

Divorce and the Jewish Woman: A Family Agency Approach*

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Inevitably, a caseworker's attempt to remain completely neutral in the crisis of impending divorce is doomed to failure. The caseworker's own marital state, his feelings about his own marriage, whether or not he's been divorced, his value system, etc., are all part of the therapeutic exchange.

I. Divorce in the Jewish Community: An Overview

In a recent convention of the Rabbinical Council of America, Rabbi Walter S. Wurzbarger cited a national survey, conducted by the Rabbinical Court of America. The survey indicated a divorce rate among young Jewish families of "catastrophic proportions, approaching four out of ten marriages in some areas."¹ While the rate of divorce is lower among Orthodox families, he warned that "it could reach the general rate if the trend is not quickly checked."² In the same presidential address, Rabbi Wurzbarger warned of another significant trend, the rejection of marriage as an institution by increasingly large numbers who are choosing to remain single. He comments that social agencies have lately developed new programs to service this newly defined group within the Jewish community, namely the "Jewish Singles." In a strong and pointed comment, Rabbi Wurzbarger warns of the "zero population program" of even those Jews who marry. He added that "the pursuit of personal careers and other indulgences are taking precedence over the traditional joys of family life . . . This depletion of our ranks is a form of self-inflicted genocide."³

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†Now Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services.

¹ The Jewish Week-American Examiner, Jan. 30 — Feb. 3, 1977, p. 4.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

This linking of divorce and singlehood to Jewish survival is a powerful concept which is beyond the scope of this paper, but which has many implications for meeting the needs of the people we serve in social agencies. That it is happening cannot be denied. In Jewish Family Service of New York City, our statistics tell the tale: In 1955, five percent of our clients were "divorced or separated," and 10 percent were "single, never married." In 1976, 23 percent were "divorced or separated" and 24 percent were "single, never married," a 200 percent rise in combined categories. In the Orthodox communities we serve, divorce is a new and rising phenomenon, and is viewed as a major failure and threat to the cohesive Orthodox community. The Jewish Divorce and Family Relations Court of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis handled twice as many Jewish divorce cases in 1975 as in 1974, an indication of the scope of the rise in divorce among the Orthodox.⁴

I shall briefly review woman's role in the Jewish divorce process and some of the long-standing difficulties related to the granting of the *get*, or bill of divorce. In a recent American Jewish Committee publication, Anne Lapidus Lerner outlines the Jewish feminist position. Prominent among issues highlighted is the pressing issue of divorce, Jewish style. "Divorce could be initiated only by the man, so that the woman in an unsatisfactory marriage had little recourse. A man who abandoned his wife but refused her a divorce made her an *agunah*, 'anchored' to him and

⁴ Jewish Advocate, Boston, January 8, 1976.

unable to marry another."⁵ Yael Dayan, writing in the *New York Times*, adds her comments: "According to Halacha, the wife is the property of her husband, and he can choose when to disown her. A deserted woman, whose husband cannot be found alive or dead, is doomed not to remarry . . . An institutionalized, mentally ill husband, who chooses not to divorce his wife, cannot be forced to do so . . . In the achievement of equal rights for women, marriage laws are the Achilles' heel."⁶ Ms. Dayan goes on to illustrate how societal issues define priorities, by adding, "The right to exist (of Israel) in dignity is still the main battle; other fights seem secondary, and not very urgent."⁷ In America, the equal rights movement is a strong and growing movement, with impact on Jewish women, who have recently formed their own organization, the Jewish Feminist Organization. Ms. Lerner, in her fascinating booklet, traces this and related movements' impact on the Jewish community. One important result is a heightening of Jewish awareness of women's issues and a public grappling with them. Rabbi Saul J. Berman of Stern College for Women, Yeshiva University, touched on one major source of discontent among Orthodox woman: "the disadvantaged position of women in Jewish civil law, particularly areas of marriage and divorce." Courageously unwilling to accept the status quo with respect to *agunot*, Berman asserts that the Jewish religious leadership must seek to rectify this situation, suggesting that the Jewish community press for legislation which would enable civil courts to enforce civil antenuptial agreements mandating religious divorce for those who obtain a civil divorce or annulment.⁸ Other suggestions have been

⁵ Anne Lapidus Lerner, *Who Has Not Made Me a Man, The Movement for Equal Rights for Women in American Jewry*, American Jewish Committee, January, 1977.

