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WOMEN INTO MOTHERS

Experimental Family Life-Styles

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Women in this country are actively experimenting with alternative forms of family composition, affiliation, and setting. Some families are new versions of familiar models, while others have been newly invented (cf. Keniston, 1965). These new family arrangements vary in their utility and success, but they do suggest possible alternative paths for increasing numbers of women. Family experiments also suggest policy areas where legal and institutional changes may be timely.

This chapter explores the diverse ways that women are using these alternative forms to manage the many concerns facing them as they become mothers. First, the resources for basic survival must be adequate and secure—food, shelter, medical care, and the like. Second, new and different social networks and sources of information usually are needed, especially by the woman no longer located in a comfortable matrix of neighbors and relatives. Third, housebound tasks multiply just at the moment when time must suddenly be devoted to a new and insistent social relationship with

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her infant. Also, the woman now has an entirely new role—the responsibility for the nurturance and socialization of a child, which is above and beyond the mere expansion of tasks and concerns—and she has a concomitant need to find a setting in which to fulfill this role. A woman becoming a mother is also usually compelled to reexamine her relations to men or to a particular man; she may want to add or subtract a man in her life or redefine an existing relationship. Finally, the woman as mother must somehow learn to balance these new and greater concerns against the sometimes competing, sometimes complementary personal need to express herself as a productive being.

For many women, these needs can be met in a conventional family setting, but for others the availability or desirability of this path is limited. Particular life-style choices usually solve some problems and exacerbate others. Furthermore, the appeal and success of different family forms may be life-cycle specific. That is, a given family style may turn out to be a practical solution for a woman at a particular point in her life or in the child's development, while a different one may be appropriate later on. This chapter considers the family and the mother at a particular turning point—the birth of a new child—and follows the woman from that stage of the life cycle.

We have assumed the point of view of a woman embarking on the road through parenthood, dealing with the problems, opportunities, and choices that she will encounter. Despite the raised consciousness and role restructuring brought about by the women's movement, mothers are still more likely to be living with children than are fathers. However, any parent or set of parents will be able to identify with most of the concerns and alternatives described. They are the common province of parenthood. Furthermore, although we are looking at life-styles from the perspective of parents, there are women and men who do not choose to be parents, but who share the needs for survival, support, and self-expression that some alternative life-styles are designed to satisfy. For them, this chapter can provide information about the many possibilities for alternate designs of individual and group living.

A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF FAMILY ALTERNATIVES

The description of families and the empirical data referred to in this chapter come from our work with the Family Lifestyles Project

at the University of California, Los Angeles. This project was conceived and initiated with a pilot study in 1972 involving a preliminary sample of 50 families. This was a time when many countercultural men and women were becoming parents. These new families were challenging prevailing assumptions and institutions, and some of these parents began to experiment with alternative ways of rearing children. Experiments in collective living became more public as well as more numerous. Pride and public avowal by unmarried couples and single mothers replaced the shame and secrecy of previous decades. They decried negative labels such as "fatherless" or "broken" homes. The birth of children into these families compelled new interest in child development and child welfare. How would their ideals and life-styles be affected by the rigors and responsibilities of child-rearing? Would the ways in which they designed and chose their environments, lived their daily lives, earned a living, and taught their children differ from the ways of their parents? Or would they converge toward more conventional patterns after all? How would the children fare, given both the hopeful and fearful predictions of the experimenters and their critics? These broad questions, and the many theoretical and practical issues they raise, are the central focus of the Family Lifestyles Project.

To best encompass the breadth of our concerns, the project is interdisciplinary and longitudinal, bringing to bear the perspectives of psychology, sociology, and anthropology in a year-after-year focus on 150 children growing up in alternative families and a comparison group of 50 children in more conventional families. These 50 comparison families are legally married, two-parent nuclear units. Since alternative family constellations vary along many dimensions —size, seriousness of commitment, ideology, to name a few—there is always some arbitrariness in differentiating them into groups and labeling them. However, we have selected three structural foci around which many families living alternative styles do appear to cluster: (1) single motherhood, (2) "social contract" relationships (two-parent units without legal ties), and (3) collective living arrangements of various sorts.

The criteria for inclusion in one of the four sampling groups are purely and purposely structural. We did not want to make judgments about, for example, a family's "traditionality" or "uniqueness" as a condition for inclusion, partly because no reliable indicator has been identified for on-the-spot labeling and also because we wanted to

cast a broad net in our sampling of the universe of alternative family styles. As a result, there is considerable diversity and variability within as well as among the four groups.

In the research design, children, not mothers, are actually the central focus. We follow babies born into these various kinds of families wherever they lead us, developmentally and geographically. Nonetheless, while the overall focus is on the child and while family style and home environment are seen as the child's milieu, the woman's concerns and outcomes as she experiences her own birth into motherhood are also well documented.

We began the study by selecting women in the third trimester of pregnancy who were living in one of the four specified family structures and who satisfied certain demographic criteria (Caucasian, aged 18-35, with a middle- or working-class upbringing) that were needed to control for other factors. We located these women through a combination of professional and network referrals and responses to posted advertisements. For each group, 50% were sought in the greater Los Angeles area, 20% in and around San Diego, and 30% in the northern half of California (Monterey to Eureka).

Fifty women from each specified family form began their participation with an interview about their attitudes, philosophies, personal histories, and expectations as mothers. Where possible, the fathers were interviewed as well (145 cases). Over the years of their participation, repeated interviews will trace the evolution of their development as women and as parents. Visits to their homes by trained observers will document their environments and child-rearing practices. Testing by child psychologists and pediatricians will assess the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth of the child.

Presently, all 200 babies have been born; the oldest is now 2½ years old and the youngest is just 6 months. Complete data are therefore available through 6 months of age. What is reported in this paper is drawn primarily from the early contacts with the mother —one interview in the third trimester of pregnancy, a second immediately after the birth, and the sixth-month interview and home observation.[1]

The women averaged 25 years old at the time of the birth, ranging from 18 to 32; fathers were a little older, averaging 28 with a range of 19 to 42. For two-thirds of the women, the child in our study is their first. Seventeen percent were living in rural or semirural areas at the time of their pregnancy, and the other 83% in various towns and

cities. Twenty-nine percent have at least a college degree (B.A.), and 91% graduated from high school.

As well as differentiating the four structural life-style categories, one can also differentiate internally in each of the three alternate family life-styles, according to the dynamics and motivation of women becoming mothers in such families. We have identified three kinds of single mothers, which we have called Nestbuilders, Post Hoc Adaptors, and Unwed Mothers. Each type is defined according to when and for what reasons the decision to bear the children was made and how the mothers carry out their new role. We have identified two types of women in social contract families. Women in Committed Social Contract families have an ideology about non-marriage—they either are making a political statement against institutional interference in family life or believe that legal ties weaken more important emotional bonds. Women in Circumstantial Social Contract families would like to marry but have not done so because of practicalities, doubts about a particular man, or some other nonideological consideration. Collective living arrangements, because of their great diversity, can be compared in many ways, but we will differentiate in this chapter between women in Creedal Living Groups, in which the group's goals and philosophies are central to family life, and women in Domestic Living Groups, which have been formed either out of practical or social needs or out of a commitment to group living rather than to a specific "higher" ideology.

