

Legitimate Voices: Teen Mothers and Education



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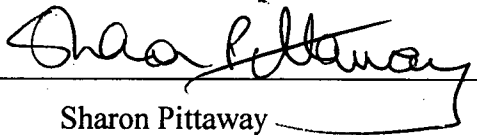
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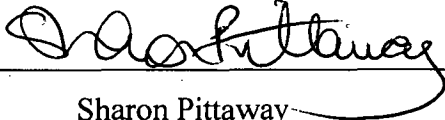
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ABSTRACT

The dominant discourses and stereotypical images surrounding the teenage mother cast her, overwhelmingly, in a negative light. She is a social, and (although to a lesser extent in contemporary society) a moral problem. The “wrong-girl” discourse is a powerful one, and shapes the dominant view of the teenage mother as having made bad (and wrong) choices. It seeks to shame and blame the young mother for her “predicament”. It is also within this discursive framework that stereotypes abound: teenage mother as high school drop out; as irresponsible; as “stupid slut”. Psychological traits are attributed to the teenage mother, which often cast her into an infantilised role, unable to make her own (responsible) decisions. According to this view of the teenage mother solutions need to be found to remedy her mistake. Some see the solution as the removal of all welfare benefits in an effort to make teenage parenting less attractive, while others call for a re-stigmatisation of teenage mothers. In terms of education, there are those who believe that teenage mothers must continue to follow the “normal” life trajectory through adolescence, which means completing secondary education at the same time as her non-parenting peers, and then find employment in order to best provide for her family. Many barriers stand in the way for young mothers re-entering the adolescent world of secondary education, especially when school environments aren’t supportive of the teenage mother. Despite this, and despite the negative view of teenage mothers, this narrative life history study sought to give voice, through the telling of their stories, to seven Tasmanian women who had given birth as teenagers and who had subverted the stereotype of “high school drop out” by re-engaging with education. This study complements earlier investigations by legitimising the voices of a select sample of young mothers in an effort to examine their view of the realities of their lives within the context of negative societal views, a mutual obligation welfare framework, and largely unsupportive school environments. There are implications of this study for educators and educational policy makers in Tasmania, the state with the second highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Australia.

Acknowledgements

Doing prolonged research work is often a lonely experience, but when I glance up occasionally from the computer I notice a crowd of people silently cheering me on. Coming this far wouldn't have been possible without the help and support of that crowd of people and I want to acknowledge them here. I have to firstly acknowledge Dr Rick Churchill, because if it wasn't for his encouragement *Legitimate Voices* would never have come into being. Rick was one of my original supervisors and his phone call late in 1999 started this particular ball rolling. Dr Heather Smigiel took over from Rick as my supervisor and I thank her for her patience and support. Heather never gave up on me even when things were looking particularly gloomy, and kept me focussed when my ideas became too big. A huge debt of gratitude goes to my colleague Dr Tim Moss, who was generous with his time and infinitely patient with my questions. His clarity of thinking and his open door policy have been greatly appreciated.

On a more personal level my thanks go to Lisa Roberts for her inspiration, her energy and her support. Lisa's artistic work on a multi-media version of this project for conferences gave the presentations tremendous depth and integrity.

Michelle Smith has travelled the whole journey with me – the journey that started, for us, thirty years ago. I cannot begin to say what her friendship has meant to me, except that without her being my friend I may never have reached where I am today. I would like to particularly thank Michelle and her family – husband Alan Sixsmith, and children Grace and Hugh – for allowing me into their home to complete the writing of *Legitimate Voices*. Getting away from the distractions of home (where I live alone) to complete the writing in a household with two young children may not make much sense to a lot of people, but then they obviously don't know Michelle.

No matter when your children come to you – whether you're ready for them or not – they're a gift to be cherished. Sometimes you don't see that when they're fighting instead of getting ready for school, or when they're arguing with you about what clothes to wear (they won't be caught dead with you if you're wearing *that*), but when you look beyond the small stuff you realise how blessed you are. I know I do. Ben, Daniel, Rochelle, Chase and Emma - you complete me.

My grandmothers, Phyllis Pittaway and Edith Humphries, and my grandsons Phil and Scott Williams remind me that life doesn't end for the teenage mother ... it keeps going for generations.

This study wouldn't have been possible without the generosity of seven Tasmanian women, who willingly shared stories of their lives with me. I also admire their strength and courage. Thank you.

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Prologue: Sharon's Story

The stories we hear and the stories we tell
shape the meaning and texture of our lives
(Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1)

Legitimate voices portrays the lives of seven young Tasmanian women who, after becoming mothers as teenagers, re-engaged in education. The term "legitimate" is used deliberately in the title of the thesis, as well as the title of Chapter Four, where the voices of the teen mothers are explicitly heard, as a counter-balance to "illegitimate" - the term traditionally used for babies born out of wedlock. My intention is to remove from these young mothers the hint of illegality and thus provide a validation of their experiences.

Legitimate Voices includes a portrayal of my experience as a teenage mother. I am aware that in telling my story in a doctoral thesis I am taking risks, pushing boundaries, wilfully engaging in a transgression. I have had some encouragement in this boundary pushing, though. Dunlop (2001) cites bell hooks who claims that there are 'so many boundaries blocking the paths that would lead us to any space of personal fulfilment that it is impossible to go forward if one lacks the will to transgress' (p. 1). I am transgressing in another sense too. I decided against constructing this report along the traditional lines advocated for a thesis of this nature. In saying that, however, I feel I haven't strayed too far from the established boundaries. I am pushing boundaries, engaging in an act of rebellion, but it's a gentle one.

Even with this quiet rebellion though, I feel a trace of fear. Fear of the acceptance of a thesis that doesn't quite conform to the rigidity of academic structures. I read Dunlop's account of her defence of her novel as a thesis,



where, she says, she was 'oblivious to the fear' (2001a, p. 21) but that only makes me more aware. Is there a place for personal stories in a doctoral dissertation, for photographs, for the writer's voice being acknowledged? "Save it for the book", I'm told, "get your PhD and then change the world", but I don't want to pretend that I'm not here, that my personal story hasn't influenced this study. I stop to think, and then remind myself that I have conformed – to a degree at least. I have created a five chapter thesis complete with an introduction, a literature review, a discussion of the research process, a presentation of the data, and a conclusion. But there are other, subversive, elements within this dissertation which are influenced by my need to allow the voices of teenage mothers to be heard and legitimised and by my reading of the literature that encourages boundary pushing.

I read Polkinghorne (1997) encouraging 'social science researchers to conceive of their research endeavours as journeys whose destination is increased understanding of human beings' (p. 19), but who continues to see 'researchers employ the standard format which is designed to display a formal demonstration of the research conclusions and to recount the correct use of acceptable methods of data collection and data analysis' (p. 18). I read Tierney (1997) who says: 'with postmodernity, then, we make decisions not simply about the length of a text or about whether our data accurately represent reality, but rather how we as authors create and present reality' (p. 24). He observes that the most widely used strategies of the use of narrative voice in the text 'posits the author as a researcher who unproblematically collected data and then presented it' (Tierney, p. 27). Lincoln (1997) tells me that 'Geertz's (1988) *Works and Lives* dismantles the fiction of an absent author' and that 'Van Maanen's (1988) *Tales of the Field* explicitly dismantles the fiction of a unitary author with his discussion of the confessional tale' (p. 39). 'A second self emerges in the confessional tale' says Lincoln, 'a self specifically excluded from the original fieldwork narrative, a self in touch with loneliness, frustration, and the inevitable



ambiguities of ethnography' (1997, p. 39). I reach for *Composing Ethnography* and "hear" Carolyn Ellis talking to Art Bochner:

I think it's dishonest to pretend we're invisible. We've left traces of our convictions all over this text. Instead of masking our presence, leaving it at the margins, we should make ourselves more personally accountable for our perspective (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 15).

Some pages later, the conversation continues with Carolyn Ellis commenting: 'maybe that's why "new ethnography" appealed so strongly to women, and people of colour, marginal voices' to which Art Bochner replied: 'and to all of us who weren't buying the party line, who wanted to come to grips with the predicaments of the scholar as an involved, situated, and integral part of the research and writing process' (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 18). On reading these works I knew that this was the position from which I wanted to conduct my study, and perhaps more importantly, the position I have taken in writing this report.

I am also persuaded by Richardson's (2000) voice, who notes her "boredom" with much qualitative work, mostly because these works suffered from 'acute and chronic passivity: passive-voiced author, passive "subjects"' (p. 924). I hear her acknowledge that she was taught 'not to write until I knew what I wanted to say' which, she says 'undermines the confidence of beginning qualitative researchers' and 'contributes to the flotilla of qualitative writing that is simply not interesting to read because adherence to the [static writing] model [which coheres with mechanistic scientism] requires writers to silence their own voices and to view themselves as contaminants' (Richardson, pp. 924-925). I am encouraged by Richardson, however, to 'explore [my] own processes and preferences through writing' as 'writing from our Selves should strengthen the community of qualitative researchers and the individual voices within it, because we will be more fully present in our work, more honest, more engaged' (p. 924). It is the notion of honesty that particularly draws me



in, as I am determined that this thesis will be an honest portrayal, not just of the way I conducted the study and the lives of the women at the heart of it, but of my part in its creation.

And finally I turn to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) and am instantly intrigued by their description of portraiture. The portraits they describe are 'designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural contexts, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences' (p. 3). I am also drawn to their notion of "illumination" as a way of expressing a point of view, and the concept of voice as variously 'witness', 'interpretation', 'preoccupation', 'autobiography' and in 'dialogue' (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, pp.85 – 123). I ponder the implications for this study and for how I represent the mothers at the heart of it.

On the subject of teenage mothers I tune in to hear Luttrell (2002) claim that:

Society is missing out on the passions, hopes, and creativity of many young women who get labelled and stigmatized. By not realizing that young women have much to learn about themselves and their social worlds, in part due to the experience of pregnancy, schools are not taking advantage of an opportune and generative moment (para. 4).

Schofield (1994) shows me the importance of tuning in to hear the voices of young mothers:

... young women need to be empowered to take control of their lives and those who become pregnant and become mothers need to be treated with respect and their voices need to be heard (p. 132).

I hear this multiplicity of voices, these legitimate voices in the field of ethnographic, narrative, life history research, from which I have borrowed,



plus the voices of those seeking to enrich our understanding of young mothers, and even though this study has been influenced and empowered by them, it is not ostensibly about these voices.

It is about the voices of seven Tasmanian women who have experienced pregnancy and parenting as teenagers. Their voices are legitimate voices too.

And my voice. I am here, in this text, constructing it, shaping it, pushing it gently across boundaries.

It's a risky business, but I decide to live with the fear.



I'd like to tell you a story. It's a true story and, let me assure you, it was much more difficult to live than to write. The story begins in 1974 ...

I was twelve and he was fourteen when we met. I was in first year at high school and he was in the grade above. He'd noticed me at the first high school party I ever went to, and a few days later asked me to go out with him.

We didn't actually go anywhere, but after six months were applauded as the couple from different grades who had "gone out" the longest. Then my father came home after spending months at sea so there were no more parties for me, and, as my boyfriend lived in another town, we initially only saw each other at school. But over the years there were football games and cricket matches at weekends and his dad often came to pick me up to take me, with the rest of his family, to watch.

I didn't ever say much to anyone while I was at high school. It was an intimidating place at first but not one in which I felt stretched or particularly challenged. Michelle and I shared most classes. We'd met at a Girl Guide camp at the end of Grade 6 and then caught up again at high school the following year. We were almost inseparable: except that we lived in towns ten miles apart. We did jazz ballet classes together on a Friday afternoon, which meant that I caught the bus with Michelle after school. I stayed at Michelle's place a lot on weekends. It was messy and her family ate fish that didn't have batter on it. I didn't know it came like that. Her mum was "Aunty Judy" and called me darling, which always made me feel special. She said that I was cheeky, but she laughed when she said it. I went with them on trips to Sydney and on one occasion on a holiday to the beach. Michelle never stayed at my place. I didn't have friends over much.

High school went on! I felt largely inarticulate in my high school years but my boyfriend was sure of himself. I didn't know the word arrogant in those



days. He called me “woman” and put the “hard word” on me when I was 14. I told him I wanted to wait and so we waited.

Michelle and I made plans for our lives. We wanted to finish year 12, move to Sydney, go to university, work for a few years, then travel. We had it all mapped out. We’d live a more grown up version of high school, except we’d live together. We were set. But then Michelle’s parents sent her to Sydney, to boarding school, for the two senior years of secondary school. I missed her. She was my best friend and she was moving away from me! We wrote, and I went to Sydney to visit her and we’d eat peanut butter and banana sandwiches, hoping they wouldn’t induce nightmares. Michelle wasn’t there when my period was late but our letters sped back and forth. It turned out to be a false alarm. You see, my boyfriend and I had stopped waiting. He’d turned 17 and I was 15. We’d been going out for three years. I thought if I didn’t say yes, he’d leave me and, if he left me, no one else would love me. He told me he loved me, and my friends reminded me of what a “catch” he was. He was captain of the football team, president of the student body in Year 12, and was in all the top classes. He did “extra maths” and was well respected, intelligent, and good looking. Although he was burdened with a difficult family life, he was supportive of his mother; a responsible son, a good son. He worked on weekends in between playing sport, and saved money for a car. It was old, but he paid cash for it. He had plans: to gain a degree in engineering, then marriage (to me) and children.

I was lazy (or so my mother used to tell me). I didn’t spend relentless hours doing my homework like my older sister but I still did well at school. I pretended not to care too much if I didn’t get high grades. I worked in my uncle’s garden shop on Saturday mornings, and once I turned fifteen, worked at one of the local supermarkets on Thursday nights, Saturday mornings and during the school holidays. I saved a bit of money, but not enough to support myself or to make a life on.



To the outside world my boyfriend and I looked like a “good” couple. We came from “good” homes – if you were able to forget about his alcoholic father. His mother liked me and I got on well with his two younger brothers: they teased me mercilessly and I would blush and hang my head and then be teased some more. After Michelle went to Sydney, I had to find a new friend. I was very quiet and it was hard, but Helen and I became close. Helen was fun, not hung up on boys, and didn’t seem to live with inner turmoil the way I did. Her house was almost historic and had a butler’s pantry. It was freezing. Her mother was kind, and her grandmother was knowing.

Helen was the first person I told. After the “false alarm” I wasn’t too worried when it happened a second time. But my period wasn’t just late, it was missing. I was in Year 11, sixteen years old and had plans for my future: a baby certainly wasn’t part of them. His aunt lived a few hours’ drive away, so I went there in the holidays to see a doctor and find out for sure. That way no one at home needed to know.

I found out for sure. I started to cry and didn’t know how to stop. His aunt rang and told him that the test was positive. He went to see my parents, to tell them. I can’t imagine how any of them felt. My mother and uncle came to get me the following day, the drive home seemed to last forever. The next morning I was summoned to the lounge room because my father wanted to speak to me. I wanted him to say that they knew this must be difficult for me, but they’d love me and support me in any way they could. My father said that I was something not even the cat would drag in. He said my life would be a drudge, that my child would be a bastard and that my friends wouldn’t want to know me. He cried. He didn’t ask how I felt about it. He didn’t see that I was shattered; that I was feeling as though my life had gone down the toilet. He said it would just look bad for the family. I was to blame for ruining the family name. I was the bad girl. Again. “How dare you sit there looking like you don’t care?” I cared. I cared a great deal, just not about the same things he cared about. “How could this happen in our family?” they cried. Easy. It



had happened before, just kept quiet, like so many unmarried mothers' stories. My grandmother on my father's side had had a child before she was married. She'd had to give her up to another family member, as she didn't have the benefit of being married. It was a shameful secret that remained hidden for many years. My grandmother on my mother's side had to marry "in haste". My grandmother was eighteen. Again, the problem solved – a different solution, but effective nonetheless.

This was a familiar story in many families; the "problem" of the unwed mother needing a solution, the family weighed down with shame and secrecy, the stigma attaching itself to all members of the family. My parents suggested I go to a refuge an hour's drive up the coast, put the baby up for adoption and get on with my life.

Or what about an abortion?

Wouldn't that be best?

No one need know then

My secret would be safe

My life could continue as before

It didn't have to end this way.

My life was over ...

Or so it seemed

At school one day, during Physical Education, a group of girls started talking about someone who'd become pregnant. They couldn't hide their disgust – it was on their faces and in their voices. She was obviously a "slut", as they were the only types of girls to get "knocked up". These were middle class girls planning the rest of their lives, which consisted, for most of them, of going to teachers college, teaching, getting married and then having children. Listening to those girls verbally dissecting "the slut" and her deviant



behaviour I felt sick with shame. They could have been discussing me. It was only days before that I had found out that I was pregnant. Helen organised a nappy party for me and all the girls from our class were there. It was a glimmer – perhaps my father was wrong about my friends.

At the end of the school year I left home. I packed a suitcase and caught the train to Michelle's place. I rang my mother and told her I wasn't going back. I was allowed to go home to get some more of my stuff then went to live with my boyfriend's grandmother, who was a Christian, and kind, but that only served to deepen my sense of shame. His grandmother wondered why I didn't talk about my pregnancy; she was hurt that I didn't, but I simply couldn't. The shame I felt stopped me talking. I kept my head bowed so that no one saw how I really felt.