⁶ Yael Dayan, "Israeli Women — More Feminine than Feminist," *Sunday Times Magazine*, February 13, 1977, pp. 77-80.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Anne Lapidus Lerner, *op. cit.*

made, including transferring the power of issuing divorces to the rabbinic courts. In Conservative Judaism, in 1968 an antenuptial agreement was instituted, providing for the retroactive nullification of the marriage if the husband refuses to grant a divorce. This agreement should go a long way toward alleviating problems in recent and future marriages. In cases where no agreement exists and the husband refuses to grant a *get*, a conservative *bet din* will annul the marriage. However, since such a procedure is not recognized by Orthodox Jews, it will not solve the problem of Orthodox women, or a woman who wishes to marry an Orthodox man.⁹

Among the Orthodox, one finds little change in this area. There is a sense of rabbis being sympathetic to the plight of the "chained" woman, but feeling that persuasion and community pressure can result in the husband ultimately granting the *get*. Not addressed are the situations in which pressure is brought to bear without such a result, nor are the psychological implications fully recognized. How do these issues impinge on our clients' lives? One recent case example illustrates how these issues are played out in the life of one family:

Mr. S., a 29-year-old Orthodox Jewish Ph.D. candidate from a middle-eastern country, initially applied to Jewish Family Service in 1957, presenting an obsessive preoccupation, and excessive rage over his rejection by a young woman. In 1968, he reapplied for marital counseling. In the intervening years, he had obtained his degree, was teaching in a college, and had married, in 1962, an Israeli, Orthodox woman. They had two sons, Mark 4 years old, and David 3 years old.

The S's were seen for 10 months, in a fruitless and frustrating process leading to little change or relief in chronic marital difficulties. Mrs. S. was viewed as a narcissistic, infantile and hysterical personality. She had no family in America, came from a poverty-stricken and emotionally depriving family in Israel, and was chronically depressed, isolated, and yearning to be reunited with her

⁹ Ibid.

mother in Israel. Mr. S. was an obsessive-compulsive character. He was hostile and contemptuous toward his wife, was bright, empty, petty and seemed to have little ego strength or flexibility. They were clearly a limited pair, with a guarded prognosis. Mr. S. punished his wife by excessive withholding of money; she in turn refused to cook or clean for him with any regularity. The children were caught in the crossfire, and the caseworker was unable to modify the destructive interaction between the two, both of whom projected all blame and responsibility to the other.

In 1973 and 1974, there were sporadic agency contacts, and a third child was born. The Jewish Conciliation Board was involved, with no success, and the civil Family Court was contacted by Mrs. S. who wanted a divorce. Mr. S. opposed divorce "because of the children and religious custom." He sought the advice of rabbis and the Jewish Conciliation Board. In 1975, the couple separated. Mrs. S. was referred back to the agency (she had refused all contact during the actual separation) by a rabbi, "for financial help."

Mrs. S. has been seen on a continuous basis since that point. Her financial problems are overwhelming. She receives public assistance, and is a poignant victim of budget cuts and welfare "reforms" in New York City. Her public assistance income does *not* cover household goods, religious education, clothing, kosher food, a telephone or periodic rent hikes. For one year, the agency has supplemented her income, to enable her family to survive and hold to a religious way of life. Strikingly, her college professor ex-husband (they are now legally divorced) has never paid any child support and has been threatened in two state courts with jail. Interestingly, in the maze of complicated court proceedings in two states, he has neither paid nor been jailed.

In January 1977, Mrs. S. appealed to the Rabbinical Council for a *get*. Mr. S. appeared at a planned hearing, but refused to grant the *get*. He wanted to use the hearing to air his obsessive, irrational grievances, but was not permitted to disrupt the proceedings. Thus far Mrs. S. is deprived of her bill of divorce, and Mr. S. has a strong need, seen in

the marriage, to continue to abuse, punish and deprive his wife with the weapon of his power to give or deny the *get* as an enhancement of his pattern of punitive withholding. For Mrs. S. the experience is a reinforcement of her profound feeling of helplessness in coping with her life, and her children's welfare. She feels inadequate, and devalued, and in the experiencing of her husband's continuing control, she is a devalued, powerless object. She is struggling, with the caseworker, to separate emotionally from Mr. S. and obtaining the *get* would have been a symbolic representation of a fresh start, now denied her. (Caseworker: Lillian Goldstein).