The following discussion describes the mother's role in each family life-style and how each life-style meets the common problems of (1) the provision of basic resources, (2) the organization of domestic tasks, (3) the responsibility for child nurturance and caretaking, (4) access to social supports for the mother herself, and (5) the mother's relationship with the father and/or other men. These problems are pivotal ones for new mothers. They profoundly affect and are affected by the choice of family life-styles.

SINGLE MOTHERS

Since the availability of birth control and legal abortion in California makes childbearing almost completely optional, single

motherhood is increasingly a voluntary condition, different from the involuntary "unwed mother" of past generations. Empirically, however, we find that women differ in the nature, timing, and perception of their choices. One-third of the single mothers in the current study planned their pregnancy; the others chose to become mothers by not availing themselves of abortion or adoption. Likewise, women vary in their attitudes toward remaining single. Half hope to marry eventually; the others feel that marriage is irrelevant or undesirable.

The three types whom we call the Nestbuilders, the Post Hoc Adaptors, and the Unwed Mothers are distinguished by the degree of planning and choice in their pregnancy and on related attitudes, resources, and resourcefulness that the woman brings with her in the transition into motherhood. These dimensions are particularly relevant since the single mother faces even more acutely the general concerns of all mothers. She has sole and unshared responsibility for her child. She does not have the standard, taken-for-granted solutions or arrangements provided more or less automatically in the legally married family. She often must come up with creative and experimental solutions of her own devising and, in fact, may try out several such family arrangements.

THE NESTBUILDERS

One group of single mothers sees single motherhood as a defined and desirable role, even as a solution. These women are often older (28 to 32 years) and feel that they are ready for a child, but they have no mate. Many are disenchanted with men and marriage. Others may still hope for marriage but are willing to reverse the usual sequence of marriage and motherhood (cf. Klein, 1973). Meanwhile, they seek out men whom they personally perceive as good biological fathers, sometimes hoping for, but rarely expecting or receiving, involvement beyond their brief sexual relationship. Six months after the baby's birth, most Nestbuilders have minimal or no contact with the baby's biological father. In many cases, they see him less often than prior to the pregnancy. These men were usually friends or colleagues, sometimes married to someone else. A few have some contact, showing pictures of the baby or describing developmental details.

These women build a foundation for single motherhood. They

consciously prepare themselves financially by obtaining good jobs and providing for insurance needs. They make a wide variety of contacts in search of information and social support. They reject the idea of dependence on welfare, the father, or even their own kin. From the beginning, these women expect, accept, and, in some cases, want total responsibility for their child.

While our statistics show that by the end of their pregnancy, two-thirds of our single mothers receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and continue to receive this aid six months later, this is not characteristic for the one-third who are Nestbuilders. Typically, they have college degrees and stable jobs. Most of them worked right up until delivery date; likewise, they were working again six months later. This spirit was reflected in the ways they anticipated and managed the postpartum period—a time they preferred to spend at home with their newborn. Several women consciously prepared for this period by soliciting temporary work assignments in the home that utilized their training and skills. For example, a commercial artist arranged to paint dolls and make designs for T-shirts at home. Another woman, employed on a research project, wrote a grant application from her home.

Our society's severance of domestic from financially productive work proves somewhat troublesome for the Nestbuilders who live alone. A few have hired household workers. Most, however, do all domestic chores by themselves. Day-care homes usually provide child care once the Nestbuilders return to jobs away from home. The mothers frequently have ambivalent feelings about these arrangements. Day-care usually means that a baby must be bottle fed, although several women, reluctant to give up completely, continue to breast-feed for the early morning and late evening feedings. They complain about the lack of day-care choices and feel frustrated if the caretaker's child-rearing philosophy and practices are not in complete harmony with their own. Even those who enjoy their work miss their infant during their long working day.

As a result of these pressures, some Nestbuilders are seeking permanent ways to earn a living from home. One mother is trying to write a screenplay; another is looking for a position as a resident manager of a large apartment building. They seek work which has some flexibility of time and can be performed at home and can thus reintegrate the domestic and economically productive work settings.

Many of these mothers intentionally seek out a system of social

support. Those separated geographically and in some cases emotionally from their own parents extend their own social ties by expanding relationships with friends, neighbors, the community, and professional associates. One mother's older neighbors are called and consider themselves "aunts" and "uncles." Some of these fictive kin were even present for the baby's home delivery. Some have a friend (male or female) close enough to attend natural childbirth classes and assume the "father's" position as a labor coach. Most Nestbuilders are active seekers of information, reading numerous childbirth and development books, consulting experts, and attending childbirth preparation classes.

THE POST HOC ADAPTORS

For Post Hoc Adaptors, pregnancy is a problem, not a solution. In contrast to the Nestbuilders, Post Hoc Adaptors did not seek to be single mothers. Usually the pregnancy was unplanned; in some cases, the pregnancy was planned, but the mothers did not intend to be single. In most cases, the baby's father encouraged an abortion or adoption, but instead these women elected to bear their child and raise it alone.

These women tend to be younger than the Nestbuilders. As a partial function of the age difference, they also have less formal education. Although some have a stable working record, many have not yet established themselves in a particular occupation. Frequently, the pregnancy at least temporarily interrupts their school or career plans.

Post Hoc Adaptors typically rely on AFDC for their financial support. While some view AFDC as a source of income indefinitely, most consider it a necessary but temporary solution to their financial needs. While grateful for it, many would prefer to get off the "welfare cycle" and earn a living. Some quietly supplement their income by selling handcrafted items. Many feel that the low salaries that they could earn would be eaten up by child-care expenses. They also see this as a poor exchange for being separated for long days from their infant. By six months, some have gone back to school part-time with a clear vocational purpose in mind.

Child care for those who return to school or who simply need some time of their own away from the baby is provided in a variety of ad hoc ways, contingent upon the mother's setting. Some

mothers, perhaps previously estranged from their own parents, enter a state of peaceful coexistence with them. They purposely move nearer, although rarely into the grandparents' home. Post Hoc Adaptors separated from their family often seek out other women in similar circumstances. They find acquaintances and support in natural childbirth classes, La Leche League groups, and the like. These are avenues of support and information available to and used by mothers in all life-styles, but particularly appreciated by single mothers. They often maintain these contacts and later form cooperative "play groups" for their infants, which are used for baby-sitting, as an opportunity for the mothers to exchange ideas and information about child-rearing, and as a source of playmates for their children.

