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Teenage Mothers: ‘It’s not what people think; it’s how you feel yourself’

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In 1996, nearly 12,500 teenagers gave birth in Australia (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, cited in Gray, 1998b), accounting for 5.6% of births (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997). The birth rate among teenage girls (aged 15-19) in 1995 in Australia was 1 in 47, compared with 1 in 30 in the United Kingdom and 1 in 16 in the USA (Population Action International, 1998). This relatively low rate has not prevented condemnation of teenage mothers by Australian politicians. The most publicised example is that of Pauline Hanson, who was quoted in a press release claiming that, ‘My concern is with those who start young with children out of wedlock and then repeat the performance — in many cases with a different man’. The press release announced her party’s policy of refusing government assistance to unmarried mothers beyond the first child. Hanson continued, ‘The real figures for teenage sole parents receiving the pension when compared to population growth show marked increases, a fact that has been hidden in the percentage figures usually stated’ (Hanson, 1998). In other words, Hanson implied that there was an epidemic of teenage mothers.

We interviewed twenty volunteers; young women aged from 16 to 23, all of whom were between the ages of 14 and 19 when they became mothers. They were recruited through six community groups providing services for teenage mothers. The support groups were located in the outer suburbs of Melbourne and a regional city; all areas were of low socio-economic status. Two of the women identified themselves as Kooris. Some of the volunteers were living with the father of their child or a new partner; others lived with parents, family, or friends, or were living alone in rented accommodation. Most had one child; one woman had two children and one had three. The children were aged from a few months to six years. The majority of the young women had not completed secondary schooling.

Each participant gave formal consent to her participation after being informed about the study and her right to withdraw at any time. In the quotations that follow, pseudonyms are used for the women.

The Dominant Narrative Of Teenage Motherhood: Judgement and Condemnation  

We found that young mothers are aware of the dominant narrative of teenage motherhood: It is a story in which they are judged and condemned. The following quotation from Mandy represents many of the matters raised by other young mothers. Mandy said:

I hate just people saying things ... like, ‘You’re stupid, you should’ve waited.’ But they would say it with a smile on their face, but I knew that they were serious and stuff, but it never got to me because I knew that I wanted to finish my school anyway, so it didn’t bother me. The only time I ever had
problems was when [baby] was six weeks old, I had a lady on the train turn around and go, ... 'How old is your baby? Is he six weeks?' And I said, 'Yeah, he is six weeks. That was pretty funny, you guessed how old he was.' I thought that was pretty good. And she turned around and goes, 'You're only about 17 yourself. You're a baby yourself.' And I said, 'Yeah well –', 'cause I don't like being mean to nobody. And then she turns around and says, 'You've ruined your life.' And I said, 'Look lady, my life has only just begun now that I've got my baby.' And she turns around and goes, 'You won't be able to go to parties, you won't be able to do your schooling. You've ruined your life.' And I said, 'Well, I never really went to parties anyway, and my life has just started.' ...She was about 50 and she was just so rude, I couldn't believe it. ...And I'm just trying not to take it to heart, but she didn't have any right to say that; I mean a stranger! If it was somebody else that wanted to say something, and they weren't saying it to hurt my feelings and just wanted to talk to me, that wouldn't bother me; but she really wanted to have a go. ... Everybody was listening, so I was also embarrassed as well, but I just got off the train and kept walking, and then thinking all the things that I should have said. ...I get people looking and staring at me all the time, but what can you do? ...I just smile and keep on walking. I'm not going to say anything or nothing. [Partner] gets a bit upset sometimes when we are in doctors' surgeries; we get old people looking at us. Sometimes they're ...looking at the baby 'cause everyone looks at babies, and [partner] thinks they're staring at us 'cause we're young parents, so he'll sit there and say, 'What are you looking at? Rah, rah, rah', and that embarrasses me. They are probably just looking at [baby] as well, because I love looking at other babies.

