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## Evolution of the Un-Wed Mother

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**Evolution of the Un-Wed Mother** by Carol Jean Obergfell

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First Edition

Evolution of the Un-Wed Mother

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### Abstract

According to the National Vital Statistics System, since the 1980's, there has been a dramatic increase of unmarried pregnancies, close to an 80% increase. Drawing predominantly on historical information, and interviews with a multi-generational group of unmarried mothers, my research will show that although there are socio-economic factors which contribute to this phenomenon, the overwhelming factor is the increase in individualism, and that over the decades, unmarried women have evolved. With the release of societal pressures that once deemed them "fallen women" they no longer feel that they have to be married in order to provide a good life for their children.

## Evolution of the Un-Wed Mother

### Introduction

“When I was growing up, I always read horror books, while my sister read romance novels. My sister became unmarried and pregnant during high school, and she kept saying, 'This wasn't supposed to happen! Why is this happening to me?' Someone should have given her another book to read” (Allison).

Taken in by the promise of love, generations of women experienced shame, and the fear of being shunned by society because they bore a child out of matrimony. Many were labeled as fallen women, or ruined, and those without family support were destined to lead a life of struggle and economic hardship.

The millennial generation of women do not share that experience. Unmarried mothers today have benefited from a shift in cultural values. Women now have greater choices in the timing of their fertility decisions, and how they want to live their life, their life, their choices. How have unmarried mothers evolved since the shotgun weddings of the past? In which aspects have cultural values changed in order for unmarried women today to be more self-assured, and not care what other's think?

Drawing predominantly on subject interviews with a group of young, unmarried women with children, my research will show that although there are socio-economic factors that contributed to this shift, the overwhelming factor is the increase in individualism, which has helped the un-wed mother evolve. Today's women no longer feel that they have to be married in order to provide a good life for their children.

I will also include personal interviews with three, more mature women, who during the decades of the 1960s and 1980s had children without benefit of marriage. In exploring their

experience, I will be able to discern what effect past social and cultural values had on these unmarried mothers, if any. How did their struggles pave the way for the newest generation of unmarried mothers?

### Historical

According to Jane Mattes' book, *The Single Mother By Choice*, "There has been a dramatic increase in the number of mature single women...becoming mothers" (9). The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 1993 that nearly a quarter of the nation's never-married women now become mothers, an "increase of 60 percent in the last decade" (10). In the ten years between 1980 and 1990 the birthrate for unmarried women in their thirties and forties increased 120 percent.

The National Vital Statistics report shows that for 2011 the "general fertility rate was the lowest ever reported for the United States" (3). Although, currently, the United States population has been declining, at times there has been a dramatic increase in un-wed pregnancies of women in their twenties, and older, particularly of unmarried women in their 30s and 40s. Overall, the percentage of births to unmarried women is about 41 percent (Joyce A. Martin, Hamilton, Ph.D. and Ventura, M.A.).

These statistics suggest that many unmarried mothers today are postponing marriage, either in favor of co-habitation, or foregoing marriage completely. It is no longer the sole desire of women to have their identity attached to a husband; self-worth is no longer identified by having a Mr. around the house. The pressure of "having" to get married because of a pregnancy has all but disappeared. Those women who are financially successful do not feel the need to get married, and those that are not, find it financially beneficial to live with their co-parent. This

allows them to receive aid for the care of their child while sharing living expenses with their co-parent.

It is estimated that “in England around 1550, and again around 1800, about a third of all births were conceived before marriage” (Wilson 131). During the time when strict moral codes were in place, “the Puritan seventeenth century and the Victorian nineteenth century”, unmarried pregnancies were about 10 percent of all births (Wilson 132). During times where there was more personal freedom, unmarried pregnancies were between 25 and 30 percent of all births.

Prior to the nineteenth century, families were not “sentimentalized” (Risman 31). Families were run like a business, with children (legitimate) considered as assets. Children were thought of as small adults; there was not a sense of precious innocence about them, as there is today. In some families, if a child was needed as a servant for others, and it would benefit the family, they could be shipped off. In many well-to-do families it was commonplace to sign an intended marriage contract between infants, again, if it would benefit the families. Children were a bankable investment for the future of the family.

If a person was not deemed worthy of being a parent, their children could be taken away from them. Having an illegitimate child took heavy tolls on the mother, but the child also suffered. Illegitimate children had no rights. “Through much of European history, a child born outside an approved marriage was a “filius nullius”-literally a child of no one, with a claim on no one” (Risman 31). Children that were legitimate could be heirs, endowed with an inheritance, and therefore legally carry on the family name, protecting the family fortune. Bastards were only burdensome, and of no value to the family, those children were at considerable risk; their future would not be very bright. In polite society, if a child was illegitimate, they were of no use to the



family, mostly they were not even acknowledged; by contrast, primitive society loved all children, “legitimate and “illegitimate”; it makes one wonder which society was truly savage?

In the United States, prior to World War II, “illegitimate pregnancy was generally considered to be the product of moral and mental degeneracy”. In the public consciousness almost all unwed mothers occupied a state of shame and ruination...” (Solinger Abstract). Interestingly enough, in post-war society, white unwed mothers were considered unfit mothers, and those that wanted to keep their children were considered, “particularly immature, or more usually, mentally ill” (Solinger 24).

Post war society’s ill feelings towards the unwed mother could be categorized even further in relation to race. “In short, after World War II, the white bastard child was no longer the child nobody wanted”. The black illegitimate baby became the child white politicians and taxpayers loved to hate” (Solinger 148). It was expected that black mothers would keep their children, and that white mothers would put their illegitimate babies up for adoption. A social scientist in the 1950s described white, illegitimate babies as “the silver lining in a dark cloud” (Solinger 154). These babies offered infertile couples their only opportunity to meet the post war demand for community and family.