Another possibility for the Post Hoc Adaptor is some sort of collective living arrangement. Some live with a roommate, generally female, but this arrangement is usually for financial reasons only and not particularly long-lived. Roommates characteristically help with general household tasks and occasionally baby-sit after the baby is asleep. Overall, roommates are a temporary expedient and are minimal in their potential to satisfy the mother's long-term needs.

Seven single mothers in the project were in one or another kind of living group. It is important to note that collective living is an attractive choice for the Post Hoc Adaptors. For a woman with limited resources of her own, collective energy, resources, and help are particularly useful. This living situation seems to alleviate many of the problems that women often look to a husband to solve. Nonetheless, many Post Hoc Adaptors, though accepting and making the best of their single status, would prefer to be married or at least in a serious relationship with a man.

UNWED MOTHERS

A third group of single mothers never quite accepts single motherhood as a positive role nor views it as an alternative life-style choice. They seem passively resigned to their situation, often regarding themselves as victims of men or fate. Since they resemble the familiar model of single motherhood of their parents' generation, we call them the Unwed Mothers. They even at times refer to themselves by this term. Most of the Unwed Mothers are anxious to be married and try countless times to get together with the usually

unwilling or uncommitted father, himself either young and unprepared to take on the responsibility of a family, or older and otherwise committed.

These women tend to be the youngest of the single mothers. Many are just 18 and have not had the time to educate themselves and/or expand their job skills or experience. They are barely out of their own nest, still in the habit of turning to their parents for support. Most families, though deeply disappointed, do come to the rescue. Typically, the Unwed Mothers live in or return to their parents' household. Those who receive AFDC contribute their check to the household economy; other needs are taken care of by the mother's parents. Her parents and siblings may be available to baby-sit, although these women often sadly complain that they have no place to go. The mothers do get help raising their child—not only baby-sitting but lots of advice (sometimes too much) on how to bring up the baby. Often, the maternal grandmother relates to the new baby as the youngest member of her own family, with the dependent young mother acceding to this tacit redefinition of status. The mother usually does a significant share of the total housework, as well as supervise younger siblings, nieces, or nephews in exchange for room and board.

CONCLUSION: SINGLE WOMEN INTO MOTHERS

The conscious choice of single motherhood is a key variable determining the roles that these women define for themselves. External circumstances are, of course, of great importance in shaping the women's roles, particularly age, life cycle, and income-occupational differences among the women. Yet the autonomy and self-reliance of the Nestbuilders stands out regardless of economic advantages or life experience factors, in contrast to the dependency and lack of reformulation of familial relations characteristic of the Unwed Mothers. The Family Lifestyles Project is examining the long-term influences of these variables on both mothers and their young children.

WOMEN IN SOCIAL CONTRACT RELATIONSHIPS

A social contract couple is a family unit in which the man and woman are not legally married. The term "social contract" connotes

a sense of serious commitment, which differentiates this life-style from "living together" and from the "shacking up" of their parents' generation. Even though they themselves experience a strong sense of commitment to each other, these couples continually fend off the pressures of social convention and of their own families to formalize the commitment and "really get married." For many of the women and men in these relationships, legalization and lifetime vows are undesirable. There is the persistent belief that separation, for better or for worse, is easier without the complication of legalities.

By the women's third trimester of pregnancy, one-third have been with their present partner, or compeer, three years or longer; half, from one to three years. More than half of these couples planned the pregnancy of the child studied in our project; in a few cases, this is the second child in the family unit.

Though resembling the legally married nuclear family in outward form, these alternative families do seem to be different in a number of ways. To begin with, one-third of the social contract partners, both women and men, have been previously married—twice the rate as among their married peers. Forty percent of legally married fathers have had some graduate education, compared to 14% of social contract fathers. The legally married family's income is also commensurately higher. Social contract families earn $3,000 to $20,000 per year, with a mean between $7,000 and $8,000; legally married families earn $6,000 to $30,000, with a mean between $12,000 and $14,000.

In background as well, social contract women and their compeers differ from the legally married. As children, they made many more residential moves. They were also less likely to feel close to their own parents and significantly more likely to feel close to their brothers and sisters. This is particularly significant in terms of their avenues of social support as they become parents. As one finds often with these alternative-seeking parents, women in social contract relationships are more likely to be estranged from their own families of origin. Half of these mothers see their own parents only twice a year or less (25% see them not at all), as compared to legally married mothers, half of whom see their own parents at least several times a *month*.

We have also found empirical differences in their family style. During a comprehensive sixth-month home observation of the families, 58% of the fathers or other males were present and caretaking, compared to 14% in the legally married family settings.

This finding reflects the fact that social contract families more often have a flexible, egalitarian division of responsibility. This tendency may be partly a function of the absence of a legal vow. Without a formal long-term commitment, there is a concern for not allowing either person to become overly dependent in any area of responsibility, and there is a desire for an accounting in the here and now.

The more egalitarian nature of social contract relationships may also be a function of the type of people who seek out such relationships. Most of the women, more than those in other life-styles, reported that they were in sympathy with the women's movement. Eighty percent of these women said that as parents they will not emphasize sex role differences and that they will try to treat sons and daughters similarly (compared to 59% of women in legal marriages). Their compeers are similar: 60% of these fathers, compared to 36% of their legally married peers, said that their lives had been changed by the women's movement. Women in social contract relationships also differ from the married participants in the higher priority they place on both creative and humanitarian pursuits. Again, the values of their compeers were in harmony with their own; men in social contract families most frequently ranked humanitarianism as their first or second most important value—three times as often as men in legal marriages, who instead valued career and financial success.

Just as with single mothers, women in social contract relationships differ in their reasons for entering into their particular family style. Some women actively choose the social contract status for reasons of personal or political philosophy, even though it often requires an exertion against the expectations of their parents and against the system and all its institutions. In this way, they share a certain spirit with Nestbuilders. We call this family style the Committed Social Contract. There are also women who are confined to this status only out of legal, economic, or other pragmatic considerations and would ideally like to marry. These women form what we call Circumstantial Social Contracts. These quite different motivations tend to outline the form of the relationship and the characteristic style in which the woman approaches and solves the general problems of her transit into motherhood.

THE COMMITTED SOCIAL CONTRACT COUPLES

For some women in social contract relationships, refusing to marry is a political statement, a positive act against governmental interference in personal affairs. They reject a system of laws that dictates who, when, and by whom a family commitment can be made and the complicated process by which it can be undone. Others choose a nonlegal status mainly out of concern for the quality of the relationship itself. They feel that legal marriage, usually regarded as a requisite for an enduring bond, has instead a deleterious effect on the quality of the relationship; because of long-term commitment and absolute vows, legal marriage allows people to take each other and the relationship for granted. Women in this family style often emphasize that relationships are fluid and in process, and they prefer to stay in a relationship only as long as it is rewarding in the present. Thus, their relationships are by definition open to change and are purposely not bounded by roles and vows. Typically, these are not transient relationships, but serious attempts to experiment with a form of family organization. The assumption in legal marriage that one must have a reason for separating is turned around; Committed Social Contract couples insist that there must be a reason to be together. People should be together because they want to, not because they have promised to. Self-expression, spontaneity, and interpersonal honesty are highly valued, and they feel that these values will be corrupted in the stifling presumptions of legal matrimony.

