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# **Un/titled**

## ***Constructions of Illegitimate Motherhood as Gender Insurrection***

Somehow, illegitimacy has been recognized both historically and contemporarily as a purely female transgression: “there really is no deviance labeling of ‘unwed fathers’” (Moorman, 1996: 34). Illegitimate conception represents a gender violation of large and multi-faceted proportion: Within one event, patriarchal notions of femininity, motherhood, family, and sex are simultaneously subverted. In failing to fulfill the “social requirements for at least the image of chastity” (Adams, 1997: 105), perceptions of insubordination and sexuality in the illegitimately pregnant woman become intrinsically and inevitably interwoven.

The unmarried, however pregnant, woman enacts insurrection by transgressing gendered sexual standards: “as parties to the [sexual] system, ‘good’ women [have] an interest in restraining male sexual impulses, a source of danger to women, as well as their own sexuality” (Vance, 1984: 2). Here, we see that the male party—while present and necessary in procuring conception—has performed no misdemeanor. Yet where “self control and watchfulness” are “major and necessary female virtues” (Vance, 1982: 4), the woman becomes a “refractory girl,” whose illegitimately pregnant body stands as “inescapable evidence of the . . . consequences of the pleasures of illicit sexual desire” (Reekie, 1997: 79).

When gender functions as a governing and normalizing force in society, those who transgress the standards are constructed as sexual, social and moral deviants. Along racial lines, in addition, this deviancy takes on diverging connotations. In this socio-sexual system, it is easily the illegitimately pregnant woman who takes the blame: since the 1960s, both black and white unwed mothers have been surveyed not only as victims “but rather [as] agents of larger social problems” (Lynn, 2001: 5).

## I. Discourse

Let us begin with a definition: a definition applied to mother and child. The word “illegitimate” is defined in two ways. First, it literally signifies one “born of parents not married to each another”; secondly, it is circumscribed as that which is “contrary to law, rules or logic” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 1990: 293). The word—and thus label of—“illegitimacy” is revealing. We know that the label ‘illegitimacy’ as it is ascribed to pregnancy, birth and motherhood today is understood primarily through the above first denotation. However, it is the underlying presence of the second meaning that is nonetheless relevant, operational, and attendant within the construction of notions of “appropriate” reproduction and sexuality among women. The title ‘illegitimate’ is pejorative wherein it projects “expressions heavily burdened with intended prejudicial meanings” (Solinger, 1992: 358). By definition, an illegitimate pregnancy is a pregnancy conceived “contrary to law, rules or logic”; by implication, the illegitimately pregnant woman is a law-breaker, a recreant, one who actively undermines and topples “the rules.” Ideologically, she is non-conformist and lawless: functionally, she is morally, socially and sexually aberrant.

This essay aims to uncover purposes implicit in the categories of il/legitimacy. Where legitimacy is a term and social concept associated with lawfulness and validity, illegitimacy is laden with inferred meaning: incorrect, untitled, and *unentitled*. Feminist post-structuralism theorizes that hegemonic language constructs its subject “by a discourse that weaves knowledge and power” (Alcoff, 1997: 336): within the definitive classification of “illegitimacy,” a feminist post-structuralist analysis determines, there dwells an allying discourse that assigns specific qualities and judgements to its subject. It is this discourse that differentiates between “legitimate” (signifying notions of lawfulness, reasonability and conformity [(*Webster’s*, 1990: 337-38]) and “illegitimate” (pragmatically, the antagonist towards all that is legitimate). This piece will use a feminist post-structuralist approach to identify and disseminate what this language implicates of its subjects. Further, it will locate historical and popular notions that have contributed to the race-specific conceptualizations of il/legitimacy, as well as the race-specific confounding of il/legitimacy and gender mis/behavior. Indeed, discourses that surround terminology and ideas resonate with inferred, socially situated meaning.

