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AUTHOR Herzog, Elizabeth
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ABSTRACT

A survey of the family system as it exists today is presented. Initially, a comparison is made between the present system and the family system in other times and places. The three principal subjects of this paper--all interrelated--are families, change, and youth. The point is made that child marriages have not been exclusive to primitive peoples; they have occurred also in Europe and India, for example. With respect to change, it is noted that we are currently in a process of geometrical and constant change. It is pointed out that an attempt should be made to answer the questions of what we should want for young parents and their children and how we should facilitate their efforts to define and achieve what they want. The following views were expressed by high school students on the subject of change: (1) Change itself is a value; and (2) Most parents don't recognize change and they resist it. Plus and minus elements of the extended family are discussed. Other aspects of the three principal subjects which are covered in this paper include: psychological independence, economic independence, early separation between parents and their adolescent children, early marriages, and day care. (CK)

THE YOUNG FAMILY: SOME PERSPECTIVES

Elizabeth Herzog
Social Research Group
The George Washington University

(Formerly with Children's Bureau,
Office of Child Development, DHEW)

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Perhaps a subtitle of this conference should be "Advice to Unborn Children." They could use it, including the advice not to be born--which, so far, has been beamed at their potential parents.

Many years ago, Maeterlinck wrote a play called The Bluebird, in which one scene was populated largely by the souls of children not yet born. As befitted that pre-participatory era, the unborn babes had nothing at all to say about who their parents would be or what kind of life work they would pursue. In these two respects, Maeterlinck's fantasy was uncomfortably true to life. Where its message may have been less authentic was the ultimate discovery that the blue bird of happiness inhabits one's own back yard. (Or perhaps it's just that so many of us don't have back yards.)

Thinking about young parents means thinking about young families--in or out of wedlock. And by young families, I mean most of those in which both parents are of high school age or near it. The very-very-youngest are so small a proportion (in spite of their sobering numbers) and so special a case that they call for separate consideration.

Thoughts about young families--like thoughts about anything else--are conditioned by the context in which they occur. That context, in turn is strongly conditioned by what one thinks about families in general, about change, and about youth.

It's hard to talk about any one of those three--families, change, youth--without talking about the others, and I don't propose to try. Still, in the interests of wieldy talking--and listening--there may be some structuring under those three heads plus the author's privilege of a wind-up at the end.

The subject of families in general immediately invites comparison of our family system with the family as it has been known in other times and other places. Such an antequarian-anthropological tour can be a gratifying armchair sport. One thinks of the many primitive peoples to whom it has seemed natural, inevitable, and right that daughters are married off at puberty, often without being consulted, and usually with an eye to economic advantages for one or both of the families involved.[13] The economic consideration is not necessarily demeaning. Among American Indians, for example, the Crow considered the purchase of a woman the most honorific form of marriage for a girl. As Lowie puts it, "In a love match the man was trying to get something for nothing, he was 'stealing' his sweetheart. Such unions were not likely to last long, But when a man paid ten horses for a girl, it was proof that he esteemed her...and then the marriage was likely to be stable." And among the Northwest Californians, "the offspring of an unbought woman were reckoned bastards and barred from the men's club."[13]

Child marriages, of course, have not been exclusive to primitive peoples. Europeans at various times and places have also assumed that to marry their daughters off young was natural, inevitable and right, and that the preferences of the girls were unimportant since "at fourteen or thereabouts they do not know what is good for them." Whether their parents knew better is a question on which some--but certainly not all --of those child brides might agree with today's young people .

And then, of course, there is always India. Ghandi himself was the child groom of a child bride. And though one can hold no brief for that marriage or its effects on the young spouses, one can hardly claim that it prevented the bridegroom from becoming a functioning, contributing member of society.[4]

In one sense, piquant tidbits about other cultures have slight relevance to our present concern with young parents and their children. No one, as far as I know, has been able to disentangle and document the causes and effects of young marriages for the individuals and the societies involved. And even if that were accomplished, the circumstances in which those marriages occurred were too different from ours in too many ways to permit confident generalization from their experience to this country and this moment in history.

In another sense, however, it is fruitful to recognize the myriad forms the family has taken throughout time and space, and the fact that for certain periods any one of these myriad forms has been accepted as natural, inevitable, and right by most of the people among whom it flourished. Such recognition loosens the rigidity of our own assumptions about our own family forms and their permutations. To the extent that we recognize both the variety and the degree to which almost any variety has been accepted, we can transcend the assumption that the family as we think it exists today is firmly rooted in human nature and that any drastic change is bound to violate human nature and thus to spell disaster. It also might mitigate a nervous readiness to perceive changes that have not happened and a certain blindness to changes that have happened.