Typically, Committed Social Contract couples also question and redefine the roles associated with marriage and feel especially committed to an egalitarian division of labor in the family. In contrast to legally married couples, in which the women reported and were observed doing most domestic tasks alone, these social contract families were significantly less likely to stereotype domestic and financial tasks by sex. Tasks tended to be unplanned and shared in a flexible, variable manner.

Preliminary data indicate that this difference in flexibility of domestic tasks carries over to some extent into child caretaking roles; i.e., there was more variability in who performed caretaking functions in these families than there was among their legally married peers, among whom the mother was typically the sole caretaker. Some of this is a consequence of the fact that fewer social contract

fathers were working at jobs outside their homes and therefore were more available to do child care. However, in some of these cases, the father purposely chose to stay home, consciously forgoing additional income, in order to help raise the child.

Financially, most of these women have a clear sense of their own economic contribution to the household. Six months after the baby's birth, 25% of the women were earning at least a part-time income. Those who have moved into rural areas often turn their gardens into a primary source of sustenance and sometimes raise chickens and goats as well. Like many of the single mothers, those who receive AFDC often view public assistance as a temporary solution in an economy in which jobs are scarce and require long hours of separation from their infants. Meanwhile, these women consider their AFDC checks as their personal income contribution to the household.

Some couples make a conscious effort at egalitarian reform. One family has a negotiated understanding about income and equal work sharing such that neither feels a total dependence on the other in any area of responsibility. They each are responsible for the baby's care and concurrent household tasks three days a week. This arrangement is seen not only as a matter of equity but also as a calculated effort to correct a personality imbalance that traditional roles are seen to create. These parents believe that child-care responsibilities for the man will foster the growth of his nurturing qualities and that income and decision-making responsibilities for the woman will promote assertiveness and a sense of self-reliance for her. It is interesting to note that a year after the baby's birth, when financial pressures necessitated that both parents give up the "luxury" of working less than full time, they are still trying to maintain some semblance of this arrangement. They still each have days that they are in charge, but now dressing and feeding the child are followed by packing her day's paraphernalia and taking her to the sitter's, then picking her up in the evening.

Another well-established social contract couple has formed a productive and close-knit family life with their two children during the 10 years of their relationship. In the wooded hills where they live they have designed and built a unique and beautiful home primarily of natural local materials, brick by homemade brick, and piece by salvaged piece—an ancient stove, a bowling alley lane, railroad ties. On the slopes around the house they have planted and hybridized a

fruit orchard and an extensive vegetable garden and maintain a goat and poultry; from these they derive most of their food. They have minimal contact with the "conventional" world, utilizing its cash economy and institutions as little as possible. The semirural area where they live is peopled by a network of like-minded friends, who not only are an effective source of social support for the mother and her values but also have established a successful alternative school. The school is taught by all the parents and attempts to completely integrate curriculum with daily life, parents' work with the children's learning, and the natural world with the school environment. The couple's rejection of legal marriage, employment, and public school is rooted firmly in their commitment to a life that is simpler, more peaceful, and harmonious and open to whatever changes the future may bring. Their personal bond to each other and to the careful upbringing of their children supercedes and replaces the usual legal contract.

Many of these couples have applied this same spirit of critical evaluation, serious study, and experimentation to other aspects of their lives. One-third of these mothers carefully planned and carried out home deliveries. This method was chosen because they wished to ensure the father's full participation, and because they believed it superior for the mother and the infant. Nutritionally, too, these mothers often critically evaluate conventional diets and habits. They make an effort to avoid foods with additives or preservatives, and a significant number are vegetarians because they feel it to be more healthful. They frequently reject commercial canned baby food, preferring instead to make their own according to nutritional principles that they have studied. Some have also experimented with unconventional housing forms for their families. A few live in purposely primitive settings without running water and electricity. Some have built their own homes. These are generally not haphazard assemblages, but rather represent many hours and even years of study and planning to efficiently and economically utilize available resources.

Because of the emotional or geographical separation from their families of origin, many currently cluster in "counterculture" areas of a city, where their life-style is unremarkable and where they can get information from people whose values are similar to their own. For example, it was in local self-help clinics and birth centers in these areas where these women found out about home deliveries and

gained access to midwives and doctors for such a delivery and also where they linked into the available social support of mothers and others with similar ideas. In this setting, social contract women are typically quite open about their nonlegal status, often retaining their own name and making it part of the child's surname.

THE CIRCUMSTANTIAL SOCIAL CONTRACT COUPLES

There are also in the social contract sample women for whom nonmarriage is less a matter of principled choice than of practical circumstance. The woman may genuinely want to marry her compeer, but be restrained by some exigency—such as waiting for a divorce to be final or preserving some tax or income advantage. Other women are being cautious; their relationship is in a trial period, as a precursor for legal marriage. Sometimes marriage itself is valued, but not with this partner. In one family, the mother finds it expedient to stay with the baby's father because he cares for the child while she attends classes; eventually she hopes to marry someone else. In other cases, it is the woman who wants to marry, but the man who is unsure or unwilling. The women in this category ultimately expect to marry either the baby's father or some other man; therefore, in spirit and style, these families often closely resemble the legally married. They view the concerns of becoming parents in a similar manner, yet without the sense of security and the protections of property provided by a legal contract.

Sixty percent of all social contract women receive AFDC, and a number are postponing marriage partly to avoid losing this support. Either their income level is so low as to necessitate this strategy, or they feel strongly the need to have some degree of financial independence from their compeer. Since many of these fathers are still unemployed when the baby is 6 months old, many of these women were thinking in terms of providing their own financial support in the interim, until the man becomes a stable provider. For these women, earning an income is an expedient. They differ in this sense from the Committed Social Contracts and also from the Nestbuilders, both of whom value and plan to continue in their sole or shared breadwinning capacity.

In terms of child-rearing and the performance of domestic tasks, these families more closely resemble the legally married, with a division of household labor along sex-stereotyped lines. Some

exceptions to this occur in cases in which a woman is staying with this particular man precisely because of his helpfulness. Likewise, when the father is unemployed, he becomes more available to help, at least on a pinch-hit basis.

Women in circumstantially unmarried couples often present themselves as married and may wear wedding bands and use the father's last name. These couples also often live in conventional neighborhoods where there would be less likelihood of acceptance of their nonlegal marital status. Where the mother's own parents know the couple is not legally married, disapproval is common. All these factors combine to provide less social support for many of these women, caught as they are in a grey area, neither legally married nor truly committed to the social contract ideal of family life.

