts might come to light to increase our knowledge.

This study indicates the need for rehabilitative work with such families. The question being, however, one of family cooperation and the resources being available in the community to meet the need.

The position of the client in the family constellation and the relationships he has with his siblings seem of great importance also. Parental favoritism played a large part in making the women feel rejected, unloved and unwanted.

This study can only point out trends and apparent similarities and advise a worker to be alert when this particular sort of psychological constellation presents itself;

a. before a precipitating event so that help may be rendered to the client in working through these feelings and possibly avert disaster.

b. after a pregnancy to analyze with a client her feelings and motivations in order to prevent repetition of this essentially antisocial neurotic act. If the foregoing is not possible with a client, that is, such analyzing would be upsetting to her, it is important to at least get at reality with her keeping in mind these psychological factors in order to prevent a recurrence.

Accepted:  
David Landy  
Research Advisor

**APPENDIX**

**SCHEDULE A**  
**ATTITUDES EXHIBITED BY THE MOTHERS**

Was the mother:

Dominant in the home

Indifferent to the client

Rejecting toward the client

Cruel and sadistic

Possessive

Hostile

Seductive

Managing and controlling

Warm

Close to the daughter

Helpful and giving

## SCHEDULE B

## PERSONALITY TRAITS EXHIBITED BY THE CLIENTS

Was the client:

Dependent upon her mother

Overly submissive, compliant, passive

Unable to make decisions

Masochistic

Self-absorbed or narcissistic

Able to make decisions with casework help



**SCHEDULE C**  
**BACKGROUNDS OF CLIENTS**

**Was the home:**

**Broken -- either by death, divorce or desertion**

**Unhappy -- overt hostility between parents**

**Indifferent -- no overt signs of pathology, but underlying tensions**

**Happy -- the parents shared a happy marriage and loved their child**

**Economic status -- was the family well off, comfortable, marginal, deprived**

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