



Adjustment to parenthood among a select group of disadvantaged parents
by Sharon Kay Hurlbert Tooke

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE
in Home Economics

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Abstract:

Fifty disadvantaged couples participating in the Mountain-Plains Education Economic Development Program at Glasgow Air Force Base, Montana were the subjects of a parenthood study. The objectives of the study were two-fold. One, to determine if social class is a significant variable in the difficulty experienced in adjusting to first-time parenthood. This was done by a comparison between a disadvantaged population and a cross-section of a population. And, secondly, to determine if significant differences existed between selected variables and the difficulty experienced in adjusting to parenthood. The subjects were all parents of an eldest child aged four years and under. A combination questionnaire-interview instrument was administered to both husband and wife. The findings were: (1) The Mountain-Plains population showed significantly more difficulty with first-time parenthood, than did the population cross-section; (2) women have significantly more difficulty than men in adjusting to parenthood; (3) men and women did not differ by pre- and post-birth ratings of their marriages; (4) preparation for parenthood did not make the adjustment to parenthood less difficult; (5) older individuals, versus younger, found the adjustment to parenthood less difficult; (6) there was no difference between pre-versus post-marital pregnancy and adjustment to parenthood; and (7) there was no difference between planned versus unplanned pregnancy and adjustment to parenthood.

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GROUP OF DISADVANTAGED PARENTS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

Fifty disadvantaged couples participating in the Mountain-Plains Education Economic Development Program at Glasgow Air Force Base, Montana were the subjects of a parenthood study. The objectives of the study were two-fold. One, to determine if social class is a significant variable in the difficulty experienced in adjusting to first-time parenthood. This was done by a comparison between a disadvantaged population and a cross-section of a population. And, secondly, to determine if significant differences existed between selected variables and the difficulty experienced in adjusting to parenthood. The subjects were all parents of an eldest child aged four years and under. A combination questionnaire-interview instrument was administered to both husband and wife. The findings were: (1) The Mountain-Plains population showed significantly more difficulty with first-time parenthood than did the population cross-section; (2) women have significantly more difficulty than men in adjusting to parenthood; (3) men and women did not differ by pre- and post-birth ratings of their marriages; (4) preparation for parenthood did not make the adjustment to parenthood less difficult; (5) older individuals, versus younger, found the adjustment to parenthood less difficult; (6) there was no difference between pre-versus post-marital pregnancy and adjustment to parenthood; and (7) there was no difference between planned versus unplanned pregnancy and adjustment to parenthood.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Parenthood means different things to different people. Not always is it regarded with unalloyed delight. To some it is a joy; to others an inconvenience; and to still others parenthood can be baffling and stressful. Whether the children are born by choice or by chance, perhaps the one thing on which this diverse group called parents would agree is that parenthood means change.

At the verge of parenthood both men and women feel either vaguely, or more intensely than at any previous step in adulthood, that they can no longer find the way back— the beautiful way into the land of childhood (Anthony and Benedek, 1970, p. 212).

Others contend that parenthood is complex and that one life-time is too short to learn all there is about it. Norbert Wiener, the man given credit for being the brain behind the development of the computer, wrote,

Thus like all families, we had our problems to consider and our decisions to make. I am neither certain of the correctness of the policies I have adopted nor ashamed of any mistakes I might have made. One has only one life to live and there is not enough time in which to master the art of being a parent (Wiener, 1956, p. 224).

Many parents, like Wiener, are beginning to confess their humility in their attempts to cope with the baffling complexities of parenthood. Also parents, quite competent in other areas of their lives, are finding parenthood a mystery and a confusion, with resulting feelings of insecurity and inadequacy as parents (LeMasters, 1970, p. 1). LeMasters

found this in his study, "Parenthood as Crisis," in which 83 per cent of those studied viewed first-time parenthood as a crisis. Regarding this crisis event, LeMasters stated,

Since babies do not usually appear to married couples completely by surprise, it might be argued that this event is not really a crisis- "well-adjusted" couples should be "prepared for it." The answer seems to be that children and parenthood have been so romanticized in our society that most middle-class couples are caught unprepared, even though they have planned and waited for this event for years. The fact that parenthood is "normal," does not eliminate crisis. Death is also "normal," but continues to be a crisis event for most families (LeMasters, 1970 p. 116).

The parental role has several unique and salient features which might contribute to its being perceived by some as a crisis. Some of these features, according to Rossi (1968), are (1) cultural pressure to assume the role; (2) the sometimes involuntary inception of the parental role; (3) irrevocability of the parental role; (4) the lack of preparation for parenthood; (5) the abruptness of the transition to parenthood and (6) the lack of guidelines to successful parenthood. Concerning culture and parenthood, Rossi states that where cultural pressure is very great for American women to bear and rear children, psychological readiness, desire and ability may often be at odds with each other to perform adequately as a parent. The inception of a pregnancy or the parental role is not always a voluntary decision and parenthood is usually irrevocable. "We can have ex-spouses and ex-jobs, but not ex-children (Rossi, 1968, p. 32)." The lack of preparation for parenthood is in contrast to the learning and preparation that precedes

marriage. The limited learning that occurs during pregnancy is instrumental in making adjustment to parenthood potentially more stressful than marital adjustment. The abruptness of the transition can be seen in that all at once parenthood becomes a 24 hour job and there is no gradual taking on of responsibility. Concerning the lack of guidelines to successful parenthood, Rossi indicates that it would be helpful for a parent to know specifically what could be done in the way of rearing children to become competent adults since this is the central task of parenthood.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was two-fold. One, to determine if social class is a significant variable in the difficulty experienced in adjusting to first-time parenthood. Secondly, this study sought to determine if a significant statistical difference existed between selected variables and adjustment to parenthood.