WOMEN IN COLLECTIVE HOUSEHOLDS

Collective living can take a variety of forms, differing on such dimensions as size, membership, design, beliefs and practices, and degree and kind of communality, to name only a few. The collective living groups sampled vary in size from three adults to hundreds. Out of a total of 50 living group mothers, 33 were legally married, 10 had social contract arrangements, and 7 were single mothers at the time they joined the project. The groups vary in what they share, ranging from the simple practicalities of daily life, to joint ownership of properties, to total life philosophies. A group may regard itself as one large "family" of brothers and sisters, perhaps under the stewardship of a charismatic or spiritual leader. Nuclear ties are at times intentionally diminished, with children separated from their parents or parents from each other. As a corollary, children may be regarded as everyone's children, with the responsibility taken from the parents and lodged with the group as a whole. In other groups the nuclear family unit is preserved intact; families enter, live in, and leave the group as a discrete unit.

There is no typical design for a communal dwelling. This is partly because collectives vary so greatly in size and structure, but more importantly because housing was never designed with collective living in mind. These groups have had to take the existing structures and adapt them to their needs. Occasionally they build from the ground up, but generally an adaptation is ingeniously devised. The use of

space is reinterpreted such that abandoned mansions, no longer economically feasible for most nuclear families, are revived and put to new use. Apartment complexes, duplexes, or triplexes, especially those with some central court or other centripetal space, are taken over completely. Rows of houses become a communal "neighborhood." Tents, buses, and shacks are drawn into a wagon circle in the open countryside or the woods. An abandoned motel is unboarded and reawakened. A farm is reorganized for people more than for animals and farm functions, so that the outbuildings become bedrooms even while retaining their colorful original names: "the Brooder Shed," "the Pumphouse," "the Springhouse."

Household tasks and income production are assigned and organized in many different ways. In some groups, sacred texts, leaders, or governing boards make these decisions. Other groups are explicitly democratic and experimental; decisions are made and enforced by house meetings, with posted rules and schedules; typically there are periodic reassessments. In these latter groups, diversity and change are accepted, even taken for granted.

For the purposes of obtaining a great range of types of collective households for the Family Lifestyles Project, the selection criteria were minimal: the household had to contain some number of people above and beyond the mother and her husband or compeer, and some degree of economic and/or value bond had to be in evidence.

COLLECTIVE LIVING AS AN INTEGRATED SOLUTION

At every income level, there are potential economic benefits to communal living. Buying power in housing, food, and utilities can be maximized. In the inflationary housing market, young families who cannot independently afford their dream of a home and a yard can realize it if they share resources with one or more other families. If two families share one large household, there can be one washer and dryer, one vacuum, one stove instead of two. For many women this is desirable not only as a simple savings, but also as an ecologically sound use of resources. Welfare payments in this setting can stretch to a more livable income. Child-care costs can be reduced to zero. A mother who wishes to work outside the home is often freer to do so, and a mother who does not is often relieved of the necessity to do so. For the relatively affluent, conveniences and luxuries such as a swimming pool, grand piano, or library are more financially feasible.

In all groups, there are private tasks and common tasks. Each person or couple has responsibility for their own space, be it sleeping mat, room, or apartment. We observe that the average number of tasks that the mother does alone is less than half the number in other life-styles. In addition, teamwork alleviates the monotony and isolation associated with housework. "Just housework" becomes elevated to the status of "Work," publicly defined and publicly recognized as an essential contribution (cf. Oakley, 1974).

The presence of other parents and children in 71% of the living groups provides access to playmates for the child and the possibility of shared caretaking for the mother. Whether to go to work, take a class, or just have a long bath, the mother can call on someone who knows and cares about her child. At the sixth-month home observations we found these children having more caretakers and more changes of caretakers than in other living arrangements. As a simple index, twice the number of people were generally within view of the child during these observations as in other family settings.

The pattern of assistance in which the mother retains full primary caretaking responsibility is the most common arrangement. But some groups have appointed or hired chief caretakers. In other groups, members take turns (either all group members, all parents, or all who are willing) in some sort of schedule of shifts, with a written log of each child's behavior handed from caretaker to caretaker. Some groups have only a general agreement that whatever adult happens to be present assumes the responsibility for supervision.

The needs for and types of relationships with men are influenced by communal residence. For example, none of the single mothers in our project who live in collective households report that marriage is important to them, whereas half the single mothers outside such groups do value and want marriage. Living groups offer security to women which can reduce some women's desire to marry; these women may feel greater freedom to choose single motherhood or a social contract status. In addition, relationships between couples are altered due to the immediate group support that each member can draw on. For instance, both parents can gain more free time once responsibility for income production, household maintenance, and child care are shared. Some couples find it easier to practice sex-role egalitarianism when there is group solidarity and pressure to change old habits. Explicit ideals, group decision making, and public posting of rules and tasks can encourage change. In some groups, fidelity and

kindness between spouses is valued and publicly enforced with group pressure. Bolstering, exhorting, and nagging can be diffused from the couple to the relatively impersonal group framework of rules and sanctions.

In our sample, women in collective households tend generally to be more alienated from their families of origin and seem to have substituted the group matrix as a kind of self-selected extended family. The alienation is graphically evident in the third trimester interview. Only half as many mothers in living groups as in legal nuclear residential arrangements report good relations with their own mothers and fathers. Only a third of the parents of living group women feel good about their daughters' life-style, and a full third feel negatively. At the time the baby is 6 months old, far more living group mothers have "infrequent" (less than once a month) contact with their own parents than the legally married participants in nuclear households. The substitutive social support function of the group is also clearly demonstrated by the fact that one-third of these mothers had home deliveries of their babies within the living group setting.

Collective living can create problems as well as solve them. For instance, not all groups allow or value children, and some offer only minimal help or support to the mother, in spite of the great potential for mutual assistance. Groups may alleviate isolation, but the members sacrifice privacy. Some aspects of group life can stress the parents' personal relationship—e.g., reduced privacy, other relationships competing for the mate's time, or pressures to change familiar patterns. Some marriages and social contracts may be easier inside a group, but some will split apart. Also, one may not like or get along with certain other members but be compelled to work side by side with them. Another important drawback for some women is the demonstrated instability of many living groups; they tend to dissolve after a very few years in most cases. (Creedal groups are an exception; see the discussion below.) At the very least, personnel changes are common, with the child and the mother required to make and break attachments frequently. Finally, the inevitable diminution of autonomy is not for every woman. Women are answerable to others and, in creedal groups, to religious or ideological goals as well—such as community service to drug addicts, an unwanted move to a foreign country, or simply distasteful work assignments. Large, hierarchical groups are more stable but often

require greater sacrifice of self and a confession of faith that would be unacceptable or inappropriate for many women. Choosing a compatible living group setting is clearly comparable in many respects to selecting a mate.