The theme of change is inextricably intertwined with any consideration of the family in general or young families in particular. That we have entered into an era when change proceeds at a geometric rather than an arithmetic pace is a truism which has entered our minds but not our bloodstreams. We grant its accuracy but fail to accept or even to perceive many of its implications. Margaret Mead makes the very strong statement that:"There were always some elders who knew more than any children in terms of having grown up within a cultural system. Today there are none. It is not only that parents are no longer guides, but that there are no guides." And again, "We must recognize that...no other generation will ever experience what we have experienced."[4]

Given the present rate of change and its permeation of every aspect of life, what should we want for young parents and their children, and how should we facilitate their efforts to define and achieve what they want? I doubt if we are in a position to answer those questions, but this makes it all the more necessary to try.

The subject of change is no less salient for young people than for their elders and their views about it both resemble and differ from the views of the over-thirties.

Some of us in the Office of Child Development are conducting a small and rather unconventional study of opinions and attitudes among high school students in various parts of the country.[8] In discussing the so-called Generation Gap, our Youth Reporters had a good deal to say about change: that parents and adults in general don't recognize its existence and extent, that they try to resist it, and above all that they don't want it. Some of the comments were angry, some understanding and indulgent. But what impressed us most was the emphasis on change itself as a value--a value they pictured as accepted with enthusiasm by the young and rejected by most (though not all) adults. But one thing that makes change so difficult, as a value and as a concept and as an experience, is that, while some things may have changed more than, or in different ways than, we realize, others may have changed less.

I have referred to the family as we think it exists today, because a considerable number of popular assumptions about our own family system are under strong challenge. One is a persisting belief that our modal family--our norm--is patriarchal. Another is a rather common belief that the low-income Negro family, especially the one-parent family, is matriarchal.[7] And another is the assumption that the extended family is nearly extinct and the nuclear family is disintegrating.

The alleged decline of the extended family is a fascinating example of a proposition stood on its head. For some time it was accepted as a simple fact and used to explain a number of less simple facts. Then an amazing spurt of research by several independent investigators came up with the news that the extended family is alive and well in the U.S.A.[10,12]

Clark Vincent, who has contributed so much to our deliberations here, is among those who have most convincingly argued in print that the nuclear family shed some of its formal characteristics and some of its former functions without necessarily losing its vitality and crucial role.[20] A number of others have offered similar assurances, including Ralph Linton's poignant prediction that when the nuclear deterrent finally fails to deter, the last man will spend his last hours searching for his wife and child.[11]

Nevertheless, anxiety persists about the changes reflected and foreshadowed in the decline and fall of the family (nuclear and/or extended). This mourning for its demise oddly coexists with evidence of its survival.

The mourning coexists also with a tendency to deplore some evidences of the extended family's continuing existence. When a teenage mother surrenders her maternal role to her own mother and herself adopts the role of quasi-sibling, the transfer is almost unanimously deplored as unfortunate both for mother and child, and it may be so. However, this is an example of the extended family at work.

Perhaps we are somewhat ambivalent about the extended family, as about a good many family matters. There are valid grounds for ambivalence about many aspects of the family. And it can be constructive to recognize both the plus and the minus elements, provided that both kinds are recognized at the same time. Problems emerge when mythical ideal family norms are viewed as the pattern of what is natural, inevitable and right, and any deviations from those norms seen as all bad; or when the existence of a standard ideal-norm family is seen as the only hope for a child, or when the discarding of the nuclear family is seen as the only hope. At a recent meeting some mothers in a poverty program advocated an end to nuclear families, on the ground that you should be able to love any child as much as your own. In another meeting down the street, a mother in a different program was scoffing at the idea that anyone could know more than a child's own mother about what was good for him. This is the kind of collective ambivalence in which various individuals simultaneously take conflicting either-or positions. We also get collective either-or positions through time, for example, in connection with group care of children. In one period, the professions unanimously repudiate any group care at all for children under three. In the next, they may advocate group care from infancy for all children who were not wise enough to choose prosperous, middle-class parents.

The either-or view in its myriad manifestations must be counted among obstacles to healthy evolution for the family as an institution, including most emphatically young families.