Need of the Study

Researching the difficulty (if, indeed, it exists) of first-time parenthood has relevance to the disadvantaged in order that their adjustment to parenthood might be better understood. The number of disadvantaged individuals in the United States is not insignificant. One source indicates that 15-20 percent of the population are truly

disadvantaged in terms of income and educational achievement (Havighurst, 1970). The research in the field has dealt primarily with the middle-class population, which has been one of its shortcomings, according to the researchers themselves. Daniel Hobbs conducted two different studies (1965, 1968) using individuals from all social classes, with the finding that the majority did not view parenthood as a crisis. This was in contrast to LeMasters (1957) and Dyer's (1963) studies, which found parenthood a crisis event for the middle-class populations they studied.

Information regarding the needs and concerns of the disadvantaged in relation to parenthood may be useful in developing programs or modifying existing ones for their use. This study attempts to gain some information as to how the disadvantaged view parenthood. This will perhaps aid in understanding if a great deal of difficulty or very little difficulty in adjusting to first-time parenthood can be explained in terms of social class.

Finally, this study is important because for too long parents have received little or no preparation for parenthood. This lack of knowledge seems to have perpetuated the romantic myth of parenthood and made adjustment to it more difficult. "The suspicion is growing that modern parenthood is too serious a business to be left to the complete novices caught up as in many cases within the cycle of deprivation and noninheritance of parental skills (Hubbard and Salt, 1973, p. 4)."

Statistical Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. There will be a statistically significant difference between the MP subjects and Hobbs' NC subjects, with the MP subjects experiencing more difficulty in adjusting to parenthood.

Hypothesis 2. There will be a statistically significant difference between the MP females and males, with the females experiencing more difficulty than the males in adjusting to first-time parenthood.

Hypothesis 3. There will be a difference between men and women by pre and post birth ratings of their marriages.

Hypothesis 4. There will be a statistically significant difference between subjects who were and who were not prepared for parenthood, with those having preparation receiving lower difficulty scores.

Hypothesis 5. There will be a statistically significant difference in difficulty scores between subjects who were younger versus those who were older, with the older subjects experiencing less difficulty in adjusting to parenthood.

Hypothesis 6. There will be a difference in difficulty scores between subjects who became pregnant before marriage and those who became pregnant after marriage.

Hypothesis 7. There will be a difference in difficulty scores between subjects who planned the pregnancy and those for whom it was unplanned.

Limitations

This study and its results are limited to a select group of disadvantaged parents, namely those participating in the Mountain-Plains Program. These parents are possibly not typical of the vast majority of disadvantaged individuals in terms of their motivation and goal setting, requisites of the Program in which they are involved. It also limits itself to parents whose eldest child is not over four years of age. Because of this, the results cannot be generalized to include all parents participating in the Program.

This study will be limited by the different methodology and terminology used in this study and the previous four. Therefore, comparisons between the studies must be made carefully.

The 23 item checklist developed by Hobbs (1965) and used in this study has some deficiencies. It is fairly reliable, but its validity is not known.

The sacredness of parenthood will be encroached on by this study. Parent feelings that are negative may be difficult to uncover, as mothers and fathers in our society are not supposed to feel regret or hostility about having had children.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be defined for purposes of this paper.

The term "disadvantaged" will refer to individuals whose annual

gross income is less than \$3,000, who have a high school education or less, but at least a fifth grade reading level, who are rural residents, and who are unemployed or underemployed.

"MP" or "Program" will refer to Mountain Plains.

"NC" refers to North Carolina.

The term "student" will refer to a participant in the Mountain Plains Program.

"Social Class" refers to segments of the population (lower, middle, upper) divided as such by education, income, and standard of living.

"Crisis" is defined as "any sharp or decisive change for which old patterns are inadequate (Hill, 1949, p. 51)."

"Difficulty" refers to the degree of perplexity.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This study was to determine if social class is a significant variable in the difficulty experienced in adjusting to first-time parenthood. Also, this study sought to determine if a significant statistical difference existed between selected variables and adjustment to parenthood. In accordance with this, a review of literature is presented under the following subheadings: Mythology and Romance Surrounding Parenthood Controversy: Is Parenthood a Crisis?, Social Class Differences in Relation to Marriage, Contraception, and Parenthood, and Preparation and Education for Parenthood.

Mythology and Romance Surrounding Parenthood

Max Lerner (1957) wrote of the romanticization of parenthood in his book, America as a Civilization. He indicated that when the romantic ideals of life and courtship are not realized in marriage, the couple transfer their romanticism to the child or parenthood role.

According to LeMasters (1970), a great deal of romantic folklore surrounds parenthood, although it is not always recognized as such. Folklore is defined as widely held beliefs which are not supported by the facts. Some of the folk beliefs cited by LeMasters are: (1) rearing children is fun; (2) children will turn out well if they have

good parents; (3) today's parents are not as good as those of yesterday; (4) child rearing today is easier because of modern medicine, modern appliances, and child psychology; (5) there are no bad children - only bad parents; (6) two parents are always better than one; (7) all married couples should have children; (8) childless married couples are frustrated and unhappy; and (9) children improve a marriage. It seems that these myths exist because of their value in sustaining parents in the oftentimes difficult and discouraging job of parenthood. The romantic folklore surrounding parenthood also evolved to make sure that the role was not avoided by most adults. Sanctions are provided, but increasingly less today because of the problem of overpopulation, to encourage men and women to have children and rear them. Some examples are that parents receive preferential tax treatment, they have priorities in applications for public housing and they receive higher pay in the armed forces (LeMasters, 1970).