Thus, we see in this case example, the powerful psychological implications in the male control of the *get*. The implications are highlighted when one is dealing with disturbed couples, in which the privilege to give the *get* can be destructively used in the service of continued abuse. To move "beyond the *get*," we must first insure the ability to get the *get*, and must turn our attention to this area of Jewish life as it impinges on our clients. Although many of our clients are not Orthodox and may never be directly involved in the granting or receiving of the *get*, the value system surrounding this area of traditional Jewish life has its subtle impact on women's rights and women's role in the family. Linzer suggests an ethical stance for caseworkers in Jewish agencies when they are working with divorcing couples. He asserts that it is the worker's responsibility to raise the consciousness of couples about the existence of the Jewish bill of divorce, to give information about the process if requested, and to review the consequences of failure to receive the *get* on remarriages and on the status of future offspring of remarriages.¹⁰

This is an area of Jewish content in casework which deserves continued staff education and discussion.

¹⁰ Norman Linzer, *The Jewish Family, Compendium for Social Workers in Jewish Agencies*. New York: Commission on Synagogue Relations, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, November, 1968, p. 50.

II. The Crisis of Impending Divorce: Crisis Intervention Services

Many couples are turning to family agencies during the crisis of impending break-up. In Jewish Family Service of New York City, Quick Response Units in the three major boroughs were set up in 1970 in order to facilitate rapid access to crisis intervention services.¹¹ Crisis may be viewed as an upset in a steady state and as a time-limited period of acute disequilibrium in which normal coping mechanisms fail. Generally, families in a state of crisis are more fluid, and in some cases, more accessible to focused, rapidly available help, as provided in the easy-access Quick Response Units, which offer up to six weeks of service.

In the acute phase, the threat of divorce is a major crisis involving a sense of profound loss, and feelings of abandonment, failure, guilt, depression, shame and rage. Normal restraints on the expression of rage are weakened, with a higher incidence of physical abuse and suicidal gestures or threats. Therapeutic intervention when divorce impends cannot be regarded as a routine matter, and the caseworker needs to be acutely aware of the strong impact he or she has on the system in stress. This is stated well by Whitaker and Miller, "Any move by the therapist that discounts the significance of the marriage may be unexpectedly influential. Thus the ordinary medical system of replying affirmatively to a request for help by one person in a marriage, excluding the other, may in effect be an intervention favoring divorce."¹² The above authors are commenting on an individual medical model of therapeutic intervention. An important contribution of social work and social agencies was toward an emphasis on a

family-oriented approach which views the family as a system. Our response to the initial therapeutic encounter, the telephone call for help, usually from the wife, is to offer a skilled professional intervention on the telephone, with the goal of helping to engage *both* spouses in an initial interview as soon as possible. Seeing both partners avoids the dilemma of the therapist unwittingly being viewed as an "alternative mate" by the spouse who is seen, or by the absent spouse, who hopes to deliver his partner to a therapist to relieve his own guilt and burden of responsibility.¹³

Whitaker and Miller comment that including both spouses, and perhaps children and "significant others," is often a powerfully helpful device, but they add they are not certain why this is so.¹⁴ One explanation might be that seeing all the people who will be powerfully affected by divorce in the family acts as a counterweight to the American cultural value of individualistic goals, phrased as "doing your own thing." Divorce is a family affair, and seeing the family as a natural group underlines respect for the family and the fact that divorce will have a continuing impact on all family members.

Inevitably, a caseworker's attempt to remain completely neutral in the crisis of impending divorce is doomed to failure. The caseworker's own marital state, his feelings about his own marriage, whether or not he's been divorced, his value system, etc., are all part of the therapeutic exchange. Non-verbal communication is significant; even the caseworker's fleeting smile as the couple share pleasant memories may be interpreted by them as a stance *for* remaining together. For a Jewish caseworker in a Jewish agency, there may be a conflict between a sense that this couple's relationship is truly destructive and unchangeable, and a sadness related to the sense of the Jewish family as a cornerstone of a strong and united Jewish community. Judaism has, however, followed the principle

¹¹ Judith Lang, "Planned Short Term Treatment in a Family Agency," *Social Casework*, Vol. 55 (June 1974), pp. 369-74.