All these considerations about collective living—the problems, the opportunities, the variety—have a general effect on the woman's day-to-day life-style and mothering role. For all the differences and similarities among various groups, however, we can differentiate them into two fundamental types: those with a commitment to the life-style itself or the advantages and promise it offers, and those with a commitment to a creed or ideology that surmounts the life-style but which the life-style may serve to further. The former we call Domestic Living Groups and the latter Creedal Living Groups.

DOMESTIC LIVING GROUPS

Historically, communal experiments were likely to be large and internally oriented and thus relatively isolated from the larger society, often retreating to the countryside or even to new territory as pioneers (cf. Hostetler and Huntington, 1971; Muncy, 1974). These kinds of groups still exist, but a new model has also been born to meet very different needs (cf. Jaffe, n.d.).

Many of these domestic arrangements burgeoning at the present time seem to be affiliation-oriented, a conscious effort to create a hybrid of neighbors and self-selected extended family. Personal compatibility, a search for mutual assistance, and sometimes disillusion and alienation from technological values bring these people together. No shared central ideology, no particular leader, no significant joint-ownership of resources ties them to one another beyond immediate exigencies and conveniences. Most are small (3-6 adults). Some are urban and oriented toward, rather than away from, the larger society. In fact, group living is sometimes sought to facilitate career opportunities, because of the capacity to simplify household maintenance, child care, and accessibility of social contacts. Others are attempts to live close to the land and out of mainstream urban America. Another frequent characteristic is a zeitgeist of experimentation, of a search for a more humane, creative, and satisfying form of family life. Women, whether single, married, or socially contracted, are in these groups by design, seeking a better environment for themselves and their children.

For example, two Los Angeles families, one legally married, the other a social contract relationship, established a Domestic Living Group during the year prior to their entry into the project. These families had previously lived in adjacent apartment buildings. As neighbors, they had become quite friendly, frequently sharing meals and social experiences. They decided to share a home not only in order to afford a larger dwelling and space for a garden and chickens but also in order to experience the warmth of a larger "family." These four parents are all committed to personal values of cooperation and egalitarianism in the ways in which they rear their children. They felt it particularly important that their infants be cared for in their own home and by other "family" members who knew them well. Both of the women were pregnant when they moved in together. After the births the families helped each other on an informal, casual basis with the care of the infants. Housework and meal preparation were divided and rotated among the four adults. The arrangement worked well, but at the end of a year the social contract couple decided to move to northern California. This couple is now looking for a communal group in a rural setting; the married couple has returned to living as a nuclear unit, which they find they prefer.

CREEDAL LIVING GROUPS

Creedal Living Groups are distinguished from others by a system of values and beliefs that all members share as a condition for membership in the group. Sixty percent of our sample of living groups are of this type. Most of the groups are based on a religious belief system—Western, Eastern, or Western adaptations of Eastern religions. The rest of the groups are based on various other ideologies.

In the creedal groups, each person shares a defined source of their particular Truth, whether a sacred text, an anointed leader, or both. Some leaders live among their followers, some are in foreign countries, and some are alive only in spirit. Common features include rules and rituals for daily life and a clear line of authority to elders, masters, or teachers for daily guidance on behavior, diet, clothing, sex, etc.

For women living in these groups, the economic, social, sexual, and parenting problems are often regarded as the concern of the

entire group, not only of the individual. Groups may pool outside income; they may operate their own manufacturing or service business. They may collectively and publicly solicit donations or receive contributions or grants. Group self-sufficiency is frequently a strongly held value, often accompanied by a pride that precludes the taking of any state aid. They may maintain an extensive enough agricultural operation to feed themselves and even sell surplus.

From the point of view of the woman with a baby, responsibility for solvency is taken off her shoulders at this critical time. Money comes in and goes out, rent is paid, provisions are purchased, while her contribution can vary with her abilities at the moment. However, while she is often free not to work, she is often *not* free *to* work if she wishes. Some groups dictate duties and the division of labor according to codified rules. For example, perhaps only minor work is allowed outside the home, or only women are allowed to do child care. To many women, this lack of choice is a disappointment, but for others it is a liberation from worry and responsibility. A woman who wants and/or can accept such a centrally organized and structured setting is provided with a stable, secure, and protective home.

Creedal group members often speak of "dying to yourself," "breaking the will," "transcending the flesh," and other exhortations to consider the other and the whole above oneself. There is in addition the pervasive notion of a "chosen people," an elite spiritual corps with a special mission. This ambiance of higher purpose is in and of itself a bulwark of psychological support. Individual members are therefore very special to one another. The individual is not just anyone. Even groups that house nonmembers in "crash pads" or halfway houses or provide other ministry services make a distinction between outsiders and insiders.

In creedal groups, division of labor tends to be traditional, with women having responsibility for household maintenance and child rearing. Furthermore, the usual practice is for the mother herself to have primary responsibility for her own young children, even though other women may take important roles. In easy reach are other "sisters" to help out or free the mother for her other tasks. Some groups, however, do not follow this pattern but experiment with nontraditional caretaking arrangements. They may employ men as caretakers, have nonmother primary caretakers (as the *metapelet* on the kibbutz—Spiro, 1965) or require child-care shifts from all members.

In addition to providing personnel for child care, a group must also specify or arrive at what child-rearing philosophy and practice is consonant with or fosters the group goals. In groups following an old-established religion with written texts, great detail about such matters is often dictated. In others, in which there is no text or in which families per se were never included in the membership (for instance, in which members traditionally were all celibate priests) ideas about the proper way to raise a child are still evolving.

From the point of view of the mother, having her child in someone else's trusted care obviously relieves her of the moment-to-moment worry of a child and frees her to pursue other activities. But from another point of view she is also partly relieved of a right or privilege to rear her child as she sees fit. A great deal of trust in the concern and shared values of other caretakers is therefore needed. Even if she does all her own child rearing, she is expected to follow the established practices of the group in most cases, with social or disciplinary pressure sometimes brought to bear in the event of maternal resistance. She has somehow to reconcile her own inclinations with the rules or consensus of the group or endure public disapproval. One mother in our sample eventually left a living group because of this conflict, even though she did not leave the faith. In her case, she could not inflict the physical punishment on her child which was the creedal norm.

Even the decision to have a child in the first place may be determined by the group's need for new bearers of the faith or, on the other hand, by its need for the woman as laborer rather than parent. Sovereignty over adult personal relationships in most creedal groups also rests with the group: choice of partner, limits on premarital and extramarital relations, frequency of sexual relations, birth control, and similar matters are determined according to explicit rules of the community. At the extreme, sex even between married people is restricted to a highly ceremonial mating for procreative purposes only.