The undesirability of an either-or view is, of course, generally recognized in principle. Probably it is also recognized in practice by most of us here, up to a point. Yet, even for those of us who consciously try to elude the either-or trap, it has a way of secretly infiltrating our thoughts, assumptions and words. We may recognize that there are various populations of young families: the poor and the prosperous, the white, black, brown, red and yellow; the offspring of stable unions and the offspring of "broken homes"; the products of cohesive, warm, supportive families (which may also live in so-called "broken homes") and the offspring of stressful, conflicted families; the married and the unmarried; the young and the very-very young.

We may recognize also that within these varied populations there are individual differences, sometimes greater than the overall differences between populations. We may escape the either-or pattern to that extent and still fall prey to it in other ways, for example in the ways we neatly dichotomize along other dimensions: between sickness and health, say, or wanted and unwanted children, or between teenage parents and other parents.

One either-or trap especially relevant to young families has to do with dependency and independence. It is customary to assert or imply that a person who loses his economic independence becomes a dependent person, and that one who gains economic independence ceases to be dependent. Similarly, there is an either-or implication regarding psychological independence. And sometimes no differentiation is made between the two--economic and psychological. Along with the either-or view we

have on the whole clung to the assumption that the change represented by extending the number of years required for education must necessarily extend the period of dependence.

Of course a few moments of reflection remind us that dependence and independence can be intricately graded, timed and mixed. Childhood is a period of sanctioned, graded, phased, segmented dependence which (in theory) gradually diminishes and ultimately terminates. Adolescents achieve independence in some respects (traveling around town, social activities, perhaps owning a car) long before they achieve it in others, and different individuals achieve different segments at different times--if at all.

In the United States, University scholarships and fellowships have drastically modified the one-to-one correlation between student-status and economic dependence for a fortunate and steadily increasing number of students. They represent a small proportion, nevertheless, and for the most part are beyond the ages included in young marriages as we have been defining them here.

Alva Myrdal is one of several authors calling for more sweeping divorce between the status of dependence and the status of student. "Due to the increased life expectancy," she says, "it is but natural that a longer period should be attributed to study and training....But what is not 'natural' is that economic and disciplinary dependence on the parents should continue for an equal period. Rather, the discrepancy between biological and social maturity may be one of the most fundamental causes of the so-called 'youth problem' besetting so many countries just now. Or, to make the issue appear even more realistic, at the same time as we allow children and youth more 'freedom' we keep them de facto longer in dependence." (p. 9)

Psychological independence, she says, should be the first concern of education. She urges, no more child-centeredness (which she views as a "particularly horrifying trend" in the United States), but rather an educational policy that "would conscientiously prepare children for being able to stand a certain degree of 'neglect'." This, she claims, is a necessary adaptation to changes that include a longer life span, more leisure hours for men, a reduced proportion of married life devoted to child-rearing, and a longer period for the cultivation of shared husband-wife activities, and activities for the wife outside the home--including, of course, employment.

Greater economic independence for the young she views as "another major consideration, where public compensation for study and training costs is beginning to provide a solution. "But," she adds, "economic independence should, of course, not just mean obtaining more money, but earning it, even if the work consists in studying." Here she diverges from the prescription of some who appear to advocate a stipend to teenagers just as a reward for being teenagers.

She raises the question whether the demographic, technological and social changes which the family must respond to now indicate the desirability of early separation

between parents and their adolescent children. Residential schools, perhaps. "Or perhaps we could make do with just such changes in typical housing plans that there are created 'houses within the home,' that is some independent quarters where privacy is respected." Though the suggestion implies a somewhat Utopian view of the housing situation, it is worth pondering.

The relevance of economic dependence is obvious. Parental financial assistance bulks large in the economic arrangements of young families--either with or without provision of housing accommodations. Such help is surprisingly frequent. Sussman and Burchinal point out that financial aid patterns from parents to children "are probably more widespread in the middle and working class families and are more integral a feature of family relationships than has been appreciated by students of family behavior."[2,19] They add that "while there may be a difference in the absolute amount of financial aid received by families of middle and working class status, there are insignificant differences in the proportion of families in these two strata who report giving, receiving or exchanging economic assistance in some form;" and that financial aid from parents is received most commonly by young couples in the early years of married life.

Economic independence and residential autonomy would not in themselves necessarily guarantee that every young family could live happily ever after. But they would go a long way toward relieving some disadvantages of young parenthood that go far beyong the budget.

