

Letters

Unwanted Pregnancy

The article by Frederick S. Jaffe "Toward the reduction of unwanted pregnancy" (8 Oct. 1971, p. 119) makes a cogent argument for the provision of adequate contraceptive services to all segments of our society. It is indeed important that the most sophisticated health and social services we have available be provided for all. Yet to be realistic and not overoptimistic, we must recognize that the establishment of an adequate national family planning program is only a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition to enable the United States to become "a society free of unwanted pregnancy." "Unwanted pregnancies" result not only from lack of contraceptive services but also from unconscious motives, life-style pressures, or other social and personal factors not always clearly identifiable. To illustrate, I would like to cite my experience with pregnant teen-agers who have been studied since September 1967 in Hartford and New Haven, Connecticut (1). These girls registered in special programs with educational, social service, and medical or nursing components; they were studied for 2 years after the births of their children. The programs in both cities strongly emphasized contraceptive education and encouraged use of contraceptives. Yet despite the programs, after 15 months 18 percent of the 127 Hartford mothers interviewed and 24 percent of the 164 New Haven mothers interviewed were pregnant. After 24 months, approximately 50 percent of both groups were pregnant.

Certainly strong, outreaching, and complete fertility-control programs are desirable and should be provided as a public health measure. But to assume that such programs will eradicate unwanted pregnancies is to credit them too highly; they will be unfairly condemned as failures when such an unattainable goal is not reached.

EDITH FEIN

Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, School of Medicine, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut 06510

Note

1. Supported by grant MC-R-090048-05-0, Maternal and Child Health Service, Health Services and Mental Health Administration, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Jaffe seems to underrate the importance of measures "beyond family planning" which are designed to reduce fertility motivation. He dismisses these measures as lacking "specificity, political or ethical acceptability, or scientific or administrative feasibility; in addition, they are untested as to presumed effectiveness." Yet it has been clearly shown that family planning alone will not result in population control, since desired family size is, in general, greater than that which would result in population stabilization (1). If this is indeed the case, one must not focus only on reducing unwanted pregnancies while other important aspects of population control are ignored.

The women's liberation movement is attempting to change attitudes toward child bearing; this may solve much of the problem without our having to resort to coercive measures. The traditional sex roles in society—men having to "prove their virility" by fathering many children, and the idea that motherhood is the only "true fulfillment" for women—are being challenged. As long as motherhood is considered the only true vocation for women, they will not be satisfied with smaller families.

It has been shown that employed mothers have fewer children than those who are not employed (2). But there are many obstacles in the paths of women aspiring to careers. Discrimination in admission to graduate and professional schools and in the awarding of fellowships, discrimination in hiring and promotion, and salary differentials are all well documented. Maternity-leave policies, discriminatory social security laws, and tax laws that do not allow deduction for child-care expenses must all be changed. When equal employment opportunity has become a reality, women will not be discouraged from pursuing careers. However, there are many invisible barriers that will also have to be removed. Girls are

socialized into passivity and into the housewife's role from a very early age with toys such as dolls, brooms, ovens, sinks, and so forth. The vast majority of children's books are male-oriented and show boys active and adventurous, while girls are often shown sitting quietly watching. Men are shown in a variety of interesting jobs, whereas women are almost all portrayed in domestic roles, aproned, in the kitchen (unless they are in the traditional female jobs of nurse and teacher). These stereotypes are being foisted on young girls at an age when they are beginning to formulate ideas of themselves and their worth; such conceptions of sex roles are often reinforced in schools and homes and by many members of the psychiatric profession. Although there are no basic intellectual differences between boys and girls, girls' productivity and accomplishments begin to drop off because of this type of socialization; they are trained to be obedient and dependent, rather than ambitious and self-reliant. The girl who is motivated and ambitious is considered an abnormal female. Intellectual activity is regarded as incompatible with femininity; a bright woman is told that she "thinks like a man."

When these psychological barriers, as well as the legal and occupational ones, are removed, when "Woman's Place" is no longer considered to be at home, and when women are encouraged to seek the same careers that men seek, children will cease to be the main mode of fulfillment of women, and desired family size will decrease. It has been shown (3) that women who see themselves as more active and independent and less stereotypically "feminine" tend to have smaller families than those who have incorporated the stereotype more completely into their self-image.

JUDITH S. WEIS

Department of Zoology and Physiology, Rutgers, the State University, Newark, New Jersey 07102

References

1. J. Blake, *BioScience* 21, 215 (1971).
2. F. I. Nye and L. N. W. Hoffman, *The Employed Mother in America* (Rand McNally, New York, 1963), pp. 7-17.
3. F. E. Clarkson, S. R. Vogel, I. K. Broverman, D. M. Broverman, P. S. Rosenkrantz, *Science* 167, 390 (1970).

Jaffe states that "A program to prevent parents from having wanted children would violate constitutional and human rights." To make this state-

port as a categorical statement with no recognition of the fact that legal opinion on the question is divided, conveys a false sense of finality and uniformity.