¹² Carl A. Whitaker, M.D., and Milton H. Miller, M.D., Clifford J. Sager, M.D. and Helen Singer Kaplan, M.D., eds., "A Re-evaluation of Psychiatric Help When Divorce Impends," Brunner Mazel, Inc., p. 529, 1972.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

of the School of Hillel: "If marriage was to fulfill its purposes, which include psychological and emotional needs, then gross conflict that shatters the opportunities within the relationship for need fulfillment and growth potential is sufficient grounds for dissolving the marital bonds."¹⁵ The caseworker's task is to facilitate communication among family members which will lead to deeper understanding, change when possible, and eventually to their own decision, based on a meaningful assessment of their conflicts and strengths.

I agree with Whitaker and Miller that it is probably better to err on the side of too much respect for the fact of the marriage, especially in the early interviews, and not to discount its ongoing power, its beating heart.¹⁶ In fact, I dislike the popular phrase "pre-divorce counseling," which seems to me to imply a direction. It has been my experience that the outcome of couples therapy, in a crisis of impending separation or divorce, is an unpredictable process to which we bring our broadest perspective and our most skillful and sensitive interventions. In a cool, distant relationship, the heat of crisis may well reaffirm engagement, and provide the opportunity for growth of the relationship. One example of this phenomenon is the P. case, a family I saw in brief therapy:

A Near Divorce

Mr. and Mrs. P., a couple married eight years, telephoned with an urgent need for immediate help. In response to their desperation, they were seen the same day they called. In this initial contact, they revealed plans to separate; Mrs. P. had already obtained an apartment in the city. However, both were obviously anxious, frightened and in conflict about this plan.

Both Mr. and Mrs. P. were professionals in the same field and financially and otherwise successful. However, their sense of themselves outside the work area was in striking contrast to their professional confidence. They were both extremely self-critical, iso-

lated, inhibited and frightened of closeness, although they stressed a togetherness which appeared to the worker like a clinging together of two terrified infants. The precipitant to their move toward divorce was unclear, but seemed to be related to their both turning thirty and to Mrs. P.'s growing realization that their relationship was "dead," lacking an emotional spark which other marriages seemed to have. She began to ask, "Is this all there is?" and to question the viability of their marriage. Mr. P.'s dissatisfaction centered on the sexual area. Mrs. P. disliked sex, had never experienced orgasm and had refused sexual intercourse for months. Mrs. P. had only recently been able to acknowledge her sexual fears as a problem for her and her husband.

During the six interviews, the couple experienced the unreality of their togetherness and their failure to treat each other as individuals. They began to recognize that they were often unaware of the other's real feelings and misjudged situations because of this fact. Mr. P., in his relationship with the worker, vividly experienced both his strong desire to be told what to do by a female and his paradoxical rage when he characteristically was told what to do by his domineering mother. His unresolved dependency conflict resulted in his dominating his wife and then becoming enraged when she remained passive and did not make decisions for him. He began to differentiate between his mother and his wife and learned to see his wife through a less distorted lens. This view allowed him to lessen his public deprecation and his excessive criticism of her. Mrs. P. began to understand that her superficial compliance, learned in many years of growing up in a family which valued docility and never allowed open disagreement, resulted in her resentment's going underground, where it was converted into passive-aggressive withholding, especially in bed. The worker encouraged non-threatening "cuddling" in bed, which did not have to result in intercourse and which was enjoyed by both spouses. While not expecting severe sexual conflict to be worked through in brief therapy, the hope was that Mr. and Mrs. P. could at least begin to relax some of their incapacitating anxiety regarding sexual performance.

At a follow-up contact, five months after termination, Mr. and Mrs. P. were physically quite different, as reflected in body language. Mrs. P.'s posture was open and loose, in sharp contrast to the pinched, closed, barricaded posture of double-crossed arms and legs of the previous contact. The couple, who had always chosen chairs as far apart as possible, now sat close together. They saw the six sessions as having turned a near-disaster into an opportunity to shift some inhibiting marital patterns. The basic shift seemed to be a lessening of self-criticism and then a lessening of the tendency to turn that criticism against the spouse. Being less critical allowed the release of warmer feelings between them. Both expressed surprise that one could reveal flaws and still be accepted by friends, by the worker, and by each other.