It is significant that Mandy acknowledges that babies attract benign attention: she is not calling herself a victim, or saying that her life is generally bleak, or that other people are necessarily judgemental. However, her pride and pleasure in her child are overlaid by knowing how teenage mothers are usually described.

Mandy went on to say that she had even been criticised by older mothers in one of the two support groups she had attended. She said:

I rather go to the Young Mums' group, because I can talk more there, 'cause at the other group there is 40-year-old mums and they just talk about ... But sometimes I think I'm more smarter with my baby than they are, 'cause they do everything, everything the 'right' way. I started feeding [baby] when he was three and a half months. I told one of the ladies there, and it was the end of the world. She said, 'I would never do that to my baby.' ...I just sit in the group and I don't talk, but when I'm [in the Young Mums' group] they can't stop me from talking. I just say whatever I want ... because I know that nobody judges you there. ... I feel really comfortable there. ...I get a bit bored with the things they do because I've been there for so long I'm just repeating things. But I just don't want to leave there because I like being with other girls going through the same thing of being judged by other people and stuff like that. See, when you have a baby when you're 28, whenever they have babies, they just don't get judged, so they don't know what it feels like. They don't get looked on as being too young, and too young to be able to look after a baby. But I know I'm doing a good job with [my baby].

It is a sign of the strength of the dominant narrative of teenage mothers as 'too young, and too young to be able to look after a baby' that it is perceived even within a group designed to support mothers of any age.

Other anecdotes of confrontations like Mandy's illustrate the complex ways in which the young women were interpreting their experiences. For example, Debbie told of strangers who 'said something about my age', but then she immediately balanced their rudeness with a much more detailed account of being praised by a stranger for dealing so well with a young baby. Debbie reported, 'She said, "I couldn't cope at your age."' Debbie's pride in her skill as a mother is emphasised in preference to condemnation because of her youth. Similarly, Olivia recounts tales of harsh treatment during her pregnancy, but does
so in a manner which stresses her skill with a witty response and her acceptance of responsibility for her own actions. Olivia, who gave birth at 19, said:

Because I look younger than what I am, everyone just automatically thinks, ‘Oh God here we go, another 14-year-old pregnant.’ ... I also had severe acne when I was pregnant, which was just part of it, and being at work and that, and because I couldn’t wear make-up and I had to wear my hair full off my face the whole time, ... people would come along and point at me and laugh and say, ‘There is that girl I was telling you about.’ ... My friends at work were really good about it, and they didn’t judge me by it or think I was dirty or anything like that. ... I just felt very insecure about how I looked. ... But that cleared up later in the pregnancy. ... Everyone just sort of judges you because you are young. Yeah, ‘Another one who just can’t keep off her back,’ basically. You know. Some of the comments that people come out with! But then you’ve got to have a bit of fun with it too. At work, the amount of people who would say, ‘How did it happen?’ I would just say, ‘Believe it or not, I just sat in the wrong chair.’

The interviewer then said to Olivia, ‘So what about now, being a mum?’ Olivia replied:

Oh, you still get a few dirty looks and that. I don’t let it worry me any more. ’Cause I think, I did the deed, I got pregnant, I kept the baby, here we are today. Like it, love it, or lump it.

Olivia sees herself as coping, as responsible, as and someone who can deflect derogatory comments or impertinent questions with wit. She represents herself as more vulnerable to problems with her appearance than to condemnation from others.

Some of the young women had encountered discrimination, particularly in finding accommodation, because of the common representation of the teenage mother. These accounts came from young women living in poverty on meagre welfare payments, with little or no family support, who were known as unmarried young mothers. For example, Danielle said:

The thing I found the hardest the most was trying to get rental. ... Like I applied to probably 15 places. The 16th place I got this. ... Because I said that I got maintenance. ... I did lie, tell a white lie to the estate agent, but I had to in the end to try and get in to a place. ... But it wasn’t the money, it was just the fact that I was a single mum getting the pension with a baby.