The Silvermans point out that individuals with idealized notions of motherhood and fatherhood often find themselves in a state of disillusionment that causes an overall decline in marital satisfaction. Also, those couples who have few illusions about childbearing are better prepared to accept the satisfactions and dissatisfactions of parenthood. In their book, The Case Against Having Children, the authors state that husbands and wives who decide to raise a family with no preconceived belief that children will improve their marriage will probably be the

best emotionally equipped parents of all (Silverman and Silverman, 1971).

Controversy: Is Parenthood a Crisis?

In the past 17 years, considerable interest has been evoked in the subject of parenthood as crisis. It began in 1957, when E. E. LeMasters wrote what he considered a dry, scientific paper entitled, "Parenthood as Crisis." After publication of the study, he became aware of the widespread interest in parental problems as evidenced by the overwhelming reception given his paper. Since then other parenthood as crisis studies, some with conflicting findings, have appeared in the literature.

What LeMasters' study (1957) attempted to prove was that the arrival of the first child forces a reorganization of the family and that this arrival could be construed as a crisis or critical event. Crisis was defined as any sharp or decisive change for which old patterns are inadequate. In testing this hypothesis, by way of an unstructured interviewing technique, he interviewed 46 college educated, middle-class, urban couples whose first child was age five or under at the time of the study. The finding was that 38 of the 46 couples or 83 percent, reported extensive or severe crisis, versus moderate, slight or no crisis, in adjusting to the first child. The interviewer and the parents arrived at the crisis rating jointly. In the sample studied, the crisis reaction was not the result of not wanting children, it occurred whether

the marriage was good or poor and it did not appear to be the result of neurosis or other psychiatric dysfunction on the part of those studied. LeMasters found that mothers with professional training and extensive professional work experience suffered extensive or severe crisis in every case. Also, the 38 couples in the crisis group appeared to have romanticized parenthood to a great extent and they had very little, if any, effective preparation for parental roles. Some of the feelings or experiences reported by parents in adjusting to the first child were fatigue and tiredness, interference with social life, economic pressure, guilt at not being better parents, additional household duties, never-ending job of caring for an infant, worry about a second pregnancy in the near future and general disenchantment with the parental role.

A further finding was that parenthood and not marriages marks the final transition to maturity and adult responsibility in our culture (LeMasters, 1957). This change in transition points is due to improved and more widely used contraceptives. At an earlier time when pregnancy was likely to follow shortly after marriage, the major transition point in a woman's life was marriage itself. Now this transition point has become the first pregnancy rather than marriage (Rossi, 1968).

A second researcher, E. D. Dyer (1963) patterned his study, "Parenthood as Crisis: A Re-Study," after LeMasters' and arrived at similar results. A majority, or 53 percent reported an extensive or severe crisis, 47 percent reported moderate or slight crisis, and none

reported no crisis. The sample consisted of 32 college educated, middle-class, urban couples whose first child was under age two. Information was gathered through the use of questionnaires administered separately to husband and wife. The results, like LeMasters' study, were based on couple crisis scores. Dyer, recognizing as did LeMasters that the family's organization and resources have an influence on the impact of the crisis, determined and found that the state of the marriage and the family organization was average or above for the large majority of the couples up to the advent of their first child. Those couples whose marriage was stronger and who had more resources to draw on tended to experience less crisis. The crisis manifested itself in much the same way as found in the LeMasters' study - i.e., being tied down to the home, financial concerns, adjusting to the new demands of parenthood. Some of the characteristics of couples experiencing less crisis were: (1) those rating their marriage as excellent after the birth of the first child; (2) enrollment in preparation for marriage classes in high school or college; (3) married three years or more before becoming parents; (4) husband a college graduate; (5) planned parenthood; and (6) child was at least six months old at time of study. Dyer, like LeMasters, ascertained that parenthood rather than marriage marks the final transition to adulthood.

Daniel Hobbs, Jr. conducted two different studies (1965, 1968) to determine the effect of the first child on the family. In both instances

he found that, contrary to earlier studies, the arrival of the child did not constitute a crisis experience. Because of the variance in the finding of mothers and fathers on the crisis variable in earlier studies, Hobbs scored the marriage partners independently rather than combining the crisis scores of husband and wife to get crisis scores for couples. The majority of parents indicated that their marriages were more happy and satisfying since the birth of the child. In his first study an objectively scored 23 item checklist was given to a sample of 53 white, urban, first-time parents from all social classes. Education, occupation, and income were quite varied and the mean age of the babies was ten weeks. Hobbs, by means of subanalysis, ruled out the possibility of difference in class background among his subjects as accounting for the discrepancy in crisis scores between his study and the previous two. Concerning the 23 item checklist, 75 percent of the fathers and 66 percent of the mothers indicated that a given item did not bother them at all, versus bothered by it somewhat and very much. A majority of fathers, indicated that they were bothered somewhat or very much by the following two items: interruption of routine habits and increased money problems. The categories of somewhat and very much were checked by a majority of mothers for four items: 74 percent were bothered by interruption of routine habits, 68 percent were bothered by tiredness and fatigue, 66 percent were bothered by increased money problems and 60 percent were bothered by feeling edgy or emotionally upset. Only one

variable, income, was found to be predictive of crisis, which suggested that fathers may view their role relationship to the infant as primarily economic.