With regard to psychological dependence, Rose Bernstein makes the point that parenthood does not end dependency needs any more than the adolescent status precludes the ability to be a good mother. On the other hand, as I understand it, legal independence occurs automatically at marriage, and is immune to economic or psychological needs or pressures.

Not only does the either-or approach distort perceptions of specific factors affecting young families. It seems also to permeate the over-all views of many--though by no means all--about young families. In such cases the balance is heavily weighted on the negative side.

There is, of course, an impressive amount of evidence to support and reinforce a negative view. The disadvantages of young parenthood have been documented in dismaying detail. For this audience it will be enough only to list some--amd maybe at this point even that is too much.

Young parents are more likely than others to have low educational and occupational advantages and skills, with occupational choices and income expectations restricted accordingly; to come from low- rather than middle- or high-income families, to live with in-laws, possibly in cramped quarters, possibly with attendant frictions, but in any case not "on their own."

Moreover, young parents (in or out of wedlock) risk being trapped in the family cycle so vividly described by Alvin Schorr.[18] The likelihood of large families with their

attendant economic handicaps, is increased by the relatively large proportion of school-age wives who are pregnant at the time of marriage. Some are pregnant because they are planning to be married, but some are married because they are pregnant. A number of studies report that such marriages run more than the average risks of stress, regret, and divorce, and of low marital satisfaction.

It may be suspected further that even if marriage is not entered because of pregnancy, a very young marriage is more likely than others to be entered because of family or individual problems rather than for more promising reasons, related to the individual characteristics of the prospective spouse, a tested belief in congeniality of interests and values, and a considered wish to spend the rest of life together.

Thus, young people without economic resources, face--as Schorr puts it--"a common problem about school, family, and work...in being forced to make decisions prematurely and unprepared. In the situation in which poor youths find themselves," he adds, "the alternative to one choice for which they are unprepared (completing school) is another choice for which they are also unprepared (early marriage or work)." He adds further that they are thus robbed of what Erikson has called "a psychological moratorium--a period of delay in the assumption of adult commitment."[18]

Most of these hastily summarized points have enough documentation to withstand dismissal. Some of them apply more to the poor than to the prosperous, but some are no respecters of income.

In the light of this grim catalogue, how can one do other than deplore young parenthood? Such a question calls to mind Samuel Butler's answer to the query whether life is worth living. "That Sir, is a question for an embryo, not for a man." Deploring is a fruitless exercise and we've already had enough of it to last for quite a while. During the last two days a number of things-to-do-about-it have been suggested.

Just now it's relevant to speculate about the other side of the either-or. What do we know about the plus elements in young parenthood?

Actually, we know very little except on an anecdotal basis, and this may be the result of another either-or propensity--namely, our propensity to focus on problems and weaknesses rather than strengths. It's a natural propensity since illness and symptoms are easier to define and measure than health and well-being. Just the same, the problem-focused approach does foster some unfortunate habits.

An example of it occurred the other day when I received a request for a recent paper on "social pathology." Since I couldn't remember ever writing about social pathology, I was stumped until it dawned on me that the request was for a paper reviewing research about one-parent families--a major conclusion of which was that they should not be relegated to the pathology corner.[8]

It is a part of a one-side focus on problems to make a bogey man of a percentage

or trend or correlation and scare ourselves to death with it. One result of the bogey-man approach is that energy and attention are diverted from efforts at coping, to venting and fomenting alarm, indignation and hostility. Though few agree with me, I believe that these tend to be counter-productive, even though we have trained legislators and the public to increase services and facilities only when someone pushes the panic button. It doesn't really have to be that way. Child labor legislation, for example, was forthcoming not because child labor was shown to be on the increase but because it was shown to exist and to be bad.

In the case of young parenthood there isn't even an honest bogey man. The chief reason for an increase in the number of unmarried teenage mothers is that there are more teenage girls. And accoding to our somewhat iffy national estimates, the rates of young marriages stabilized in the 50's and increased somewhat in the 60's despite some oscillation. I have some questions about these estimates, and so do the statisticians who compile them. It seems possible that during the 60's rates of young marriage rose more than the Monthly Vital Statistics Reports imply.[16] However, it seems practical just to say that a good deal of wrestling with very iffy figures leaves this particular wrestler ready to claim reasonable solidity for two generalizations. First, the number of teenage parents is large enough to justify solicitous attention and strenuous efforts to improve the situations and prospects of young families; second, changes and trends in rates and in the numbers involved are not substantial enough or at least not clear enough to affect, one way or another, the amount of interest that should be devoted to young families.