The inscription of deviancy upon the illegitimately pregnant woman is both explicit and hidden. This association has been—historically and today—affixed to unmarried mothers in general. Yet while the impression of gender plays a central role for all illegitimately pregnant women, it is interesting to note how this impression varies along racial lines. Indeed, all unmarried pregnancies symbolize (or at least are socially perceived as) “a costly form of role reversal” (Solinger, 1992a: 35) or gender misconduct; however, how this misbehavior is *received and interpreted* by social commentators regularly depends on the mother’s skin color. Specifically, white illegitimacy is understood as individual and accidental: the white unwed mother is a “maladjusted female who could be

cured” (Solinger, 1992a: 152) of her sexual and source gender misconduct. For the black woman, however, deviant femininity, sexual practice and the resultant illegitimate motherhood is understood as an “alleged biological condition of black womanhood” (Solinger, 1992a: 42). These diverging perspectives have—over decades—simultaneously influenced and shaped social policy on abortion, illegitimacy, and reproductive rights. Fundamentally, they have tacitly shaped popular notions on white/black womanhood, “legitimate” motherhood, and racialized sexuality. Where does this belief system begin?

Directly, illegitimacy has historically been defined as a social problem. During the twenty years following the Second World War, North America observed a marked increase in unwed pregnancies, especially within the white middle-class. In the Post-war years, familial, sexual and work relations shifted dramatically along gender and racial lines. The foundation of the American middle-class and white male privilege swayed under changes inflicted by (among others) a growing female workforce, racial desegregation, and the post-war welfare state (Solinger, 1992a: 34-37). Within “postwar interest[s] in preserving or restoring social stability,” unmarried pregnant girls “became key symbols of the potential for race and gender insubordination” (Solinger, 1992a: 34) at a time when such disturbances were understood as a snowballing phenomenon. As opposed to recognizing it as symptomatic of a multi-dimensional societal shift, illegitimate pregnancy was instead contrived by social authorities as episodes of individual non-conformity (Solinger, 1992a: 34). Beyond the 1960s, social commentators conceded that unmarried mothers may not be held solely to blame for their dilemma, and began to finger media, weak familial ties, and social attitudes on sex in tandem. Despite this turn, old judgements on “single motherhood” and “illegitimacy” are still evident today. In 1992a, author Rickie Solinger noted that Americans have a positive bearing towards welfare reform legislation, which aims “above all, to end illegitimacy” (241). Contemporary policies on adoption, pro-choice discussions, and welfare still carry the implicit message:

If you are married, and have a reasonable level of income, you are a more worthy parent than someone who is young, single or impoverished. These things are not said outright, especially in 2001, with our illusion that “things are different now.” (Rolfe, 2001: 6)

More insidious, however still attendant, is the social directive of il/legitimate sexual relations, conception and birth. The notion of valid and invalid social and sexual relations are grounded in multi-faceted values on gender-appropriate sexuality: they exist today. It is these social hegemonies that govern female sexuality as a whole, while the case of the illegitimately pregnant woman stands in obvious contrast: she is an example (among many) of female sexual/social deviancy. After all, the illegitimately pregnant woman is everything that the *legitimately* pregnant (that is, sexual and reproductive

within marriage) or single, non-pregnant woman (that is, ostensibly non-sexual) is clearly not. Black or white, representations of the illegitimately pregnant woman construct a subject who demonstrates deviancy by actively disobeying socio-sexual norms. She has reneged her gender category through action: the unwed mother “violate[s] multiple rules concerning femininity and sexuality, marriage and maternity” (Rolfe, 2001: 22). Simply stated, she has committed gender treachery.

## II. Performance

Patrick Hopkins’s “Gender Treachery: Homophobia, Masculinity and Threatened Identities” delineates the relationship between gender misbehavior and societal intolerance. In an attempt to dismantle homophobia, Hopkins investigates the pervasive and orthodox role of gender within North America. Hopkins attributes contemporary hatred of non-heterosexuals to Western society’s general fear of “anyone who violates the ‘rules’ of gender identity/gender performance” (1991: 13). Hopkins theorizes that political and social “inertia” is antagonized by those—for example, homosexuals, cross-dressers, feminists—who “reject the criteria by which the genders are differentiated” (1991: 13). Hopkins succinctly captures the motive behind societal imperviousness and judgement towards gender deviations:

A threat to established gender categories, like most other serious threats, is often met with grave resistance, for challenging the regulatory operations of a gender system means to destabilize fundamental social, political, and personal categories ... and society is always prejudiced toward the protection of established categories.” (1991: 13)

Like the non-heterosexual, the illegitimately pregnant woman’s sexual behavior contradicts common gender expectations. Much as the homosexual male “violates a tenet of masculinity” (Hopkins, 1991: 13). by acting on his sexual orientation, the illegitimately pregnant woman exercises a “social and sexual license that challenge[s] their traditional, subordinate role” (Solinger, 1992a: 35).