Even those young mothers who acknowledged only judgemental ‘looks’ or no condemnation at all were aware of the common view of teenage motherhood. Fiona, for example, said that ‘elderly women looked down on’ her when she was pregnant, and ‘you can sort of tell what they’re thinking by the look they give’. Belinda’s assessment was that ‘there’s a lot of stereotyping’. Helen reported that her fellow students made derogatory comments about teenage mothers without knowing that she was one, and said she had ‘heard some horror stories’ of negative attitudes, even though her personal experience of it was limited.

We think that the different emphases given to the dominant narrative by the young women in this study reflect not only differences in their personal experience, but also the differential weight given to various possible interpretations of those experiences, depending on what else was happening in their lives at the time.

An Alternative Narrative: Teenage Motherhood as the Norm

Sarah: [Mum]’s 38. She had me when she was 19. Her mum had her when she was 17, and her mum had her when she was 19. ... I’ve got a friend who’s 16 with two kids. ... She was 14 when she had her first. And the father is two years older than her.

Many of the women in this study reported a history of teenage motherhood in their families; some said that it was common among their peers. We are not, in this...
paper, concerned with whether this might encourage the young women to continue a family tradition (Furstenberg, Levine, & Brooks-Gunn, 1990; Trussell, 1988). It was clear that the teenagers themselves did not interpret family history as the sole or even central determinant of their actions. We suggest that these well-developed stories of mothers, grandmothers, and friends who became mothers as teenagers encourage the development of positive interpretations of their own lives by the young women once pregnancy has occurred. The family stories offer to the young women alternatives to the plot of disgrace and doom provided by the dominant narrative.

Their own experience of teenage parenthood does not necessarily mean that mothers will encourage their daughters to become young mothers. When Grace told her mother of her pregnancy, Grace reported:

Mum ... goes, ‘You’re too young’. So I said to her, ‘Mum, you were 17 when you fell pregnant with ...my older brother’, and then she goes, ‘So? That was back then’, and I said, ‘Yeah, Mum, but it’s the ‘Nineties’. And I said, ‘Everything’s changed’.

Sarah went on to say, ‘My family just want it to stop. Just want someone to break the pattern. They just don’t think my age is the age to have kids’.

There is, therefore, a variety of possible interpretations of their motherhood presented to these young women. The mothers who participated in our study hinted at complex, individual explanations of their own experiences in the accounts they gave of motherhood. We would expect that these would change and develop over time. Nevertheless, every one of the women, to a greater or lesser degree, justified her role as a young mother in a way that challenged the dominant narrative.

The Autobiographical Narrative Of Teenage Motherhood: Justification

The autobiographical narratives told by participants in this study unite confidence in themselves as mothers, defence of their right to be mothers, and their resentment at the need for justification. These young women showed themselves to be fully capable of defending their own lives from generalised condemnation. Emma said:

I was 17 when I was pregnant. And ...a lot of people look at me as if to say, ‘You’re young.’ Or look at you really funny, or — I don’t know, they whisper to each other or something. Just little things like that. But I mean, if that’s their attitude — I mean, they don’t know me or what I’m like, sort of thing, so they really can’t judge me.

Emma refuses to be anonymously included with all women who share one feature of her life: teenage motherhood. In doing so, Emma exemplifies individuals who know that their lives are more complex than any stereotype allows.

Pride in labour

The women often gave a detailed account of labour and birth. They represented themselves as competent — even remarkable — protagonists throughout this ordeal, as though their claim to be strong women and good mothers could begin with a triumphant labour. Grace, for example, told of her birth experience as ‘the only teenager in the hospital’. She was proud of not ‘screaming and yelling’, and said that people greeted her with smiles because her ‘cool, calm, and collected’ demeanour during labour was known throughout the hospital. Lauren gave a long and detailed account of late pregnancy and birth which included pride in her physical fitness, the awful pain of birth, her triumph at surviving the pain, and her excitement at being a mother. She also made it clear that her knowledge of the progress of labour was superior to that of the medical staff.