Although most of the creedal groups in the study are religious, some are frankly secular. One such group has an ideology based on maximizing sensory and material satisfaction and has a founding leader who inspires and instructs them in this pursuit of pleasure. There are branches in various cities, some of which have existed over five years. Another multiresidential creedal group, even longer-lived and also inspired by a charismatic leader, was established as a self-appointed guardian of what they idealize in America's past.

Several other creedal groups are dedicated to revising the typical sexual bonding in the family unit to include more people; this small but unique subset of living groups is called Expanded Marriages. In our sample, we have three triadic "marriages" and one group marriage consisting of eight adults. The ties are sexual, emotional, and financial, completely paralleling conventional legal marriage. Moves in and out of the expanded marriages are far more weighty than a mere change in life-style. These decisions and changes are equivalent in magnitude to any marriage or divorce. Emotional upheavals, concern for the effect on the children, and seeking marital counseling would all be likely to accompany any dissolution. All adults are viewed as each child's mothers and fathers. This concept is often difficult to mesh with the institutions of the larger society. For example, in one triad, both "fathers" wished to be present at the birth of the child, but only one was allowed into the delivery room. The expanded families tend to be viewed with suspicion by the larger community and by their own families of origin. Unlike a larger communal group, the triads cannot rely on solely within-group social support when they feel estranged from the larger community, because they simply are not big enough. Support is sometimes obtained by participation in an organization that promotes, educates, and supports people interested in alternative sexual-emotional relationships (e.g., open marriage, expanded families).

CONCLUSION—LIVING GROUP MOTHERS

There are other collective living alternatives beyond the ones that we have described, and more may be discovered as women continue to experiment with new solutions to their common concerns as mothers. What we have attempted to portray, in addition to the diversity, is the seriousness of purpose and the sense of searching that often pervades these groups. The popular stereotypes of cults of "irresponsible hippies" dominate the media and drown out the message that resourceful people are trying to create a new form of family affiliation.

WOMEN IN LEGAL MARRIAGES

Most of the legally married parents in our study were located through obstetricians randomly selected from the American Medical

Association directory in an effort to obtain something resembling "typical" or "normative" American families in the same geographical areas as the alternative families, for purposes of comparison. A smaller portion of this group was obtained through network sampling in the same way as the people in the three alternative life-styles.

For a substantial number of legally married parents, marriage is not a chosen "life-style" so much as simply the right thing to do. They may question who or when but not whether to marry. When we asked these mothers why they chose their life-style, we were often greeted with a puzzled expression. They perceive marriage not as a life-style among life-styles, but as a normal event in the life cycle.

There were, however, 14% of the married women interviewed who stated that legal marriage either never was or no longer is important to them. Some of them were married before the women's movement and other social forces encouraged women to consider arrangements other than those previously taken for granted. Some who do not value marriage are propelled into it for purely practical considerations, such as tax advantages, pacifying their own parents, or legitimizing the baby. Many of them are critically evaluating the idea and practice of marriage. In a few cases no wedding rings are worn, no last names are changed, and the couple present themselves socially as unmarried. Within these families we also frequently find less conventional role divisions.

For most of the legally married women, however, the two-parent nuclear family, legally attested and tied into an established framework of kin and neighbor relationships, is still their ideal family model. The wife is expected to maintain the domestic sphere while the man is designated as the material provider. The marriage ceremony signals a welcoming into the fold extended to the new couple on the part of the existing family network, even in cases in which the couple has been previously living together. Kin and "good neighbors" back up the woman with emotional support, information, and, at critical times, practical assistance. The legally married nuclear family has access to this ready-made blueprint for building a family: familiar models, designated roles, and socially approved patterns of behavior.

Overall, the married parents in our project are finding that the model is still viable, at least by comparison with the other family alternatives being studied; for most people it is still the more stable

and reliable way to cope with the fundamental concerns of childbearing and child-rearing. More than half of the legally married sample have been with their mate five years or more, and 90% three years or more. This is longer than the typical relationship between social contract compeers and, of course, much longer than that between single mothers and their men. They are also far less likely to have been divorced; for 90% this is a first marriage. Eighty percent live in houses, as opposed to apartments or more transient arrangements. The father is almost always employed, and family income is at the national urban average, higher than in any other family life-style.

Almost half of these fathers rank "career" as their highest or second highest value. The mothers are more likely to place their highest priority on "family" and "security," and 86% assert that legal marriage is important to them. This emphasis on stability is consistent with the reality of their daily life from the point of view of such objective measures as length of relationship, residence patterns, and financial security. Furthermore, almost all these women are receiving some of the social support from families that the institution of marriage supposedly promises. Only three women out of the whole group reported anything but good relations with their own parents. Both grandparents on both sides feel positively about the parents, the life-style, and the new baby. In about half the cases, the women were seeing their own mother at least twice a month during their pregnancy. The figures are substantially the same at the time of the six-month interview.

The married participants, being demonstrably more security-minded and also involved in one uninterrupted relationship, usually have been on a stable regime of birth control for the several years of their marriage. Three-fourths of these women planned their pregnancies (many more than in the other family style groups as a whole), and very few have had previous abortions. (By contrast, half the project women in other kinds of relationships have had previous abortions.)

ALTERNATIVES WITHIN LEGAL MARRIAGE

We are not going to enumerate the conventional nuclear family roles and solutions to the problems facing new parents; this has been done many times before. Instead, we will mention certain changes

that we are seeing in marital relations and role assignments. Egalitarian shifts, with women more often working outside the home and men more often sharing domestic and child-care responsibilities, are occurring in many families. Rather than simply adding employment to a woman's other responsibilities, there is beginning to be a real reinterpretation of roles and reallocation of household responsibilities. These trends are clearly visible in our sample of legally married families.

In 10 of the 50 legally married families, awareness and practice both have markedly shifted away from the previous sex stereotypes. In one case the woman supports the family financially by teaching in a junior college. She and her husband divide the other responsibilities and share the child-rearing, but he may properly be regarded as a house-husband. In another family the man's career allows him to be in his home workshop a great deal of the time. Another room is set aside for the woman's painting. With both of them doing a lot of their important work at home, they have developed an informal but very workable system of child-care in which one or the other assumes complete responsibility depending on which is available at any given moment. The other parent is therefore free to be involved with work or friends. In this family, what little housework is done is still in the woman's province.

In a more conventional example, both parents have careers away from home to which they are seriously committed, and so they have devised a different system of shared responsibility for their infant. The father has taken on the "morning shift" with the baby, changing the diaper and making breakfast and taking her to the sitter's before leaving for his job as an accountant. The mother does the evening caretaking. Each parent values this time with the child as part of a full parental role. In this family, each parent uses his or her own surname and the baby carries both.

Thus "conventional" legal marriage is undergoing changes too, as many of the values and practices of experimental families are becoming a part of American family life. This reinforces our belief that experimental families, though small in number compared to legally married nuclear families, have had and are having an influence far beyond their numbers.