The social evaluation of unmarried mothers indeed “stress[es] [gender] role violation” (Solinger, 1992a: 35) alongside sexual misconduct as its fundamental concern. Historical and contemporary theories envision the illegitimately pregnant woman’s sexuality as gender treachery in two ways. First, she is seen as mutinous, a rebel who knows the boundaries of female sexual propriety and maternity and actively violates them. Secondly, as the latter part of this essay will detail, psychological theories hypothesized the unmarried mother as a damaged gender invert: a woman victim whose illicit sexual activity and pregnancy is the result of psychic depravity (if she is white), or biology-based pathology (if she is black).

In the first model, the illegitimately pregnant woman commits gender treachery through her own strategy of sexual deviancy. If “the pregnant teenager function[s] as an emblem of sexual-cultural disorder” (Reekie, 1997: 77), then the event of illegitimate conception signifies a female sexuality that is “dangerously uncontrolled and uncontrollable” (Reekie, 1997: 78). She is a social problem, a scepter of femininity gone wrong. Popular representations of the illegitimately pregnant woman construct female sexual deviancy and sexual propriety simultaneously: through this dichotomous portrait, patriarchal notions of womanhood, femininity, reproduction and sexual practice are carefully enforced. The deviant is pathologized, ostracized, supervised; the proper character is oppositely conveyed as a woman engaged in “respectable service” (Reekie, 1997: 79) and thus a goal for the aberrant to realize.

The notion of the aberrant and illegitimately pregnant woman as “Fallen woman” is indeed connected to the maintenance of gender and sexual norms. The Fallen woman is one who, through the isolated misstep of non-marital sexual activity, has caused her own social/moral destruction (Solinger, 1992a: 5): interestingly, this title was attributed to white girls only. Within representations of the Fallen woman, the subject is conveyed not only as anomalous but disobedient: that is, in parallel with her title, the illegitimately pregnant Fallen woman has achieved her predicament via behavior “contrary to law, rules or logic” (*Webster’s*, 1990: 293). Much in the way that a ‘fall’ represents “ruination” following a “yielding to temptation” (Solinger, 1992a: 215), the Fallen woman’s active disregard for female sexual norms results in the consequential—if not punitive—downfall of illegitimate conception.

While she is biologically female, the body of the Fallen woman demonstrates a blatant defiance of all that is considered appropriately feminine: it speaks simultaneously of sexual “purity and carnality; ignorance and knowledge; innocence and guilt” (Solinger, 1992a: 215). Consequentially, through her illegitimate pregnancy, the Fallen woman is branded as inherently defiant and disobedient. The apparent defiance attendant in the Fallen woman is discernable in her demeanor and daily relations; paralleling her sexual transgression, she is “characterized as persistently disobedient” (Solinger, 1992a: 215). The “waywardness” of procuring illegitimate conception is equated with a necessarily and thoroughly disobedient female character: “potentially unclean, disorderly, deceitful, disrespectful and corrupt” (Solinger, 1992a: 215). The idea of the misbehaved Fallen woman—whose predicament is a result of her own “gross and public departure from ‘good’ woman status” (Vance, 1984: 4)—delineates the boundaries of appropriate versus deviant female sexuality.

While both black and white unwed mothers are attributed to sexual deviancy, the black unwed mother receives additional, racially-grounded criticism. While the white woman is seen as socially disobedient for her actions, sexual and gender misconduct in the woman of color is credited with blanket essentialism: the black illegitimately pregnant as an emblem of “black womanhood” and thus “irresponsible hypersexuality” (Solinger, 1992a: 42). Indeed,

both black *and* white pregnant girls have been historically associated with sexual excess—in itself an “unfeminine” quality—however, racist presumptions define this ‘excess’ as racially imbedded when the ‘offender’ is non-white. It is interesting to note that when sexual aberrance is identified in a white woman, this is perceived as gender malpractice; occurring in a woman of color, however, this same transgression is furthermore categorized as a marker of inferior race. Here, female sexual activity, illegitimate motherhood, and indulgent misconduct coalesce to create a portrait of black femininity, historically situated in slavery: “purely sexual” and unrestrained “reproductive citizens” (Solinger, 1992a: 49).