Rachel was confident that she had made the right choice in having drugs for pain during labour, and was scathing of men who insist that their partners should have a ‘natural’ birth. Similarly, Belinda assessed her decision not to have her baby in her room for the first three nights as wise, because she slept well while, as she said, ‘the other mothers that had their baby with them from the first minute were walking around tired and distressed’. There were some things that Belinda had found to be unsatisfactory about the management of her labour, but she didn’t suggest that it was beyond her control, saying, ‘I just know what I’ll do better next time.’
Benefits of young motherhood

All these young mothers were actively interpreting their motherhood so as to make the best of the vicissitudes of their lives. They described their lives as enriched, not restricted, by motherhood; said that young mothers would be free in the future when others are tied to children; and concluded that their child is a source of pride and pleasure to the extended family as well as a means of bringing the family closer together.

Emma heard the negative interpretation placed on her experience by others, but chose to describe it differently, saying:

There were a lot of people...who [said], ‘She is a little bit young, she will regret it’, type thing. ‘You won’t be able to do this and you won’t be able to do that’. But I mean, fair enough, there is all that to it, but then you look at what you’ve got, sort of thing, [compared] to what they’re doing, sort of thing. And it was like, I can still do that, but I just can’t do it as often.

Lauren had a similar response, saying:

Someone said to me, ‘I can’t believe that you’ve ruined your life.’ I don’t believe that I’ve ruined my life. I’ve added to it, if anything. I mean, I miss out on a lot, but also when I’m older I’m going to be able to do a lot more than they will be. So it kind of pans out in the long run. It works itself out. I want to travel; if I can’t do it when I’m younger, I’ll just do it when I’m older. I will have more money at that stage. I’ll be able to do more. No restrictions or anything; it will be great.

Other women supported the notion that they will be free in the future when other women are tied down by motherhood. Most also claimed that their youth gave them an advantage when looking after children. Danielle encapsulated their views, saying:

There’s a lot of young mums out these days. I think it’s actually better to be a young mum because you’ve got, you know, more energy and, you know, excitement in you to play with your baby and to bring them up, you know, and...when you turn 30, your child’s in, practically, you know, through its primary school years and, you know, you get to do the things you want to do. So it’s not like you’re just ruining your life to have a baby because five or six years later it’s like your baby’s in school and you’ve still got a life. You can go and make a career for yourself.

Belinda stated a familiar delight of motherhood:

It is a full time job and you don’t get a break from it for quite some time, but that doesn’t bother me. ...I think the best thing is that smile that you get [from your child] when everything is going OK.

A further benefit of having children, one which was highly significant to some of these women, was the influence of their child in drawing the family closer together, or the child as a source of pride and pleasure to the extended family. Belinda said of her mother and grandmother, ‘They boast to all their friends about this little one.’ Rachel reported that her brother said, ‘I hope when I have kids they’re going to be as cute as [my daughter]’. Sarah said that, since her pregnancy and birth, she and her mother are ‘a lot closer, which is good’. A recurring theme in the interviews was of families that had been unhappy with a teenage pregnancy who became warm and loving when the grandchild was born.

Belinda went on to say that her baby’s Name Day had been an occasion to bring the family together, and that, after a few deaths and losses in the family, the baby was a symbol of hope. She interpreted her life to include a baby who was destined to be born, even though it was unplanned, and whose birth had transformed her partner into a responsible young man. As though to counter any scepticism, Belinda reported that others had commented on the transformation. She said:

Having [daughter] has sort of opened up a whole new side to [partner] that I don’t think anybody has seen. Even his family comment on it; that, you know, we’ve done such a wonderful job of settling him down and just making him more of a nicer person to be around. But yeah, we still have our fights, but I suppose they’re not as bad because she’s asleep or just the fact that it upsets her if we have an argument.
**Disadvantages of young motherhood are acknowledged**