Concerning the possible reasons for the discrepancies noted in the three different studies, it was felt that the length of time which had elapsed between the baby's birth and data collection may have influenced the findings. LeMasters' subjects recalled as long as five years, Dyers' subjects as much as two years and the parents of Hobbs' study had given birth to their first child within the past four and one-half months. A possibility is that parents can more readily acknowledge negative feelings about their child in retrospect than they can during the time that they are experiencing these feelings (Hobbs, 1965).

Hobbs' second study (1968) bore out the same results - i.e., the addition of the first child may be somewhat stressful, but does not constitute a crisis. Employing both the checklist and the interview method with the same 27 couple sample, Hobbs found that the parents' crisis scores varied with the method of measurement used. Hence, the difference in measuring instruments could account for some of the variations in findings. David Beauchamp (1968) in an unpublished Masters thesis, used the two different information gathering techniques (interview and questionnaire) on different subjects and found the two different sets of results quite similar to each other as was not expected. His data fell between the extremes of LeMasters and Hobbs,

each of whose crisis index (interview and questionnaire respectively) was used in this study. It was expected that the oral interview would yield a high degree of crisis as was true in the LeMasters study and that the questionnaire method would reveal a very low percentage of crisis. Beauchamp's sample consisted of 37 married student couples whose first born child was under six years of age (mean age was 2 years, 4 months). It was found that the birth of the first child causes a need for adjustment in all couples.

As can be seen, the results are quite contradictory in the parent-hood as crisis studies. Arthur Jacoby (1969) in a critical review of these studies, gives possible explanations for the discrepancy in published crisis scores. Some of the possibilities are: lack of a standardized method of obtaining and reporting crisis scores, the age of the child at the time of the study, and social class may be a significant variable.

A little different slant on the subject is provided by William Wainwright, M. D., who has found that fatherhood can precipitate a mental illness, particularly in those individuals with already existing emotional conflicts. Some of the dynamic factors operating together to produce a psychopathological reaction to fatherhood are: (1) the child's meaning increased responsibility to the father, financially and otherwise; (2) the birth of a male child may reactivate homosexual conflicts; (3) new child disrupts dependency needs on the part of the

father; (4) in becoming a father himself, the individual may become aware of his unacceptable ambivalent feelings toward his own parents and (5) the baby represents a binding force in an unsatisfactory marriage (Wainwright, 1966). Dr. Wainwright points to the need for obstetricians and family doctors to determine what meaning fatherhood may have for the spouses of pregnant patients. These potential fathers could then be given support in becoming established in their new role.

Social Class Differences in Relation to Marriage,
Contraception and Parenthood

The poor exhibit a fatalistic attitude; they feel as though they don't have much control over their choice of a mate. In marriage there is emotional isolation of the spouses from each other (Ireland, 1966). Closely associated with poverty are early marriage, early arrival of the first child, and closely spaced children. Havighurst, in his longitudinal study (1962), found that lower class girls marry at an early age. Three-fourths of the lower class girls in his study were married by the age of 20 and 43 percent were married before reaching the age of 18. There was no clear relationship of social class to age of marriage among the boys. Regarding ratings of the marriages in relation to age at marriage, there was a tendency, for both boys and girls, for higher ratings to be associated with the later ages.

Studies dealing with mental satisfaction have found that Blacks and those with low income or education were more apt to be dissatisfied with

their marriages than were Caucasians or people with adequate income and education (Komarovsky, 1964, Renne, 1970).

Economic deprivation, anxiety about the future, the sense of defeat, concern about the failure to give one's children a good start in life, the bleak existence - these and other features of poverty are found to affect marriage in a variety of ways. These features tend to produce tensions in the personalities of family members, with inimical consequences for the marital relationship (Komarovsky, 1964, p. 290).

Social class status alone, however, does not determine or measure the extent of marital satisfaction. Karen Renne (1970) in her study "Correlates of Dissatisfaction in Marriage," found that people currently raising children were more likely to be dissatisfied with their marriages than people who had never had children or whose children had left home, regardless of race, age, or income level. Feldman, in an extensive study of middle and upper class urban couples found that those with children had a significantly lower level of marital satisfaction than did those without children. His findings were reconfirmed in a follow-up study of 268 husbands and wives. The results were that having a baby caused a decrease in marital satisfaction for both sexes (Silverman and Silverman, 1971).

Concerning desired family size, the lower class Americans, who have the highest birth rate, want as few children as, or fewer than, those of higher socio-economic status. A 1960 Growth of American Families Study showed that non-whites want a significantly smaller average number of children than whites (Jaffe, 1964). Several reasons

or explanations exist for the large family size of the lower class. Their sub-culture contains few deterrants to parenthood - i.e., they live in the here and now and are oriented toward immediate gratification. This is reflected in a higher frequency of sexual relations and less use of contraceptives (Winch, 1952). Pohlman (1969) states that it is argued that in the U. S., contraception has been withheld from the poor in a discriminatory fashion. That is, the public medical facilities which lower class people must depend on have not issued contraceptive information or supplies freely because of sensitivity to public opinion. He goes on to say that this situation is changing rapidly. It seems that a more lasting obstacle to effective contraception among the poor is motivational - i.e., it requires some effort on the part of the individual. An important psychological aspect of contraceptive effectiveness is the disposition to plan and control life and thus to interfere with nature. The reluctance on the part of the lower class to plan, control, or interfere with nature makes birth planning difficult.