My boyfriend went to university. Not to study Engineering as he'd planned, but to do Food Technology - it was a compromise. By doing Food Technology, he was guaranteed a job through the holidays and when he finished his degree. A job was important for a man with a family. In the month before the baby was due I moved in with his mother and two brothers. I started year 12 by correspondence, but lacked self discipline, and so gave up those studies. I didn't pull my weight around the house. I wanted to be invisible, to meld with the wallpaper, to not be there (at least not in that position). It seemed that my life was heading in a direction I had no control over. I certainly had no control over my body.

My belly grew big.

My breasts swelled.

My bladder worked overtime.

And then one night I wet the bed.

The toilet was outside and I dripped all the way.

I'd gone to ante-natal classes,

But they hadn't told me it would be like this.



His mum took me to hospital. It was two in the morning, a Monday morning. There was an old midwife on duty and she had the softest hands. She shaved me and gave me an enema; that was my preparation for birth. No contractions that day, and none that night either. The doctor came and mentioned something about a drip if things didn't begin to move.

Tuesday morning,

Still no contractions

At least I'd stopped leaking.

The doctor came back and I was taken to the delivery room.

A stark room

Ten am

Drip in

Noon

Pain

A gas mask covers my mouth and I breathe deeply.

I'm on my side with my legs in stirrups.

It's the preferred position apparently.

Well, for the doctor at least.

Lots of pain. More gas.

Two oh five

It's a boy!

Blonde hair, blue eyes,

Gorgeous

Ben.

After Ben Hall, the bushranger. It had been on television while I was pregnant.

Silly, isn't it?

My mother came to visit me in hospital but my father stayed away. The baby had jaundice so it wasn't until ten days after he was born that I was allowed to



take him home. But where was home? We didn't really have a home. I stayed with my grandparents for two weeks then moved back in with my boyfriend's mother. The baby was contented and slept through the night from an early age. People said it was because I was calm; I'm not sure where that came from. I visited mum every now and then, but always made sure I left the house before dad got home. Except one day I mistimed my exit and, as I was putting Ben in the car, dad drove up. Mum insisted on taking Ben to see his grandfather and, from then on, it wasn't a problem for me to be there with the baby if dad was at home. It seemed he was smitten.

My boyfriend and I went to the local minister to ask about baptism and he said we may as well get things done properly and get married first. So we did. I remember being resistant to the idea – but I don't remember saying anything about how I felt. Ben was four months old. The lady across the road from my parents looked after him for the day. Parents these days often include their babies in the wedding, but it wasn't an option then. Pretence was in, although my dress was off-white, which, I suppose, was more honest. I was getting married and it was as if my status as a mother had to be denied. My father gave me away. He danced with me at the wedding and said he hoped I'd have a "beautiful life". I had just turned seventeen.

* * * * *

I felt totally unprepared for this new life. It was as if part of my mind had shut down, part of my self. I didn't feel able to cope with this level of responsibility. I was now "Mrs", a wife as well as a mother. Not only that but I was a teenage wife and mother and the group of people that I now had contact with had changed since my marriage and the move to the university town in which my husband lived. I was no longer visiting older, married women who had children the same age as mine, but university students the



same age as me who had bright futures carved out for themselves. My self image was very low – I didn't particularly like being a stay at home mother. It seemed that my father was right: my life was a drudge.

* * * * *

The day after the wedding Mum and Dad helped us move to Sydney, where we'd rented a third floor flat. There was no lift but luckily we didn't have much furniture. The rent was \$60 a week and the tertiary allowance my husband received was \$65 a week. It was tough. His father was a butcher and would give us meat trays every now and then. They sometimes had cigarette ash on the meat. Or maggots. We ate a lot of vegetables.

At the end of the year we packed our meagre belongings and moved into the shed in my parents' back yard so that my husband could work for the summer at the local dairy factory. We moved back to Sydney at the beginning of the university year – into a different flat this time. Again, I was a stay at home mum. I didn't like it much. Ben and I would catch the train sometimes to meet Michelle in the city, but it was a two hour train trip from where we were in the west, so we didn't do it often. We went "home" some weekends. We lived in the shed again for the summer. Ben's eyes turned green. He was round and soft and always smelled good. I breast-fed him till he was a year old, then weaned him onto a cup. I didn't like bottles. He was happy and had lots of attention and love. He sometimes went to class with his dad; I'd even made them matching school bags.

In third year the university my husband attended offered a one year course I felt I could have done. But I had a toddler and he was my priority, so my husband said. And anyway, it was time to have another baby. Ben was 2 ½ when Daniel was born. I was 19. Somehow we'd managed to save some money, and in my husband's second year of university, had taken out a loan.



With some financial assistance from my parents we bought a block of land. We sold it a year later for three times what we'd paid for it, and so were able to put a deposit on our own house. We moved in just after my 20th birthday.

I'd been feeling increasingly like a vegetable while my husband was at university. I was meeting girls my own age who were learning and all I was doing was sitting around at home, being bored. I'd finished my schooling at the end of year 11 and once we were settled in to our own home I investigated completing my Higher School Certificate. While I'd never been a particularly high achiever at school I was determined that I didn't want to be someone who hadn't graduated from year 12. I made an appointment with the principal at my old high school, discovered that I had to do four consecutive terms to qualify for my HSC, and so started back at school in third term year 11. I decided to wear school uniform so I didn't stand out from the other students. It was 1982; I was 20, Ben was four and a half and Daniel was one. I found a fantastic child carer who was old and kind and washed the nappies. She lived across the road from a pre-school, where I enrolled Ben. Ben started "big" school the next year, at the school I'd attended from Grade 3 to 6. His teacher had taught my brother. I started to feel connected again.

In 1983 I finally made it to year 12. I was 21 but in my school uniform didn't look much older than the other senior students. One of the boys asked me to a school dance, and looked confused when I said I'd have to ask my husband. I loved year 12. I was organised at home, had friends at school, and did my homework much more diligently than I'd ever done it before. I was determined to do well. I didn't want to be the "scum" my father had said I would become. I held study days instead of going to the sports carnivals and was able to justify my non-attendance, and the non-attendance of other students who'd been with me, to the principal. I made friends with the international exchange students – we were all a bit "different". They came to my 21st birthday party. I sat the end of year exams, and hung on as breathlessly as the other students for the results to come through. When they



did, I went to the pub to celebrate with everyone, and felt like a "normal" student. I applied for university and was incredibly excited when I was accepted. It was an hour's drive away, but I felt I could cope. I knew I could cope. It was what I wanted. The idea was thrilling. I went up there to check out child care facilities. I walked around the unfamiliar campus telling myself that if I at least looked confident, people wouldn't know I was scared stiff. Being there was exciting. My life was about to open up. I had a sense that, at last, my life was beginning to get back on track.

My husband told me I couldn't go.

Not while Daniel was still at home. My job was to be at home with him and going to university when it was so far away just wasn't feasible. It wasn't going to happen.

For one long moment my world stopped.

To say I was devastated is an understatement.

I took my wedding ring off

I went to visit a counsellor

I spent the hour crying

I felt trapped again

I hated my husband with a passion

He'd gone to university,

He'd been able to do something with his life.

I had to stay home.

I hated it at home.

I was lonely.

I felt isolated.

And then, I was pregnant again.



I hated myself.

The only thing I was good at was having babies. It was what my life was going to consist of.

Ben was five and Daniel was about to turn three when Rochelle was born. She was the first grand-daughter for both sides of the family, and she was lovely. Round, big brown eyes, soft, loving. When she was four months old we moved to Brisbane. When she was nine months old I was pregnant again. Why not? I couldn't do anything else. At the age of 23 my life was out of my control anyway, so another baby wouldn't make any difference. I eventually made friends with the next door neighbours, who had two boys the same age as Ben and Daniel, and there were two more boys down the end of the street who became part of the group. My grandparents lived two hours' drive away; I had an uncle who lived about two hours away in the other direction. My brother-in-law finished university in Canberra and came to stay for a while, bringing some friends. They decided to stay in Brisbane too. Suddenly there were friends and family around again and having them there made life easier. I went to the theatre with the woman next door. All the bits of the family would get together on the Gold Coast for picnics. We'd go to pool parties at my brother-in-law's place. I liked the warmth. The temperature soared to 42° C for days on end. We bought a pool and I spent lots of time in there, floating, the size of a whale.

Chase was born two days before my 24th birthday. Four children by the age of 24; I didn't see how I was going to cope. I cried a lot while I was in hospital. I couldn't do this. I couldn't look after this family. I didn't have what it took. But I didn't tell anyone how I felt, even though I desperately needed some support. Nan came to stay for a while, and Mum came in her lunch hour and washed nappies. My sister came to visit, and then life returned to normal. I had to pretend I could do this. I had to make out that I could manage. It was what life was about.



When Chase was four months old we moved to Tasmania. We didn't have any family in Tasmania. We didn't know anyone who lived there. My husband had wanted to be a factory manager by the age of 26 and Tasmania was to be the place to fulfil his ambition. We stayed with his mother for a month en route, while he went ahead and found a place for us to live. That place was on a sheep farm, five minutes' drive from the closest town (population 400); over an hour's drive to Launceston. From Brisbane to a sheep farm; from family and friends to the curiosity of strangers.

It was August. Rochelle's second birthday the day we got there. It was raining when we first arrived and it didn't stop for three days; and it was cold. When the clouds finally lifted we saw snow on the hills. It had been winter in Brisbane too, but winter in the north was nothing like this. My mother-in-law had come with us, to help me set up the house. It had, at one time, been a guest house and the rooms were huge, and freezing; there was no form of heating apart from an open fire in the kitchen. There was no shower, only a bath and the water was pumped directly from the river. When it rained worms were pumped up too. Worms in the bath, snow on the mountains, sheep bleating all day, three shops in town, plus a butcher's, a post office and a bank. I wanted to go home. I didn't want to live there. I hate being cold. I had a four month old baby, three other children, no warm clothes, a house that we couldn't heat, and a reluctance to stay there another day; but my husband was happy. He was a factory manager, had a company car, got to go to Devonport and Wynyard regularly, and was considered an "important person" in the area. We were invited to dinners with politicians and local dignitaries. We went to conferences in posh places. We were included on the guest list of functions, along with the bank manager, the wealthier farmers and the school principal. Everybody knew who we were. In the summer we played in the tennis roster.



I watched the children love being on the farm. After school the boys would drop their school bags inside and run up to the old farmer's place on the hill – they hadn't taken long to learn that Mrs Rosier had afternoon tea waiting. They trundled around behind Sandy on his tractor, chased him on their bikes, fell asleep in the trailer while he cut wood, rode the sheep in the shearing shed. Rochelle tried to teach the sheep to count, her little legs pushed into pink gumboots, a stick in her hand in case the sheep wanted to wander off. "Get back there" she'd cry, impersonating Sandy. Three years old and in her element.

I was desperate to get out. The trapped feeling I'd experienced when I'd been told I couldn't go to university three years before was increasing. This life wasn't right for me. I grew to love the light on the hills though, when the children and I would go for walks in the long summer evenings. It was almost tangible, that light. The bells on the cows from the farm across the river would jangle musically, sheep baaed lazily, the children chatted and laughed. They were happy. But I wasn't. I took every opportunity I could to get away. I took the kids on a trip around the state in the summer holidays. Just decided one day I had to get away, packed up the car, rang my husband and said we'd be back in a few days. I so wanted not to go back.

But when my husband went to have a vasectomy I felt that part of me had gone. All I'd been able to do since I was 17 was have babies – and I produced four in seven years. That was my role; that was how I defined myself. What could I do now that I could no longer have babies? I was at a loss.

I bought the general store in the next (even smaller) town; it was a little business in a rundown building, but it was something for me to do. It meant I had contact with people; customers, sales reps, locals wanting to catch up on the town's doings. We also moved into town from the sheep farm; we'd bought our own house and it just happened to be around the corner from the pub. John, my alcoholic father-in-law who'd come to live with us the year



before, had recovered enough to be able to walk, very slowly, around there in the afternoons while I was at the shop. In the end, we had to send him back to his place. I could no longer cope.

I was also pregnant again.

To another man.

My husband spread the mantle of shame over my shoulders and pointed it out to everyone in that small community. It weighed me down and any sense of self-worth I had fled.

* * * * *

We moved to the other side of the island in an attempt to “start over”. Two years later I divorced my husband. I went to work at a community radio station and discovered that I was good on air and at organisation. I became Program Director within a few months. It was a voluntary position, but it was work, and I loved it. Some time later, a pamphlet on the front counter at the radio station caught my eye. It was from the university and was about an education degree specialising in English, Speech and Drama. I’d been a literacy tutor at the local high school for some time, as well as with Adult Education, and had an abiding love of theatre, so it seemed perfect for me.

It was another chance.

I applied, and as I was “mature age” was invited to have an interview. It was nerve wracking but afterwards I didn’t feel that I’d done too badly. I waited breathlessly for the notification.

I was accepted!



Excitement rushed through me.

At the age of thirty I finally had an opportunity to go to university!

My first class was acting, then movement, then voice and speech. I did education subjects, drama, and technical theatre. I loved it all, and more importantly, I did well academically. I worked hard and each year received a letter of commendation from the Dean. It meant I was invited into the Honour's program in my fourth (final) year. I saw the four eldest children infrequently; they lived with their father, a two hour drive away. He refused to bring them to see me, and I was living on a student allowance which didn't stretch very far. Emma, my youngest daughter, lived with me and missed her brothers and sister terribly. Throughout second semester of my final year I didn't see the children at all; every weekend was spent on my Honours dissertation. I felt guilty, selfish, a neglectful mother. I put myself before my children. It wasn't what good mothers did. I graduated with First Class Honours and won the award for the Honours Student with the Highest Grade Point Average. My degree was in education, specialising in English, Speech and Drama. Mum and Michelle flew down for graduation.

After teaching English and Drama (plus a variety of other subjects) at a senior secondary college for a number of years I returned to university in 2000 to complete a PhD.

* * * * *

Even though I am an adult and have moved on with my life since my days as a teenage mother, I feel the condemnation of being a teenage mother strongly. In the staff lounge at university a professor asks about my study. I talk about young mothers and his lip curls. He tells me of the discussions he's had with his daughters about the moral laxity of falling pregnant as a teenager, of the



"disgrace" of young mothers "raising brats"; of young mothers "having big families they can't support properly", of those "living off the government". What he's saying about young mothers, he's saying about me. It still rankles. I tell him I was a teenage mother and that I have five children. I walk away, leaving him stumbling through some kind of retraction: "I wasn't talking about you though". Yes, you were. And that's the problem. In the lumping together we tend not to talk about the individual.

* * * * *

If my life had been studied at the age of 19 it would have had many of the hallmarks associated with teenage pregnancy – constant moves, a second child as a teenager, and lack of educational attainment due to early school leaving. It's a life that could have been represented by many of the 'at-risk' statistics.

I feel that my experience of teenage motherhood defined me, gave me a lens through which to view myself – a view that often wasn't (isn't) helpful. I was bad, lazy, irresponsible, stupid. It's a way of viewing myself that has stayed with me, although I sometimes wonder what I'd see if I removed those lenses.

I'm not a photographer, but I do know that when you change the lens you get a different view. I also know the difference between the "negative" and the coloured image we show our friends. For me, it's time to create a print from the negative.

* * * * *



Legitimate Voices

A story of subversion

A story of transgression

A personal story

A subversive text

A risky text

A personal text

A subversive voice

A rebellious voice

A personal voice

My story

My text

My voice

A legitimate voice



One: Introduction

The fact that society has a role in defining school age mothers in a particular way is apparent from the sense in which they are viewed as a social problem (Schofield, 1994, p. 45)

My personal story, as told in the prologue, provided much of the motivation for this study. As a teenage mother, I was acutely aware of the dominant stereotypes projected on to young girls like me: irresponsible adolescent, high school drop out, “stupid slut”. As an adult, I was aware of the statistics that indicated teenage mothers were more likely to have more children as a teenager (and a higher number of subsequent children), and more likely to live in “diminished” circumstances. To a certain extent at the time, I accepted that I could be defined in those ways. Later, as an educator, I was aware that teenage mothers were less likely to finish formal education, and I came face to face with the attitude of some members of the community, and other educators, to teenagers becoming pregnant. At the senior secondary college in which I taught it was common to hear staff saying “what a shame” and “what a waste” when a student announced her pregnancy. Upon asking students in my senior year Human Interactions class their visions of their future, many of them indicated that they would complete secondary education, find paid work, marry and have children. Their plans seemed to be limited to those sequences. It was as if having children meant an end to life. Attitudes such as these - the “waste” of a life (in the case of a teenager becoming pregnant) and the idea of having children being the “end” of life – still seem to be prevalent in the community at large. However, for me the reality of being a teenage mother (while it had been a troubled reality) had, ultimately, meant neither of



those things. I do not consider my life to have been wasted, and neither do I think my life came to an end when I became pregnant. I have fought against those dominant stereotypes in terms of my own life, refusing to take them on board. I fought hard against the high school drop out label, in convincing the principal of the high school I had attended as a junior student to allow my enrolment as a senior student in a system that in those days did not actively encourage, or make provision for, mature age students. I do not consider myself to have been irresponsible in failing to adequately control my fertility. As I'd only had one boyfriend throughout high school I did not feel that the "stupid slut" label was particularly fitting. Yet as a teenage mother I was lumped together with other young mothers to form part of a group defined in this denigrating way. Even though I was unaware, as a teenage mother, of the terminology, it was the "wrong-girl" discursive frame (Kelly, 2000) at work.

