

PRE- AND POST-PARTURITION PERSONALITY FACTORS IN "KEEP" VERSUS "GIVE" UNWED MOTHERS¹

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Abstract

Unwed mothers who decide to place their child for adoption were compared, both pre- and post-parturition, with those who chose to keep their child. Dependent variables included locus of control, assertiveness, and self-concept, measured respectively by the James I-E scale, 16PF scales E, H & Q₂, and Bill's Index of Adjustment and Values. It was found that in general, there are few differences between these two groups, but with a significant improvement in self-esteem by both groups post-parturition. The women who decide to keep their child have a high ideal self-concept following the birth, and are more conforming and conservative than the women who surrender their child.

Résumé

Les filles-mères qui ont décidé de faire adopter leur enfant sont comparées à celles qui ont décidé de garder leur enfant. Cette comparaison se fait en deux étapes: avant et après la naissance de l'enfant. Les variables dépendantes à l'étude étaient les suivantes: le foyer de contrôle, l'assurance et le concept de soi. L'échelle James I-E, les échelles E, H et Q₂ du 16PF et l'Index d'ajustement et de valeur de Bill ont servi à mesurer ces variables. En général, peu de différences distinguent ces deux groupes. Cependant, on a noté chez les deux groupes, après avoir donné naissance, une amélioration significative dans le degré de respect de soi. Après avoir donné naissance, les femmes qui gardent leur enfant ont un concept de soi qui incarne un idéal noble. De plus, elles se montrent plus conformistes et conservatrices que les femmes qui placent leur enfant en adoption.

There has been little research in the area of out-of-wedlock pregnancy, especially studies which attempt to determine differences and/or similarities of girls who keep and those who surrender their child for adoption. After working with unwed mothers, writers such as Kravitz, Trossman & Feldman (1966), Pochin (1969), and Bernstein (1966) state that the more disturbed girls tend to keep their child. Researchers such as Vincent (1961) and Jones, Mayer, & Borgatta (1966) found that the girl who keeps her child shows more general immaturity or lack of ego strength, and more submissiveness in her overall personality characteristics, than does the girl who surrenders her child for adoption. Kogan, Boe, & Valentine (1965) found

that the girls who give their child for adoption are low on real self-concept during pregnancy but this improves after parturition. This finding should also hold true for girls who keep their child.

The studies cited above are generally anecdotal or case study in nature. For the present study, it was proposed to investigate various possible personality differences between unwed mothers who decide to keep their child (Keeps) and those who decide to place the child for adoption (Gives). The self-esteem level of the Keeps was hypothesized to be lower than for the Gives since by keeping their child they are placed in the "discredited" group (Pearson, 1971). Since the girls who place their child for adoption return to their previous life style, unchanged in terms of ambitions in life and previous relation-

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ships (Loesch & Greenberg, 1962), it was hypothesized that their ideal self-concept would be higher than that of the girls who keep their child. Since both groups would rate equally on real self-concept, this indicates that the Keeps should score better on self-adjustment level. It was also hypothesized that since the social expectancy is generally to keep (Pochin, 1969; Osofsky, 1968; Hackett & Barza, 1971), and since this may also be the easiest decision (or lack of decision) to make, the Keeps would be more externally oriented than the Gives in terms of the internal-external locus of control continuum.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were all first-time pregnant, unwed women. These included ten women who kept their child (mean age of 18.1) and nine who gave up their child for adoption (mean age of 18.8), all of whom were receiving assistance from the Department of Social Services, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Instruments & Procedure

The following tests were administered approximately 1½ months pre-parturition (Keeps: 35.7 days; Gives: 36.3 days): James I-E (Internal-External locus of control) Scale; Marlowe-Crowne Social-Desirability Scale (M-C SD); Bills Index of Adjustment and Values (BIAV); and the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire-Form C (16 PF). Three scales from the 16 PF (E, H, & Q₂) were selected as a measure of submissiveness versus assertiveness. All subjects again completed the BIAV and 16 PF approximately 1½ months post-parturition (Keeps: 46.9 days; Gives: 46.9 days). The data from the I-E and the M-C SD were analyzed by a one-way analysis of variance model while the data obtained from the BIAV and the 16 PF were analyzed by a two factor, fixed-effects analysis of variance model.

RESULTS

There were no significant differences between the two groups on the I-E dimension, need for social approval as measured by the M-C SD, and on self-adjustment.

There was a significant subject x time interaction effect [$F(1, 17) = 6.915, p < .05$] on the real self-concept of the VIAV. Following parturition, the Keeps scored higher than Gives (either pre- or post-parturition) and higher than their own pre-parturition level.

Keeps also had a significant group effect [$F(1, 17) = 4.636, p < .05$] in terms of ideal self, scoring consistently higher than Gives.

There was a significant time effect [$F(1, 17) = 4.413, p < .05$] on the concept of self-esteem. In all cases, the women's self-esteem increased with parturition.

On the submissiveness measure calculated from the 16 PF, there was a significant group difference on Factor E [$F(1, 17) = 12.656, p < .01$] with Keeps scoring more humble, obedient and conforming than Gives, but there were no significant differences on Factors H and Q₂.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suffer from small numbers of subjects but do tend to dispel some of the myths and stereotypes about unwed mothers. In terms of self-concept, for at least the first 1½ months after delivery, Keeps have a very high real self-concept, suggesting it is rewarding to keep the child. Perhaps this is because at this point they are receiving full financial support from social services and feel secure.

Post-parturition, both groups apparently feel better about being the type of person they perceive themselves as. It seems their body concept improves and they again become more active participants in the community.

An interesting finding was the higher ideal self-concept with Keeps than with Gives. Women who keep their child seem full of wishes, dreams and ambitions for that child and think in terms of being an ideal mother.

Both groups showed equal self-adjustment which suggests it is a myth that the unwed mother is emotionally disturbed or neurotic. While Keeps were somewhat more dependent than Gives and tended to lean on others when making decisions, these differences were slight and Keeps were otherwise not excessively "submissive".

Generally, it appears that both groups were equally able to cope with the effects of the pregnancy and the decision to keep or surrender the child is based on a personal conviction of what is best, rather than being indicative of one group being more disturbed than the other.

Some limitations of this study suggest future research possibilities. There is a definite need

to use a large sample in research of this type, although the confidential nature of such research and the simple logistics make this difficult. As well, unwed mothers should also be compared with married, first-time pregnant women. Finally, it is suggested that additional pre- and post-tests be included both much earlier and much later than 1½ months. There is the possibility that the women feel much different during the early realization of their pregnancy than they do after a longer period of time when they have more contact with society.

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