Many erroneous studies on unwed mothers were conducted. It was thought that morally upright women would never partake in activities that would bring shame to their family, like becoming pregnant without a husband; therefore, something must be wrong with them, they’re sick. One prominent psychiatrist found in his study of fifty-four unwed mothers that he could label fully one-third of them schizophrenic. The author of a Ph.D. dissertation at New York University in the late 1950s wrote, “My study demonstrated that unmarried mothers behaviorally

are overtly dominant, aggressive, narcissistic and bitterly hostile, but are covertly passive, inadequate, and masochistic” (Solinger 88).

The objectification of these women was a benefit to the psychiatric field, as well as government and social agencies that referred to these psychiatric studies. These misguided studies helped the policy holders, and social strategists to determine where best to apply services and funding. “Whether the experts understood these disorders as the causes or the wages of unwed motherhood, the implication was clear. Females who violated gender-determined sexual norms were routinely designated as formally ill” (Solinger 90).

Solinger asks the question, then why do disturbed women get pregnant? Most experts found that the main reason was dysfunction in the family. Mothers were mainly held responsible for not preventing their daughters collapse into sexual activity and pregnancy; they obviously were not sufficient role models. Fathers also took a small share in the blame, for one, not taking their paternal role seriously, and the other,

“unwilling or unable to curb and correct their wives”. Dr. Cattell found a disproportionate number of passive fathers and women “who wore the pants of the family”.... “A 1958 study of residents in the Los Angeles Florence Crittenton Home found dramatic evidence of severe emotional deprivation. Absent relationships with fathers...In the Draw-A-Person Test almost all depicted the male parent as faceless with detached feet” (Solinger 91).

Between 1945 and 1965 maternity homes was an alternative place for these women to go for privacy, safety, and to recover from their “illness”. The homes were places where a young woman could go to redeem herself. She no longer would have to suffer the mark and shame of her

unwed mother status for the rest of her and her child's life. After the manipulation and restructuring of her persona, she would be cured and allowed back into society.

There were also religious church affiliations that ran homes that did not focus on reshaping the persona. They were more interested in saving the mother's soul, stressing redemption, rather than rehabilitation. The mother was an outcast, and after a time spent in the home she would be released and told, "Go and sin no more" (Solinger 106).

Another escape from shame for these women was to just disappear. The family would make arrangements for an out of state birth, the child would be placed for adoption, and then eventually the mother would just return from whatever fictional place her parents chose, and all would be well. "A caseworker for one of the girls, whose father wanted her sent to the Salvation Army home for unwed mothers, said that if people asked where his daughter was, he would just say she's dead" (Solinger 109). This one father was definitely a faceless man, with detached feet, and there were many more like him; some thought that the presumed shame that a daughter with an illegitimate child would bring to the family, was far greater, than the death of their child.

The human rights revolution of the 60s and 70s began to change people's opinions and behaviors toward unwed mothers. "...the women's rights movement, and the welfare rights movement, together with legislative and judicial actions they spawned, had an enormous impact on the way girls and women experienced illegitimate pregnancy and childbearing" (Solinger 235).

With a new sense of empowerment many women, former as well as currently unwed mothers, stopped being passive, stood up, and called for a stop to the degradation. The Supreme Court's reproductive rights and welfare rights decisions in the late 1960s and early 1970s helped to legitimize their struggle. As early as the 1970s there was a "significant reduction in the stigma

that was previously affected by out of wedlock births.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Americans surveyed said it was not morally wrong to have a child outside of marriage” (Mattes 15).

According to a report done by the Brookings Institute, during the 1970s the United States experienced a “reproductive technology shock” (Akerlof and Yellen). With the legalization of abortions, and greater access to contraceptives, women became more in control of their reproductive freedom. This freedom granted women the opportunity to control not only when they would have children, but how many. “In our view, it was the technology shock itself that, by eroding the age-old custom of shotgun marriage, paradoxically raised out-of-wedlock birth rates instead of lowering them” (Akerlof and Yellen) .

With the increased availability of contraceptives and abortions, by 1969, shot-gun marriages were on the decline, and gradually disappeared. The new sexual freedom changed the way a lot of couples related to each other. Men no longer felt the need to offer marriage in order to engage in sexual relations, and “Women who were willing to get an abortion or who reliably used contraception no longer found it necessary to condition sexual relations on a promise of marriage in the event of pregnancy” (Akerlof and Yellen).

As is common in the United States, we try to take a social phenomenon, identify it, label it and then neatly put it into a box. Accordingly, if we can identify the cause, we can treat the problem. Conservatives cried that the reason there was an increase in out of wedlock births was due to the liberal amounts of welfare benefits distributed to these women and children. This theory was discounted because at the time of the most significant rise in out of wedlock births, welfare benefits had decreased.

Democrats felt that it was the decline in the availability of marriageable men. At the time, men who were educated and had jobs were on the decline. “Yet another popular explanation is

that single parenthood has increased since the late 1960s because of the change in attitudes toward sexual behavior” (Akerlof and Yellen).

In 1986, a poll taken by Glamour magazine, (a magazine geared towards women in their twenties and thirties) indicated that almost 80% of the respondents felt that it was o.k. for a single woman to choose having children (Mattes 15).

On May 19, 1992, Vice President Dan Quayle delivered a controversial family-values speech at the Commonwealth Club of California. In his speech he commented on the CBS decision to have the female lead in their top rated show, Murphy Brown, have a child outside of marriage.

Bearing babies irresponsibly is simply wrong, the Vice President said “Failing to support children one has fathered is wrong. We must be unequivocal about this. It doesn’t help matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today’s intelligent, highly paid professional woman, mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another lifestyle choice (Quayle).