Among the lower class, the biological fact of becoming a parent has much meaning.

To impregnate and to become pregnant signify to the individual a kind of categorical maturity as adult human beings; the natural consequences of sexual intercourse fixes more permanently and obviously than can the private experience of love-making the status of adulthood, of being grown up. For the working class, which lives much closer to biological experience than does the middle class, the experience of having children assumes heightened importance and around this fact much of their lives revolve (Rainwater, 1960, p. 82).

Differences can be found between the lower class and middle class in how they view children, parenthood, and the difficulty experienced in the transition to parenthood.

At least 40 million fathers, mothers and their children must be considered to be at the lower class level in our society as of the late 1960's. If one assumes that at best rearing children in modern America is the most difficult task that most adults ever have, then it follows that lower class fathers and mothers have an almost impossible task in rearing their children (LeMasters, 1970, p. 71).

According to LeMasters (1970) lower class parents suffer from the following disadvantages in rearing children: (1) high birth rates; (2) slum neighborhoods; (3) inferior employment; (4) inadequate education; (5) poor health; and (6) unstable marriages. There are also advantages for parents of lower class position. Some of these are: (1) less fear that they will lose status or position in the society; (2) lower class parents are not haunted by the achievement of their ancestors in the way that middle class and upper class parents are; and (3) lower class people have fewer social obligations and, hence, some have more time with which to rear their children.

Jacoby (1969) suggests that the transition to parenthood may be more difficult for middle class parents than for working class parents. His rationale is the social class variable and the divergent results of LeMasters' and Hobbs' studies. Some of the possible reasons he gives for the transition being more difficult for middle class parents are: (1) middle class standards may be higher; (2) the working class woman

places a greater intrinsic valuation on having children; (3) the principal sources of gratification for the working class woman are located within the family rather than outside; (4) parenthood is far more likely to interfere with career aspirations for middle class mothers; (5) working class respondents may be less honest in their responses; (6) middle class mothers are less experienced in the care of children; and (7) the middle class husband-wife relationship is more strongly established as affectively positive at the time of birth.

In elaboration of some of the above reasons, other sources, with one exception, concur that parenthood is possibly more difficult for the middle class population. The working class wife expects to find her main source of satisfaction in her family and thus to become a mother is to achieve one of the things she wants. Many working class women find the role of mother highly satisfying in and of itself. The middle class woman, on the other hand, expects to be an independent person in her own right and thus finds that the presence of young children frustrates her from fulfilling what she considers to be her rightful role (Newson, 1963). Blood and Wolfe conducted a study in which they asked about "bad things" connected with having children. Wives whose husband's income was less than \$3,000 annually did not see children as restricting their freedom, as did the wives whose husbands earned more than \$3,000. The low income wives saw motherhood as their only role and they did not expect to have any freedom (Pohlman, 1969).

Gavron (1966), who interviewed a sample of English working class and middle class mothers, found results that indicate that motherhood is more difficult for the working class population. She found ambivalence and self-consciousness on the part of middle class mothers combined with a feeling that it is their right to be something more than just a mother. Among working class mothers, motherhood was expected and accepted as normal, and yet, in some ways, their ability to keep their heads above water as mothers appeared considerably less than that of their middle class counterparts. The factors contributing to this situation include poor housing, lack of play facilities, lack of nursery school, and reduced earning capacities. It was also found that although the middle class mother may encounter psychological difficulties concerning her role as an individual with her first baby, she very soon makes a deliberate effort to assert her own rights as an individual. The working class mother who sees motherhood as inevitable is in fact less prepared for the ties of children and is less able to cope with the isolation that follows.

To the working class mother, caring for children represents the central activity of her life. She defines herself mainly as a mother and seeks to find gratification in life principally through this function. The children are considered mainly her property and responsibility and it is through them that she expects to fulfill herself and her potentialities (Rainwater, 1960). The special significance of

children and motherhood to the lower class woman may arise from the emotional deprivation in the husband-wife relationship. Children may represent compensation for the husband's lack of attention and for the dullness of life. Also, the limited outside interests of the lower class woman increase the significance of rearing children. Because the father plays a passive role in the home, the dependency of the children on the mother is strengthened (Ireland, 1966).

Higher education affects a woman's attitude toward motherhood, also. The more educated women, found among the middle class versus the lower class, are less likely to view motherhood as the proper role for all women and the more likely they are to see that there are alternatives to motherhood. On the other hand, the less well-educated women turn to child bearing to find fulfillment and self actualization (Silverman and Silverman, 1971). The question arises as to whether the lower class woman has alternative life styles to marriage and motherhood.

From the point of view of the individual girl who is failing in school, the most desirable thing is likely to be an early marriage. From society's point of view, it would be better if this type of girl was better prepared for marriage, and for adult life, for it seems clear that under present conditions these girls will marry early unless a much more attractive alternative course is open to them, and no such alternative has been offered them by society (Havighurst, 1962, p. 130).

Preparation and Education for Parenthood

Are today's prospective parents being prepared adequately for

parenthood? It would seem that they are not, according to parents themselves and scholars in the field of parenthood. One wife and mother in LeMasters' study expressed it by saying that she and her husband knew where babies came from, but they didn't know what they were like (LeMasters, 1957). Anna and Arnold Silverman (1971) suggest that some of the fault for the lack of preparation for parenthood lies with the educational system, in that the subject of parenthood is passed over. The Silvermans advocate that students be given information in the pluses and minuses of parenthood, so that they can then make an objective decision as to whether or not they want to become parents.