The numbers are large enough and the difficulties are serious enough that the best we can possibly do will not be enough. Therefore we can forget what Friedenberg called the diversionary tactic of counting, and concentrate on doing the best we can.[5]

To return to the statement that we know very little about the positive aspects of young parenthood, the fact is that we know little about any aspects. Moreover, that little has been concerned chiefly with the youthful parents. I know of only one investigator just now who is making a serious effort to discover what it means to have a parent who is also a child. Yet a number of young families provide evidence that there are also some positives in the picture. Until these are explored we are in no position to say which way the balance tips--or how much we could and should influence the tilt.

We do have one or two studies that show children of very young mothers at a disadvantage as compared with children of older mothers.[17] But one or two other studies suggest a disadvantage for children of older parents. None of these is concerned primarily with parental age and therefore none can be taken as direct evidence one way or the other. However, some very incomplete browsing leaves me with two tentative conclusions: First, that we have little solid information about young parents as parents, and still less about their children; second, that what

little we have is inconsistent enough to suggest that the answers, when they come, may not fit neatly on either side of a plus-and-minus ledger.

Some young parent positives have emerged during the last two days and a few can be mentioned now, not as reasons for preferring a very young marriage, but rather as a mitigation of the either-or negative view. One that emerges in anecdotal material is the energy of the young, especially those who by grace of economic situation or individual endowment are in good health. We do have some scrappy information about the extent to which exhaustion, depleted energy, and ill health impede the mothering potential of adult women in poverty, especially some who are receiving welfare assistance; and also of some mothers, especially working mothers, who are well above the official poverty line.

Concomitants of youthful energy are flexibility, resilience, and adaptability. I am told that, because of these attributes, the military view their youngest recruits as their best human material. One can reject the noxious context and the cynical carry-over to domestic warfare and still accept the testimony to the value of these youthful characteristics.

Another possible positive is the ability of some young mothers to love their children and to express their affection in warm, playful and enriching ways. A sensitive and gifted caseworker has told me about a child of child-parents who has experienced a good deal of trauma for a four-year-old, and nevertheless displays amazing stamina, resilience, intelligence and gaiety. She speculates that perhaps the joy and pride and the kind of expressive, playful love these young parents have showered on the little boy from his earliest infancy have strengthened the core of him to withstand the ups and downs of the undeniable stress beteen his two immature parents.

Still another possible positive may lie in the very fact that young parents are young and therefore more like their children. The disadvantages of being a child parent, from their point of view, can hardly be denied. Yet it is conceivable that the generation gap may prove less serious for them as parents than for some of their elders.

Some clues on this score can be derived from the experiences of siblings who are put in charge of younger brothers and sisters. A frequent tendency of experts is to give blanket disapproval to surrogate parenting by siblings. Yet here again, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is more gold than we have mined in the relatively unexplored hills of sibling relationships. We do have a modest amount of research testimony on the values of an older sibling for children in fatherless homes. Whether some of those values can operate for children whose parents are in the sibling age bracket is an unanswered but inviting question.

The subject of young families lies in what bureaucrats delicately call "a sensitive area". A good many adults today are up tight about families and even more are hung up about youth. In fact, the United States has a thing about age.

The yen for eternal youth is neither new nor indigenous. Peter Pan graced the turn of the century and Ponce de Leon antedated him by quite a bit. And a few characters in Greek mythology had the drop on both.

Fulminations against the brashness of the young and the supine indulgence of them by the old may be more characteristic of what we quaintly call developed nations than of primitive societies, but that also goes pretty far back. With regard to the American scene, Charles Dickens and Mrs. Trollop had some pretty tart comments on the spoiled, brash, over-indulged, ill-mannered children of the Americans. So did some contemporary American authors, judging from nineteenth century comments. For example, on "the irreverent, unruly spirit" prevalent among young people, or the "facetious complaint" in the 1850's that "there is as much family government as there used to be...only it has changed hands."[3] There was also alarm, voiced somewhat earlier (1835) about "the increasing tendency of children to seek social satisfactions outside the family, among groups of their own peers."[3] The generation gap has a longer pedigree than it usually gets credit for.