### III. Duties

Within both popular American culture and social policy, the problem of illegitimacy begins with ‘illegitimate’ sexual relations. Regularly, the illegitimately pregnant woman, whether white or black, is conceptualized—simultaneously—as sole impetus and victim of her own crisis:

Notice how the problem is phrased: a woman facing an unplanned pregnancy. The spotlight is focused full tilt on her; she has a problem, and of her own creation ... We never hear of the dilemma of a man facing an unplanned pregnancy. We don't have any moral judgements about this man either ... Somehow she is alone with this problem that took two people to create. (Rolfe, 2001: 5)

Welfare policies, children's bureaus and medical professionals simultaneously encourage and brood over the phenomenon in which “for the most part, all men seem to be forgotten men in studies on illegitimacy” (Solinger, 1992a: 36). Certainly, financial support agencies appeal for these men's contributions: however such policy typically penalizes women, as mothers are required to “produce” (Solinger, 1992a: 36) the child's father before receiving welfare assistance. In policy, social and familial discussions, the issue of illegitimate pregnancy becomes a plainly female problem. The unmarried mother is conceptualized as a girl who “got herself in trouble” (Solinger, 1992a: 35). Yet how is it that she accomplishes this alone? If “trouble” signifies the pregnancy itself, a woman obviously ‘got herself’ there via heterosexual relations. Despite the cooperative effort required for conception, only one partner is “judged for exercising [the] right to be a sexual being” (Rolfe, 2001: 1).

In *Pleasure and Danger*, author Carol S. Vance draws a relationship between female sexual desire, judgement, and the fear of punishment for its unbridled expression. Women, Vance states, take on a social role as “the moral custodians” of both male behavior and their own sexual desire (Vance, 1984: 4). In a cultural atmosphere where—as a result—women's desire is “suspect from its first tingle,” it is understandable that “women's fear of reprisal and punishment for sexual activity has not abated” (Vance, 1984: 4) over time. For the

illegitimately pregnant woman, accidental maternity is the tariff paid for illicit sexual relations. Punishment for the illegitimately pregnant woman is construed as fulfilled in the illegitimate pregnancy itself; that is, accidental conception is understood as a damaging—although appropriate—consequence for a single woman’s sexual activity. This idea is reflected in the attitudes of the community as well as the reasoning of the illegitimately pregnant woman herself: “Jean felt that she had ‘gotten herself pregnant.’ She thought, ‘I wanted to die, but he was right. I got what I deserved’” (Solinger, 1992a: 5). Much as illegitimate pregnancy signifies a breach of societal and gender rules, it is simultaneously understood as a measure of discipline, dispensed to the illicitly sexual woman: “pregnancy [is] an incontestable marker of having crossed the line between normal/moral/good and abnormal/immoral/bad” (Adams, 1997: 105). While motherhood is a hegemonic (if not obligatory) marker of femininity, fecundity, and maternity within the illegitimately pregnant body becomes a mark of vice and punishment.

Does the illegitimately pregnant woman stand a chance at salvation? During the 1950s and 1960s, the illegitimately pregnant woman was conceptualized as “a fallen woman to be saved” and a “sexual delinquent to be controlled” (Wegar, 1997: 78): that is to say, through regulation and instruction, her status was considered mutable. Much as an illegitimate pregnancy signifies disobedience and a rejection of the socio-sexual “responsibilit[ies] of a proper woman” (Vance, 1984: 5), the stipulations of redemption require women to “go on to become properly married wives and mothers” (Solinger, 1992: 346). Ultimately, a Fallen woman could atone for her refractory past only by subscribing to patriarchal definitions of womanhood and maternity. We will see that, historically speaking, such “repentance” was both theoretically and practically more accessible for the white woman than for the woman of color.