As an educator, working within a system that did little to cater for teenage mothers, I was concerned that the solutions being formulated for the "problem" of teenage motherhood were based on reductionist generalisations of "representative" samples, on the clumping together of teenage mothers as having made "wrong" or "bad" choices. Many of my experiences as a teenage mother were not the same as other teenage mothers' experiences. I am an individual with my own set of values, attitudes and motivations. When studies on teenage mothers are conducted which reduce them to a homogenous group, and which seek to categorise them as "other", there is a risk that teenage mothers will be essentialised and taken to have a certain set of experiences, attitudes, and values, which are then necessarily different to non-mothering teens. It is only in allowing individual voices to be heard that we may be able to put into place educational programs which allow for a range of parenting students' needs and aspirations, or indeed, to question the necessity of a teenage mother following the same life trajectory as a non-mother, through formal completion of education at the "normal" time and on to the paid workforce. In the current climate of "student-centred" learning, where dealing with individual student's needs is seen as paramount to a



quality education and part of the inclusive endeavour of education, the provision of education without consideration of the specific needs and motivations of young mothers is cause for concern. For me, education has been an essential and significant part of my life since having children. But has it been that way for other young mothers? What role does education play in their lives?

WHY THIS STUDY?

The honest answer to the question of “why this study” is because, when talking to me about my experiences as a pregnant and parenting teenager, people would invariably say “Oh, Sharon, but you’re different”. I didn’t believe that. There must be other young women who resist the high school drop out label, who continue with their education despite the weight of scientific evidence saying they’re likely to do otherwise. What are their motivations?

What were mine? Well, mine were about proving people wrong, about a love of learning, a quest to fill my day with more than washing nappies and doing the ironing. A memory: The lady who lived next door to me while I was growing up was a “stay at home” mother. My mother, my aunt and my grandmother all worked outside the home. My mother was very dismissive of her friend next door because she “didn’t do anything”. I didn’t want to be one of those mothers.

Another memory pops into my head: I have just given birth to my third child, and from the TV lounge I hear the theme music of a television program. I ask the lady in the next bed what show it was the theme for. She looks quizzically at me for a moment before telling me it is a show called Dynasty. “Don’t you watch it?” she asks, and I tell her we don’t have a television. Her mouth falls open, then she says, “What do you do all day?”. And there’s another part of the answer. It has as much to do with being a mother as it has to do with



being a teenage mother. I was doubly damned. But, of course, there are other reasons. Identifying that there are other young mothers who strive to achieve high school completion, combined with a lack of supportive school environments in Tasmania, and coming to understand how young mothers situate themselves in terms of education were compelling reasons to undertake this study. The diversity of voices shows a variety of perspectives highlighting the range of experiences and backgrounds from which young mothers are drawn.

* * * * *

This study is therefore largely driven by a personal response to the events of my life and to ways others have sought to categorise me, and thus it is a personal study, having within it elements of autoethnography. The use of photographs of my children in the headers of the thesis highlights the personal nature of the work, seeking to remind the reader that while the “problem” is “out there” it is also “in here”. They also serve to remind the reader that there are others involved in the story of the teenage mother, not only the mother.

The notion of the photograph is also an evocative one, in that a photo, that which we collect in albums and frames, is developed from a negative. Photographic images that show a more rounded, more detailed picture aren’t seen until the positive image is developed. The negative image of the teenage mother is the one most commonly portrayed, but as with the photograph, we will only see a fuller image if we look at the positive, rather than at the negative.

* * * * *

I fear the tag of “self-indulgent” and turn to Ellis and Bochner (1996):

Carolyn: Maybe it’s good to worry about the impact social science can have on your life. It makes the concern some critics



have raised about the self-indulgence of autoethnographers seem absurd. If autoethnography doesn't touch a world beyond the self of the writer, then there's no need to worry about its potentially profound impact on one's material existence.

Art: The self-indulgence charge seems like only another way to try to reinscribe ethnographic orthodoxy. If culture circulates through us, how can autoethnography be free of connection to a world beyond the self?

Carolyn: It can't ... on the whole autoethnographers don't want you to sit back as spectators; they want readers to feel and care and desire (p. 24).

* * * * *

THE "PROBLEM" OF TEENAGE MOTHERHOOD

Despite my early start to parenting, I do not consider myself to have been a "problem" needing a solution. However, teenage motherhood has been defined throughout history as a social problem, although Hartley (1975) claims that 'it could more accurately be defined as a social fact' (p. 251). While Luker (1996) questions how it is we came to think about teenage pregnancy as 'a social problem' (p. 10) Swain (1995) argues that it is the objectifying of teenage mothers which has led them to be constructed in such a way. Luttrell (2003) wants to get "inside" the problem because, she argues, 'personal opinions, cultural prescriptions, and political rhetoric are not enough, especially for educators whose business it is to understand the "strange experience" of being a "problem"' (p. 3). According to the Jordan Institute of Families (1995) changes to the age at which people marry 'combined with economic and gender role shifts, have created the "problem of teen child bearing"' (p. 2). Thus, teenage mothers 'represent a whole collection of what are deemed to be problems [in that they] breach a whole range of moral and social boundaries' (Schofield, 1994, p. 46).



After being frustrated at the judgemental nature of those she spoke to about teenage pregnancy and parenting it ‘dawned on’ Luttrell (2003) that she ‘was missing an opportunity to reframe the terms of the debate. What if I could find a way to turn these audience questions of “judgement” into questions of *interest* about the girls’ self and identity-making?’ (p. 6). To my way of thinking it is an inviting, though possibly more difficult-than-it-looks, idea. Negative judgements which derive from embedded stereotypes are often the most entrenched in our thinking, as Schofield (1994) suggests: ‘child mothers ... are likely to be seen as flawed and therefore in themselves and through their children as a source of contamination’ (p. 46).

No matter how the “problem” came about or how it is defined, Probert and Macdonald (1998) see as important the need to reframe the way we look at the lives of young mothers:

We will not be able to secure better futures for young women without recognising the reality of their lives and responding to their needs as mothers and workers in constructive ways rather than seeing their decisions and lives as the problem (p. 25).

I would add that responding to their needs as “students” is another vital component of reframing the ways in which we view teenage mothers.

STATISTICS

The statistics for teenage pregnancies vary because of ‘different collection methods and reporting systems’ (Slowinski & Hume, 2001, p. 1). Despite this limitation, an estimated 25,000 teenagers in Australia each year (Boulden, 2001) become pregnant and must make a decision that will almost invariably change their lives no matter which choice they make. de Vaus (2002) notes that despite ‘national [Australian] data not being available ... abortion statistics indicate that since 1995 teenage pregnancies are more likely to result



in an abortion than a birth’ (p. 38). Live births in Australia to women under 18 years of age account for 1.5 per cent of all live births (ABS, 2002).

THE NATIONAL PICTURE

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that in 2001 the birth rate to mothers aged 15 – 19 was 18 babies per 1000 Australian women, a significant decrease from the 1971 rate which was 55.5 babies per 1000 women in the same age group (ABS, 2002). The decline in teenage child bearing (de Vaus, 2002) is obvious when we look at the statistics in another way: in 1991 one in ten Australian women had a baby before her twentieth birthday as opposed to one in four in 1971 (McDonald, 1995, p. 46).

THE TASMANIAN PICTURE

The birth rate to 15-19 year old female residents of Tasmania is higher than all other Australian states except the Northern Territory. In the year 2000 the birth rate for Tasmania was 25.7 live births per 1000 15-19 year olds, which was a significant decline from a peak in 1961 of 70.4 live births per 1000 15–19 year olds (ABS, 2002). This is also a significant decrease from the 1947 rate which was 50.8 births per 1000 females in the same age group.

1947	50.8
1961	70.4
2000	25.7

Live births per 1000
15-19 year old females
in Tasmania
(Source: ABS, 2002)

Tasmania is a small state with a total population of approximately 470,000. It has a large rural population and in that respect many pregnant and parenting teenagers may find it easy to avoid going to school and become subsumed into their communities, especially when very few schools have dedicated programs in place for pregnant or parenting teens (Boulden, 2001). This therefore has implications for education and employment amongst teenage mothers in rural and remote areas.



As Tasmania is the state with the second highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the country, it would seem important to ensure that the Tasmanian government was proactive in its support of young mothers and their children, or at the very least that schools were catering for their needs. In September 2003, the Tasmanian state government announced a “Teen Pregnancy Alliance” and provided \$80,000 towards ‘reducing the rate of teenage pregnancies and improv[ing] life prospects for children of teenage mothers’ (Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services, Press Release, September 30, 2003). This alliance has subsequently moved beyond its original brief of reducing the rate of teenage pregnancy, and is now investigating the ways in which teenage girls make decisions about pregnancy and child rearing in an effort to find answers to the question of why teenage girls become pregnant (J. Coombs, personal communication, August 18, 2004). After speaking with many school principals across the state, in both high schools and colleges, it seems that the provision of education for young mothers only happens in an ad hoc fashion, where a student’s needs are taken into consideration once she announces her pregnancy and her intention of remaining at school. The Tasmanian Education Department’s Equity Policy doesn’t specifically mention teenage mothers, and the Minister for Education informed me (P. Wriedt, MHA, personal communication, September 2004) that ‘teachers have opportunities to update knowledge and skills using Talking Sexual Health, a sexuality / sexual health resource for secondary schools’. The provision of educational programs addressing the specific needs of school-age mothers is not being addressed through these current measures.

TALKING ABOUT TEENAGE MOTHERS

The different ways of talking about teenage motherhood show some of the threads that have been woven together to create a lasting image of the young mother as social pariah (SmithBattle, 2000). Probert and MacDonald (1998) note that in many English speaking countries there has been a ‘public campaign of criticism, aimed particularly at young single mothers, suggesting



that this group consciously choose motherhood as a passport to a social security income' (p. 4). As Milne-Home, Power and Dennis (1996) describe it, young single mothers are said to be 'planning careers in motherhood at the taxpayers' expense' (p. 14). Such a "career" was given public notoriety in Australia by Pauline Hanson's One Nation party which added single mothers to their 'list of targets for the withdrawal of government payments' (Probert & MacDonald, p. 4).

Teenage mothers are often put into a homogenous group, but sometimes their only similarity is the fact that they have a child. Hoffman (1998) reminds us that 'teenage mothers are individuals, so they naturally vary in their circumstances, their behaviour and their well-being' (p. 236). Young mothers come from all social classes; have different levels of achievement at school, different levels of parental support, and different aspirations for their lives. If we continue to write "about" them, and "for" them, all the while silencing their voices, we will never discover their stories that might begin to make sense of their experience, not just for themselves, but for the wider community as well.

Englander (1997) raises a point relevant to this study in *Dear Diary, I'm pregnant* when she states that:

... it may be worth questioning the assumption that young women should complete their education before starting a family ... social policies that support young women's desire for both an education *and* a family, and a greater range of choices for combining the two, are thus worth considering (p. 15).

If the lives of young mothers are understood from the perspective of individual mothers and their lived experience, alongside broad-scale social statistical studies which are more common sources of information for educators and policy makers, it may be possible to develop and implement



more effective educational policies. For this reason capturing young mothers' attitudes, views, and needs is an important undertaking.

From an educational perspective there is still a linear, or sequential, progression through high school (adolescence) to further education and then the workforce (adulthood) which frames the order in which individuals progress through their life course. Teenage pregnancy can disrupt this process, but there is insufficient allowance made by government policy for a young mother to spend time out of education while raising her child, and even less allowance for her re-entry into secondary education if that is part of her future plans.

Education is not necessarily unproblematic for many of Australia's adolescents (Brannock, 2004), but it is the time line, the chronology for moving through life that young mothers circumvent. Elder (1985) makes the claim that 'there is an appropriate time for entering school, leaving home, getting married, having children, and retiring' and notes that 'informal sanctions [are] associated with being on time, later, or very early' (p. 26). Teenage mothers do things "out of synch". They reach for the adult world in terms of becoming a mother but are pulled back to the world of the adolescent in terms of education. Even though "life-long" learning has become part of the rhetoric of education in the Western world, not many adults return to senior secondary schools to undertake that learning, and not many secondary schools are set up for adults. Yet it is the only exit point for teenagers for the formal completion of secondary education and is seen as a necessary step towards work or further study, and thus a legitimate entry point into the adult world.

Another concern of the writing on adolescent parenting which raises different questions and issues, although again, in a negative light, is that which sees 'teen pregnancy operat[ing] outside the norm of legitimate reproduction, marking it as a site of moral concern and state control' (Pillow, 1997, p. 351).



Thus 'teen pregnancy presents the paradox of young women fulfilling their reproductive responsibilities, but not in the way the state wishes' (Pillow, 1997, p. 351). It is this "stepping out of line" that makes teenage pregnancy and child rearing difficult for many to accept. The rhetoric of "babies having babies", prevalent in the US, is symptomatic of this view (Kelly, 2000).

APPROACHING THE RESEARCH PROCESS

There have been many years of research into teenage pregnancy and parenting. Hudson and Ineichen (1991) suggest that 'in the US it sometimes seems that the epidemic so often feared refers not to pregnant teenagers but to books on the subject' (p. 1). Despite that level of inquiry, there is an associated problem, namely a silence in the literature: in very few studies are the voices of young mothers heard, beyond snippets of their conversation to illustrate a point. Overwhelmingly, writing on teenage mothers is *about* them; about the decisions they make, about the level of support that's available, their (lack of) educational achievement, plus the (usually negative) outcomes for their children. The literature often casts such young women as living in poverty, making poor choices and creating a situation where their own children will continue the cycle (www.teenpregnancy.org). This portrayal, however, of teenage mothers doesn't fit those who, like me, went back to education; who combined education *and* a family.

Reductionist research processes (which serve to generalise experiences into various categories) were not apt given the questions this study sought to address. Such processes would not have satisfactorily captured my personal experience as a (teenage) mother, or the viewpoints and experiences of the participants. Thus, in this study I took an ethnographic approach in allowing the voices of a selection of young mothers enrolled in a variety of educational institutions across Tasmania to be heard in relation to their motivation behind re-engaging with education and in relation to how their life has played out so far. I heed Kelly's (1997) warning that 'a danger exists in seeing the teen



mothers' experiences as somehow more authentic and able to transcend the dominant discourse to a new point of clarity' (p. 167), a caution she gives in light of 'poststructuralist feminists and other theorists [who] are seeing this view of unmediated experiences as naïve' (p. 167). In teen mothers' re-telling of their stories, to me, and to others, there is a 'continual reflecting on their experiences and actions ... [thus] the stories are always representational' (Kelly, p. 167). I will discuss these concerns, and the way I have addressed them, in more detail in Chapter Three.

The life-stories I gathered were primarily in relation to the importance or otherwise of education in the lives of the participants and, to a lesser extent, the impact schooling had on them, particularly in relation to the construction and development of their sense of self as young woman, mother, student. Their life-stories also illustrate the wider context in which they live, and how the individual works out what Tierney (quoted in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995) refers to as 'large concepts (culture, society, time)' (p. 117). This situating of the individual is important in order to avoid romanticising her (Hatch & Wisniewski, p. 117).

This project, then, provides a unique perspective on the participants' lives. Not, I hasten to add, on the lives of *all* teenage mothers, but the seven I was able to interview, who are presented as unique and complex individuals, each with their own story to tell. In this sense the study does not aim to create results which can be generalised across a population or sample group, rather a narrative life-history inquiry such as this 'focuses on making meaning of individual's experiences' (Cole and Knowles, 2001). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that the:

... uses of narrative in relating to our audience are the narrative inquirer's counterpart to generalization. The narrative inquirer does not prescribe general applications and uses but rather creates texts that ... offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications (p. 42).



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The imperative to formulate questions which sought out the individual, rather than lead to generalisable experiences of teenage mothers was an important one. Thus, the study was framed around the following questions, although other, broader, questions (which are explored in Chapter Four) were asked of the participants:

1. What are the influences in a teenage mother's decision to return to education?
2. What issues impact on the life of a young mother when she returns to education?

Furstenburg states that 'policymakers must go beyond ... public stereotypes ... and look to the realities of ... lives' (quoted in Harris, 1997, p. xi). It is the looking to the "realities" of the lives of teenage mothers which this study set out to do so as to provide unique understandings of such experiences.

Some differences noted in much of the writing on teenage pregnancy from the United States, are where the attendant issues, particularly racial ones, may not apply to the Australian context. While the rate of teen births to Aboriginal Australians far outweigh the rate of non-Aboriginal Australians (the South Australian's Department of Health and Human Services report on teenage pregnancy states that 'the Aboriginal fertility rate is about four times the rate for all Australian teenage women' (Slowinski & Hume, 2001)) race is not generally one of the distinguishing feature of research on the subject in Australia.

What constitutes school age mothering is different depending on the country, and the state, in which the young mother lives. As this study focuses on young mothers in Tasmania, where the school leaving age is



currently sixteen, not all of the mothers participating in this study can be classified as “school age” mothers. What distinguishes the mothers in this study, is that despite being past compulsory school leaving age, they have combined education and a family.