In an excellent review of the law that has been and might be applied to control of population growth, Montgomery (1) concludes, "If the problem is not solved voluntarily, there will be no constitutional bars to compulsory population control." Colorado State Representative Richard Lamm is of a similar opinion (2).

In the 1965 National Fertility Study, respondents reported that one-third of all children born in the previous 5 years were "unwanted." Jaffe, therefore, contends that, "The reduction of unwanted pregnancy . . . provides a tangible objective for national policy. . . ." Before we undertake such a policy, we should first pause to consider the implications of other findings of social science research.

When respondents are asked to label their children as wanted or unwanted, the researcher has little alternative but to accept their replies as valid, for there are no validation criteria avail-

able. In the absence of such criteria, the researcher must accept the respondents' responses as valid. If those studies demonstrate the accuracy of self-reported data, then we may feel little confidence accepting such measures of unwanted pregnancy as valid.

Green (3) reported responses and actual behavior in a study of contraceptive usage in East Pakistan. Using interview data and clinic records, he found that people underreported both their use and knowledge of contraceptives. Approximately 20 percent of all males and 25 percent of all females who knew about contraceptives (according to education program records) denied any knowledge of them. Of all couples who had used contraceptives (according to clinic records), about 20 percent of husbands and 33 percent of wives denied ever having used them. Other studies have also found significant discrepancies between self-reported data and objectively measured indicators of the same behavior (4).

It would be a mistake to make the elimination of unwanted pregnancy a major objective of U.S. population pol-

icy until we know what we are talking about. What does labeling a child "unwanted" mean? To what extent is the verbal behavior of the parent an indication that they will willingly take preventive action?

EDGAR R. CHASTEEN

Department of Sociology,
William Jewell College,
Liberty, Missouri 64068

References

1. J. C. Montgomery, *Hastings Law J.* 12, 655 (1971).
2. R. D. Lamm, *Amer. Bar Ass. J.* 56, 44 (1970).
3. L. W. Green, *Stud. Fam. Plann.* No. 39 (March 1969), p. 9.
4. D. L. Phillips, *Knowledge from What?* (Rand McNally, Chicago, 1971), p. 23.

The objectives of women's liberation cited by Weis are totally consistent with a national policy to reduce unwanted pregnancy. Indeed, the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future recommends several related efforts—ending sex discrimination in employment and education; changing the content of education that our schools offer both women and men; legitimizing roles for women, alternative to or supplementary to mother-



**One-shot
macro** with
Bausch & Lomb's
35mm

Bausch & Lomb's 35mm Micro/Macro System for Technical Photography saves you time and money. The Canon through-the-lens spot-metering system assures convenient and accurate exposure measurements under all conditions. Most correction calculations have been eliminated. Time and film used in bracketing exposures are saved for more productive work. It surely is a "one shot" operation.

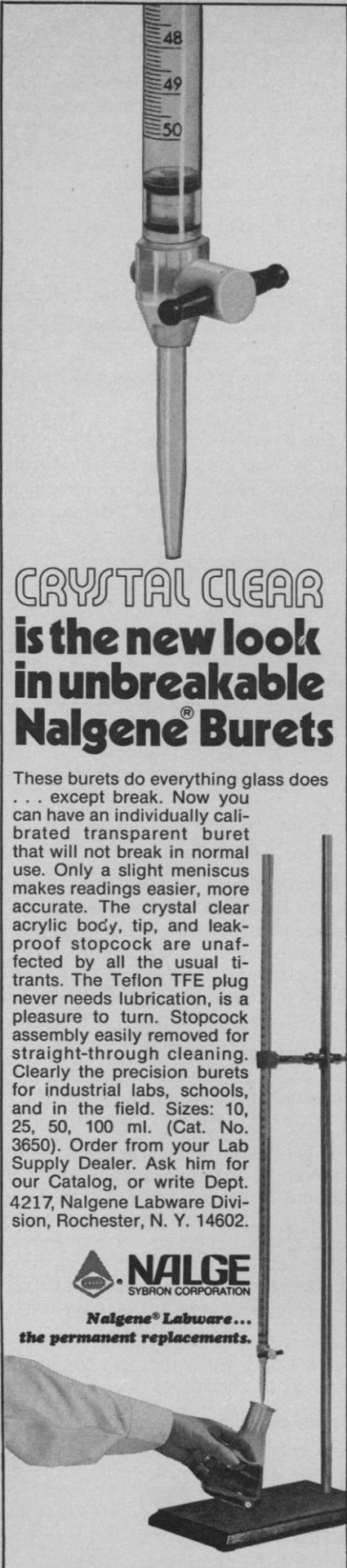
With extension tubes, rings or adjustable bellows you can get down close to your subject for 1:1 same size images on the film. Or, you can back off for an infinite number of magnifications, up to 15X without a microscope.