One way that repentance was achieved for the Fallen woman was through an adoption arrangement for her illegitimate child. Beginning in the post-Second World War era in North America, the rising number of single pregnancies and families willing to adopt helped to create a discourse of deliverance for the white Fallen woman (Solinger, 1992: 346). Through the stain of unwed conception, the illegitimately pregnant woman would be marked; however, through a secreted adoption plan, “the unwed mother could put the mistake—both the baby *qua* baby, and the proof of non-marital sexual experience—behind her” (Solinger, 1992: 346). An adoption arrangement could simultaneously “efface episodes of illicit sex” and conception, while the infant was transferred to a “normative [two-parent, heterosexual] family” (Solinger, 1992: 346). The championing of adoption over single motherhood reiterates the social propriety of heterosexuality (traditional, married partnership), gender (feminized notions of maternity), class and race (the mildly eugenicist assertion that only the financially/morally “fit” may parent) (Wegar, 1997: 78). Pragmatically, through adoption, the white Fallen woman could revoke her sin and the semblance of social normalcy would be restored. At

institutionalized maternity homes, the objective was to literally delete the illegitimate infant from existence, while simultaneously expunging the inmates of their sexual pasts. In this way, each girl was carefully rerouted towards socially acceptable womanhood: while “it was possible to get school credits while in residence, restoring marriageability was considered more important than education” (Solinger, 1990: 50).

Simply stated, the goal was for the girl to return to appropriate white womanhood. Integral in this model was the disavowal of the illegitimate child, and the diametrical acceptance of mandatory, legal, heterosexual union. The message about illegitimacy for the white woman was twofold: not only was it true that “a repentant, reclaimed and purified self could transcend a body temporarily by sin” (Reekie, 1997: 79), but further, within a patriarchal social structure, “outside of marriage neither sex nor the resulting child had ‘reality’” (Solinger, 1992: 358). Outside of socially-delineated sexual relations, biological motherhood becomes conditional, and if necessary, obsolete. Even today, white mothers who relinquish their babies become “separate, different than and less than full mothers” (Lynn, 2001: 3).

For those women who did not—or could not—atone for their deviancy in this way, further penalization was common. Such social backlash is prominent in the experiences of black single mothers during the same time period, as well as in contemporary welfare policy on single motherhood in general. Due to a racist and selective adoption market, black illegitimate babies were more difficult to place for adoption in the post-war era; single black women were less willing to place their babies and instead chose to keep (Solinger, 1992: 356). The historical social response to this was punitive:

Politicians ... argued simply that the mothers were bad and should be punished. The babies were expendable because they were expensive and undesirable as citizens. Public policies could and should be used to punish black unmarried mothers and their children in the form of legislation enabling states to cut them off from welfare benefits and to sterilize and incarcerate ‘illegitimate mothers.’ (Solinger, 1992: 352)

The black woman’s willingness to take on unmarried motherhood was problematic to social authorities, because it conveyed that these women considered their motherhood legitimate and functional despite societal disension. In the face of systemic racism, poverty and social ostracism, most black women continued onto single motherhood—again, asserting their ability to operate outside of patriarchal and heterosexual institutions. In a response that aimed to degrade black women as mothers, sexual beings, women and members of an already marginalized race, authorities continually made “facile association[s] between black women, sexuality, and crime” (Solinger, 1992a: 34). In addition to blatant racism, the black woman who kept her baby experienced backlash over her choice to mother. The treatment of illegitimate motherhood—an



extension and *acceptance* of illicit sexual activity and conception, no less, is revealing. It is as if the black illegitimate child, in remaining with its mother, remained as “proof” of its mother’s gender misbehavior and sexual practice. Black single mothers of the post-war period were punished regularly by social policy, financial aid, and housing authorities, whose disapproval of their motherhood status represented accusations of sexual, social and maternal misconduct. The black single mother was seen as holistically illegitimate:

Black unwed mothers were guilty of being without a man, thus in some sense independent, or at least ‘on the loose’ in a way that violated gender norms ... They were guilty of being extramaritally sexual, again a violation of gender norms, but were also guilty of being mothers, the ultimate gender role fulfillment. (Solinger, 1992a: 53)

Black illegitimacy was fingered by racist society as “a readily employed argument as to asserted Negro inferiority”; yet further to this, it was the black woman who more often chose to raise her child alone. Simultaneously, these women subverted patriarchal, heterosexual and social mandates.