Our schools provide career counseling and college guidance, but nowhere do we have an objective and realistic program that equates parenthood with the words "Sacrifice," "Responsibility," and "Dedication" (Silverman and Silverman, 1971, p. 143).

LeMasters says much the same thing - i.e., young people should have adequate and accurate information regarding parenthood before voluntarily or involuntarily becoming parents.

Some of the truths that are not frequently brought out in our romanticized parenthood culture are that rearing children is hard work, it involves tremendous responsibility, it takes all the ability and know how one has and once you have begun you can't quit when you feel like it (LeMasters, 1970, p. 19).

According to a prominent marriage counselor, physicians also are negligent in not preparing prospective parents for what they can expect when they become parents. Only a few physicians, obstetricians included,

discuss with the prospective parents what is happening in the pregnancy and what is going to happen to them, as a couple, when they go home with the "tiny intruder" into their lives together (Fisher, 1968).

One might ask why parents have not been better trained and educated for one of the most important and, potentially, one of the most skilled and rewarding of all jobs. One writer speculates that it has probably been felt that since most everyone is likely to be a parent, everyone would manage to bumble his way through parenthood in his own way, somehow. And this, it seems, is what has happened. People have bumbled through as their parents did, and as their parents did, and so on (DeRosis, 1970).

Much of the training for parenthood seems to come de facto or with parent education programs. Those programs are concerned with individuals already in the parent role and in that sense are oftentimes curative rather than preventive. There's an abundance of literature dealing with parent education, but a paucity pertaining to preparenthood education - i.e., the preparation and education of individuals for their later role as parents.

The picture in regard to preparenthood education is, however, not all bleak. In 1971 a federal program, Education for Parenthood, was instituted to help teenagers learn about children and how to care for them. The object of the program is to prepare young people for rearing their own families in the years ahead and to encourage them to pursue

careers involving work with children. The program, administered by the office of Child Development and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, is planned to help secondary schools introduce new courses in parenthood education or to modify existing courses. The Education for Parenthood program, by giving teenagers a realistic picture of what it is like to care for children, may enable young people to make more informed choices about both marriage and parenthood (Wolverton, 1973).

Summary

Parenthood has been romanticized in our culture, in part to insure that individuals will continue to reproduce and to sustain parents in their oftentimes difficult job of parenting. However, because of the overpopulation problem, fewer sanctions are provided individuals today to become parents.

Research studies have shown that most parents find the arrival of a child calls for major adjustments and changes in behavior. The literature is inconclusive as to why the adjustment to parenthood constitutes a crisis for some couples and not for others. Many theories and explanations have been entertained as possible reasons. Knowledge has been advanced in this area over the past 17 years, but much research needs yet to be done to determine if parenthood is truly a crisis.

Lower social class individuals marry at an early age and are more

apt to be dissatisfied with their marriage than are individuals with adequate income and education. The lower class also have more children than they desire due to lack of contraceptive measures or ineffective contraception. For the lower class woman, motherhood and her family, particularly her children, are her whole being. "The reward the working class mother seeks for her maternal efforts is reciprocal love while the middle class mother hopes for reflected glory (Rainwater, 1959, p. 102)." A number of studies have indicated that the transition to parenthood is more difficult for the middle class woman than for the lower class woman.

Parents have not been adequately educated or prepared for parenthood. The failure for this lies in many realms--educational, medical, familial. Preparenthood education is a pressing need and one which is finally receiving some attention.

Chapter III

PROCEDURES

Introduction

The problem of this study was two-fold. The first was to determine if social class is a significant variable in the difficulty experienced in adjusting to first-time parenthood. The Second, was to seek significant statistical differences that might exist between selected variables and the difficulty experienced in adjusting to first-time parenthood.

Population Description and Sampling Procedure

This study deals with the disadvantaged. The Mountain-Plains Education and Economic Development Program, Inc. at Glasgow Air Force Base is a residential career program for rural, multi-problem families of the six state region encompassing Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The criteria for selection of these families for the Program are that their annual gross income be less than \$3,000, they have a high school education or less, they must have at least a fifth grade reading level, they must be rural residents, and they must want to pursue a job for which training is offered through the Program. These families, of which there are currently 208 in the Program, are moved to Glasgow AFB for an average stay of 11 months. Housing is provided the students at a cost of 40 dollars per month including utilities. Each family participating in the Program receives

a payment of approximately 350 dollars per month to be utilized as they wish.

This study concerns itself only with the first-born child in the family. Information as to the presence or absence of children and the ages of the children in each of the 208 families was obtained from the individual family files contained in the Program's data center. The distribution by age of the eldest child is shown in Table 1. The names of the 137 families with children and their corresponding addresses were recorded by the researcher.

Table 1
Number of Families with Children by Age
of the Eldest Child

Age Group	Number of Families
0 - 1	21
1 - 2	21
2 - 3	19
3 - 4	22
4 - 5	10
5 - 6	5
6 - 7	6
7 and over	33

A sample size of 50 couples was chosen to assure representativeness. Those families in which the eldest child was still a young child- i.e., age seven and under were selected to assure the accuracy of the information given by the parents because of the time element. That is, these parents only had to recall up to seven years ago versus perhaps recalling a longer period if those with older first-born children had been selected. Also, previous researchers dealing with the subject of parenthood and crisis interviewed those parents whose eldest child was under five years of age. For the sake of comparability with other studies, this age category was also chosen. To attain a sample of 50, the families in which the eldest child was age one and under were first contacted, next those in which the eldest was between one and two years old were contacted. This was repeated with each age group until the quota of 50 families was reached. The families had the option of participating in the study or not.