The right angle viewer makes for convenient observation of the specimen with the camera in the vertical position. For extreme, low-light level conditions there's a Light Meter Amplifier for exposures longer than one second. In effect, this optional attachment amplifies the available light by a factor of sixty-four.

Suggested list prices start at approximately \$500. Compare Bausch & Lomb with other less complete systems. Your checkbook will love you.

Get the complete information in our new catalog 42-2326. Write today.

BAUSCH & LOMB 
SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT DIVISION
20905 Bausch Street, Rochester, N. Y. 14602



CRYSTAL CLEAR
is the new look
in unbreakable
Nalgene® Burets

These burets do everything glass does . . . except break. Now you can have an individually calibrated transparent buret that will not break in normal use. Only a slight meniscus makes readings easier, more accurate. The crystal clear acrylic body, tip, and leak-proof stopcock are unaffected by all the usual titrants. The Teflon TFE plug never needs lubrication, is a pleasure to turn. Stopcock assembly easily removed for straight-through cleaning. Clearly the precision burets for industrial labs, schools, and in the field. Sizes: 10, 25, 50, 100 ml. (Cat. No. 3650). Order from your Lab Supply Dealer. Ask him for our Catalog, or write Dept. 4217, Nalgene Labware Division, Rochester, N. Y. 14602.

NALGE
SYBRON CORPORATION

Nalgene® Labware...
the permanent replacements.

hood; and providing adequate child-care services—both because they increase personal freedom, and because, in aggregate, they are likely to reduce fertility (1). The interrelation between women's liberation and successful control of fertility seems obvious—without the latter, there is not likely to be much of the former. Some of these efforts, for example, child care and discrimination in employment, are beginning to be conceptualized in specific enough terms to become actual national programs; those which depend on changes in basic values and attitudes continue to lack the specificity necessary for programming. If I “underrated” anything, it was skepticism about our collective capability to induce changes in values directly as a matter of national policy. The more vocal advocates of “beyond family planning” measures rarely confront this problem explicitly, but implicitly they express more confidence in social intervention to change individual motivations directly than is justified by history. Modification of institutional arrangements and priorities seems more tractable, particularly when the institutions involved are in some measure dependent upon public funds and thus more readily influenced by public policy and programs.

The program I outlined stressed the need for various kinds of research to answer unanswered questions, including the “unconscious motives, life-style pressures, and other social and personal factors not always clearly identifiable” that Fein describes. Until they are identified by competent research, it will not be possible to formulate programs that can cope with these factors. I am not familiar with the projects with teenage mothers that Fein cites, but I wonder if they emphasize the *provision* of contraceptive services as strongly as they stress contraceptive *education*; according to an internal evaluation made by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare of all such comprehensive programs for pregnant teenagers extant in 1968, of all possible services, contraceptive services were *least* likely to be provided in these programs. The problems of already pregnant teen-agers, however, are not necessarily identical to those of all sexually active teen-agers, many of whom might well be able to utilize contraceptive services effectively if they were made available. It will be interesting to see what effect the availability of safe and dignified abortion has on the number of both initial and

subsequent out-of-wedlock births in New York in the next several years.

Chasteen's discussion of the limitations of survey research ignores the basic fact that, in the surveys in question, respondents were required to characterize children already born as unwanted or wanted at the time of their conception. In view of the natural propensity of parents to feel affection for their children and retrospectively to rationalize unwanted conceptions as wanted, the directors of the 1965 and 1970 National Fertility Studies concluded that there was probably error in those findings, but on the side of *underestimation* of the incidence of unwanted births that could have been prevented by more effective fertility control (2). A comprehensive set of programs to achieve such control, at relatively modest social cost, has been recommended by the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future (3), not out of *certainty* that they will by themselves produce replacement-level fertility, but out of the *conviction* that they are likely to take us pretty far down the road to that goal. Reputable legal scholars believe that laws or programs to prevent parents from having wanted children would be deemed unconstitutional in the light of the Griswold case (4) and other rulings. The basic constitutional rationale—the right of the woman to determine whether or not she bears a child—is both implicit and explicit in those recent rulings that invalidate restrictive abortion laws because they violate personal freedoms. Unless the factual circumstances become vastly different from what they are today, it does not seem likely that the same court will interpret the same Bill of Rights as holding state intervention to prevent the birth of wanted children constitutional and antiabortion laws unconstitutional.

FREDERICK S. JAFFE

*Center for Family Planning Program
Development, Planned Parenthood—
World Population, 515 Madison
Avenue, New York 10022*

References

1. Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, *Population and the American Future* (New American Library, New York, 1972), pp. 141–144, 148–156.
2. See, for example, N. B. Ryder and C. F. Westoff, *Reproduction in the United States 1965* (Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, N.J., 1971), pp. 92–95; L. Bumpass and C. F. Westoff, *Science* **169**, 1178 (1970).
3. Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, *Population and the American Future* (New American Library, New York, 1972), pp. 163–190.
4. Griswold v. Connecticut, 381 U.S. 749 (1965).