These young women did not describe benefits without also describing disadvantages of having children so young and, in some cases, having them without the support of a partner. At times, these disadvantages echoed aspects of the dominant narrative of teenage motherhood. However, the young mothers were very careful not to give the impression that their lives were dominated by difficulties. Robyn admitted:

Sometimes you feel like killing them. ...If you’re a single young mum, you can’t go out when you want to go out, if you know what I mean, so that is mainly a disadvantage. ...A disadvantage is that ...when your kids get too much out of control, you know the other person’s not there to step in and set it right. ...You’ve got to be the mum and the dad, if you know what I mean. ...Especially when they get sick of listening to you, they just totally ignore you, do what they want anyway.

Helen said:

It is a massive step in your life ...and you’re not taught that much. ...You don’t realise how much it affects your emotions as well as all the other changes. ...It’s not the best thing for your social life either.

Melanie expanded on this last point, describing the disadvantages as: 'Not being able to do what you want, going out wherever you want. Just things you would like to do. Before you had a child.'

When Sarah was first asked about disadvantages, she made the sweeping statement that, 'You lose your life, practically.' When asked what she meant, she said that 'your friends don’t invite you out any more, ...because of the baby. They just think, “Because she’s got a baby she can’t go out.”'. But she went on to say, 'they don’t realise it’s not all that hard, it’s just grabbing the stuff and that’s it. ...I always said I’m not going to let her change anything. ...I’m not that restricted.' The restrictions on this young woman’s life are in the minds of her friends, not in limitations arising from her baby. Others echoed Sarah’s view, including Fiona, who went on to describe a further common disadvantage: 'Probably that you don’t have a lot of money, than say an older couple that’s doing a career and working and things like that.' An associated issue was unemployment. Abby said that if you want to get a job but have no work experience, 'You’ve got no hope.' However, Abby made it clear that she was assessing problems of young mothers in general; it was not a problem that applied to her.

Belinda said that it was difficult having a child dependent on you, but that it became easier with time. Instead of emphasising the disadvantages, the young women tended to emphasise how they dealt with these demands. Tania said, for example:

Constant crying can get to you a bit. But I’ve learnt how to deal with that: I just switch off and let her cry. The early morning feeds, and it’s just, like, normal baby stuff. You’ve got to do it. I mean, if you’re willing to go ahead and have the baby, you’ve got to be prepared for all the stuff that’s going to come in the years after. That’s the way that I look at it. ...It’s trial and error. If you do something wrong the first time, maybe you will do it right with the second kid, or third, or whatever.

**Confidence in themselves as good mothers**

The way in which these young women represent their motherhood is in stark contrast to the dominant narrative of teenage mothers. Without exception, they represented themselves as confident, good-enough mothers. We have already quoted Mandy saying: 'I know I’m doing a good job with [my baby].’ Their devotion to their children is rewarded with love. Mandy went on:

When I leave [baby] I can’t breathe. ...I’m just really worried to leave him. I don’t want to, ever. ...[I wonder], is he crying? ‘Cause I’m the only person that settles him down; nobody else. It’s not that he’s an upset baby or nothing, but as soon as I leave, he doesn’t like it when I’m gone. ...Maybe because I’m breast feeding, it makes us closer. I’m not sure. But he is very close to mummy.

Such intimacy and special maternal skills are not acquired without effort. These young women represent themselves as learning quickly how to carry out a very difficult job. Kelly said of her daughter:
She used to cry a fair bit, when she was little. And I don’t know, I just couldn’t cope with it. Like, I didn’t like to hear her cry, so I was always up trying to put her on my stomach and stuff like that. But after probably about two weeks I was pretty used to being mum. ...The lady at the hospital said, ‘It won’t take you long, as soon as you get the knack of things you’ll be right’. And I said, ‘Yeah, right’ [sarcasm]. But yeah, I did.