PARTICIPANTS

Despite difficulties in gaining access to teenage mothers in Tasmanian schools (outlined in more detail in Chapter Three), I interviewed seven women, who ranged in age from 17 to 44. Each was either currently, or had been in the past two decades, a teenage mother. At the time of the initial contact, all mothers were involved in some form of education, although throughout the course of the study one participant (Louise), who finished her final year of post-compulsory secondary education (year 12) while pregnant, decided not to continue with any form of education until her child was older. Another participant (Anne-Marie, a 34-year-old mother of five) found that she could not continue to juggle motherhood and university and so put education on hold while she explored other life options.

In what follows I introduce the young mothers. Their more extensive life-histories will be re-presented in Chapter Four, while a more thorough rendering of the research methods will be detailed in Chapter Three.

Please note: all names, including place names, have been changed to ensure anonymity. Other details may also have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The mothers were given the opportunity to choose their own “new” names.



Janelle (21)

Janelle is the one mother I have maintained contact with from my initial approach to the young mother's program at a senior public secondary college in 2001. We had a number of informal conversations over a period of a few months, and then I met with Janelle again at the end of the following year when she had just completed Year 12 as a mature age student. Janelle was 21 when I first met her, and mother of one-year-old Jacob.

Janelle is the second youngest of five children. Her mother was also a young mother (at age 18) although Janelle is quick to point out that there is an eight year gap between the two eldest children. Janelle's story comes haltingly. It isn't that she's reluctant to tell it, it is more that she is not practised in telling it and can not understand, initially at least, why I am interested in her story, or in her. Janelle and the father of her child, a man five years her senior, had been going out for six years before she fell pregnant. Janelle feels that falling pregnant was "meant to be" and as she doesn't believe in abortion, never considered taking that step.

Janelle was determined to spend at least one year being a full time mother then was encouraged by a former acquaintance from high school to return to college. She enrolled in photography, art (which had always been an interest for her) and the young mother's program.

Janelle is now enrolled in the Art, Craft and Design course at TAFE (a college of Technical and Further Education) and plans to complete the advanced diploma and then go to university to train as a teacher. She is also undertaking a business course by distance education.



Nikki (19)

Nikki is the mother of two children: a two year old daughter and a three month old son. Her daughter was born when Nikki was 18 years old, and her son eighteen months later. Her children have the same father and they live together as a family in their own home. Nikki is a “house-proud” mother, who maintains a firm discipline towards her daily housework routines. Once the housework is done she likes to escape the house; she finds herself bored at home.

When I first met her, Nikki was attending a local college, completing Certificate II in Community Work. She is also an active volunteer ambulance officer, and this commitment keeps her busy with training requirements at least one night a week and rostered work on weekends at local sporting events.

Nikki is the eldest of five children; her parents are divorced and there is animosity between her and her father. Nikki’s mother was a young mother – having her first child at the age of 17. For Nikki, this is the way things are. She has a strong pragmatic streak and sees nothing unusual, or worthy of note, in her situation. This makes her quite reticent. Her life is the way it is and “that’s that really”.

Nikki identifies as Aboriginal, although in her usual style didn’t make a big thing of this fact. She told me, very casually, at our third meeting. She doesn’t expect special treatment; it’s just the way it is. That sums up Nikki’s attitude. She deals with life. Nikki is independent, sensible, and has a no-nonsense approach to life. She has a keen sense of her future; she is determined to just get on with it. Having children has not stopped her achieving her goals; she just goes ahead and does it.



Octavia (20)

Octavia is a young woman who has definite goals for her life. She has not let the fact of an early pregnancy stop her from working towards what is a clearly thought through career path. Things may not be happening at the same pace as she had hoped for, but the direction for her future is still on track.

Octavia is the oldest of three children; her parents are still married and both her brother and sister live at home. Her parents have been very supportive of Octavia since her pregnancy and the subsequent birth of her daughter, who at the time of our initial meeting was sixteen months old. Octavia was pleased to have the opportunity of being involved in the study; she is an open, articulate young woman who had no reservations in telling me her story.

The father of Octavia's daughter is thirty-five years old, with two children from previous relationships; his eldest daughter is a year younger than Octavia. They had been together for four months when Octavia became pregnant. Her initial reaction was to have an abortion – many of her friends had taken that step – but the day after the pregnancy was confirmed she resolved that life was about taking care of your responsibilities and decided against a termination. Her relationship with the baby's father ended three weeks before the birth of their daughter.

Upon completion of Year 12 at a local public senior secondary college, Octavia enrolled at university where she is completing, by distance, a course in viticulture. Her ambition to become a wine maker is still on track. Octavia maintains a firm discipline with herself, working in a vineyard three days a week and studying two days. She is in a new relationship, has no plans for more children – and has taken steps to prevent that from happening – and is determined to spend some time in France, learning about winemaking.



Louise (18)

Louise is the youngest participant in my study, although not necessarily the youngest to become a mother. Louise fell pregnant at age sixteen and, when I first met her, she had just turned seventeen, and was six months pregnant. She had completed Year 12 the month before our first meeting at a public senior secondary college. At that time Louise lived with her partner (the baby's father) in a small, two bedroom housing unit across the road from the college. There was evidence of marijuana use in the flat and Louise talks about this during subsequent interviews.

Louise gave birth to a healthy son early the following year and moved twice more in the next six months. Louise was initially happy to stay at home with her son, but found, after being a stay at home mum for two years, that she was ready for a new challenge. She made enquiries about enrolling in another year (year 13) at the senior secondary college where she had completed year 12, in order to feel that she has completed her secondary education "properly".

There are a number of barriers: the process isn't automatic. As Louise would be going in to year 13 she has to wait for a place to be available. An associated problem is that one of the subjects she wants to study is photography (which is a popular course) and priority is given to new students, not those wanting a second chance. There is no child care available at the college so Louise will need to make private child care arrangements, and as she doesn't have her own transport she will be reliant on public transport. Because Louise's partner works some distance from the city (in which the college is situated) they have moved closer to his place of employment. The area in which they live isn't well serviced by public transport. His work as an apprentice affords them a limited income; they are partly reliant on government family benefits (available to all low income earners). There is no added benefit for Louise to engage in education.



Tammie (17)

Tammie was fifteen when she fell pregnant to a man five years her senior and she is now the 17 year old mother of 18 month old Angel. Tammie left home at the age of 13, living with her grandparents and “on the streets” for the next few years. Tammie and her mother had a difficult relationship: immediately before she left home Tammie expressed extreme violence towards to mother. Her parents are divorced, and she has two younger sisters.

The father of Tammie’s daughter was in prison during the period of time I met with her. Their shared history includes episodes of violence, drug use and homelessness. Tammie and her daughter are now living with Tammie’s mother, although she does have her own “housing” place in a nearby street.

Tammie attends a local public college on a part time basis, and her view on life is optimistic: she claims that her life can only get better.



Anne-Marie (34)

Anne-Marie was raised in a Catholic family in the beachside suburb of Brighton in Melbourne's east. She has one brother and one sister, both younger than her. Her mother had multiple miscarriages – Anne-Marie thinks about thirteen in all. Her mother was a stay-at-home mother, and a seamstress, who had freshly baked biscuits waiting for her children when they came home from school. Anne-Marie's father was an accountant, a silent, lonely man who never discussed his problems. Anne-Marie describes it as the "typical 70s family". Her mother was pregnant, and nineteen years old, when she and Anne-Marie's father were married.

Anne-Marie achieved success at school, but it meant very little to her. Her attitude was rebellious and, at the end of year 10 (the final year of compulsory education), when aged 16 she left home. She lived on the streets for a six month period, stealing food and other necessities as most of her dole cheque (welfare benefit) went on alcohol and drugs. She'd been disappointed that her application to continue on to senior, post-compulsory secondary education (Years 11 and 12), had been rejected by her private school, and didn't realise her parents had organised another school for her to attend. She didn't ever finish those final two years of schooling. Anne-Marie was depressed, suicidal, drinking alcohol and taking illicit drugs, but determined not to return home. She felt the freedom of living on the streets was preferable to her home environment. A high speed police chase in a car taken by friends for a joy ride, in which she was a passenger, ended in an accident, her arrest, two months in a juvenile detention centre and another month in a half way house. She went home at the end of that period: pregnant.



Robyn (44)

Robyn attended an all-girls Catholic school throughout her high school years in the mid 1970s. She had aspirations to study law, but fell pregnant at the end of year 10, at the age of 16, to her 19 year old boyfriend, a police cadet. Robyn felt the shame of being pregnant as a teenager and didn't want to add shame of being an unmarried teenage mother so married the baby's father before their son was born. Robyn and her husband had another child, a daughter, three years later.

Robyn felt that she needed to put her own aspirations aside in order to be a "good" wife and a "good" mother. Robyn gained employment, once the children were at school, stacking shelves in the local supermarket and as a seasonal fruit harvester. After ten years of marriage, she divorced her husband, and, determined not to be a "welfare mother", found employment in a police youth club, running programs for school aged children. Robyn remarried at the age of 30 and had another son.

At the beginning of 2004, after being a teacher's aide for seven years, Robyn commenced university, studying by distance, which enables her to keep working as she studies. While she feels guilty about doing something for herself, Robyn is determined that nothing will stop her completing her education degree. She feels "angry" that supports weren't in place when she was a teenage mother to enable her to continue her education, and sees the need for attitudinal change amongst teachers and others in the school community, to encourage young mothers to remain in, or re-engage with, education.



STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

The roots of the study and its personal nature, as well as of the “problem” of young motherhood, have been briefly explored in this chapter, and the participants have been introduced.

In Chapter Two the teenage mother is contextualised in terms of how, as part of a group, she has traditionally been conceptualised as “problem”. The literature pertaining to the history of the study of teenage motherhood is explored, including the part the collection of statistical information has had to play in the “problem” becoming an international one (and a countable one) and how legislation from two centuries ago still influences today’s conservative policy makers in many Western countries, including Australia. The conceptualisation of teenage motherhood as “problem” is examined from a historical point of view, and the literature on issues such as welfare, motherhood, the dominant stereotypes of the young mother, and education is considered.

The research processes used in conducting this study are outlined in Chapter Three, along with an account of ethical issues surrounding the re-telling of others’ life-stories. A justification for the use of “portraits” is also given, as it is in the form of portraits of the participants that the data is (re)presented.

Portraits of the participants are presented in Chapter Four, in which each participant is provided with an opportunity to have her voice heard (Schofield, 1994). The lives of the young mothers are portrayed from an insider’s perspective, allowing for a frank and authentic view of the realities of their lives.

Following from the portraits of the young mothers, a discussion of the educational implications of this study is presented in Chapter Five. This discussion incorporates the views of the participants and in emphasising



shared experiences highlights the issues that could be taken into account by educational policy makers in providing for the educational needs of young mothers. Limitations of the study and areas for further research are also outlined in Chapter Five.



Two: Literature Review

Everyone has an opinion about
teenage pregnancy and why it is a problem
(Luttrell, 2003, p. 3)

In this chapter the literature surrounding aspects of teenage pregnancy and parenting is explored. A study of the literature, predominantly from the US and to a lesser extent from the UK, Australia and New Zealand, reveals a variety of research interests: the link between sexuality education and the rate of teenage pregnancy (Cromer & McCarthy, 1999; Landry, Kaeser & Richards, 1999; Planned Parenthood Federation of America, 2000; Soloff, 2003; Skinner & Hickey, 2003; Elvin, 2003); obstetrics risks of an early pregnancy (Buchholz & Korn-Bursztyn, 1993; Social Exclusion Unit, 1999; Hagan, Coleman, Foy, Goldson, et al., 2001; Loto, Ezechi, Kalu & Ogunniyi, 2004); life outcomes of teenage pregnancy (Harris, 1997; Hoffman, 1998; Probert & Macdonald, 1998; Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; SmithBattle, 2000a; Lawlor and Shaw, 2002; Spear, 2004); educational attainment (Carey, 1984; Delin, 1984; Littlejohn, 1991; Klepinger, Lundberg & Plotnick, 1995; Luker, 1996; Milne-Home, Power & Dennis, 1996; Baragwanath, 1997; Ainley, 1998; Probert & Macdonald, 1998; Boulden, 2001; Fergusson and Woodward, 2000; Kelly, 2000; Luttrell, 2003); the “at-risk” nature of the children of teenage mothers (Buchholz & Korn-Bursztyn, 1993; Records, 1993; Campbell, 1999; Hagan, Coleman, Foy, Goldson, et al., 2001; Slowinski, 2001) and other social and welfare issues which serve to provide a background context to the lives of many teenage mothers. These are the threads which I attempt to weave throughout this review in an effort to provide a picture of teenage mothers as they are represented in the literature.



The research interests surrounding teenage mothers differs depending on the country of origin, so that the literature from the US is mostly to do with race, welfare and the costs of teenage motherhood (Farrell, 1995; Maynard, 1996; Thompson, 1997; SmithBattle, 2000; Luttrell, 2003). New Zealand research tends to focus on employment and educational issues (Baragwanath, 1997; Fergusson & Woodward, 2001), as does Australian literature (Littlejohn, 1992 & 1998; Milne-Home, Power & Dennis, 1996; Probert & MacDonald, 1998; Boulden, 2001). Notably, much of the Australian literature does not examine teenage mothers in relation to the educational institutions which they previously attended nor those which they could attend. At present it is more often left up to health centres and social welfare based organisations to provide educational opportunities for teenage mothers, particularly in the fields of neo-natal care, nutrition, and child development, all of which are related to the care of the child, rather than catering for the mother's formal educational needs (Milne-Home, Power & Dennis, 1996). It is a curious focus given that teenage mothers' education is generally truncated (Littlejohn, 1991), with the implication being that the mother is not seen as having any further use for education for her own sake, but only as it relates to the wellbeing of her child.

This chapter includes an examination of the historical background to the study of teenage pregnancy and parenting, including a brief history of illegitimacy and the issue of morality to which it was closely linked. This is in an effort to explore how the thinking about teen pregnancy and ex-nuptial births, first published in the 18th century, is still influential today and deeply ingrained in public consciousness. The role statistics has had to play in the definition of the "problem" is also examined.

ILLEGITIMACY

In much of the Western world, illegitimacy has traditionally been viewed from the perspective of deficit: of the myriad ways it is bad for society as a whole,



for the mothers of illegitimate children and for the children themselves (Reekie, 1998). The historical literature associated with illegitimacy suggests that the field is one 'widely regarded as a suitable subject for sociological research' (Teichman, 1982, p. 11), a viewpoint with which Laslett, Oosterveen and Smith (1980) concurs, stating that 'illegitimacy can be said to possess a considerable amount of literature' but makes the point that 'nearly all the earlier writings were heavily moralistic in tone' (Laslett, Oosterveen & Smith, p. 1). Today's single mothers remain caught up in the historically based view, which has seen illegitimacy defined as a 'social problem for the last two centuries and a moral problem from time immemorial' (Laslett, Oosterveen & Smith, p. 1).

It would appear that early social observers viewed illegitimacy through the 'lens of pauperism' (Reekie, 1998, p. 23), so that the problem these observers addressed was not so much the rate of illegitimacy but its cost. As early as 1786, critics of the Poor Laws in England argued that immorality and debauchery were being encouraged through the support of illegitimate children and unwed mothers (Reekie). Joseph Townsend argued, in his *Dissertation on the Poor Laws (1786)*, that 'idleness and vice' were encouraged and 'instead of remedying the problem of pauperism [the Poor Laws] tended to multiply the poor' (quoted in Reekie, p. 24).

A causal link between poverty and illegitimacy is extrapolated from the statistics, either those produced from historical evidence or figures from more contemporary analysis (Reekie). It is clear from Teichman's discussion of the concept of an illegitimate child being one which 'ought not to have been born' (1982, p. 7) that the predominant thinking in Western cultures is that all illegitimate children are unwanted. She concludes that the traditional idea in our own society is economic, so that an illegitimate child is:

... a child which will have no one to care for it and protect it, an 'unwanted child', a child who will become a burden to the state and to the taxpayer and, in all probability, a misery to



itself; in other words, a child with no legal claim on a breadwinning (male) parent (Teichman, pp. 7 – 8).

It is still the case today that much of the literature surrounding single motherhood has a base in the economics of the “problem”. The notion of illegitimacy has re-arisen in public policy debates, and thus among politicians, largely through the work of Charles Murray, a public policy analyst in the United States. Murray is the author of *The Emerging British Underclass* (1990) and contributor to the subsequent publication in 1996 of *The Emerging British Underclass: The Developing Debate*. Murray (1996) claims that illegitimacy ‘is the best predictor of an underclass in the making’ (p. 26); ‘constitutes a special problem for society’ (p. 30); and ‘is the most worrisome aspect of single parenthood’ (p. 32). Murray’s warnings to British leaders and policy makers are dire:

Whatever else you may think about illegitimacy, this much is indisputable: it costs money. As illegitimacy continues to rise, the costs will rise not just linearly, but by multiples, for so many things go together—not just the costs of single-parent benefit for young women and their children, but the costs of coping with young males who are not in the work force and are in the criminal justice system, of children abandoned and neglected, of increased drug addiction (Murray, p. 117).

In a counter to Murray’s critique of the emergence of an underclass in Britain based on illegitimacy Deakin (1996) asserts:

Generally, the point cannot be too strongly stressed that single parenthood—regarded by many Conservatives as a form of moral plague (‘the most socially subversive institution of our time’ according to P. Johnson)—is not a static condition, still less an immoral one. Rather, it is a stage in the life cycle which may lead in a variety of different directions, with widely various consequences (p. 77).