Nevertheless, a few vibrations in the current American accent on youth seem to be more recent and more local. One among several is the extent to which we have become age-punitive--We punish people for not being a different age from what they are. Many primitive societies are age-graded, in the sense that specific observances, rituals and limitations are formally associated with different ages, and specific rituals mark the graduation from one level to the next.

Among Melanesians, adult men would often eat, sleep, play and dance in a club house apart from the women's huts, and at about age twelve boys left the mother's domain for the father's. This means that before adolescence, the boys were reared mainly by women, with occasional visits from the father. According to current doctrine this should have effeminized the boys, but fortunately for the Melanesians that doctrine had not been expounded or exported during their heyday.

Our own culture does not have formal age grading accompanied by rites de passage. The landmarks of growing up used to serve some such function, but fashion has obliterated the significance and the threshold thrill of the first long trousers, first long skirt, first piled hair, first real night-time dance party, first boy-girl date. Mothers dress like little girls and both show their transcendence of historical niceties by combining the miniskirt with Gibson Girl Sleeves.

Yet the fact that adults make like children and children make like adults and both scramble their historical tenses reflects no indifference to age level. Quite the contrary. Some European societies have associated certain perquisites with certain ages, usually in ascending order of gratification, from childhood to old age. The age-punitive system is more notable for the penalties of being in the wrong age grade than for the rewards of being in the right one. One approach is to punish for being under twenty-one or over twenty-nine. The dividing line is thirty, but the year preceding the thirtieth birthday is shadowed by imminent crossing of that dread line.

The penalties of being overy thirty in our society have been discussed and lampooned too much to require further comment. What has seemed more noteworthy to us in our study of youth attitudes was the extent to which our Youth Reporters defined themselves as a minority group, and the extent to which they documented the definition. Their list of particulars reads like an excerpt from Sociology One, lecture on minorities.

Like other minority groups, they picture themselves as condemned wholesale for the misdeeds and excesses of an unrepresentative few. And, like other minority groups, they cite instances of oppression, unfair discrimination and prejudice. Adults are hostile, their minds are closed, they are dogmatic, they don't listen. They react to and perceive teenagers, not as individuals but as members of an undesirable group. Moreover, they deny rights of self-determination while imposing obligations of self-control and self discipline (which they by no means accept for themselves.)

Like other minority groups, the teenagers claim not to respond in kind by lumping all the over-thirties into one spuriously homogenized mass. "We," they declare, "do not condemn all adults because of a Lee Harvey Oswald or an Al Capone." On the contrary, they differentiate reasonably between good and bad adults.

To the extent that they practise this anti-homogenizing preachment, they protect themselves against counter-charges of inconsistency. Some heroes of the young people have themselves crossed the deadly deadline into over-thirty. Dr. Spock, for instance, and Senator Eugene McCarthy. Venturing into a smaller and more vociferous wing, one encounters such venerable youth heroes as Uncle Ho, Mao Tse Tung, Marcuse, and Picasso, creator of the Dove symbol. A number of authoritarian names do show up on that roster.

Like many minority groups, again, this one cherishes the Messiah dream of ultimate triumph--but with one all-important difference. They exult in the sure knowledge that one day they will oust the dominant group from the seats of power. And some of them are confident that they have both the determination and the ability to improve on what they call "the mess this world is in."

The minority group picture sketched by these high school students is elaborated by some adult authors who point out, for example, the legal deprivations of juvenile delinquents, or the subordination of child rights to parental rights in adoption placement. Friedenberg goes further and argues that youth are the only group set apart and dictated to "for their own good."

Perhaps a majority of adult Americans at one time or another have been, or have fancied themselves, members of some category that could loosely described as a minority group. A rather neat demographic trick, come to think. Yet if you count up everyone who has been under the golden age, over the golden age, a Negro, a Jew, a member of some other disfavored ethnic, national, religious, or professional group, a woman, a person in poverty--it seems that we have really managed, in varying degrees, to give a majority of our citizens the experience of membership in a minority group.

If this be so, it might be expected to result in a high level of intergroup empathy. Whether it has may be a matter of dispute.

The here-and-now relevance of the age-punitive label is, of course, that young parents belong to the minority group so feelingly described by our Youth Reporters, as well as to a more circumscribed minority. As teenagers they share a number of complaints in addition to those already mentioned, concerning their own status and the dominant adults. None of the complaints is wholly irrelevant to young parenthood, but one is especially relevant. This is the theme of cultural discontinuities, stated by Ruth Benedict thirty years ago and recently revived with variations by several authors. It involves the discrepancies between what children learn and the way they are later expected to behave, what they are led to expect and what actually confronts them, what adults preach and what they practice.