Lauren said:

I ended up having [baby] on the Monday and they let me out [of hospital] on the Friday. So that was good. Then [baby]’s dad came on the Saturday and stayed till the Sunday to see him, and so I had that kind of happen. Mum was home on the Friday, I had that kind of happen. Then Monday everyone went. ...So it was the first time ...I had been by myself, and I kind of panicked a little bit. Oh! He was crying, and I had to make a bottle and hold him and do this and do that, and it was very scary ...but you get used to it pretty quickly. You have to cope. It was probably good getting thrown in at the deep end, ‘cause I had to cope, so I learned how to do it pretty quickly.

Although there are hints that these young mothers perceive other people blaming any mistakes on their youth, they explain their circumstances differently. Anyone doing a job as difficult as motherhood is going to make mistakes; the skill lies in learning from those mistakes.

Some young women described themselves as improving on the mothering job done by their own mothers. Debbie said:

[My mother]’s a single mother of five. She used to work nights. She worked night shift for eight years, and did college through the day. So she used to average three hours of sleep a day. But I want to do everything the opposite to her. I hated her when I was younger. Absolutely hated her. Because she was never, ever there. ...[Boyfriend] said to me, ‘Why don’t you go out and get a job?’ But I don’t want to do that. I didn’t have [my son] to stick him in a crèche full time. ...[I want to] just do all the motherly things. ...When he gets home from school I want to be home, or not long after ...I don’t want him to never be allowed to bring friends home from school, or have nobody there to make him a snack, or have him and his brothers and sisters punching on and have nobody to stop them. Because we used to do that. And I just hated it.

One way of defining oneself as a good mother is in contrast with a bad or selfish mother. Fiona said:

A lot of it, I think, comes down to laziness, ... ‘cause I’ve got two [friends] and one’s with her boyfriend and both smoke, use disposables, and use all of Heinz food, where I don’t use disposables and I don’t use Heinz food and I don’t smoke, so I’m different in them in that way. ...If I think if I did smoke and I did use all them, I would cut back on something, ‘cause something would have to go, to be able to give [my daughter] a bit more.

Belinda said:

I can understand sometimes how people get really burnt out with young babies, and how you know, some mothers really stress out. ...But what I could never understand was, why do you hit a child that is screaming to stop it screaming? That one just never made any sense to me, because, as you understand, kids cry more when they get hit.

Belinda, in common with other young mothers in this group, acknowledged that motherhood is difficult. Furthermore, Sarah asserted that society did not appreciate mothers, who, she said:

are not classed as working; like, we’re always told we ...sit at home all day watching Days of Our Lives. ...We don’t do that at all. It’s a whole lot of hard work. It’s like a full-time job. We’re all made to go out and work and leave the kid with strangers and we feel guilty if we don’t. We can’t win.

Some professionals who deal with these young women may not share their interpretation of what makes a good mother; the difference may be class-related. For example, Robyn was concerned not only to give her children their basic needs, but sweet treats as well, saying:

Although there are hints that these young mothers perceive other people blaming any mistakes on their youth, they explain their circumstances differently. Anyone doing a job as difficult as motherhood is going to make mistakes; the skill lies in learning from those mistakes.
My kids might not get the best name food, they
might only just get the home brand food, but,
you know, still it's their food, they get their fruit,
they get their vegies, they get their ice cream or
ice blocks and their lollies and their biscuits, so,
you know. Yeah, we get there.