In contemporary welfare policies and discourses, the image of the non-conformist single mother is still operative. How dare she violate social boundaries pertaining to sexuality and motherhood? How dare she ask for financial support from her community (effectively asking for their alliance in her decision)? Her ‘deservedness’ of social and financial assistance is problematized due to her unlawful maternity, and her child’s illegitimacy:

[In 1955] a two year waiting period [for social assistance] was enforced to ensure that these [single] mothers were ‘fit’ to care for their children and that they did not continue their ‘improper’ sexual practices. Eventually this was reduced to three months, but only in October 1991 was this time restriction removed. (Little, 1994: 385)

Indeed, regardless of race, all single, pregnant women were defined and treated as deviants threatening to the social order” (Solinger, 1992a: 3). However, the white unmarried mother could choose to relinquish her child (and thus, her sexual mistakes), while the unmarried woman of color did not have this option. Intrinsic in this model is the notion that relinquished children spawned by illicit conception were “cleared of the charge of inherited moral taint” (Solinger, 1992a: 3) that illegitimacy implicated—and so were their mothers.

#### **IV. Pathology**

In a second model, the illegitimately pregnant woman is defined with biology-based pathology. Again, we will see how the white unwed mother’s gender and sexual misconduct is seen as mutable, yet the black unwed mother

is not. The white illegitimately pregnant woman has historically been psychoanalyzed as a casualty of mental illness: she is “driven into sex and pregnancy, professionals determined, as a result of both gender dysfunctions and family dysfunctions” (Solinger, 1990: 47). The woman of color, in contrast, is understood as biologically determined: a “permanent victim of [her] sexuality” (Solinger, 1992a: 44). In the cases of both white and black women, the pathologizing of “improper” female sexual practice and gender subversion is revealing.

In “Clitoral Corruption: Body Metaphors and American Doctors’ Constructions of Female Homosexuality, 1870-1900,” author Margaret Gibson (1997) demonstrates how historical theories on sexual perversion enforced constructed parallels between non-hegemonic female sexual practice, gender subversion, deviancy and mental illness. As Gibson contrasts the gendered “stereotype of the passive, asexual woman” with “cases of obvious female sexuality” such as promiscuity, lesbianism and nymphomania (Gibson, 1997: 13), she illustrates how gender “appropriate” behavior has been historically aligned with sexual practice. Where normal feminine sexuality is believed to be conservative, “circumspect” (Vance, 1984:2), the openly sexual woman “represent[s] a lust that is necessarily masculine” (Gibson, 1997: 113). The illegitimately pregnant woman—a “woman whose sex drive [is] clearly evident” (Gibson, 1997: 112) through her physical state of fecundity—is similarly identified as hypersexual, if not masculinized.

As Gibson notes, “for a woman to be adamantly sexual represented more than a bedroom concern” (1997: 113): through her illicit sexual activity, the illegitimately pregnant woman is diagnosed as fundamentally “conflicted between [her] masculine and feminine drives” (Solinger, 1990: 47). As her sexual practice indicates a subversion of appropriate womanhood/motherhood, the illegitimately pregnant woman “was attributed to sexual excess, in itself a ‘masculine’ quality” (Gibson, 1997: 123). She is all at once a gender traitor and a bastardization of feminine motherhood. Interestingly, many psychological studies performed on white unwed mothers during the early 1950s looked for evidence that these women “assumed male prerogatives sexually, aesthetically, and otherwise” (Solinger, 1990: 47); these studies identified anomalies in their subjects such as boyish appearance and dress, an aggressive or independent disposition, and feelings of envy towards men” (Solinger, 1990: 47-50). Health practitioners and psychologists hypothesized that the illegitimately pregnant woman’s sexual practice (and resulting dilemma) was itself a consequence and culmination of her disordered gender identity: it was “almost as if she denied her femininity by redirecting her sexual energy” (Solinger, 1990: 47), thus achieving pregnancy. The illegitimately pregnant woman of color was, too, described as gender misappropriated; this was defined, however, as a racial flaw. Biologically speaking, authorities constructed the image of “the black woman as unrestrained, wanton breeder” (Solinger, 1992a: 43): this, commentators ascertained, was determined by body-based and masculinized “hypersexuality.”