Many people wonder if today, he wasn’t correct. According to an opinion editorial piece in the Washington Post,

Twenty years later, Quayle’s words seem less controversial than prophetic...The proportion of children born outside marriage has risen from roughly 30 percent in 1992 to 41 percent in 2009. For women under age 30, more than half of babies are born out of wedlock. A lifestyle once associated with poverty has become mainstream... Some argue that these changes are benign. Many children who in the past would have had two married parents could have two cohabiting parents instead. Why should the lack of a legal or religious tie affect anyone’s well-being (Sawhill)?

If we're going to focus on the child, then we must realize that there is no right or wrong answer. A child's success is a compilation of positive role models and relationships, education and a healthy lifestyle which steer a child to be a productive contributor to society, there is no one correct manner of child rearing. When all those factors are tabulated, raising a happy, well-adjusted child, whether in a committed relationship, or alone can still be at risk.

### Subject Interview Summaries

In order to gain understanding of the life these women have chosen for themselves and their children, I have conducted subject interviews. These interview responses are un-cut, but do include some grammatical changes for clarity, and flow.

Subject number one was an unmarried mother in 1963, giving birth in 1964. She had multiple children while not married, three over the span of six years. While she did receive the occasional "look" from neighbors and relatives, she never paid much attention to it. Although her mother was supportive, her father was not. He was concerned about appearances, and when he found out that she was pregnant, forced her to get married, although in name alone. Her nemesis at this time was her lack of education around topics such as birth control, sex and pregnancies. She still feels that she got pregnant even though she did "not go all the way". Her experience may have been different had her friends communicated with each other. She and her friends did not discuss having sex because they were afraid of how they would be perceived, nobody wanted to be labeled the bad girl. During this time, it was image that mattered.

In the 1980s, subject number two had two children from different fathers, both of whom abused her. She had been kicked out of the house at age 18, and five years later she found herself with a sick child and an abusive boyfriend, who was the father to her baby. She was leaning over

the hospital crib whispering to her baby, the father didn't like what she said, so he hit her. She sought a protection order, and with the help of family and friends, never looked back.

Although she received strong support from her mother, at first her father was unwilling to accept her choices because her child was a "mixed race" child, after time, he eventually grew to love his granddaughter.

Subject number three became pregnant prior to marriage, but eventually lost the baby. She was in love, and didn't care what others thought, but her mother sure did. Her mother was emotionally and verbally abusive to her, how could she be so "stupid" to have a baby before marriage? Her mother was so controlling that she took over her wedding plans. This subject, even as a fully grown adult still struggles with her mother's control issues.

Subject number four is a successful attorney, who received a tremendous amount of family support during her unplanned pregnancy. Due to the infidelity of her boyfriend she began to develop a hardened exterior toward the institution of marriage. While she never denied the father access to the child, she was careful to not accept money for the child's care, in case there was ever a custody dispute. This subject remembers hearing how her maternal Grandmother took care of her two daughters and her mother when she was ill, she felt this to be empowering, and less inclined to "need" a man. Her mother always told her and her sister that if they became pregnant, they could leave the man, and move back home.

Subjects five through ten, are women in their twenties who have each chosen the path of unwed motherhood for their own reasons. Although one is now married, her decision to marry was due to the illness of her father, and her parents religious beliefs; neither she nor her partner had planned to marry.

Subject number five is a young unmarried mother who struggles through her relationship with the father of her child because at times, he is a good father. Her happiness revolves around her child. When she became pregnant, her group of friends was also pregnant. This is something that they had talked about when they were young girls, wouldn't it be fun to raise their children together?

Subject number six is now married, but only did so out of respect for their parents who have strong religious beliefs. Both her and her husband's parents are in strong marriages. She feels that although marriage is not necessary, it is beneficial to the child.

Subject number seven struggles in her relationship with her child's father. Beyond the occasional financial support, he spends minimal time with his child. This is his second child out of wedlock, the first by another unmarried mother. She also has not had much support from her mother. Without this key support, she has turned to her group of friends, and fortunately for her, they are emotionally supportive. She has high hopes for her and her child's future.

Subject number eight became estranged from her parents at the age of 16. She moved out, and eventually met the father of her child, when he was 21. She struggled in their relationship because he could not remain faithful. He was seeing other women, and actually had three other children. She ended their relationship and reconciled with her parents, who now help with the babysitting while she works. Subject number nine is a well-educated and talented young lady. She found herself pregnant by someone that she knew would not be a good father. Although she chose not to marry him due to his "destructive" nature, she feels that marriage is important, "it elicits more responsibility from partners". She made a conscious decision to have her baby after carefully considering an abortion (feeling it was too gruesome) as well as adoption. She does not



have a lot of friends, and her family lives out of state, so she has been raising her child on her own with the assistance of a new boyfriend. She works full time, and attends school.

Subject number ten made the decision to keep her child after ruling out an abortion; she couldn't go through with it. She feels that her decision caused the father of the child to move to Texas with a new girlfriend and her daughter. She has received a lot of family support, and is able to financially take care of herself and her daughter.

### Conclusion

Knowing most of these women, as I do, and after reading their stories, which at times can be heart wrenching; one thing I can say for sure is that in order for a woman to be a successful single parent a lot will depend on her self-esteem. Decades ago, women were treated as pariahs for being an unmarried mother, but even though the stigma of being an unwed mother is all but gone, some mothers unfortunately still slip through the cracks, struggling with self-esteem issues.

A common thread that ran through eight of my subject interviews was that these young women attached themselves to men who are neither good for them, nor their child. In our attempts to move away from a patriarchal society, our daughters receive mixed messages. They are taught they can be just as successful as a man, they can be anything they want to be, yet at the same time, we allow the Hollywood media machine to attack their self-esteem. They imprint on our daughter's minds that they need to look prettier, skinnier, sexier, and smell better because they are not quite good enough. If they want to be more marketable to men they will buy the products. The machine also uses sex to sell their products, is it really necessary to do that in order to sell a hamburger? Is it really necessary to do that to our daughters? With the release of movies like, "Brave", we occasionally break free from the princess mentality, but those moments are rare.