Debbie has had direct conflict over her mothering
style, with the woman who runs her Young Mums' group:

Just the attitude she takes that everybody there
can't run a serious relationship. I mean, she's not
qualified in counselling people for relationships.
...[Partner] and I have been together for a year,
just over a year. She's always asking me when I'm
going to have the next baby, and then when I say
not for a long time, it's, 'Oh, things are going
badly, are they?' Its not that, it is just I'm not ready
to have another one.... She tells me that [my son]
is a brat, and that he's hyperactive and I should get
him tested for ADD and all this sort of stuff. He's
just a typical two-year-old little boy. With a lot of
energy....She will sit there and she will say to [my
son], 'Now [toddler] don't stand on that, I think
you should hop down, it's not a good idea, you
will break the toy. Now hop down please.' And she
expects him to understand and he is two. Now the
only thing [toddler] understands is that if you're
yelling, then he is obviously doing something
wrong. But she is just hopeless. Absolutely. And
she expects them not to make a mess with their
food or anything, and she just really is hopeless.

Even well-meaning professionals may be patronising,
as Sarah's tale revealed:

[In hospital], one of the midwives, she was trying
to make everyone feel sorry for me because I was
young and on my own. I just wanted to be treated
like everybody else.

**Conclusion**

Our interviews with young mothers have demonstrated
both their awareness of the dominant narrative, in
which they are condemned, and their contrasting
autobiographical narratives, in which they represent
themselves as good mothers who are capable of
continuing to develop the skills of motherhood.

In summary, the young women included the following
among the positive aspects of mothering:

- life is enriched by motherhood;
- young mothers have more energy than older
  mothers;
- young mothers will be free in the future when
  others are tied to children;
- there are benefits in growing up with one's
  children; and
- the child is a source of pride and pleasure to the
  extended family as well as a means of bringing
  the family closer together.

Although the women refused to emphasise the
disadvantages of teenage motherhood, they
acknowledged difficulties in:

- the demands of children on their mothers, no
  matter how old the mothers are;
- the restrictions on social life caused by both
  the child's needs and the reluctance of friends
to include the young mother and baby in their
  social life; and
- their limited incomes.

The effects of a baby on the relationship of the young
woman with her partner can be both good (greater
emotional closeness) and bad (reducing the time for
intimacy between the couple).

Throughout their autobiographical accounts, we
may infer that these young women are undertaking
the work described by narrative psychologists as
re-authoring their lives (White, 1995). Instead of
accepting the interpretation of teenage motherhood
represented by their culture, they are interpreting
their lives to their own benefit. Young women may
be helped in this endeavour by stories of mothers,
grandmothers, and friends who became mothers as
teenagers.

The purpose of this paper is not to recommend teenage
motherhood as a consequence of our findings. Our
goal has been to examine teenage motherhood as it
is interpreted by young mothers. We will give the last
word to them. Grace summarises the pleasure described
by these young mothers in both their mothering and their relationships with their children. Grace said that she loved watching her daughter grow up.

Watching her go through, like, rolling to crawling and then to walking. Um, then sort of waking up in the morning thinking that I've got something to look forward to. ...Even though I've got her, I'm bored sometimes, but other times I sit on the floor playing with her for two hours and she likes that. ...I enjoy being a Mum. I didn't really want to be at first. ...When I fell pregnant, I thought, 'Nuh, I don't think I can handle being a mother'. But then when I had her and that, and the first time I held her, I thought, 'That's it; I can't believe it! I'm a mum now'. I just burst into tears because I was happy.

As Jessica said, 'It's not what people think. It's how you feel yourself.'

Acknowledgements

The contributions of the young women and the convenors of the support groups for teenage mothers are gratefully acknowledged. Jodie Clarke was Research Assistant to the project. Lyn Harrison, Lynne Hillier, and Priscilla Pyett were awarded a Central Starter Grant from La Trobe University, Melbourne, to conduct this research.

A version of this paper was presented at the Young Women 2000 Conference, hosted by Absolutely Women’s Health, Royal Women’s Hospital, Melbourne, Australia, March 2000. A longer version, which places the study in its theoretical context and provides methodological details, is published as Kirkman, M., Harrison, L., Hillier, L., & Pyett, P. (2001). 'I know I'm doing a good job': Canonical and autobiographical narratives of teenage mothers. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 3(3), pp. 279-294.

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