Although it's not possible to elaborate on the theme of discontinuities, discrepancies, inconsistencies and consequent disillusionment, it rings out loud and strong. To the extent that young people become parents because of personal problems rather than because they feel ready and eager for parenthood, culture clashes and discontinuities cannot be wholly absolved.

And now, not to sum up but to wind up, it seems practical to differentiate sharply between the things we now have it within our power to accomplish and those we are just learning how to do or suspect we could achieve only indirectly. To aim at reducing the number of young marriages--if that is a reasonable objective--I would put in the category of achieving indirectly if at all. To reduce the number of children with child parents, I would put in the category of learning how, for example, through more rational and effective programs of family planning. To improve the situations and prospects of young families that exist, I would put at least partly in the category of what we <u>can</u> do <u>now</u>.

The part most clearly within our power is to improve the educational-economic situation of young families--which in turn drastically affects psychological, social and physical factors, including energy level and health. These are things we know how to do something about, if only we can learn how to want to do it as much as we wanted to go to the moon. I think I can safely entrust further comment on that point to my fellow speaker (who undoubtedly is aware that it involved many who are not "welfare mothers").

Another thing we <u>can</u> do is improve community supports for mothers--young or less young, married or unmarried, employed outside the home or only inside the home. These include housekeeping helps, recreational opportunities, and of course adequate daytime care of children. There is some tendency to forget that what some call "reality factors" can condition those higher-status factors involving psychology and interpersonal competence, including competence at parenting. The parent who is harried, exhausted, ill, depressed, or even hopelessly bored, is not likely to be the most effective, stimulating, and delightful parent or spouse.

There has also been a baffling failure to benefit by the experience of other countries. We might learn from some of them not only how to offer specific programs and supports, but also how to invest in this kind of enterprise a proportion of the national income commensurate with the size of our needs and our own claims of commitment to the welfare of children.

A woman who directs a model day-care center for working parents told me that she thinks the best thing her center does for children is to help parents love them more. (The same might apply to student parents.) When they are relieved of worry about the children, she says, and are less worn out by trying to do everything for them, she can see a change in the happier and more affectionate way parents and children greet each other at the end of the day. "When I see the love growing in their eyes," she said, "then I know we are really helping those children."

This kind of change can be difficult to document. Our research technicians haven't yet come up with an instrument for measuring optical miniwatts of maternal lovelight. But just give them time.

Another thing that lies within our power has to do with the self-fulfilling prophecy. The attitudes and behavior of family and society may not affect the number of young parents, but they can influence the outcomes of young parenthood. If the social environment is convinced that the outcomes will be dire and is set up to make them so, the conviction will help to make the prophecy come true. In this sense, a conviction can convict.

I have suggested, in reverse, two ways in which the self-fulfilling prophecy can be circumvented. One is through attitudes toward change: readiness to see it when it's there, ability not to see it when it isn't there, and readiness to plan and promote it when it is needed. Perhaps the greatest change of all would be a national readiness to supplant the Topsy principle with a principle of planned change.

Another way to de-fang the self-fulfilling prophecy is through supplanting the either-or approach with one more sophisticated, qualified and realistic. Easier said than donebut, like charity, it begins at home--in this case quite literally. For in the last two days I have broken out of one either-or trap myself. I had assumed a dichotomy between the bringing of services and counseling to individuals and the bringing about of institutional change. Through individual services, I have assumed, one can reach only the limited number of individuals served, plus a few whom they reach directly. According to this view, it is not within the responsibility or the power of program people to engineer the social and economic changes required to effect significant improvements in the lives of the many not reached by services and programs--or even to effect, for those who are served, changes beyond the scope of individual services.

I wouldn't quite discard the idea of a division of responsibility embodied in that either-or. But now I would fuzz it up quite a bit. For I think the group represented

at this conference has not only scored some program successes, but has also pioneered in bringing about some institutional changes--for example, relaxation in restrictive school policies concerning pregnant girls. Possibly for the wrong reasons, the growing and spreading willingness to have pregnant girls continue in their regular schools does seem attributable at least in part to the work represented by the people gathered here. This effecting of needed change, simultaneously within relatively limited programs and on the broader social horizon, seems to me a notable achievement. And the best is, we haven't seen the half of it yet.

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