What messages are we sending our young men? The derogatory references to women in music today is commonplace, and accepted not just by men, but also many women do not have issues with the degradation. What words are we not saying to our sons that might help them learn to respect women? Clearly, many young men need to learn about personal responsibility, and how their actions have consequences. We need to remember that behind every great leering, jeering, beer guzzling misogynist lies a mother, what has happened?

The majority of these women wanted their happily ever after, but what they got was a smashed pumpkin, and rotten apples. Their Prince Charmings beat them, cheated on them, or just dumped them; something is terribly wrong with the part of our society that finds this to be acceptable behavior.

Frequently, but not unanimously, a woman would succumb to moments of self-blame for not finding a marriage partner...At some level, self-doubt and self-criticism insinuated themselves into every woman's story: Is there something wrong with me? Am I to blame? Did I refuse to compromise? Am I naïve (Hertz 11)?

As the divorce rate depressingly soared young women have either been discouraged by their prospects of finding a good mate, or they attached themselves to men who were the worst possible mate for them, but are a father to their child. "While social norms would dictate because marriage seemed unattainable—women salvaged the baby. Women shed the burden of marriage, determined to win the race to motherhood alone" (Hertz 11).

Another notable observation from my research is that the importance of grandparents is far greater than at any time in our past. A visit to Grandma's house for hot cocoa and cookies is a thing of the past. Multi-generational families living together have become commonplace. With few exceptions, my subject interviews point out that Grandparents are heavily involved with the

financial support of their children and grandchildren. If they are not involved in the financial support of their grandchildren, they gladly give up their time to babysit in order for their child to labor outside the home. Retirement from work sometimes means helping to raise their grandchildren; without a co-parent that is assisting financially, there is no other option. Additional research needs to be conducted on this topic because I believe that today's grandparents are the unsung heroes of this generation of single mothers.

It used to be that an un-wed mother was looked down upon, and shunned by society. The stigma was so great that those women that did engage in pre-marital sex usually did so only because there was a promise of marriage, usually false. Now that we are in the twenty first century, have we left the social stigma attached to being an un-wed mother behind? Is the institution of marriage on the decline, in favor of co-habitation? Is the ability to receive readily available benefits (MediCal, W.I.C, welfare) for mother, and child a financial reason for postponing marriage? May we attribute it to the continual increase of individualism? The answer to all of these questions is a resounding yes, but the main reason that women no longer feel the need to be married is simply that un-wed mothers have evolved.

The un-wed mothers of today owe their thanks to those un-wed mothers that came before, the ones who suffered shame, humiliation, and disgrace, not just at the hands of society, but also their own families. The women who in the 1960s and 1970s demanded change, and whether it was for birth control access, or abortion rights, didn't matter, society listened. They made the road a lot less bumpy for women today. In the 1990s Hillary Clinton reminded us of the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child". This is where society stands today, and as subject number one stated, the focus now is more on the well-being of the child. Society shifted its focus

to where it should be, to the child; therefore, being married just doesn't matter, nobody cares anymore, except perhaps, the child.

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## APPENDIX 1

Subject number one is a 65 year old woman who is now retired, this is her story:

In 1963, when I found out that I was pregnant, there was no question about having my baby, and absolutely no consideration of an abortion, or adoption for me. The father of the baby did try to talk me into adoption, but I said no. No talk of abortion between he and I because it wasn't legal in those days; anyway, we had no clue that an illegal one could be had. There wasn't any abortion issue in those days. I found out later that there were illegal abortions happening that I never realized.

Of course, at first my parents were shocked. My mother made it clear from the beginning that she would be as supportive as she could, and she was, never once offering her opinion or pressure about adoption, abortion, or keeping the baby.

My father however, hardly talked to me. He walked out on my mother and me when I was about seven months pregnant. Before he left though, he set up an abortion for me, totally illegal in those days, which I refused to have, and before that, got me some ergot pills,<sup>1</sup> which some doctor told him would cause a miscarriage. Those times, were the only times I ever defied my father, no pills, and no abortion. Then he tried to force me to give up the baby for adoption but he found out he legally couldn't do that either. He did though keep me and the baby on his medical plan till I later got coverage on my own from my job.

In those days, it was expected that we would get married, and so we did, but never spent a married night together. It did matter to me, but honestly more so because I wanted to be grown up, and be like any other married family with a child, also to make sure my child had a name (I

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<sup>1</sup> According to WebMD, Ergot is a fungus that grows on rye and sometimes on other grasses such as wheat. Ergot has been used as medicine. Women use it to treat excessive bleeding during menstrual periods, at the start of [menopause](#), and before and after [miscarriage](#). They also use ergot after [childbirth](#) to expel the placenta and contract the uterus. Historically, ergot was used to speed up labor, but its use was abandoned when people made a connection between the use of ergot and an increased number of stillbirths.

didn't want child to be embarrassed later in life). I wasn't quite so concerned about keeping the "talk" down. I knew at my age, people knew I "had" to get married and that damage was done anyway so I just made myself get over it.

Before I got pregnant we had talked about marriage in the far future, but nothing really serious, we weren't even out of high school. He told me a couple of months after we got married that divorce would soon follow. I honestly don't know if we would have divorced though, had we been allowed to live together. My parents wouldn't let him live with us, and since he had become an orphan about a year before that (his mother and two younger brothers were drowned in a boating accident, and he had not seen his father since age 2).

He was living with his grandparents who only said he and his brother could stay there till end of high school and they too didn't want me, or a baby. No jobs, no nothing, and my father in particular told me I was allowed to marry for the sake of the child, but to consider it in name only. I believed he had the power to run my life at that time, so no argument from me about us not living together.