Method of Collecting Data

The adjustment to parenthood instrument was utilized because of its objective (questionnaire) and subjective (interview) aspects. This allowed for measurable results and also gave the respondents an opportunity to express themselves. The checklist (page one of questionnaire) was the one developed by Hobbs (1965). He found it to be a fairly reliable instrument, but its validity was not known. Although this

research avails itself of Hobbs' instrument, the extent of crisis was not measured, nor could it be, due to their being no basis in the methodological design of the instrument for measuring such. "Crisis" terminology, assigned as it was (arbitrarily) to test scores seemed inappropriate and, therefore, in this study the word "difficulty" is substituted. Hobbs' categorical results (none, slight, moderate, extensive, severe) for his population cross-section were converted to Arabic numeral groupings and cell combined for the sake of comparison with this study's disadvantaged population.

Concerning the instrument, the checklist (crisis rating scale) was completed by both husband and wife independently of each other. Some of the wording of items in the checklist had been slightly modified by this researcher for usage with disadvantaged individuals. For example, the word marriage partner was substituted for the word spouse. Question one, a two-part question which also appeared in Hobbs' study (1965) was completed by both spouses independently of each other. Questions two and three were asked by the researcher of the husband and wife individually in the other's presence. Question four, five, six, and seven were asked jointly of the husband and wife and the responses were recorded by the researcher.

Prior to data collection, the study received publicity, which helped pave the way. An article appeared in the Program's student newspaper and this researcher discussed the study at a meeting of the

MOWINDS council. The council is comprised of student representatives who relay information back to the other students in the Program.

Before the adjustment to parenthood instrument was administered to the 50 couples, a pretest was performed with four couples. Members of this pretest group were also participants in the Program and were parents whose eldest child was seven years of age or older. This category of parents with older first-born children was chosen because it could be safely forecast that they would not be among those included in the sample. As a result of the pretest and its findings, several changes were made in the instrument with regard to word usage and clarity of questions asked. As was not expected, the four couples stated that it had not been difficult for them to remember back to the time when their first-born was an infant.

In an attempt to reduce some of the difficulties in gathering information from the disadvantaged, information was obtained from the respondents in person rather than through the mail. In this way, also, the researcher was better able to determine through facial expression or verbal response, if the respondent seemed puzzled by the meaning of a word or phrase. In regard to class differences between researcher and respondent, it was helpful, in terms of knowing what to expect, that this researcher had had experience in working with lower-class families through the Public Assistance Program. The racial differences between the researcher and respondents presented no apparent problems. Three

couples were of Spanish/Mexican descent, four couples were Indian, and the remainder were Caucasian. However, the racial factor was one variable that could not be controlled and which could possibly have affected the results of the study.

Fifty student families, selected according to the sampling procedure previously outlined, were contacted for participation in the study. See the verbal explanation, given each potential respondent, contained in the Appendix of this paper. The initial contacts were made and the interviewing conducted during April 1974 by the researcher.

At the homes of the participants, the instrument, containing both fixed alternative and open-ended questions, was administered to both husband and wife. The questionnaire-interview was completed in approximately 20 minutes. At the time the instrument was administered, the respondents were told that there were no right or wrong answers, the researcher was only interested in how they really felt and that they would not be identified in any way.

Method of Data Analysis

The data were coded for transfer to electronic data processing facilities at the Montana State University Computer Center. Results were analyzed by the University and by the Mountain-Plains Research and Personnel Services Department. Percentage distributions were computed and the hypotheses were tested by means of the chi square test

of independence and the analysis of variance statistic. The .05 confidence level was used throughout as the criterion for acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses.

Chapter IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The problem of this study was two-fold. One, to determine if social class is a significant variable in the difficulty experienced in adjusting to first-time parenthood. Secondly, this study sought to determine if a significant statistical difference existed between selected variables and adjustment to parenthood. Seven hypotheses were set forth. The .05 confidence level was used throughout as the criterion for significance of statistical differences.

The sample was comprised of 14 couples whose eldest child was age one and under, 15 couples whose eldest child was between one and two years of age, 9 couples whose eldest child was between two and three years, and 12 couples whose eldest child was between three and four years old.

A breakdown of the four groups participating in the study is shown in Table 2. The study met with a high rate of response. Only three couples did not wish to be included in the study for various reasons.

Table 2

Distribution of Families Participating and Non-Participating
in the Study by Age of Eldest Child

Age Group	Participating Couples	Number Refused	Number Ineligible (1)	Unable to Contact (2)	Total Number
0 - 1	14	0	2	5	21
1 - 2	15	1	1	4	21
2 - 3	9	1	3	6	19
3 - 4	12	1	4	5	22

(1) Ineligible due to one spouse being a step-parent to the eldest child.

(2) Unable to contact after repeated attempts.

It should be noted that the study was conducted during a two and a half week period following Easter. A number of the families were on "Incentive Leave" from the Program and, hence, were not able to be contacted. Incentive leave refers to paid days off earned for having made satisfactory progress through the Program. Although the researcher was aware that some individuals would not be available at that time, the time limitation was such that the data were collected during that two and a half week period.

Findings and Interpretations

Hypothesis 1. There will be a statistically significant difference between the Mountain-Plains (MP) subjects and Hobbs' North Carolina (NC) subjects, with the MP subjects experiencing more difficulty in adjusting to parenthood.