Joan Brown (1996), also responding to Murray's definition and solutions to countering the emergent underclass based on illegitimacy, brings a different focus to the debate. Brown claims that 'making scapegoats of single mothers for society's ills does not help us approach the serious issues raised by the growing proportion of one-parent families' (p. 65), and provides her own solutions:

... we have to tackle the obstacles that prevent lone mothers from combining home responsibilities and the interests of their children with paid employment. And we have to deal with another major problem – not mentioned by Murray – the large scale failure of absent fathers to meet their responsibilities for the support of their children (p. 66).

The discussion surrounding illegitimacy and morality then, on the one hand by "classic liberals" such as Charles Murray, and on the other from those who come from different political and ideological directions, intersects to show how single motherhood has developed to become such a socially fraught issue. An awareness of the historical, political, cultural and social context for single mothering is important in order to better understand the stance taken by politicians, policy makers, educators, health workers and others involved in what has become known as "the problem of single mothers" (Swain & Howe, 1995; Reekie 1998; Kelly, 2000; Luttrell, 2003).

THE PLACE OF STATISTICS

Reekie (1998) claimed that 'it took a particular constellation of intellectual and political developments in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to make people think of illegitimacy ... as a problem of national and international significance' (p. 21). The advent of official statistics meant that populations could be counted and comparisons could be made between illegitimate and legitimate birth rates (Reekie). When 'intensive work [was]



done on parish records and ... official registers of births and marriages' it became clear to demographic historians that ex-nuptial pregnancy was more common 'than the conventional explanation of the domestic servant seduced by her master would suggest' (Swain & Howe, 1995, p. 1).

When the gathering of statistics and methods of statistical analyses became more sophisticated, the reliability and applicability of these figures became more important to political leaders, policy makers and others. In 1835 Belgian statistician, Adolphe Quetelet, gathered statistical data from a number of different European countries, including France, the Kingdom of Naples, Prussia and Montpellier giving the study of illegitimacy a distinctly 'international and comparative character' (Reekie, 1998, p. 32). In a sense, the problem of illegitimacy could be viewed as having moved beyond local communities to cross national borders.

Although the fervour with which statistics were collected was waning by the mid-1880s, the attachment of an 'arithmetical mantle to illegitimacy ... proved permanent' and while 'statistics were no longer seen as the answer to the problem of illegitimacy, they had become indispensable to its public definition' (Reekie, 1998, p. 41). Reekie claimed that 'without statistics, scholarly conversations about social problems become virtually impossible: effectively there would be no problem, or at least not one that can be talked about in public' (p. 45).

Illegitimacy statistics gain widespread media attention. A drop in ex-nuptial birth rates is hailed as good news for the social fabric of a country; in August 2000 US President Bill Clinton was 'very encouraged' by data which revealed the teen birth rate in the United States had reached its 'lowest level since record keeping began sixty years ago' (White House, 2000). The figures, released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, showed that the teen birth rate dropped 20 per cent from the most recent peak in 1991. President Clinton stated that the 'new information confirms that we continue



to make impressive strides in addressing one of the most important social problems facing our nation' (White House). His administration was sending a strong message to the teenagers of the US: don't get pregnant or father a child until you are ready to take on the responsibility of parenthood. So far as governments are concerned, this predominantly means the economic responsibility of parenthood. In the foreword to a United Kingdom report on teenage pregnancy, British Prime Minister Tony Blair lamented that Britain had 'the worst record on teenage pregnancy in Europe', a record he said in which Britain 'can not take any pride' (cited in *The Blair Report*, Social Exclusion Unit, 1999, p. 4).

This rendering of the statistics by leading politicians in such public forums seems to suggest that births to single women are still considered "other" (Kelly, 1997): Statistics on birth rates to married women aren't given the same attention, or examined with as much interest. Given the greater tolerance of society to pre-marital sex and to de facto relationships, this categorisation of births into "the norm" and "deviant" is difficult to explain (Swain & Howe, 1995). However, given the influence economic rationalism has had on government policy development throughout the Western world, such categorisation may not be surprising. In addition, most Western governments are endeavouring to contain public expenditure, and strategies of exclusion therefore become part of that process. Reekie (1998) has another explanation: that the 'pleasures of dealing scientifically with illegitimacy were ... as much intellectual as sexual' and that they were 'on the one hand, deadly serious, on the other, titillating and tantalising – a winning combination that may explain why they continue to fascinate social scientists all over the world' (p. 47).

The politics of counting illegitimate births, whether from an intellectual interest or a sexual one, or from the perspective of considering the welfare of the unmarried mother and her child, or the cost to the community of single motherhood, fails to highlight or address the lived experience of the women giving birth outside marriage. Claims or assumptions can be made about their



morality (Reekie, 1998); their status as a victim and their “fallen” nature (Swain & Howe, 1995); their perversity in perpetuating societal ills (Lloyd & O’Regan, 2000); their dependence on welfare (Maynard, 1996); their lack of education (Littlejohn, 1998); their direct link with crime and poverty (Murray, 1996); and health issues (Skinner & Hickey, 2003) – among many others. When counted for statistical purposes, single mothers become a homogenous group (Phoenix, 1991) who become “scapegoats” (Swain & Howe) for the rest of society: ‘it’s their marginal status and relative lack of power that make them such good “catch-all enemies”’ (Kelly, 2000, p. 26). Charles Murray, as has been discussed, is one who views unwed mothers as “catch-all enemies”. Murray’s views are clear:

Illegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time – more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness because it drives everything else (cited in Thompson, 1997, p. 27).

Maynard’s (1996) views are similar to Murray’s. In her *Kids having Kids* report for the Robyn Hood Foundation in the United States, Maynard found that the costs to the US taxpayer are not only those associated with ‘lost production’ (p. 20) but are also associated with the costs of ‘constructing and maintaining prisons to house the increased number of criminals caused by adolescent childbearing’ (p. 19), a cost she found to be ‘about \$1 billion each year’ (p. 19). When framed in such a way, statistics are a means of blaming, shaming and naming teenage mothers.

In a related way Reekie (1998) argues that the ‘study of history and historical statistics of illegitimate births’ have been used to support a modern-day ‘pro-moral campaign’ (p. 8). When talking of the situation in the United States Luker (1996) claims that ‘when Americans today talk about “babies having babies”, their thinking is shaped, whether they know it or not, by discussions that have been going on for the



better part of three centuries' (p. 15). She goes on to state that the 'kinds of concerns that troubled the Puritans – the moral problems posed by sex without marriage and the economic problems posed by babies without fathers – are still rife in the United States' (Luker, p. 15). Luttrell (2003) writes of her frustration when discussing her study of pregnant teens with others, and makes a similar comment: 'it was next to impossible to move away from public discussions scrutinizing the girls' motivations, in ways that sometimes felt like a modern-day version of the Puritan's public stockades' (p. 6). Luker points out that when we talk about teenage pregnancy we 'are talking about something which is very new and very old' (p. 15): in that sense the current focus on the "teenager" is new, the focus on unwed motherhood is more deeply rooted.

The modern-day pro-moral campaigns, coming largely from the "Puritan" thinking described above, serve to 'diminish the scale and complexity of the problem facing society ... and encourage[s] the belief that comparatively simple and inexpensive policies can be effective' (Walker, 1996, p. 74). Nathanson (cited in Luttrell, 2003) claims that the early campaigns which served to:

... reassert society's moral order against the threat of deviant (wrong-girl) behaviour [represented] more than public concern about *individual* transgressions ... it elevated [teenage mothers] into *cultural symbols* of disorder, moral decay, and social instability (p. 32).

One of the visual representations of this disorder and moral decay is the pregnant teenager. When Soloff (2003) makes the claim that "teenagers are having sex" clearly she's not stating anything new. It is estimated that in Australia in the mid-1960s 'about a quarter of all new brides were pregnant at marriage' (McDonald, 1995, p. 33) and many of these new brides were younger than 20 (de Vaus, 2002): there were many others who, upon finding



themselves pregnant, faced the alternatives to marriage, namely abortion, adoption, or raising the child as a single mother. The “sin” which single (and teenage) women committed was usually regarded by mainstream Australian society as a moral one, whereas four decades later the ‘sin that modern teen mothers commit is not the sin of desire but of not planning and rationally choosing their futures’ (SmithBattle, 2000, p. 29). This later-day sin is a much more contemporary idea than the one against morality many young women committed in earlier times.

SHAME AND STIGMA

In earlier times, morality in Australia and many other Western countries, or a perceived lack of it, meant that harsh codes applied to not only the young mother, but to her family as well. Teichman (1982) observed that at least until the late 1960s and certainly even after that time for many:

... the shame of being a single mother was the worst possible shame a woman could suffer. The disgrace spread to all her immediate kin, who were expected to purge their shame by expelling the guilty woman from the family or by hiding her away somewhere. Secrecy about the illegitimate birth was absolutely mandatory (p. 119).

Stigmatised women often subscribe to the values of the wider society, and so accept the judgement of that society (Swain & Howe, 1995). In the days when unmarried pregnancy was the “worst possible shame” for a woman, many in that situation found that exclusion from society rendered them invisible. Such treatment nonetheless gave them an opportunity to regain a lost reputation sometime in the future (Atwood & Genovese, 1993). But there were many problems along the way. Whether excluding herself from society, or remaining part of it (despite the stigma attached to her situation) the unwed mother had many challenges to face (Swain & Howe). Stigmatisation and exclusion are just two of these (Reekie, 1998).



There were a number of factors that have seen the plight of the single mother made more difficult since she has become a more visible, more widespread “problem”. Morality is just one of these but it meant that for many, punishment of the single mother for her transgression was necessary and no place could be afforded her in respectable society as ‘the single mother was the deviant’ (Swain & Howe, 1995, p. 1) and, according to Laslett, Oosterveen and Smith (1980), if having children outside marriage ‘was no longer thought of first and foremost as a moral lapse, it was still regarded as deviant behaviour’ (p. 1). It is this stigma, this singling out of the unwed mother as “other”, which silenced many mothers and caused them to disappear from public view. Moralists called the mother “sinful” and her child “unwanted” and ‘the stigma attached to their deviance/defiance [was] used to reinforce morality in the community as a whole’ (Swain & Howe, p. 1), an attitude which has taken many years to break down.

In the last decade in particular, across Australian society, there has been a more inclusive stance towards teenage mothers - ‘pregnancy and parenting amongst adolescents is commonplace and whilst not generally celebrated, is certainly not out-rightly condemned’ (Campbell, 1999, p.1) - but the rigid and narrow categorising of a teenage mother as “problem”, plus singling her out as “Other” (who exists in a separate space) means that teenage mothers must still deal with unwritten censure, and anachronistic government policy largely based on attitudes that haven’t changed a great deal in two hundred years (Swain & Howe, 1995).

Kelly (1997) claims that ‘the teen mother today ... is hardly without stigma’ (p. 165), but despite this there have been renewed calls to “re-stigmatise” teenage mothers. Whitehead (quoted in Kelly) goes even further, calling for ‘imaginative measures to “uglify” unwed teenage motherhood’ (p. 165).



Green (1996), like Whitehead, argues for a re-stigmatisation of teenage mothers and claims that attaching a stigma to young / single mothers and to illegitimacy is done in a spirit of helping those stigmatised. Green asserts that:

Social policies have been designed and redesigned in the hope of avoiding stigma. And to avoid stigmatising someone appears at first sight to be humane because it would be wholly wrong to brand someone a failure, or to stain their character permanently. But if we criticise a person who has fallen on hard times due to their own inappropriate behaviour, we do not brand them failures in some absolute or permanent sense. We spend our time criticising them because we believe them capable of more (pp. 21 – 22).

Green (1996) states that ‘to criticise a person is to treat them as a dignified individual capable of functioning as a morally-responsible citizen’ (p. 22), and concludes his remarks with the suggestion of a ‘new rallying cry [for social policy analysts]: Bring back stigma; all is forgiven!’ (p. 23). It is a view shared by Alan Buckingham (1996) who, in giving a statistical update to the size of the underclass in Britain ties together the various threads of the discussion on illegitimacy, welfare benefits to the poor, and the attachment of stigma to single motherhood:

... the act of providing guaranteed benefits and housing to lone mothers sends a moral message to the poor, declaring that it is fine to act in an irresponsible manner since the state will pick up the tab. Eventually, as lone-parenthood and welfare dependency becomes the norm in housing estates, the social stigma attaching to such behaviour weakens. And so, the final barrier to a mass underclass vanishes (p. 172).

Ways of avoiding the stigma attached to teen motherhood - whether that’s meant as a means of “helping them reach their potential”, as Green would have us understand, or for some more draconian reason – has seen the



pregnant teenager explore a variety of escape routes from the shame of an early pregnancy.

FINDING A WAY OUT

For Australian teenage girls the escape routes from unwed pregnancy and parenting are varied. Historically, one of the most widely used escape routes out of the shame of unmarried motherhood was a 'hastily arranged marriage' (Luker, 1996, p. 17). It was presented to the single mother as 'both a norm and an ideal' (Swain & Howe, 1995, p. 156) and while it didn't always bring economic or emotional security, it brought at least some respectability. In Australia today, marriage is seen as a less likely outcome of unwed pregnancy: In 1971 about 13, 500 teenage brides were pregnant at marriage; in 1991, the figure had fallen to only 1,100 (McDonald, 1995, p. 46). The figures for births to married teenagers show that while the birth rate has dropped overall for this cohort, the birth rate to married teenagers has decreased even more significantly. In 1971 there were 20,500 births to married teenagers. In 1991 that figure had fallen to 2, 600 (McDonald, p. 46). This drop has to do with the decrease in marriages overall, and particularly of teenagers (de Vaus, 2002).

Abortion was another way out. The fact that so many single women risked their lives to have an abortion 'is an indication of the strength of the stigma that they were facing' (Swain & Howe, 1995, p. 47). Abortion, while not as potentially life threatening these days, is still an option for many women, including adolescents, seeking to avoid an unwanted or unplanned pregnancy. It appears to be a well travelled escape route from teenage pregnancy for those who had access to, and could afford, such a service. Skinner and Hickey (2003) note that 'legally induced abortions were the second most common hospital procedure and reason for hospital admission in young women aged 12 – 24 years in Australia in 1997–1998' (p. 158). This issue is one discussed by others outside the research field, and opinions, as would be expected are



mixed. Adele Horin, writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald Weekend Edition* (August, 7 – 8, 2004), claims, in an article titled “Women are more than wombs”, that ‘women need access to abortion. It is an essential back-up to women in the struggle to control their fertility, and thus their lives’ (p. 37). Not surprisingly, in the March – May 2003 *All life matters*, a publication of the Right to Life Association of NSW, the abortion debate is treated differently. However, they do provide ‘several principles that should govern both supporters and opponents of abortion’, one of which is that ‘no woman should ever be made to feel ashamed to be pregnant’ (p. 9).

Another way of avoiding shame and stigma until the early 1980s was to enter an institution while pregnant and give the baby up for adoption. These institutions were set up by charitable organisations to ‘save fallen women (i.e. unmarried pregnant girls or unmarried mothers) from starvation or prostitution’ (Teichman, 1982, p. 109): many babies’ homes were connected with the new style “maternity homes” and became registered profit-making adoption agencies (Swain & Howe, 1995). The function of the homes was part of a system:

... by which single mothers were able to hide their pregnancy and dispose of their babies so that, in theory, their reputation was impugned. [Babies’ homes] became the means by which babies were miraculously produced without mothers; adoption the means by which they were placed into socially acceptable two parent homes’ (Swain & Howe, 1995, pp. 131-132).

Adoption in Australia was legalised in 1928. At the time, Attorney-General Slater argued that in legalising adoption the child would be ‘protected from the slur of illegitimacy’ (quoted in Swain & Howe, 1995, p. 137).

The increasing visibility of single mothers since the mid-1970s has had many benefits. Many single mothers, for example, realise they’re not alone; financial support is more readily available. Illegitimacy as a legal status has



been abandoned, but there are some areas where the visibility of single mothers has had a negative impact. Paul Gray, writing in the *Herald Sun*, in October 2000, stated, 'happily, the stigma against single parents today is far less. But that leaves us with an important question: if there's so much less stigma around, why do we still see babies being abandoned?' (Oct 18, 2000, p. 18). Grey added, 'perhaps where we used to point the finger of moral condemnation at the people bringing up children alone, today we do something just as bad – ignore them, and let them struggle on their own' (Gray, 2000, p. 18).

* * * * *

STEREOTYPES

Over the past few years, researchers have begun to look more carefully and critically at many of the negative stereotypes and assumptions about teenage pregnancy and teen mothers (Englander, 1997, p. 12)

The stereotypes surrounding young mothers 'are difficult to challenge and dispel because they simultaneously connote so many already-stigmatised, and at times, contradictory, meanings' (Kelly, 1997, p. 165). Luttrell (2003) describes the "minefield" of 'competing discourses, stereotypical images, and public representations through which girls must walk as they make decisions and take actions in their lives' (p. 25). It is a minefield shaped by discourses – which Luttrell defines as 'institutionalised and taken-for-granted ways of understanding relationships, activities, and meanings about the way the world works, in this case sexuality, pregnancy, and motherhood' (p. 25). These discourses 'influence what people take to be true, "right", or inevitable' (Luttrell, p. 25) and in the context of teen pregnancy and parenting it is the "wrong-girl" discursive framework which is dominant (Kelly, 2000).