No one treated me any differently or tried to give me "advice". I was sure some talked behind my back but I never caught wind of it. Oh, I'm sure there was judgment; I got the "looks" but not the words from a few adult women from my memory. Only my best friend asked me what I was thinking, but she didn't judge me. We stayed close friends, and her mother allowed her to give me a baby shower. Lots of my school friends came, which told me, their parents weren't being too judgmental either.

As my friend and I talked, I found out that many of my friends, including her, were sexually active, as I suspected some more than others. She said no one talked to me about it because they knew I wasn't "that kind" and were afraid I might think badly of them. I think I



wish they had told me so even though they were teens too, I might have gotten some good education. I was sure I was safe since I didn't go "all the way" but maybe with a little more knowledge, I'd have been smarter and used that protection anyway or completely abstained.

My friends were surprised to say the least. I was the smart kid who skipped a grade and on the honor roll. I was never, ever in any kind of trouble in school or anywhere else, and was among the popular group. Suspecting that some of my friends were sexually active, I am sure they just thought I was stupid for being "caught".

Anyone who knew me didn't treat me differently and were actually pretty "everyday" about it, offering help and advice if I asked for it. I spent my junior year being home schooled by a teacher sent out by the school system. I then went back to regular high school as a senior. The first few days back at school, I noticed a little psst, psst going on, but after that nobody treated me any differently, except of course the father. He moved from his grandparent's house into the house of his new girlfriend, and her parents.

I had worked since age 14 and was working weekends and summers at that time too, but once I got pregnant, I had to stop. As I mentioned earlier, my father kept me and my baby on his medical, so that part was covered. I lived at home with my mother since my father left. I don't know much about what the financial arrangements were between my parents, since his departure, but I think he paid the mortgage. I lived at home with my mother as my babysitter during school time only. She bought the food, no diapers because they hadn't been invented yet. The father of the baby didn't contribute a single dime or material thing, nor had any interest.

My daughter's father re-entered our life after 40 years. We spoke a few times and he asked if I'd pass on his information. My child and he emailed a few times, but no face to face and no interest beyond early curiosity, and still no interest today. The day I gave birth, I called him to

tell him his child was born, and his response was that he didn't care if me or the baby lived or died. That pretty much said it all about any involvement he intended to have. I never got a dime from him until he went into the military. He never told them he had a child, but I did, so I received a child allotment during his military life. I was also awarded a whopping \$25/month (not a week... a month) for child support from the court during our divorce, but I never got it.

To any young woman today contemplating becoming a single parent, my first piece of advice would be to take adequate precautions to avoid pregnancy until they're absolutely, positively sure, that the decision to have a child is their own, based on both emotional and financial ability. I'd caution that they seriously consider how ready they feel, and are they willing to accept the drastic change of lifestyle raising a child would bring.

I would remind them that children are very, very expensive, especially if they choose to be a single parent. Then I would advise them to have a very long talk with the other potential parent (assuming pregnancy wasn't accidental) about how they intend or don't intend to be involved, both physically, and financially. Talk with other parents, particularly mothers, both married and single, before deciding if kids before marriage are best for them. I know I'd toss in my own opinion about marriage and children, and tell them that if I could change my history I would. I would also tell them why if they wanted to know.

I guess in closing, my words of wisdom are more about avoiding pregnancy until there is no doubt you're ready to be a parent, either as a single or married one. I'd tell them to talk to people, preferably those who know about sex, marriage, and children. Learn everything about the hazards of sex and pregnancy and make sure you're confident about all the decisions you will make. Once you learn how not to get pregnant, then learn everything you can about being a parent.

I don't think society cares nearly as much as they did in "my day." I think more casual judgments are made now, and then forgotten by most. I also believe today's society cares more about the child, meaning whether or not the parents married or not, can financially and emotionally handle it and whether or not the child will become another welfare statistic, or abused or neglected, than they do about whether or not the parents are married. I think most would still prefer parents be married. I do, and believe, maybe naively, there's less a chance of a parent walking out.

## APPENDIX 2

Subject number two is a 56 year old, unwed mother of two adult children, this is her story:

I had just moved to Kansas City in 1983. I found out I was pregnant in summer or fall of 1984. I was due in mid-march of 1985. My dog died and left me with 10 un-weaned puppies, my water broke at 12:21 am on February 6, 1985, five weeks early. My daughter was born breech, at 2:21 am. I told my mother later that day, she hadn't known, nobody in St Louis knew. My family and friends in Kansas City were supportive, especially two of my cousins Rick and Marshall who are both deceased now.

I was with her Dad because I was afraid to leave him. When my daughter was six weeks old we visited St Louis. She got sick and was hospitalized, they thought it was meningitis. I was leaning over her hospital crib and said something her dad didn't like; he hit me across the back of my head. I called security and had him removed, got an order of protection and never looked back.

My mom had to threaten my dad with divorce to let me come home. He was the one that kicked me out at 18 and he was horrified that I had a mixed kid. Funny that my daughter ended up being his favorite, he took her everywhere.

My daughter received social security as her dad had been badly burned the year before and was on disability. I went back to school and got grants and scholarships thru five years of school plus food stamps. I'd never have made it if not for my mom and a friend who after my Mom died in 1986 she watched my daughter so I could remain at work. My siblings were not supportive of me or my daughter. My sister and brother conspired to cut me out of the will, which left me without my rightful share.

I had almost the same situation with my son who was born nine years later, except he was four weeks early. I had a broken nose, a concussion and an emergency C-section. Two failures because of two different abusive idiots. Until this happened to me, I was dismissive of abused women.

## APPENDIX 3

Subject number three is a 56 year old, stay at home, grandmother of six, this is her story:

I had been dating my boyfriend for about a year, when in 1977, I found out that I was pregnant. When I had to tell my mother about my pregnancy, I was terrified. I asked my brother to help me by being there with me when I told her. He was supportive but my mother was not at all. She told me "how could you be so stupid" "now what are you going to do"? She told me I couldn't talk to anyone about it, she made feel ashamed. She did not care if I was feeling sick, it was my problem.