In the case of the white woman, authorities cited the illegitimately pregnant woman as a victim of psychological disturbance. It is no surprise that authorities and institutions dealing with white single pregnancy at this time acted to reaffirm suitable gender behavior in their subjects as a measure of social—and by implication, sexual—“rehabilitation”:

In the postwar decades, most maternity homes were actively engaged in training unwed mothers to intensify their feminine identification. Most homes offered courses or workshops in the feminine arts of grooming, glamour, charm, beauty, cooking, handwork, and flower arranging before they offered courses with vocational or educational content” (Solinger, 1992a: 50).

The function of the maternity home was not only to hide the single, pregnant woman from her community; it was further employed to regularize the lives of the women who occasioned them. For unwed mothers, the homes became “training schools for wayward girls,” and “the training was in femininity” (Solinger, 1992a: 50).

The gender subversiveness of the unmarried mother so disturbed social authorities of the post-war era that even the medical profession was moved to explain it. It was soon conjectured that white girls’ sexual activity was symptomatic of a larger, pathological problem. Like Gibson’s (1997) “Clitoral Corruption” maintains, mental illness and non-hegemonic expressions of female sexuality are often understood as interconnected. While Gibson’s research draws from medical assumptions of the late 1800s, the notion of the “sexual delinquent” is still attendant in studies on illegitimacy from the 1960s. The real connection between sexual practice and insanity, Gibson indicates, is the socially constructed “degeneration of both madness and female sexual passion” (1997: 117). Similarly, for the illegitimately pregnant woman, sexual deviancy (and its prerequisite gender role denunciation) signaled holistic degeneration, including mental illness:

Personality and character disorders discovered by the professionals included masochism, sadomasochism, severe immaturity, psychopathic tendencies ... Whether the experts understood these disorders as the causes or the wages of unwed motherhood, the implication was clear. [White] females who violated gender-determined sexual norms were routinely designated as formally ill. (Solinger, 1990: 47)

Where gender functions as a governing and normalizing force in society, those who transgress these standards are constructed as sexual, social and mental deviants. For women who depart from their gender category through non-hegemonic sexual practice—such as homosexuals, sex workers, or the illegitimately pregnant woman—pathologization and discipline is typical. As

“disordered” women, white pregnant girls were damaged yet recoverable, and social services scrambled to rehabilitate them towards appropriate femininity.

Unfortunately, for the black illegitimately pregnant woman, there was no recourse. Racist and biologically-fast theories routinely “define[d] unwed black mothers as permanent victims of their sexuality” (Solinger, 1992a: 44). They became emblematic casualties of an ‘inferior race’ who were worth neither ‘treating’ nor supporting. This prejudicial attitude placed social authorities in a powerful position to all at once control, discipline, and neglect black single mothers: “biological determinism justified the use of measures to interrupt the fertility of black women” yet “argued against the usefulness of extending social services to black girls and women” (Solinger, 1992a: 44).

## V.

She is most unlike expectant women within the institution of marriage. For the single, pregnant woman, the label of illegitimacy is the most penetrating aspect of her condition. Her circumstances—and the practice that lead her to them—are nuanced with judgmental conclusions: she has participated in illegitimate sex, thus effecting illegitimate conception and placing herself en route to illegitimate maternity. Through her gender disloyalty, the illegitimately pregnant woman effects behavior and demeanor that is holistically “contrary to law, rules or logic” (*OWebster’s* 1990: 283): she exposes the “rules” or “the limits of what is culturally thinkable about proper sex and motherhood” (Reekie, 1997: 77) by effectively transgressing them.

The illegitimately pregnant woman represents gender treachery and a subversion of patriarchal institutions. The pregnant woman of color represents this and more; yet social commentators of today still fail to perceive that “the biological events that [lead] to an illegitimate pregnancy [are] common to all girls and women, black and white” (Solinger, 1992a: 45). Through the construction and treatment of the unwed mother, we uncover the terms of permissive gender and sexual practice: the single, pregnant woman is “illegitimate” because she has “transgressed against female norms of purity and passivity by engaging in sex without marriage” (Solinger, 1990: 52). While the illegitimately pregnant woman represents an aberrant womanhood, she simultaneously represents the social boundaries of appropriate sexuality and femininity.

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