According to Luttrell, this “wrong-girl” discursive framework is the ‘most complicated to unravel because there are several versions of it’ (p. 27). One version is the “choice-making” version, which ‘points the finger of blame at those girls who make “choices” that do not adhere to a “normative” life trajectory (i.e., finish school, get a job, find a male partner, marry and have children)’ (Luttrell, pp. 27 – 28). Girls framed in this way are ‘viewed as “deviant” or as having made a “mistake” for which they must account’ (Luttrell, p. 28).

An examination of the stereotypes which serve to frame teen mothers as ‘either unworthy of public support or as pitiable yet incompetent to lead autonomous lives’ (Kelly, 2000, p. 27) is important as ‘failing to see a woman who happened to give birth to a child while in her teens in all her complexity risks turning her into the Other, a degraded category’ (Kelly, p. 26). That is not to say that there may not be elements of truth in the stereotypes, or that in revealing a stereotype as ‘partial or erroneous, it can be replaced or erased’ (Kelly, p. 26) but rather an analysis of the stereotypes reveals many of the ‘public (mis)representations [that] frame the way we think about teenage pregnancy as a cultural phenomenon and as a social, political, or moral problem’ (Luttrell, 2003, p. 25).

The stereotype of the “fallen” woman which was rife in middle class Victorian times is closely linked with the “wrong-girl” discourse, which had its ‘roots in [the] early nineteenth century’ in the US (Luttrell, 2003, p. 31). While it could be said that there were as many “stories” as there were ‘women pregnant without the ‘benefit’ of marriage’ (Swain & Howe, 1995, p. 12) the stereotype was compelling. Swain & Howe’s study gives a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding many young women’s “fall from grace”. It tells the often tragic stories of young women in Australia assaulted by their masters, fathers, husbands of other women, and even by their ministers. It is of particular interest that while the women were often abandoned to live out the consequences of their actions or sins, the men, on the whole, escaped



censure. The picture was much the same in the United States. Kristin Luker's (1996) investigations provide examples of the American 'colonies punish[ing] bastardy with great harshness when it was discovered. In the seventeenth century a Maryland court sentenced ... an unmarried woman, to be given twelve lashes ... for having borne a child out of wedlock' (p. 17). The lashes were to be given in public to act as a powerful deterrent to other women.

FROM "FALLEN WOMAN" TO "STUPID SLUT"

Although there is a slight twist (most notably the imputation of blame) the modern day equivalent of the "fallen woman" stereotype is the "stupid slut" (Kelly, 2000). With the burgeoning use of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s the "stupid slut" stereotype saw the young mother condemned for 'irresponsible contraceptive use [rather than] for having sex outside marriage' (Kelly, p. 28). Kelly asserts that the 'prevalent double standard, which morally evaluates women's sexual practices but not men's, still places the onus on women to manage sexual and reproductive choices' (p. 28). When social learning theory has been used to explain this sexual double standard a:

... sexual script theory has emerged to explain patterns of sexual behaviour. In following traditional scripts, men are socialized to desire and engage in frequent casual sexual activity with multiple partners, whereas women are encouraged to limit their sexual experiences to encounters within committed, monogamous relationships (Milhausen & Herold, 1999, p. 361).

This double standard is one adolescent girls must navigate and Kelly (2000) illustrates the difficulty of this journey:

... a young woman who does not protect herself by ensuring that both she and her male sexual partner use contraception is "stupid"; but a young women who looks too prepared too early in a relationship is a "slut". The young woman who finds herself



pregnant and chooses not to have an abortion risks being labelled a “stupid slut” (p. 31).

According to Felice, Feinstein, Fisher and Kaplan (1999) sexual activity amongst adolescents ‘has increased significantly in recent years’ (p. 516). In a report published just two years later, the same organisation cited ‘recent federal surveys for the Department of Health and Human Services [which] found a decline in sexual activity among adolescents 15 to 19 years of age’ (Hagan, Coleman, Foy, Goldson, et al, 2001, p. 498). In addition, Spear (2004) writes of a ‘recent decline in sexual activity among young people’ (p. 120), while the Planned Parenthood Federation of America provides a numerical basis for the discussion. The Federation reports that ‘four out of five young people have sex as teenagers’ (para. 2). By contrast, in the United Kingdom, the “Blair Report on Teenage Motherhood” (cited in Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) claims that ‘more than two-thirds of under 16s do not have sex, and most teenage girls reach their twenties without getting pregnant’ (p. 6). This more positive view of the statistics is an unusual one in the literature (which seems to focus public attention on just how many teenagers are, as opposed to how many are not, engaged in sexual activity). Whether there has been an increase or not, Tolman, Striepe & Harmon (2003), assert that ‘although many parents, teachers, politicians, and adolescents themselves might prefer that sexuality were not involved in the process of moving from childhood to adulthood, it is’ (p. 4) an assertion Soloff’s (2003) pragmatic declaration sums up: ‘teenagers are having sex. That is the reality of the situation’ (p. 27).

Some adolescents could be excused for thinking that it is acceptable to engage in sexual activity, but not to get pregnant. Kelly (2000) provides a compelling example: Amanda Lemon, an 18 year old mother, was disbarred from her local chapter of the National Honor Society in the US because of her status as a mother. The student pointed out the contradictions implicit in the “litmus test” used to justify the decision not to include her:



If you're going to judge character, then what about the people that do have sex and what about the people who have had abortions [I was told] that they do know people ... that have had abortions, but that I [represented] *visual* evidence [that premarital sex occurred]' (Kelly, p. 2).

The potentially mixed messages this sends to high achieving students who are also mothers, like Amanda Lemon, underline the "other" space teenage mothers are often forced into. It was not those who were sexually active who were not permitted their place in the Honor Society, just those who had become mothers.

Perversely, and despite her achievements, it is the visibility of young mothers like Amanda Lemon that ensures the stereotype of the "stupid slut" remains prevalent in a time when teenage sexual activity is more public. Her lack of responsibility (for "allowing" herself to become pregnant) and her obvious engagement in sexual activity mean that she can be categorised as both stupid and a slut (Kelly, 2000). It is a confusing message for young people, who are bombarded with sexual imagery every day in television, films, and music clips, depictions which are seen to be both 'alluring and romantic' (Gore, 1998, para. 5). Pettersson (2004) states it even more strongly: 'pornography in Britain, from News of the World-style titillation downward, forms part of everyday life - and of the everyday visual landscape in particular' (p. 27). Steele (1999) found that 'many teens draw heavily from media images and storylines as they wrestle with who they are and where they fit in the world' (p. 331). When these images are highly sexualised, the teenager will then draw aspects of their identity from the images (Steele). Bordo (cited in Steele) claims that there is a 'need to realize that people no longer learn primarily through verbal instruction in this culture, but through pictures and images, which get directly at fantasy and desire and feed the hunger for stimulation and excitement' (p. 339).



One of the findings reported in the *Blair Report on Teenage Pregnancy* (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) was the mixed messages teenagers receive about sexual activity and contraceptive use: 'as one teenager put it ... it sometimes seems as if sex is compulsory but contraception is illegal' (p. 7). The paradox in this situation is that many think that 'if sex isn't talked about, it won't happen' whereas the outcome is usually much different: 'the net result is not less sex, but less protected sex' (Social Exclusion Unit, p. 7). Again, Pettersson (2004) has strong views on adult interest in teenage sexual activity:

Aside from the carelessness, ignorance and sheer stupidity involved, it is pretty self-evident that teenage sex is part of a process of individuation; it is one of many ways of establishing who you are, not least in emotional terms. That process is strongly enhanced, and the results more clearly visible, if the behaviour indulged in is somehow in opposition to established, parental mores. (So what else is new?) In Sweden, for a teenager to try to define who they are by having sex would be worse than pointless; it would go unnoticed. In Britain, the exact opposite seems to be the case: it is immediately pounced on.

Indeed, the problem is not so much with teenagers as with their parents, their teachers, their preachers, tabloid editors, Mary Whitehouse, Benny Hill, Nudge & Wink, and whoever else has contributed, over time, to a moral climate in which sexuality - not the diseases, not the pregnancies, not the abuse - has become such an issue. It is from this, surely, that all the trouble flows (p. 28).

Other mixed messages come from parents who find it difficult to discuss issues of sexuality with their children. Hudson and Ineichen (1991) maintain that 'the guilt, the ignorance and the general discomfort evinced by their parents and the other significant adults around them when young people



attempt discussion on sexual matters filters through with remarkable effect' (p. 26). In Pettersson's (2004) experience sex education in British schools, where boys and girls are segregated, is a place where 'the teacher cringed; the girls cringed; the boys cringed' (p. 28).

SEXUALITY EDUCATION

This issue of sexuality education, as it is known in literature emanating from the United States, is one that has generated much debate, particularly in the US where the levels of teenage pregnancy are, on average, higher than all other industrialised countries (Luttrell, 2003). Landry, Kaeser and Richards (1999) cite a 1997 survey which shows that:

... while eight in 10 adults believe it is very important that teenagers be given a strong message from society that they should abstain from sex until they are at least out of high school, six in 10 say that sexually active young people should have access to birth control, and only two in 10 object to that proposition' (p. 280).

This "society" incidentally is the same one which allows a constant stream of soft porn images to flood all forms of advertising and general entertainment, eroticising girls 'in the most respectable and mundane of locations' (Walkerdine, 1997, p. 170). Despite these messages coming from society, the involvement of parents in what is taught to their children regarding sexuality education is highlighted by Cromer and McCarthy (1999) who conclude that 'American parents are more willing to challenge providers and are generally more vigilant over their children's family planning care' (p. 292) than parents in other, European, countries. Cromer and McCarthy also claim that in 'Sweden and the Netherlands, it is generally accepted that parents should not obstruct their teenager's access to family planning services' (p. 292). It is noteworthy that both Sweden and the Netherlands have a much lower incidence of teenage pregnancy than the US (less than 10 per 1000 women aged 15 – 19, compared with 55 in the US (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999)).



Where, what, and how much, education is provided on matters pertaining to sexuality is another issue in which people, not just parents, have a keen interest. In a study on sexuality education programs in school districts in the United States, Cromer and McCarthy (1999) found that 'more than one third of districts with a policy to teach sexuality education require that abstinence be taught as the only option outside of marriage; under the vast majority of these policies, contraceptives may only be discussed in a way that highlights its shortcomings' (p. 286). The provision of abstinence only programs in the United States is one in which politicians are urged to maintain an interest (Elvin, 2003): A study published by Focus on the Family concludes that 'abstinence is the No. 1 factor in the decline in the teen-pregnancy rate' and a spokesperson for the organisation said that 'this study should be an incentive to every member of Congress to vote for the most effective prevention program for teens' (cited in Elvin, p. 16). Lalitha Chandrasekher, a member of the editorial board of *SEX, ETC*, a newsletter written 'by teens for teens about sex, pregnancy [and] birth control' has a different view:

... give teens the most comprehensive, honest and accurate information on contraception, STIs, abortion, pregnancies, teen parenting and sex regrets. Don't emphasise that sex is a "bad" thing. Emphasise that sex is a weighty decision to make, involving many factors (some painful) and that teens have the option to abstain. Take away the mystery and tell them exactly what sex is. So, even if they choose to have sex, they are well informed and, hopefully, well protected (Chandrasekher, Marchetta, Togun, Doyle, et al, 2003, p. 23).

Other authors in the same publication stress the importance of arming teenagers with information so they can be 'smart about their decision' (Doyle, in Chandrasekher, Marchetta, Togun, Doyle, et al, p. 24).

One of the concerns about sex education of course is highlighted by Emily Chaloner (2003) when she claims that 'many parents believe that if their children learn about sex they will have sex' (p. 30). In a slightly different



vein Baker, Thalberg and Morrison (1988) argue that 'programs for intervention should recognise the importance of parents' values' (p. 279). Cromer and McCarthy (1999) see an inherent problem in that argument, because 'in the United States, the possibility of ever creating a liaison between family planning services and schools seems problematic, due to the resistance of parents, and therefore, school boards' (p. 292). Landry, Kaeser and Richards (1999) draw attention to one of the problems of not allowing school age children an opportunity to learn about sexuality education or 'by permitting no discussion about contraception at all [that] abstinence-only efforts might discourage effective contraceptive use and thereby put individuals at greater risk of unintended pregnancy when they become sexually active' (p. 286).

The "stupid slut" stereotype can therefore be viewed from at least two perspectives. The girl who is subject to such verbal bullying is either "ignorant" of the available contraceptive options (which is her own failing, often linked to a lack of personal responsibility) or the options haven't been fully explained to her (which is a failure by the adults nominally charged with responsibility for her welfare). SmithBattle (2000) claims that in terms of the modern view of self:

[the view that] family practices and cultural norms that interfere with the individual's pursuit of rational goals are to be shed like a set of outdated clothing because they curtail one's ultimate freedom to choose and reach one's full potential ... fundamentally informs our practices and policies regarding teen mothers by targeting deficiencies located strictly in the self (eg poor judgement, lack of planning and lack of job and parenting skills) (p. 30).

It is more usual, it seems, to point the finger of blame for the non-use of contraception at the young woman herself. The "choices" the teen girl makes then are "wrong" putting her firmly into the dominant "wrong-girl" frame as described by Kelly (2000).



One reason posited for the lack of contraceptive use, especially in first time sexual encounters, is “sex guilt” which Baker, Thalberg & Morrison (1988) found ‘is a powerful factor inhibiting contraceptive use in young women’ (p. 280). In a notable twist on this contraceptive debate Baker, Thalberg and Morrison also found that ‘adolescents who have parents who are approving of sexual activity are likely to experience less stress associated with sex and are able to make more objective decisions about contraception’ (p. 281). For many people abstinence-only programs, the “Just say no” campaigns widely publicised by pop stars such as Britney Spears, often just don’t work. To counter this ineffective public education, Landry, Kaeser and Richards (1999) nonetheless advocate that ‘the provision of adequate and accurate information about contraception ... should continue to be a high national priority’ (p. 286).

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EDUCATION

One of the dominant stereotypes of the young mother is that of “high school drop out” (Kelly, 2000). This section of the literature review explores the young mother and her place in education in an effort to unravel the issues that either ties them closely together, or that keeps them as mutually exclusive entities. The notion of defining teenage motherhood in relation to education is problematic. Are teenage mothers over the age of 16 (and therefore past compulsory schooling age) to be included in the definition? Are mothers under the age of 18 (when they can vote, legally purchase cigarettes, enter public bars unaccompanied by an “adult”) considered teenage mothers? The line drawn between childhood and adulthood seems to shift depending on the context and the degree of public sensitivity toward any such issue under discussion (Kelly).

Educational opportunities for young people enable them to gain employment – either directly out of high school or after a period of further study (Probert



& MacDonald, 1998). Regular employment, either full time or part time, usually enables people to live with a modicum of financial security. When the educational opportunities for young people are constrained, or not taken advantage of, the benefits of employment are likewise constrained (Milne-Home, Power & Dennis, 1996). What follows may be financial hardship, dependence on government-provided benefits, poorer quality housing, an increase in health related problems, transportation difficulties, an inability to afford childcare. In such a scenario, educational opportunities are seen as a key component to living a fuller, more satisfying life with the benefits flowing on to the community as a whole.

CONSEQUENCES FOR TEENAGE MOTHERS WHO DON'T CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION

Much of the literature surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood focuses on the disadvantages of not continuing with education (Baragwanath, 1997; Littlejohn, 1998; Fergusson & Woodward, 2000). These disadvantages are abundant and clearly documented. The findings are similar across literature from Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Sweden. Hofferth & Hayes (cited in Klepinger & Lundberg, 1995) argue that teenage mothers 'are less likely to complete their education, to be employed, to earn high wages, and to be happily married; and they are more likely to have larger families and to receive welfare' (p. 23). Fergusson and Woodward cite evidence from many studies with similar findings to Hofferth & Hayes', and conclude that 'teenage mothers are more likely to experience a range of personal and social disadvantages, including early school leaving, educational underachievement, socio-economic disadvantage, welfare dependence, and marital instability' (p. 147). The disadvantages continue into the future: a longitudinal study in Sweden found that 'those who first give birth as teenagers are at increased risk of socio-economic disadvantage in adulthood in terms of employment, living arrangements, parity and dependence on social welfare' (Olausson Haglund, Weitoft &



Cnattingius, 2001, p. 73). It is quite clear from the research that the lack of educational attainment of teenage mothers can lead to 'profound, long-term consequences for the earnings and employability of the mother and, hence, for the economic well-being of both the mother and her children' (Klepinger & Lundberg, p. 24).

MEETING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF TEENAGE MOTHERS

Studies conducted in more recent years show signs of change – at least at an attitudinal level. Patsy Littlejohn conducted a longitudinal study of teenage mothers in Victoria during the 1990s. One of the findings from her study indicated the difficulty for young mothers to return to education or job training when little 'attention [is paid] to their specific curriculum needs' (Littlejohn, 1998, p. 205). It is doubly difficult for a young mother to return to school when her experience in the past has been negative and when she is then faced with barriers to returning to education over which she has little or no control (Milne-Home, Power & Dennis, 1996). In Probert and Macdonald's (1998) report on young women, work and parenting, they stated that 'the relationship between "unsuccessful" schooling and young motherhood is now very well established' (p. 9). Littlejohn also discovered that strict conditions are often applied to the provision of services for young mothers. Case management, a service available to long-term unemployed people, was not available to young mothers because 'they had been pregnant and therefore unfit to seek work for a period' (Littlejohn, p. 205). While there may be an increasingly compassionate attitude to teenage mothers from school administrators and teachers, not a great deal has been done in real terms to overcome many of the barriers young mothers face (Milne-Home, Power & Dennis).