My boyfriend had already asked me to marry him before I got pregnant so it wasn't that he felt he needed to because I was pregnant. Due to my circumstances, my mother took over my wedding plans. I had no say of when, where, or who would be in my wedding, and who would be attending. She called the church, and picked the day, she ordered my invitations before I could even look at them. I lost control of everything because I was stupid and she needed to fix it ASAP.

In June of 1978, I lost the baby, she said, call your boyfriend, he can take you to the hospital; she had no sympathy for us. Even today my mom will still mention how stupid he and I were back then. I say, that baby died why you always have to bring it up? She even told my kids about it and laughed, this was about 14 years ago but it still bothers me. She had no right to tell them, they didn't need to know, they only knew that I lost my first baby. With each and every one of my pregnancies (six) we were considered to be ridiculous, and stupid, she was never happy about any of my pregnancies. Sometime I wonder why I still talk to her, I could never do anything right. I never talked down to my children, calling them stupid or idiots. I vowed never to be like my mother.

## APPENDIX 4

Subject number four is a 40 year old woman, who is a successful attorney, this is her story:

I was quite surprised to find out that I was pregnant and keeping my baby was the only option. I didn't even consider adoption or abortion. My boyfriend and I briefly discussed marriage and I let him know that for my part, it was not necessary. I am not opposed to marriage; I just HATE the idea of ANYTHING being mandatory. Do what you feel is right for you and your family.

We had very limited financial discussions. I just told him that in order for him to be the legal dad; he would need to sign a Voluntary Declaration of Paternity at the hospital. Also, this is in effect a judgment of paternity, so there are no "take backs". It did not matter at all! One legal acknowledgment that we were/are a couple does not change my mind. I believe the reason for marriage (unless one is super religious) is antiquated and dates back to where a woman couldn't own her own, speak on her own, etc.

As for other people finding out about me being pregnant, nobody ever told me they cared, but one of my mom's older cousin's said something, not sure what. I must not have cared if I can't remember. Ironically, he had two wives at two ports, and a hidden child.

As for my family's reaction, my mother was upset only because I lived out of state. She would have been happy if I had a child at any age and lived with her forever. They were both very supportive including coming to my home two thousand miles away (mom for 3 months).

After my daughter was born, my favorite thing my mother used to say was, "she may be YOUR baby, but you are still MY baby". One day I will be able to say that without crying. Come to think of it, I think my parents even asked us to get artificially inseminated to have kids. Her

sister states that they used to tell her to get pregnant, move back home, but leave the man.

I worked full time as a Senior Conflicts Analyst in downtown Chicago making about \$80 thousand dollars a year, her father also worked. After we were no longer together, I supported my daughter alone (making more than \$80k) but lived with my sister who helped pay the bills. My only option was to work outside the home. For a while my mother and sister watched my daughter as their business was in the home. After the passing of my mother, I had to pay for child care. At one point it was very difficult financially.

The Dad was around for the first year as a family unit. After that, small visits. No financial assistance though, I never asked, my mother helped some. I remember my grandmother taking care of her two kids without my grandfather, with the help of her mom. This seemed somehow empowering to me. I was never afraid I would be homeless or go without food. I had too much family around. I think many women do not have those same options, so I am thankful.

To young women today, I would ask, is the dad around? If so, what is the difference? What if a married couple found out today their marriage was never valid? What would be different?

Looking back, the only thing that I would have done different would be to have twins.



## APPENDIX 5

Subject number five is a 27 year old, stay at home mother, this is her story:

We were not actively trying to have a baby. I was definitely shocked, but she was a happy surprise. Having my baby was the only option for me. I do not believe in abortion unless it would affect the health of the mother or child in a dramatic way, but that's just me.

We never talked about getting married just because I was pregnant. It is definitely something we have discussed before and after the pregnancy, but not for that reason alone. It would need to be the right time, when life is more organized, and less chaotic. Right now we have too many things going on to consider marriage. It does bother me that we are not married. I always wanted to wait to have children until I was married, because I wanted to have babies with the right man, not just anyone. I don't know if it is because I don't want people to judge me, or if it is just that I am a little more traditional. But either way my daughter is the best thing that's ever happened to me, so I try not to let what others think affects me.

As far as society goes, I am not sure if anyone cares anymore. The standard or norm is constantly changing, so I feel to each its own. I am sure there are still those people out there that are stuck in their ways and are going to judge, but I feel for the most part, the majority of people don't care anymore. We have learned as humans how to be okay with alternative lifestyles.

My parents were, and have been, extremely supportive. I think they were both shocked at the news, as was I, but were happy and excited to have another grandchild, since they had just become grandparents earlier that year. My mother has been extremely supportive, emotionally, and financially. She helped out a lot with getting all the things we needed for baby, and continues to do so.

My friends were extremely happy and excited for me. Like most of my family, they also knew I always wanted to be a mother. Also I was at the age where most of my peers around me were also either in the process of, or already had started families of their own, so it was, and has been a very exciting thing. All our friends had always discussed having our kids grow up together, but didn't plan it, so it was neat that we all had kids around the same time.

I live with the father of my child, but I do not work, neither does he currently. His mother lives with us, and pays most of the bills. We do things like shopping, and cooking to help her. I just started a temporary job, answering phones out of our house, so that will bring in a little extra, but not much. I do receive WIC, and food stamps, for me and my child since I'm an unemployed, unwed mother. It definitely helps so we can make ends meet. My mother is also very helpful and tends to get us a lot of extras from time to time. So both our mothers really do most of the big purchases for our daughter currently.

He is a very active part of our life with our daughter, especially since we live together. He spends a good amount of time with her one on one every day. They have a very special bond. Although she's definitely a mommy's girl, she loves her daddy. I can see her being a big daddy's girl one of these days. It's almost like they have their own language. It is very cute to see them interact, it warms my heart. When I see those special moments between them, it reminds me why I chose him to have a child with. He has some amazing moments at times as a father, which make me even prouder to be a mother.