Mountain-Plains males and females both showed significantly more difficulty with first-time parenthood than did the NC sample (See Table 3). Eighteen percent (18%) of the MP males were in the high difficulty group while 11.3 percent of the NC males were included in this grouping. Forty percent (40%) of the MP females were in the high difficulty group versus 26.4 percent of the NC females. Questionnaire data, based on Hobbs' five crisis categories, indicated that the vast majority of the MP respondents experienced a "slight crisis" in adjusting to first-time parenthood. However, this was significantly more difficulty than found by Hobbs in his NC study. Results are grouped into low and high difficulty groupings based on responses to the 23 item checklist or difficulty rating scale.

It was expected that the MP sample would experience more difficulty in view of the differences between the two different populations. Hobbs' sample of 53 couples was heterogeneous and drew from all social classes. Subjects in his sample, all Caucasian and urban dwellers, ranged from being illiterate to possessing advanced graduate degrees. The median family income was \$5,900 and the age of the babies ranged from three to

eighteen weeks. The MP sample of 50 couples, on the other hand, comprised a homogeneous group. These individuals, all rural disadvantaged, earned less than \$3,000 per year (Coyle and Myers, 1974). Concerning race, three couples were of Spanish/Mexican descent and four couples were Indian. The age of the children ranged from approximately four months to four years.

Table 3

A Comparison of Mountain-Plains (MP) Respondents and Hobbs' North Carolina (NC) Respondents by Sex and Difficulty Experienced in Adjusting to First-Time Parenthood

M A L E S					
	A + B (low)		C + D + E (high)		
	MP	NC	MP	NC	X ²
N	41	47	9	6	
%	82.0	88.7	18.0	11.3	9.43*

F E M A L E S					
	A + B (low)		C + D + E (high)		
	MP	NC	MP	NC	X ²
N	30	39	20	14	
%	60.0	73.6	40.0	26.4	49*

*Significant $p < .001$

The characteristics of the MP population point to a number of possible explanations as to why they experienced more difficulty. They exist on a nominal income and the arrival of a child means the need for additional food, clothing, and increased medical expenses. These MP individuals, who typically have a poor self-concept (Conrad, 1974), may doubt their worth as a parent and their ability to perform their new role. With the arrival of a child also comes additional household work. These individuals are not financially able to hire help and they lack many of the luxuries and conveniences (e.g., washer, dryer, dishwasher) of the upper and middle classes that help make caring for a child an easier task.

Hypothesis 2. There will be a statistical significant difference between the MP females and males, with the females experiencing more difficulty than the males in adjusting to first-time parenthood.

The data revealed that MP women have significantly more difficulty than men in adjusting to first-time parenthood (Table 4). The mean score for men, on the 23 item checklist, was 30.58 and the mean score for women, 33.94. Eighteen percent (18%) of the MP males versus 40 percent of the MP females, experienced high difficulty in adjusting to first-time parenthood. The finding that women experienced more difficulty than men in adjusting to first-time parenthood was expected for several reasons. The arrival of a child may cause a change in a woman's life style, such as ceasing employment, less contact with friends and others

in the community, while a man's life goes on much as before. Also, it is the woman who spends the majority of time with the child, caring for him and his needs. His dependence on her is absolute, while her need for him is relative (Rossi, 1968). A statistically significant difference between husbands' and wives' "crisis scores" was found by Hobbs (1965).

Table 4

Mean Adjustment to Parenthood Difficulty Score
of Mountain-Plains Males versus Females

	MALES		FEMALES	
M	30.58		33.94	
SD	5.36		5.29	
N	50		50	
	SS	DF	MS	F
Between Groups	282.24	1	282.24	9.76*
Within Groups	<u>2833.50</u>	<u>98</u>	28.91	
	3115.74	99		

*Significant $p = .01$

Concerning the 23 items in the checklist, it was revealed that women had significantly more difficulty than their husbands in eight areas (Table 5). The women experienced more difficulty than their husbands in the following: (1) the spouse showing too little attention

Table 5

Item Analysis of Difficulties Experienced Differently
by Mountain-Plains Men versus Women

Item	Sex	Response						χ^2	Contingency Coefficient
		(1)		(2)		(3)			
		<u>N</u>	%	<u>N</u>	%	<u>N</u>	%		
(1)	Male	45	90	3	6	2	4	6.51*	.25
	Female	37	74	12	24	1	2		
(2)	Male	24	48	20	40	6	12	.63	.08
	Female	23	46	23	46	4	8		
(3)	Male	36	72	11	22	3	6	13.08*	.34
	Female	18	36	26	52	6	12		
(4)	Male	31	62	16	32	3	6	.23	.05
	Female	31	62	17	34	2	4		
(5)	Male	18	36	29	58	3	6	1.16	.11
	Female	18	36	26	52	6	12		
(6)	Male	41	82	6	12	3	6	4.41	.21
	Female	47	94	3	6	0	0		
(7)	Male	20	40	28	56	2	4	3.79	.19
	Female	26	52	19	38	5	10		
(8)	Male	44	88	5	10	1	2	1.34	.12
	Female	43	86	7	14	0	0		
(9)	Male	32	64	16	32	2	4	9.41*	.29
	Female	17	34	27	54	6	12		
(10)	Male	45	90	5	10	0	0	7.79*	.27
	Female	34	68	14	28	2	4		
(11)	Male	45	90	4	8	1	2	7.56*	.27
	Female	36	72	14	28	0	0		
(12)	Male	39	78	10	20	1	2	2.88	.17
	Female	35	70	10	20	5	10		