Students with "special needs" are provided for in education legislation (see for example, the Tasmanian Department of Education's *Equity in Schooling* Policy <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/equitystandards/edeqpol.htm>) but



schools find themselves faced with a difficult situation when the issue is teenage pregnancy and parenting (Baragwanath, 1997). The Tasmanian Department of Education's Equity Guidelines (2004) emphasises the importance of engaging in education:

The DECCD believes that there are significant numbers of young people at school today who are disadvantaged in a way which makes their educational experience less rich, less rewarding and less effective than it should be. The range of educational outcomes for these students is far more limited than it is for the student population as a whole. This situation is considered to be unacceptable because educational success is crucial to every student's future (Retrieved from <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/equitystandards/edeqpol.htm>, May, 2004).

Despite this there is no specific mention of teenage mothers in the equity policy of the Tasmanian Department of Education. Similarly, in the case of New Zealand, 'there is no government policy covering the education of such young women in New Zealand unless they can make often expensive arrangements for childcare, or go on to Correspondence School work – thereby losing contact with their peers' (Baragwanath, 1997, p. 98). In the Tasmanian context, Boulden (2001) notes that:

... some pregnant and parenting students are enrolled in the Tasmanian Open Learning Service under their "exceptional circumstances" criteria. However, since it is the policy of the Department to retain pregnant and parenting students in their usual schools, these students are only enrolled in the Open Learning program if they are unwilling to remain at school with support (p. 16).

While schools have a legal requirement to provide educational services to all who request it, including the teenage mother, there are no requirements for



schools to provide for her child (Baragwanath, 1997). Access to affordable, appropriate child care is important if the young mother seeks to pursue her education and career path (Littlejohn, 1998), yet lack of access to child care can mean it becomes too difficult for the young mother who 'finds it easier to drop out' (Baragwanath, p. 99).

There is much debate on the existence of a causal link between teenage pregnancy and educational underachievement. Furstenburg, Brooks-Gunn and Morgan (1987) do not question the findings that 'teenage mothers do not achieve as much education as women who delay childbearing' (p. 7) but do point to some of the reasons:

Teenagers who have children are pressured to leave school;
adolescent mothers find it difficult to perform their schoolwork;
and poor students are disproportionately likely to become pregnant
and to drop out when they do bear children In general,
pregnancy usually precedes dropout, but a substantial minority of
young mothers drop out before conception (p. 7).

Fergusson and Woodward (2000) proposed 'two possible explanations for the poorer educational outcomes and constrained life opportunities of teenage mothers' (p. 147). One is that 'teenage pregnancy and early motherhood disrupt the educational progress' which leads to the disadvantages discussed above, while the other explanation they offer is of a partially or wholly non-causal association between teenage pregnancy and educational underachievement which arises from selection processes: 'teenage pregnancy is a selective process that is more common among young women from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and young women with a history of early-onset behaviour problems' (p. 147). Klepinger et al (1995) raised similar issues when they questioned 'whether early childbearing itself is the primary cause of the adverse outcomes, or whether it is the relatively disadvantaged backgrounds of teenage mothers ... that lead to those outcomes' (p. 23).



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

One of the barriers to educational attainment consistently identified in the literature, from the US, the UK, New Zealand and Australia, has been that of teenage pregnancy. Ortiz and Bassov (cited in Littlejohn, 1992, p. 25) found that pregnant teenagers 'average two years less education than do their peers who do not become pregnant'. This finding is consistent with many others reported in the literature (see for example Carey, 1984; Delin, 1984; Klepinger et al, 1995; Baragwanath, 1997; Rich & Kim, 1999; Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; Kelly, 2001). Schools and the community, according to Delin (1984), need to deal with the fact of teenage motherhood in more constructive ways than exempting the pregnant student and discouraging her from returning to school or not adequately catering for her if she is at school.

In referring to unwed teenage mothers and education Luke (1996) stated that:

To many people over forty, the idea of pregnant teenagers walking openly down school corridors, not to mention the existence of high school day care centres, is something that outstrips the imagination. Until the mid-1970s visibly pregnant *married* women, whether students or teachers, were formally banned from school grounds, lest their swelling bellies cross that invisible boundary separating the real world (where sex and pregnancy existed) from the schools (where they did not). The idea that a pregnant *unmarried* woman would show herself not only in public but in schools, where the minds of innocent children could be corrupted, was more unthinkable still (p. 2).

It is a dilemma faced, although in more subtle ways, in many Australian schools today.

Until quite recently, while stigma and shame were more closely associated with teenage pregnancy and morality played a large part in the ostracism of teen mothers from schools, school administrators were often concerned about the "moral contamination" possible through pregnant teenage age girls



remaining at school (Delin, 1984; Milne-Home, Power & Dennis, 1996). In a United Kingdom government's working party report entitled *Pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers* (1979) one of the concerns expressed by school administrators was the dilemma of trying to:

... maintain moral standards in the school and consequently not accepting such occurrences as normal and at the same time helping the girl. But utmost care must be taken to ensure the school's moral standards are not prejudiced. If it appeared that a school regarded a pregnancy as a part of normal school, immense harm could be done (p. 23).

In 1992, a student was expelled from a school in New Zealand because she was pregnant and under 16 years of age; her parents were told that 'she was a poor example to other students' (Baragwanath, 1998, p. 101). It is a similar case to that cited earlier (Kelly, 2000) of Amanda Lemon. As a mother, Amanda Lemon did not meet the requirements of the character component, as her child was clear evidence of her having engaged in sexual behaviour. While Amanda Lemon was not denied educational opportunities per se, she was denied the rewards of achieving at a higher level than the majority of her peers simply because she was a teenage mother. Kelly stated that teenage mothers, like Amanda Lemon, 'have become lightning rods for stigma from many quarters of society ... their presence in a public high school is read by liberals, conservatives, and radicals alike as a potent signal of societal shift' (p. 20).

The discourses surrounding teenage motherhood and education are often contradictory and consequently 'invite confused conclusions' (Kelly, 2000, p. 20). It is at the point where some discourses collide that teen mothers' lives are shaped (Kelly). Including teenage mothers into mainstream schools brings a certain kind of challenge. Excluding them, either by policy decisions or by having non-supportive environments that create barriers to learning, brings other challenges. It's one thing for a student to decide they no longer want to



continue at school, but a more weighty matter when school and system based decisions make it difficult for the mother to return (Baragwanath, 1997). The impact on the young mother's life will undoubtedly be similar – and the impacts, as we have seen, are largely negative – but added difficulties faced by the young mother battling against policy decisions in which she has no voice will almost invariably have other negative consequences.

The “non-encouragement” of pregnant students happens, according to Milne-Home, Power & Dennis (1996), in often subtle ways and they cite instances of principals advising pregnant teenagers to leave school because of the “physical danger” they were in due to school violence. Apparently, there was no thought of removing those perpetrating the violence. In an earlier investigation, Delin (1984), reporting on the Australian context, found that schoolgirls who become pregnant when they were less than 15 years of age were granted ‘an automatic exemption from schooling ... [and] in many cases they are discouraged from returning to school by school administrators who seem to fear some form of “moral” contamination’ (p. 33). Milne's (1979) findings from a United Kingdom study were similar: some schools ‘assume that pregnancy means the end of education’ (p. 21) while others ‘actually refused to have a girl back after the birth of her baby’ (p. 24). In Carey's *Report to the teenage mother working party, 1983*, for the Australian government, she concluded that:

... because most schools have little or no experience with pregnant students, a lack of preparedness or responsiveness on the part of the school staff could reinforce the assumption which many girls and parents make that pregnancy means leaving school and ending education (p. 45).

Kay Boulden (2001), writing more recently of the Australian educational context, found that ‘some schools fear that having pregnant girls and young mums on campus will give the school a “bad image”, and they fail to encourage young women to stay’ (p. 7). Despite the amount of literature on



the importance of pregnant and parenting teens engaging in education Boulden found that few 'state education systems ... have made a policy commitment to the retention of pregnant students and young parents in education' (p. 13).

THE SAME, OR DIFFERENT?

Most of the literature relating to educational programs run specifically for pregnant and parenting teenagers comes from the United States, where the number of teenage mothers far exceeds that of either Australia or New Zealand. One of the issues raised by Kelly (2000), in her study of two schools that run supported integration programs for teenage mothers in Canada, was that of the "normal-abnormal dichotomy". Kelly argued that 'historically, pregnant and mothering students have been defined as different in the sense of abnormal or Other and excluded from school on this basis' (p. 91). Luttrell (2003) describes this "gendered" 'singling out of pregnant girls as having "special needs" (parenting boys are not viewed as such) [as an] example of an institutional strategy that contributes to the very problem it is meant to solve' (p. 175). With programs now being run by many school districts in the United States the issue has become one of confronting what is referred to as a "dilemma of difference". Kelly defines it thus:

Once students are identified as teen mothers and are provided with services based on that difference, school adults may begin to notice traits – both positive (e.g., "teen mothers are more mature than other students") and negative (e.g., "teen mothers use their babies as excuses") – that distil into stereotypes. Yet were these school adults simply to ignore the differences of the teen mothers from other students, then the teen mothers might not receive due consideration of their heavy responsibilities and, as a result, might fail their courses or be asked to leave school due to poor attendance (p. 92).



Littlejohn (1998) reported that some young Australian mothers 'identified a sense of feeling stigmatised at school as a result of their pregnancy and lacked the confidence to return to school where they feared standing out as different' (p. 206). Whichever way integration into education ultimately happens, it is clear that teenage mothers have special needs in relation to a number of factors including: the curriculum offered; access to childcare, transport and supportive social networks; limited finances; and often negative attitudes arising from earlier educational experiences (Milne-Home, Power & Dennis, 1996). Kay Boulden's (2001) *Pregnant, Present and Proud* and the companion publication *Step by step, side by side* (Boulden, 2002) provide guidelines for good practice for Australian schools that want to 'ensure that pregnant and parenting students, like all other young people, have the best possible chance of completing high school' (Boulden, 2002, p. 5)

Teenage pregnancy and mothering then, is seen by some researchers as either a symptom of social disadvantage and educational underachievement, or a state of being that can ultimately contribute to reduced life opportunities. Littlejohn (1998), in arguing for the relevance of education in the life of a young mother, found that many such women 'are ambivalent about returning to school or work when it has been a negative experience in the past' (p. 205). Some young mothers do not wish to return to the education system or to work: 'women from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to view the role of mother as a natural and inevitable role for women. They are more likely to accept such a role at an earlier age [when] it is seen as less of an interruption to her life' (Littlejohn, 1991, p. 3).

In the Tasmanian educational context it is difficult to determine whether early school leaving is symptomatic of early pregnancy, or if the sequence happens in the other order because there is no central collection of data on the numbers of pregnant and parenting students in schools in any one year (Boulden, 2001). Neither does the Tasmanian Department of Education track post-



school pathways (C. McIver, Superintendent, Barrington District, personal communication, July, 2001).

While not disputing the risks to a young mother of economic, educational and social disadvantage Furstenburg, Brooks-Gunn and Morgan (1987) claim that those risks are not 'sufficiently high to justify the social stereotype of the teenage mother that has emerged from social science research and its portrayal in the mass media' (p. 8).

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FOCUS ON AGE

The issue of age is one that has had some quantitative researchers controlling for a range of factors in their quantitative studies of teenage pregnancy and parenting to see whether age is the most problematic dominant factor of their condition, or whether it is the young person's social background (Hoffman, 1998). Hence age is an important issue because of the implications it has for policies and for the way we think about teenage mothers. Luker (1996) poses an important question:

Who is "too young" to have a baby? ... Is the American public primarily concerned with the *age* of the young people involved? If all ... pregnant teenagers would just postpone pregnancy until after their twentieth birthday, would the critics be satisfied? (pp. 15 - 16).

Hoffman similarly asks, 'if we could successfully intervene and change a woman's age at first birth and nothing else about her up to that point [would] we greatly alter her life circumstances?' (1998, p. 236). He answers his own question when he says that:

the crux of the research problem is obvious: teenage mothers are clearly not a random sample of the population. They often carry with them a host of other disadvantages ... and simply changing a



woman's age at first birth would not necessarily change those conditions (p. 236).

Luker (1996) also has a similar response, namely that: 'many ... young mothers would be poor (and would have children who grew up to be poor) no matter how old they were when they gave birth' (p. 111). Kelly (2000) agrees and puts a different edge on the statistics: 'nearly two thirds of births to teenagers [in the US] are to women aged 18 or 19 years old; they are legal adults, entitled to vote as citizens. The available research suggests that were they to postpone childbearing into their twenties, most would still be poor' (p. 215). Hoffman (1998) concludes his review of the literature with a startling statement: 'the problem of teenage childbearing has been exaggerated, perhaps substantially' (p. 236).

WELFARE AND THE TEENAGE MOTHER

Governments in the UK and the US have identified a range of measures to help support teenage parents. In the UK these include helping them continue their education; prepare for, and look for, work; and to make decisions about pregnancy; and the need for better supportive structures in relation to housing. (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999, pp. 107-109). There is no such national action or means of targeted support in Australia. These types of supportive measures are unlike the more punitive ones taken by many states in the US (Harris, 1997) where the requirement to be available for work as a condition of getting welfare benefits sees some states, like Wisconsin, requiring mothers to 'work immediately after the child is born. Other States allow time until the child is weaned. However, the lifetime Federal maximum on welfare benefits is five years' (Social Exclusion Unit, p. 127). This is to actively discourage mothers from becoming welfare dependent, and hence add to the underclass of which Murray is so fearful.



There are a range of requirements across the world for “mutual obligation”, but Sweden, with one of the lowest rates of teenage pregnancy, has in place accommodating measures, such as where ‘lone parents are required to be available for work [as a requirement of receiving welfare benefits] ... municipalities must provide child care for children 18 months and over’ (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999, p. 127). Australia requirements for single mothers have changed in recent years, but benefits are usually available until the youngest child is 15 years of age (Maley & Saunders, 2004).

In considering the notion of the “welfare trap” for teenage mothers Harris (1997) states:

... that work as a major route out of welfare dependency ... has important implications for welfare policies aimed at getting welfare mothers into the labour force. The underlying assumption that welfare mothers do not work or want to work, which drives welfare policies to focus on *making* mothers work, is wrong, and this focus is misplaced (p. 94).

Fergusson and Woodward (2000) point to ‘growing evidence [which] now exists to suggest that, compared to women who do not become pregnant early, teenage mothers are more likely to experience a range of personal and social disadvantages, including early school leaving, educational underachievement, socioeconomic disadvantage, welfare dependence, single parenthood and marital instability’ (p. 147). For many such women and girls, all of this is wrapped up in just one of those areas: an unhealthy reliance on welfare.

Charles Murray (US policy maker and anti-welfare campaigner) promotes a “no welfare to unmarried mothers” stance, a stance first adopted by the Reverend Thomas Malthus almost two hundred years ago (Reekie, 1998). This stance found support with the Clinton administration in the US in the mid 1990s (Harris, 1997). Reekie stated that ‘Murray, like Malthus, characterises illegitimacy as an insupportable burden on the state’, and he sees ‘illegitimate



children [as] simply too costly' (p. 58). The Clinton government campaigned to 'end welfare as we know it' and during the campaign of 1996 Clinton made a statement on teen pregnancy that showed his stance:

we ... know it would be better if no teenager ever had a child out of wedlock; that it is not the right thing to do, and it is not a good thing for the children's future and for the future of our country (White House, 1996, p. 2).

The architects of welfare reform found resonances with conservative and anti-welfare politicians, and an American public fearful of an increase in the widely reported growing 'underclass' of society where 'Murray's rhetoric has found a more sympathetic and receptive audience than the largely contrary evidence produced by the scholarly community' (Harris, 1997, p. xi). The 1996 'Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act' was born out of that thinking (Harris). Along with landmark welfare reform there is now a requirement for unmarried minor parents to stay in school and to live under adult supervision. In a *Statement by the President* on August 8 2000, Bill Clinton spoke of 'enacting welfare reform [which takes] executive action to require young mothers to stay in school or lose welfare payments, cracking down on child support enforcement, and launching a National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy' (Office of the Press Secretary, The White House). By contrast, in the United Kingdom the focus is on providing support to young mothers rather than taking steps to stop welfare support (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999).

There are similarities with the US 'Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act' and recent welfare reform in Australia. Reekie (1998) claims that much of the Australian 'anti-welfare rhetoric is imported directly from the United States' (p. 63). Charles Murray was invited to speak at a conference of the (Australian) Centre for Independent Studies in the mid 1990s, and his influence is still being illustrated in the Howard Government's welfare policy reforms at the beginning of the new century.