CHANGES IN LIFE-STYLE

Our point of entry into the lives of these women is the imminent birth of their child, when women are facing acutely the concerns that we have outlined in this paper. Some adjusting of life-styles frequently results. By the baby's first birthday, almost a third of the alternative life-style mothers have chosen another life-style from the one in which we initially encountered them in the third trimester of pregnancy. In contrast, only two of the conventionally married mothers have made any change—both divorces. The three alternative family samples all have the same percentage of change (close to a third).

Changes toward another alternative family style are about equally as likely as change toward a conventional one: 20 changes were to conventional marriage and 25 to another alternative family setting. The changes away from the living group family were typically made by the entire family unit: seven of the married couples and five of the social contract couples who were in living groups moved out as a family unit. (One of the social contract mothers who moved out also separated from her compeer.) Changes away from single motherhood were largely toward cohabitation with a man: in seven cases a compeer and in five a husband. Three of these 12 men were the baby's biological father, and nine were legally or socially adoptive fathers. Two single mothers entered living groups. One child was given to her father to care for. The social contract women were about equally likely to marry as separate from their compeers: eight married, five became single mothers, one moved in with a different man, and another one entered a living group.

Change per se is common to the life experience of many of the alternate life-style mothers. Their own childhoods, for example, were more often marked by residential moves. Furthermore, not only are they currently living in unconventional households, but 42% of them moved into their current choice from a *previous* unconventional household. The broader range of life-style choices make it likely that experimentation will continue for our population. A woman may move in and out of several different life-styles as she explores and evaluates their consequences and appropriateness for her personality and current circumstances. Furthermore, the advent and growth of a child may alter her priorities in these choices, such that she might have preferred living alone before the baby, but communally during

infancy and with one man as the child gets older. Or she may have been content living with a particular man prior to the birth, but view him as an unsuitable father and opt for single motherhood.

These family life-style changes are influenced by the mother's attitude and by objective socioeconomic conditions. For example, in the present study, Nestbuilders, having planned and prepared for single motherhood, characteristically were more likely to sustain their status than were other single mothers. Women in Creedal Living Groups, having made a total commitment to shared beliefs, were far less likely to leave their communities than were women in Domestic Living Groups (12% versus 50%). Continued evolution in life-styles for these women and the dynamics behind the changes—the value of experimentation, individual personalities and needs, socioeconomic circumstances, life-cycle changes, and perhaps more—will be studied as we follow these families over the years.

CONCLUSION

Differentiating the subtypes within each of the life-styles depended in part on our judgments about the degree of choice and experimentation that women showed in exploring these family forms. A woman's choices are constricted by many conditions, particularly her socioeconomic position. Not all choices are equally available to all women. Even within our sample (itself restricted to a select group of Caucasian women from middle-class backgrounds), we still find considerable educational and income stratification and see its consequent influence. Thus, for example, not all women contemplating single motherhood can do the financial planning and preparation characteristic of the Nestbuilders. Therefore, "single mother" is an option with a much different meaning or consequence for women in dissimilar circumstances.

Furthermore, although we have spoken of alternative life-styles as "experimental," we have also presented data about women who have not truly chosen their life-style—for example, the Post Hoc Adaptors and the Circumstantial Social Contracts. These women have adapted to a compelling circumstance (e.g., unplanned pregnancy, fear of losing welfare) by assuming an unconventional life-style, although it is clearly not the one that they prefer. They have a pragmatic rather than venturesome spirit of choice. That these life-styles are available

as expedient, temporary solutions both qualifies our notion of choice and underscores the fact that a variety of options are indeed available.

There are other women who have clearly chosen their unconventional life-style with an experimental or pioneering spirit—the Nestbuilders, Committed Social Contracts, and many of the women in collective living groups. These are the women who are not only pursuing but also creating and further cultivating alternative life-styles. The impact of their attitudes and efforts has allowed other women to begin to look at their life-style as one among many. In this sense, marriage too is transformed into an option, a possible life-style among others, rather than a prerequisite for family life.

We do not clearly understand the relationship between life-style choice and personality. We have referred, for example, to the autonomy of the Nestbuilder, the dependence of the Unwed Mother, the independence of women in Committed Social Contract relationships, and the compliance required in some Creedal Living Groups. However, we do not know whether or how these life-styles attract or forge these types of women. Personality per se has not been a research focus of this study.

We have looked at some common needs and structural factors facing all mothers as they raise young children. These common problems not only influence the choices that women make but also are affected by those choices. We have tried to emphasize the complex interaction between life-style choices and mothers' roles. One important finding is that each life-style solves these problems differently. Women may change their life-styles or make other changes as these needs and common problems become more explicit and important for both mother and child.

Participants in our study often ask us if what they are doing is the best or the most appropriate for themselves and their children. It is premature for us to make any judgments of this nature, for we are in the preliminary stage of data analysis of a longitudinal study. The information presented in this chapter stems mainly from our earliest contacts with participants whom we hope to follow for a number of years. Furthermore, we are unsure how to ultimately evaluate these experimental family life-styles. What criteria shall we use? For example, are we to emphasize stability or change? Certainly the criterion of stability is not one congenial to many mothers who specifically value experimentation. Should we use the criterion of

internal consistency? Here again it is not clear that consistency is an appropriate choice, since many of our participants value diversity. Our judgments as to the success or failure of specific life-styles may always remain relative ones. One criterion that we might use is the success with which mothers are able to approximate their own stated goals. For example, mothers who value individual autonomy and independence are unlikely to find Creedal Living Groups a viable alternative, whereas women seeking extensive social support may find that Creedal Living Groups are an attractive and successful option. Women who value autonomy and independence may view Nestbuilder-type single motherhood as an ideal family life-style because of the freedom to make decisions and to structure their lives with only limited consideration for or compromise with the needs of others. Yet even the issue of freedom is relative. Whereas the single mother has the freedom to make her own decisions, she is never free to act spontaneously with regard to her activities but must find child care. She must plan ahead each and every time. Freedom for the living group mother is usually the converse, with great freedom moment to moment in some groups, but the ever present necessity to consider others in most decisions that she faces. Here the relative judgments involved are even more complicated than if we use absolute criteria. At this point in our research, we can only document the wide range of life-style options that we have found and continue to maintain contact with our participants in the coming years. Perhaps the parents and children themselves will point us toward more satisfactory criteria and toward some understanding of the relative outcomes and successes of these diverse family life-styles.

NOTE

1. Data presented throughout this paper come from the detailed interviews, questionnaires, and observations with the participants. There are actually over 50 babies in each life-style to allow for eventual attrition. Furthermore, the precise sample size varies for different variables, data sources, and time periods. Percentage comparisons between the life-style groups were selected to illustrate general group differences. More detailed and systematic presentations of these and other data are available from the authors and will be appearing in subsequent publications.

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