The crucial dynamic change for Mr. and Mrs. P. was their ability to risk exposing problems, first to the worker who did not reject them, then to close friends for the first time in their lives and, most importantly, to each other. The feared abandonment for being less than perfect did not occur; instead, greater intimacy resulted. Sex became more relaxed and enjoyable and they talked of wanting to have a child in the near future.

In the second follow-up, two years following the contact, Mrs. P. was expecting their first child, and they reported that their relationship had continued to improve.

A Divorcing Couple

In another recent case, Mr. S., a 38-year-old Jewish school teacher, applied for help after a period of two years of physical separation from his wife. The S.'s had a 9-year-old daughter living with Mrs. S. Mrs. S. was a student of psychology, working part time. The S.'s sought help with their continuing inability to decide finally to divorce. Their crisis was an on-going sense of their inability to emotionally separate. It was heightened by a reality factor—Mrs. S.'s apartment lease was coming up and this had increased Mr. S.'s strong wish that his wife would return to him and he had increased his pressure on her to reconcile. Although initially the S.'s seemed "stuck" in their long separation without divorce, the real agenda

soon emerged. Mrs. S. had hoped to deliver her lonely, isolated spouse to a therapist who would take him on, relieving her of enormous guilt and responsibility. Separation for her had been far more successful, and she wanted a divorce, but had been unable to say this directly to her spouse. Mr. S., who feared becoming the "loner" his own father had become after divorce, saw reconciliation as helping him remain in social contact, less alone and frightened. When the caseworkers elicited the real agenda, the couple was helped to reach their own decision to divorce. Mr. S., who was able to express his loneliness and fears, recognized that return to a "dead" relationship would not be a solution to his own interpersonal problems. The brief therapy was three sessions, with the goal of decision-making accomplished. The S.'s felt able to continue from this point on their own, with Mr. S. considering individual therapy for himself in the future. (Caseworkers: Judith Lang, Thelma Miller).

In the Orthodox community, the Rabbi remains the first and primary helping source for couples who are facing the threat of divorce. In our experience, in an office serving the Orthodox in Boro Park, Rabbis rarely turn to outside professional help, preferring to attempt reconciliation on their own, and may even feel betrayed should couples seek professional help after their efforts have failed. This area will continue to be one of concern to agencies attempting to offer a full service to all Jews, and will be increasingly important in this period of a rising Orthodox divorce rate.

III. Post-Divorce Counseling: Problems of Reintegration and Adjustment

In the Orthodox community, the post-divorce adjustment is an extended crisis, fraught with powerful implications of failure and inadequacy. This is clearly in contrast to the general American culture, in which a divorce is becoming less of a stigma. In the Orthodox community, the divorced, men and women, fall into a twilight zone. They are devalued, "damaged goods," "irregulars." They may become self-denigrating, irresponsible in their religious behavior, and shunned

¹⁵ Norman Linzer, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Whitaker and Miller, *op. cit.*

by others in the community. Remarriage, if it occurs, will be generally to another "defective" person.

Divorced Orthodox women often move back into their parental homes. The woman may go back to work, leaving the children in the care of the grandmother, who becomes "the mother." The divorced woman may feel like a "double failure," a failed wife and an incompetent mother. In subtle ways sexist attitudes do exist. The Jewish woman is considered to have major responsibility for holding the marriage and family together. If it fails she is generally more to blame than her husband in the eyes of the community. She usually keeps the children, and is tied down with their responsibility. When she seeks counseling, it is generally by way of a concrete request; for example, "I need a baby-sitter." Beneath her inability to ask for help with her own feelings directly is a deep sense of guilt and fault: "If I'm at fault, why should I attempt to assuage this pain? I need to suffer. I have no right to expect help." These feelings can be elicited and worked with, over time, and help often involves seeing the family of origin as well as the woman and her children.¹⁷

In my view, it is misleading to think of divorce as an event, rather it is a disorganizing and reorganizing process which extends over time. Research has defined this period of family disequilibrium as over two years in a relatively well-functioning family, often, for a young child, half of his life.¹⁸ I have been impressed with many women's self-definition and presentation of themselves as "divorced," long after the event. Many women who call the agency for help begin with, "I have been divorced for 3 years" or "my divorce was 1½ years ago, and I'm not doing well." Thus if we begin to recognize the pre-divorce period, actual separation period, and post-divorce period, we begin to note critical times when

help needs to be readily available. The divorced spouse and the children are often included directly in the family therapy, especially in situations in which there is a long period of emotional entanglement between the spouses. This kind of emotional non-separation in the context of physical separation is not unique and is particularly painful and confusing for the children. The periods of help may well be time-limited and episodic, given at moments of greatest need rather than regular and continuous over long periods of time.