Honestly, I'm not sure what the future holds for me, I would like to go back to school at some point. Doing what, I'm not sure, but I'm sure I will figure it out eventually. I do also miss working outside of the home. I think it is just the interaction with other adults that I miss. I do

very much love being a stay at home mom, and get to watch every new thing my baby does, but I miss having that adult time also, and of course I miss the extra money.

For now I'm trying to enjoy every moment as much as possible because I know she won't be this small forever, and time goes by way too quickly. I do hope that five years from now, that my life is more organized. I would like to be married, or at least engaged officially. I would also like to have another child. I don't want to wait until I'm too old, so I guess in a way I kind of am in a rush. I want to do some kind of schooling, go back to at least part time work, and have another child before that five year mark. I would like my children to be close in age for several reasons, all in good time though, I hope. For now I'm taking things one day at a time.

If I got pregnant again, and still was not married, I would make the same decision to have the baby. For now I don't plan on having another child anytime in the near future. I would like to be married, but if it happens, it happens. That's how I look at it, but since I am on birth control, I am not trying to let it "happen".

I want great things for my daughter. I think most parents do. I want her to be able to do more than I did for myself. I never pushed myself, so I'm going to try my best to do that for my daughter, but in a good way. Of course no matter what I am going to support her, as long as she is happy. But I'm not going to lie, I want her to go to a great college and get the education that I never allowed myself to receive. I want her to be able to get any job that she wants, because she will have the knowledge to back it up. So I'm very hopeful for her future. I think it will be very bright. It helps that she has amazing friends and family that love and support her, no matter what!

## APPENDIX 6

Subject number six is a 27 year old, student, this is her story:

When I first became pregnant I was trying to conceive; my boyfriend at the time was not for sure on board but when I gave him the pregnancy test he was shocked for a minute but smiled and said "ok let's do this". Keep in mind my partner was older 38 at the time so I think his biological clock was ticking too.

Shortly after we found out we were pregnant (a month later) my boyfriend got down on one knee in my bathroom and asked me to marry him. I actually think it was Christmas Eve and we were headed to his family's house to announce our news. I honestly think that had a lot to do with it. Both of our parents are still together and I believe we wanted to go by the book. We both really didn't care about the title of being married; hence we had 30 dollar rings from Walmart, and went in yoga pants and shorts to our a.m. courthouse wedding.

I think we did it more for our parents. My parents are super religious and told me they thought it would be best if I got married before the baby came so his birth certificate would not indicate his parents had a baby out of wed lock. The entire time I thought it was hilarious because it literally is a piece of paper that constitutes a marriage. Anyway we did it and I actually like calling him my husband. He stepped up and he is a great financial supporter and watches the baby when I am occupied with school work.

We are happy so far and I hope we grow together as parents. I really don't think it matters to get married to the other co-creator because the role of a husband isn't the same as a father. The child and the parents have different relationships than the spouses do with each other.

## APPENDIX 7

Subject number seven is a 27 year old who works for the Santa Rosa Junior College, this is her story:

I wasn't actively trying to get pregnant, it was a surprise. I was let go of my job in January, I filled my birth control prescription that same month, ran out in April when my son was conceived. I was off birth control for 1-2 weeks. I didn't have any other health coverage at the time. My partner and I had, had a falling out so I was visiting my family. When I came back we made up, our child was our make-up baby.

I fleetingly thought about abortion only because I was really scared. My partner and I were not getting along well, even though we were engaged. I had serious doubts about his viability as a father and a husband. I chose not to abort because I felt I was old enough to take the responsibility, and I couldn't bear too. I never considered adoption.

My partner and I had been engaged for 5 months when we conceived. He made it clear he wanted to marry me before our child was born; it was important to him that he was born in wedlock, because he had his first daughter out of wedlock. The discussions were happy and hopeful.

I was understandably giddy at the thought of my wedding. It was fun to imagine our wedding. He preferred a courthouse ceremony. I wanted a more traditional wedding. As time went on I started to feel self-conscious about it being a shotgun wedding. I didn't like that I wouldn't be the beautiful, thin bride I always envisioned myself, coupled with the fact that we didn't have the funds for a wedding made it even more unattainable.

At first I thought it wouldn't bother me, but it did, especially so at my doctor's appointments. My family didn't pressure me, neither did my friends. They respected my wish not

to marry. I had told my family we would get married and when I decided not to, they didn't say anything, or bring it up.

I think society does care. I think a child has the best benefit from two incomes, sources of support, and gains insight into how relationships effectively and appropriately function when the people work together in such an intimate relationship.

My mother and I weren't reconciled at the time so I didn't get her reaction first hand; I was told that she was happy for me. When we told his mother, we were going to a pirate festival in Benicia, on Father's Day. When we told her the first thing she said was "You have to be very careful about telling his other child. At the time, she didn't seem very pleased but his mother has become very supportive, it is in her nature she has given us countless boxes of diapers, and wipes, clothes, and toys. She is delighted by our child. She visits every other month or so and loves to spend time with him.

My friends were ecstatic and very supportive. I happened to benefit greatly from one of my friends since she also had a boy, I was the first friend of hers to have a child so I received donations of clothes, toys etc. from her. I also happened to be pregnant at the same time as another friend who wasn't with the father; so we reconnected.

I am currently on TANF: (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), where I get a monthly grant of \$516. I sought out this assistant after I left the baby's father when he was 8 months old. I also receive Food Stamps of about \$345, which is of a great help. I was on Food stamps when I was pregnant. I worked a part time job as a cashier but still made so little I needed the additional help. I wasn't able to work after my son was born because the cost of daycare was greater than a job I could find.