The following case example illustrates such an episodic approach, a comprehensive service given to one young Orthodox woman.

The L's, Larry and Debra, a young Orthodox couple, applied to the agency in 1970 after their marriage of one year began to break apart. Mr. L., a successful professional man, was in an agitated state, with physical symptoms and deterioration in his job functioning. He seemed desperate to reject what he perceived as the source of his anxiety, his wife. Mrs. L., a pretty and immature young woman, seemed bewildered by his growing suspiciousness and rage, denied any part in the marital difficulties, and was in a panic.

The L's lived with Mr. L's parents, and it soon became apparent that he was symbiotically tied to his mother. The L's and Mr. L's parents were seen in family sessions which highlighted Mrs. L. Sr.'s need to possess her son, and Debra's wish to cling to Larry's family as the family she had never had. Her background was one of extreme maternal rejection, and she had married Larry to find a loving family. She had mistaken the symbiotic, pathological closeness between Larry and his parents as the security and affection she had longed to find.

Debra was forcibly ejected from Larry's home, and needed on-going counseling help to deal with both the acute crisis of the present rejection and the reawakened wounds of being ejected, at age 19, from her mother's home in another city. (Larry sought private, individual psychiatric help to cope with his near-psychotic deterioration.) Debra's mother was unavailable and lived a promiscuous life style. Her father had been a suicide ten years before. Debra had received inade-

quate parenting in her troubled family of origin.

Debra was given supportive counseling for five months following the separation. The marriage was ended, and she received her *get*, an experience she found humiliating and painful, as she felt guilty over the failure of the marriage, and angry at men in general.

Over the years, Debra saw her caseworker episodically, seeking and utilizing help for the acute crisis phase, for resuming socializing activities and hobbies, for vocational changes leading to more satisfying work, and for help in dealing with troubled relationships with a series of boy friends. In 1974, she joined a short-term group at the agency consisting of a mix of divorced people and married couples, and made gains in this group leading toward greater self-acceptance and rising self-esteem.

Currently, Debra has let her former caseworker know that she has remarried an Orthodox man, and is expecting her first child. Clearly, the agency became a surrogate parent, helping this isolated Orthodox young woman initially adjust to a single life in a strange city, after a painful divorce. The post-divorce help extended, in brief, time-limited segments, over a six-year period, with a general goal of enhancing functioning in many critical areas. (*Caseworker: Judith Lang*).

Women clearly suffer many specific kinds of societal discrimination in their period of post-divorce adjustment. There are cruel squeeze plays presently impinging on divorced women in the 70's. Women's liberation offers vistas of growth, "creative divorce," and personal happiness, when the reality is often a long period of loss and mourning, and societal rejection of the middle-aged woman in favor of youth and good looks. The middle-aged man, especially if he is successful at his work, is viewed as attractive and eligible, in sharp contrast to the reality for most women. Single women are often a threat to couples: "This town is like Noah's Ark—if you aren't part of a pair, they shut you out."¹⁹

Many Jewish women primarily identify themselves in traditional terms, as wives, help-

¹⁹ Mel Krantzler, "Creative Divorce," Inc. New York: M. Evans and Co., 1973, p. 80.

mates and mothers. They may never have experienced themselves as single, independent people, may never have lived alone, may have gone from parental home to dormitory, to marriage. Paradoxically, and of significance in the Jewish community, the more a woman has defined herself in traditional terms, the more difficult is her post-divorce adjustment, as so much of her identity suffers trauma and flux. For the woman whose major role has been wife and mother, the mother role remains, but sharply redefined as "single parent," and fraught with complications. She may never have been the major disciplinarian, and may need help in developing parental authority on her own; she must cope with her children's pain, and divided loyalties; she must deal with the stress of visitations; she must often cope with a reduced income in a period of spiraling inflation.