My first job after he was born I got in August when he was 22 months old. I am a Student Assistant in the Health Science office. I work about 20 hours a week for \$8.40/hr. My baby's father, was required to pay child support, and pays \$131 a month. I get \$50 sent to me and the rest goes back to the county to pay back all the assistance I'm getting. I also get quarterly FAFSA payments through school, which is a huge help because it accounts for how I'm able to make payments on fixing my car.

My son's father is in his life. He takes him to daycare, puts him to sleep sometimes and cooks for him sometimes; mostly he just watches a lot of T.V. with him.

I have many options that I am working on to start a career that will be able to support myself, and my son. I am pursuing administrative positions at the college and in the county. I am also working on a Medical Assisting Degree which would open up the medical community careers. My eventual goal is to get a BS in Biology and become a Certified Laboratory Scientist at MedTronic or equivalent company.

I am almost done with my general education for my degree. I am considering taking the classes needed for an administrative professional degree; and in fall of 2015 take the remaining Medical Assisting Clinical classes to get my Medical Assisting Degree. And then hopefully find a job in either field. If I'm lucky I'll be finished with my BS in Biology and ready to transfer to San Francisco University for the one year certificate course to be a Certified Laboratory Scientist.

In five years, I see that my son and I are both happy and healthy, and in a safe, stable environment. I'll have a job as an Administrative Assistant or Medical Assistant. I'll be off TANF and Food Stamps. I will also take my first ever vacation and be saving for a home.

If I was "lucky enough for another surprise" pregnancy, if I thought I couldn't marry the father, I wouldn't.

I hope my son grows up to be happy and healthy. I would like him to have good interpersonal skills, and be interested in things, to develop hobbies, friends, and have good hygiene, and manners. I would like him to have confidence and make good decisions. I'd like him to develop a physical or artistic talent.



## APPENDIX 8

Subject number eight is a 28 year old, unmarried mother with ten year old daughter, this is her story:

I wasn't trying to have a baby at 17 (she was born 1 month before my 18th birthday). When I was 16 I stopped communicating with my parents and met my daughter's dad he was 21. I didn't consider abortion because I didn't know I was pregnant until I was 5 months along and her dad was kind of in the picture. I did consider adoption but when she was born I couldn't just give her away to strangers.

After two and one half years I ended the relationship with her dad. I did this because he was seeing other girls and didn't disclose to me that he had three other kids. I needed to graduate high school (I graduated high school a year late) and her dad was making me miserable. He thought that if I wasn't with him he had no obligation to be there for our child.

Two days before her first birthday, I was raising her myself with my parents help. My parents watch my daughter so I can go to work and have some time to myself. When my parents found out I was pregnant I was six to seven months along but only looked three to four months pregnant. They were upset and blamed themselves for not preventing it. Both my parents are supportive and help me out a lot with my daughter because it is hard. I work part time and do not have time or money to go back to school.

My friends didn't believe me when I said I was pregnant, I hid the pregnancy well. Almost all my friends would flake on me and never came by. They went to the junior college while I went to work 20-30 hours a week, was trying to graduate high school, and raising a child by myself.

On Father's Day, 2012 my daughter met her dad. She told me she didn't want to see him again because my daughter said "he was a stranger" and never asked to see him again. When my

daughter grows up I'd like for her to be happy, and successful. She tells me when she grows up she wants to be "an animal doctor, or a teacher." I do not want more kids of my own but would adopt if I met someone that has kids already.

## APPENDIX 9

Subject number nine is a 27 year old student, who works full time, this is her story:

I was not trying to have a baby. Although I am happy now, it was not a happy surprise at the time. I aggressively considered all options. The day after I found out I was pregnant, I scheduled an abortion. Since I was three months along, the suction abortion was necessary, and I felt that was too invasive, and gruesome, so, I decided on adoption. I chose a family and had numerous meetings with them. Keeping my baby was the last solution after discovering that nothing else felt right.

We never considered marriage. I knew that my partner was a destructive person, so I did not want to marry him. I think marriage is a good thing when having children because it elicits more responsibility from partners.

Both of my parents suggested that I have an abortion. They were not really supportive or against me. They both live across the country, so can only offer (little) emotional support. My best friend was shocked and wanted me to have an abortion. She was mad at me for getting pregnant and ruining the life plans we had made. Other friends just treated me like that "stupid chick that got pregnant". I never had many friends, so I didn't gain or lose much from this change.

I have a full time job outside the home that supports my son and me. I do not receive financial support from his father; not only because I know he cannot keep a job, but also because I don't want to involve him in any type of court case. He occasionally sends Facebook messages to me, but we are not friends on Facebook, so they go directly to the junk mailbox. My son and his biological dad do not have any contact, and have not for over three years.

Getting a college degree has been my mission, especially, after having my son. I didn't want my life to stop just because I got pregnant young. I see myself as being a kindergarten teacher because I found out that I love children after getting to know my son.

I think that I would consider it, but now that my son is 6, I don't think I want to start over with a baby. When my son grows up I hope that he is smart, calm, patient, passionate, loving, and empathetic.

APPENDIX 10

Subject number ten is a single mother of a two year old daughter, this is her story:

My daughter was a happy surprise. I considered abortion, but couldn't go through with it. Her father and I never discussed marriage, my decision to keep the baby made him run away, he moved to Texas with his girlfriend and her daughter.

Everyone was and has been very supportive, besides the father. They all warned me that it was going to be difficult emotionally, financially, and physically. My daughter was a blessing in disguise. Upon reflection, I would never go back and change my decision.

I work full-time; my daughter is in full time child care at an in home day care. I have a court order for child support but he doesn't pay. The last payment I received was in October of 2013. I am not going back to school. I have a wonderful career; I have been working hard my entire life, and it has paid off.

The next child I have will be after marriage, and a stable relationship. One is hard, two right now for me would be impossible. I want my daughter to be happy. She loves animals, and pretending to be a doctor. Whatever she decides to do, I will support her 100 percent.