Divorce remains as a wound in a woman which may be reopened by many life events. One recent case illustrates this continued vulnerability to loss:

Ms. B., 28, applied for help stating she was divorced three years ago in San Francisco. She was quite depressed and revealed that she had attempted suicide and had been hospitalized in 1974 when her husband of 2½ years had suddenly left her for another woman. The caseworker's exploration of the recent depression revealed that Ms. B.'s roommate had just announced she would be moving out, three years to the day after her divorce. In addition, Ms. B.'s job would soon take her on a business trip to San Francisco, where her ex-husband lived with his new wife. The third factor was Ms. B.'s parents leaving for an extended vacation, soon after her mother told her that she was "tired of listening to your problems." These factors had combined to reawaken the hurt and pain of the earlier traumatic abandonment. (*Caseworker: Linda Ariel*).

I have attempted to focus on the problems of women and divorce, but clearly, as a family therapist, I have been unable to stay with women's problems without discussing their ex-spouses, children and extended families.

¹⁷ Personal discussion with Stewart Ostrov, Jewish Family Service staff.

¹⁸ Presentation by Judith Wallerstein, at Jewish Family Service Staff Meeting, December 1976.

Reintegration difficulties of women cannot be viewed in isolation from reintegration problems of reorganized families, dealing with loss and change. Divorce is truly a family affair. We need to view the crisis of divorce as a situational life crisis of role transition, which

attacks all who divorce, not just disturbed individuals and families. Family agencies cannot reverse societal trends, but do have an obligation to recognize trends, assess their impact, and organize effective, efficient services to meet the needs of this population-at-risk.

Perspectives on the Jewish Single-Parent Family*

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of the contemporary single-parent family in the Jewish community and to assess its impact on Jewish life. On the basis of a review of the special problems and potential strengths in such families we will also consider the services which are necessary to enable these families to find a significant place in the Jewish community and to enhance their potential contribution to Jewish continuity.

The single-parent family is one of the most rapidly developing phenomena of Jewish communal life. Many of our leaders perceive the single-parent family as a calamitous result of the breakdown in Jewish values. For them it is the harbinger of the destruction of the Jewish family as we have known it. Others interpret this development as a new family life style marking a growing affirmation by Jewish women of their right to personal identity and fulfillment. Both of these attitudes reflect a tendency to seek unitarian, undifferentiated causes for complex social processes. Each contains an element of truth, but represents an extreme view. The growth of one-parent families results from many complex factors. It presents a challenge to the Jewish community, a challenge which requires understanding, analysis and planning.

Growth In Number of Single-Parent Families

Most recent data regarding the growth of the single-parent family in the United States are a matter for deep concern. Analyzing census data for 1974, Ross and Sawhill point out, "Over the past decade, female-headed families with children have grown almost ten times as fast as two-parent families . . . By the mid-1970's one out of every seven children in the United States lived in a family where—whether because of death, divorce, separation, or an out-of-wedlock birth—the father was

absent."¹ A recent analysis indicates, as of 1976, 10.1% (7,335,000) of the total families in the United States was headed by a woman, and 2% (1,424,000) was headed by a man with spouse absent. Of 8,800,000 children in single-parent families, 800,000 were in families headed by a man. The number of white female family heads increased by 33.4% from 1970 to 1976.

Divorce, the major factor in the increase in white single families, almost tripled from 1960 to 1976. The increase in divorce from 1970 to 1976 (83.9%) was higher than that for the previous decade (76.6%). In contrast the number of families headed by a widow has declined by 4.6%.² From 1970 to 1976 the divorce rate for the total population has doubled from 2.5% per thousand of the population in 1970 to 5.0% in 1976. The increase in divorces is considerably higher for individuals under 45. The Census Bureau estimates: "If recent trends continue, one in every three married persons between 25 and 35 years of age may end their first marriage in divorce, and a higher proportion (about 4 in every 10) of those in their second marriage may end it in redi-³

While husband-wife families with own

¹ Heather L. Ross and Isabel V. Sawhill, *Time of Transition. The Growth of Families Headed by Women*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1975, p. 1.

² Bureau of the Census. *Current Population Reports Series p. 20 No. 307*. "Population Profile of the U.S.: 1976, U.S. Gov't. Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1977, p. 17.

³ Idem. p. 1.

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