This is clearly illustrated in an article (*Motherhood as a meal ticket*) by Australian policy makers Maley and Saunders (2004) where they cite Murray's predictions about the possibility of welfare dependency growing amongst teenage mothers. Both Maley and Saunders agree with Murray and argue that by 'making single motherhood financially viable ... the welfare system ends up encouraging it' (p. 2). They also find it "encouraging" that despite:

Murray's warnings about welfare [falling] on deaf ears in Australia ... policy commentators [are] at last coming to terms with the idea that welfare payments can and do influence behaviour in all sorts of unintended and undesirable ways (Maley & Saunders, p. 3).

Maley and Saunders' concerns are not so much for 'well educated, mature women with reasonable employment prospects' (p. 2) but those they call "youngsters" who 'have much shorter time horizons than adults do, and [are] of relatively low education with poor career prospects [who] are unlikely to make rational decisions based on an informed calculation of long-term costs and benefits' (p. 2). Morton (2002) has a different view, one that requires an attitudinal shift from 'seeing welfare payments to parents lone and partnered as an investment in the future, rather than a drain on the present' (p. 11).

The notion of mutual obligation is the Australian Government's response to the "influential" nature of welfare payments, an obligation system that is based on the US Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Yeatman (2000) argues that 'since most people hold an unreflective attachment to the basic idea of mutual obligation ... the popular view of [it] is ripe picking for populist conservatives on both sides of politics (p. 4). The notion of "mutual obligation", argues Moss (2001), 'unfairly blames the unemployed for their situation' (para. 6). As mutual obligation in Australia extends to single mothers, the "unfair blame" is also attached to them (Brotherhood of St Laurence, n.d., <http://www.bsl.org.au>). Harris (1997) writes of other conservatives who 'located the problems of the poor with the welfare system' (p. 13). According to Harris many other US



conservatives either ‘criticized welfare programs for reducing the need to rely on a man for support’ or ‘accused welfare policies of being “too permissive”... arguing ... that welfare recipients were not fulfilling their social obligation as citizens when they accept “entitlements” without contributing anything to society in return’ (p. 13).

Mutual obligation which, at least in part, is the product of an active labour market policy (Brotherhood of St Laurence, n.d.), requires welfare recipients to “give something back” (Moss, 2001). In Australia this scheme – originally conceived for those receiving unemployment benefits – was extended to single mothers in 2002 (www.centrelink.gov.au). A similar approach is evident the United States where welfare reform has ‘sought to encourage economic self-sufficiency’ but has lead to the “working poor” [replacing] the “welfare poor” as the largest share of America’s poor female-headed families’ (Brown & Lichter, 2004, p. 284). Despite the substantial decrease in the ‘number of recipients on welfare rolls ... many obstacles to self-sufficiency remain’ (Teitler, Reichman & Nepomnyaschy, 2004, p. 125). One of these obstacles is in the nature of the employment available to many single mothers: Typically it is unstable, low paid, involves irregular hours, and the possibility of shift work (Brown and Lichter). In their study on sources of support among unwed mothers, Teitler, Reichman & Nepomnyaschy found that ‘the majority (76 per cent) of unwed mothers participate in the labour market, and most work full time’ (p. 143) but despite this, ‘employment alone is not a guarantee of self-sufficiency’ (p. 144). Their finding that ‘working mothers fare no better (or perhaps do worse) than nonworking mothers is at odds with the welfare agendas of both the Left and the Right’ (Teitler, Reichman & Nepomnyaschy, p. 144). Encouraging mothers to be self-sufficient by imposing social welfare policies which are underpinned by mutual obligations on them may mean the burden on the taxpayer is lowered, but doesn’t necessarily mean that the mother, and her children, will be any better off.



This framing of the “problem” of teenage motherhood in economic terms, coming as it does from the late eighteenth century, is finely ingrained in public consciousness and the ‘belief that early childbearing leads to poverty permeates our collective understanding’ (SmithBattle, 2000, p. 29). Luker (1997) writes that in the ‘eighteenth century the economic burden imposed by dependent and fatherless children became an even greater concern than the immorality of extramarital sex’ (p. 19). The economics of teenage pregnancy and childbearing have become such a part of collective thinking that they often go unchallenged when spoken of in the media, or in policy documents, or indeed in casual conversation at workplaces around the water cooler. Although the problem might have a different flavour, there is still a notion that single motherhood is a “problem” that needs a “solution”. Murray’s (1996) solutions of ending welfare support to single mothers and re-instituting the stigma attached to unwed motherhood in order to discourage more young people from becoming parents are just two examples of the solutions that have been suggested in recent years. Providing mutual obligation frameworks, to encourage single mothers into the labour market, is another example (Maley & Saunders, 2004), although Yeatman (2000) claims that in the ‘case of women who still provide most of the primary parenting in our society their capacities to be economically independent during the time they are immersed in parenting may be compromised’ (p. 2) if they’re forced into the workforce. Butterworth (2003) notes that while improved employment participation is beneficial in overcoming barriers to employment, ‘it is also critical that appropriate support and services are available for those who require assistance’ (p. 29).

SO WHO’S GOING TO PAY?

When thinking about single parenting, and more specifically teenage pregnancy, many politicians, social commentators and members of the public focus on who will be financially responsible for the child (Moss, 1991; Butterworth, 2003; Maley & Saunders, 2004). The Supporting Mothers



Pension, which had been made available to single mothers for the first time in Australia in 1975, raised all kinds of concerns within a community which was wary of being faced with an increasing taxation burden (Swain & Howe, 1995).

Centrelink, the Australian Government's welfare agency, regularly targets "welfare cheats", asking members of the public to report instances where people are abusing the system. More single mothers are reported than any other group of welfare recipients, however there are very few convictions (Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, 1998). Thus community censure is high: single mothers 'are the most resented of social security recipients' (Swain & Howe, 1995, p. 207). Myths about single mothers and their determination to live "off the government" abound (Milne-Home, Power & Dennis, 1996). Some of these myths were discussed in a 1993 article in the *Age* newspaper, where journalist Adele Horin quoted the then Social Security Minister's aide as saying, 'every time we kick a single parent we get another vote' (7th March, 1993). The Hon. Jocelyn Newman, one-time Minister for Family and Community Services, released a publication in 1998 called *Some Common Questions about Lone Parents Answered*. This publication was released in an effort to help redress the 'many false impressions in the Australian community about lone parents and the level of assistance they receive from the Government' (Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, 1998, title page). One of these "false impressions" is that making welfare support available to teenagers increases the likelihood of them becoming mothers. The figures from 1998 show that 'less than three per cent [of payments] were to teenagers' (Newman, 1998, p. 4). The report goes on to note that 'the teenage birth rate from the late 1980s into the 1990s is as low as it has ever been since ABS records began in 1921' (Newman, p. 4).



COSTS OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY

One way teenage pregnancy has been viewed through an economic lens is through examining the cost to society (more often the tax payer) of teenage pregnancy (see Maynard, 1996). Another way is to view the economic impact on the teenage mother of her pregnancy and subsequent child rearing. The cost to the community often occurs in terms of the provision of health services. Records (1993) argues that 'the less-than-healthy outcomes [of teenage child bearing] create ... financial burdens for families and institutions alike' (p. 325). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (cited in a fact sheet from the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, 2000) goes even further when they report that 'teenage pregnancy poses a substantial financial burden to society, estimated at \$7 billion annually in lost tax revenues, public assistance, child health care, foster care, and involvement with the criminal justice system' (www.plannedparenthood.org). Looking at the issue from a slightly different perspective is the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy's [NCPTP] report of February 2002 *Not just another single issue: Teen pregnancy prevention's link to other critical social issues*. NCPTP claim that 'virtually all the increase in child poverty between 1980 and 1996 was related to the increase in nonmarital childbearing, and half of never-married mothers begin their childbearing as teens' (www.teenpregnancy.org, p. 4).

THE CHILDREN OF TEENAGE MOTHERS

The issues surrounding teenage mothers aren't only related to the associated costs but also to the children of teenage mothers. Luker (1996) raises questions about the how the mother's decision might impinge on the child's future. She asks:

Have doors already been closed to [the child] because his mother is a teenager and has not married his father? Has the inevitable sequence of



life events - premature birth, impaired health, failure at school, poverty, perhaps even a tendency to violent behaviour - been set in motion for [the child] by his mother's behaviour? (1996, p. 3).

Similarly, in her study *Young Mothers?*, Ann Phoenix (1991) raises the issue of the "at risk" nature of the children of young mothers:

... the unquestioning way in which it is taken for granted that the children born to teenage mothers are 'at risk' is aptly illustrated by an incidental statement included in a recent *Guardian* book review:

Still, in his horrible way, Hitler was pointing to a problem that is constant and, in today's 'underclass', very serious. How do you stop single teenage mothers from breeding up tomorrow's football hooligans? (Stone, 1989) (cited in Phoenix, 1991, p. 1)

The "breeding up" of future delinquents was also part of Lloyd and O'Regan's (2000) findings on school-age mothers. They claim that teenage mothers are 'doubly dangerous to society both because of their own apparent lack of morality and welfare dependency and because of their responsibility for producing the male, delinquent youth of the future' (Lloyd & O'Regan, p. 45).

The South Australian's Department of Health and Human Services report on teenage pregnancy claims that 'having an adolescent mother has been linked to lower IQ, more physical health problems in later childhood, lower motor and mental development scores and a higher likelihood of being a victim of child abuse' (2001, p. 29). It does however point to the potentially sensitive nature of linking a higher risk of child abuse to teenage motherhood. The risks, it seems, aren't contained to physical harm. Buchholz and Kom-Bursztyn (1993) found that in 'addition to being less verbal and didactic, young mothers ... spoke in less positive ways to their infants ... [and] they were unlikely to provide as cognitively rich and stimulating an environment for their babies as were older mothers' (p. 368). According to Buchholz and



Korn-Busztyn their findings however, again pointed to the likelihood of other factors, not only age-related ones, to the higher incidence of risk among children of young mothers. Despite such research findings and the glut of arguments which suggest that early motherhood is detrimental to the mother and her child the 'negative construction of motherhood in the teenage years ... is a pervasive one' (Phoenix, 1991a, p. 89). Hudson and Ineichen (1991) refer to such claims as assumptions: 'it is widely assumed that early pregnancy and parenthood mean for the parents blighted lives which fail to achieve their full potential, and for the children a disadvantaged start' (p. 2). Given the gloomy view of many within society and governments it is perhaps surprising that substantial numbers of teenagers have children out of wedlock. When viewed through the "wrong-girl" frame (Kelly, 2000) and using the 'language of "choice-making"' (Luttrell, 2003, p. 29) a teenager's decision is seen as either "right" or "wrong", as "good" or "bad". Luker (1996) notes that the view of young mother as incapable of making the "right" or "moral" decision means that they:

... often find themselves the targets of those who would make choices for them. The problem is that Americans have a rather mixed history of doing bad things to young or otherwise vulnerable people "for their own good", of confusing an unwillingness to make the "right" choice with an incapacity to do so (p. 4).

This view of the young mother as incapable of making the "right" decision, when viewed through the "wrong-girl" discursive frame means that for many teenage mothers the answer she provides to the question of why she became pregnant in the first place will allow no adequate response (Luttrell, 2003).

WHY WOULD A GIRL DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

In discussing the "deviance theory" into which much thinking on teenage pregnancy and parenting fits, Luttrell (2003) acknowledges that the question: 'Why would good girls do a wrong thing like that?' (p. 5) is one often asked



by members of the public, media and social commentators and politicians. Some may say that if we knew why teenage girls become pregnant we could put strategies in place to stop it happening, but Luttrell contends that there are as many answers as there are teenage mothers. In Tasmania, a Teen Pregnancy Alliance was formed in 2003 to combat the high rate of teenage pregnancy and parenting, and it is at this point where the group started in their exploration of the “problem” (J. Coombs, personal communication, August 18, 2004). The alliance sought to investigate the decision making process of the teenager (and pre-teen) in an effort to identify why a teenage girl would choose to become pregnant. As Luttrell (2003) argues, (and it certainly seems to be the case in the current Tasmanian context) the ‘underlying premise is that “normal” girls wait until they are older, financially secure, and preferably, married to have babies. And, those girls who do get pregnant as teenagers are not just “different” but “wrong” in one way or another’ (p. 5). It appears that no matter which “lens” is used to view teenage pregnancy and child rearing, to many it is as US President Bill Clinton said: ‘just plain wrong’ (cited in Luttrell, p. 3).

Because it is considered wrong and because it’s not something “normal” girls do, reasons have to be found to explain the phenomenon. Luttrell (2003) suggests that the ‘favoured way of answering this question [of why a teenager gets pregnant] is to find a psychological trait ... or a social attitude ... that differentiates girls who get pregnant with those who do not’ (p. 5). Neville (n.d.) is one of those who finds it necessary to attribute a “psychological trait” to the question of why a teenager would become pregnant. She claims that the failure of sex education and contraceptive use ‘shows that we are not dealing with the mere mechanics of anatomy and physiology but with a more complex psychological situation’, one related to ‘psychological immaturity [including] their restricted decision making capacity’ (Neville, para. 4-5). The implication is that beyond the sole application of “safe sex” education and contraceptive principles, a therapeutic psychological awareness and intervention is needed.



Others have not only attributed psychological reasons and social attitudes to the question of why a teenage girl falls pregnant but have drawn up extensive lists outlining those reasons. A list of reasons for why teenage girls become pregnant, was developed for students at a public senior secondary college in Tasmania and published on their website. The list highlights the vast array of “reasons” why unplanned pregnancies happen and provides a stark example of the dominant discourse of the “wrong-girl” played out in an educational setting. Some of the reasons given are: Inadequate knowledge about sexuality; ineffective contraceptive methods (withdrawal, “safe” times); “it won’t happen to me” – perceived invulnerability; and a fatalistic attitude – “what happens, happens”. In addition, a lack of confidence in dealing with contraception; attitudes to contraception: it is too “messy”, and interferes with enjoyment; and the views that sex should be spontaneous, romantic, unpremeditated are listed amongst the reasons. Moreover, embarrassment or reluctance to talk about sexuality, the sporadic nature of sexual activity and the magic of a new relationship were listed, along with forced sex and child sexual assault, a fear of discovery by parents, the view that “nice” girls don’t plan to have sex, and the need to be loved overriding the need to care for oneself (<http://studentweb.eliz.tased.edu.au>).

Such disparate explanations might serve to burden the pregnant teen with images of herself as not a “nice” girl (“nice girls don’t plan to have sex”) or needy in some way (“the need to be loved overrides the need to care for oneself”). Neville (n.d.) adds to these factors a range of ‘unconscious factors [which underlie] crisis pregnancy’; which include ‘depression, replacing a loss, deprivation and hostility in childhood, uncertain femininity, self-punishment’ (para. 1). It is notable that these reasons are attributed to pregnant teenagers, rather than to teenagers engaging in sexual activity, or to pregnant women. It is very firmly part of the “wrong-girl” frame described more fully by Kelly (2000) and Luttrell (2003). Luttrell makes the point ‘that the “wrong-girl” discourse directs our understanding of these [psychological or relational] conflicts, not as part of a complex constellation of emotions



experienced by an individual, but as the *source* of a girl's problem' (p. 27, emphasis in original).

OBSTETRIC OUTCOMES

The issue of age in conjunction with the "wrong-girl" discursive frame is seen as problematic in yet another light: poor obstetric and other health outcomes for teenage mothers and their children. Loto, Ezechi, Kalu, Loto, Ezechi & Ogunniyi (2004), while not questioning these poor outcomes found that they are 'related to non-utilisation of prenatal care rather than their biological age' (p. 395). Buchholz and Korn-Bursztyn (1993) similarly claim that while 'teenage mothers are often considered an obstetric risk ... it is widely believed that adequate prenatal care minimises these complications' (p. 369). Let's examine those poor outcomes. Skinner and Hickey (2003) describe teen births in Australia as carrying a 'higher risk of medical complications, including prematurity, low birthweight, the need for neonatal intensive care, and neonatal death' (p. 159). The Academy of Pediatrics (2001a) add 'poor maternal weight gain, anemia, and pregnancy-induced hypertension' (p. 429) to the list of medical complications facing teenage mothers. In a student fact sheet on teenage pregnancy Women's Health Queensland report that 'teenagers as a group have significantly higher complication rates both during pregnancy and delivery ... associated with poor antenatal care, smoking and inadequate diet'

(www.womhealth.org.au/studentfactsheet/teenpregnancy.htm).

The links between age, socioeconomic conditions and obstetric outcomes are contentious. In a review of the literature surrounding teenage pregnancy the South Australian Department of Health and Human Services (Slowinski & Hume, 2001) cited research on the health risks of both young mothers and their children which 'confirmed the potential for poorer health outcomes' listing the outcomes mentioned previously, but then going on to claim that these outcomes were 'mostly caused by the social, economic and behavioural



factors that predispose some young women to pregnancy' (p. 26). The American Academy of Pediatrics (1998) places the emphasis slightly differently: 'many social factors have been associated with poor birth outcomes, including poverty, unmarried status, low educational levels, drug use, and inadequate prenatal care. A combination of biological and social factors may contribute to poor outcomes in adolescents' (p. 518). Lawlor and Shaw (2002) cite 'larger studies and those employing methods specifically designed to adequately control for confounding factors ... [which] suggest that young age is *not* an important determinant of pregnancy outcome or of the future health of the mother' (p. 552, emphasis in original). No matter whether age or social factors are the cause of health concerns for teenage mothers the Blair Report found that 'age at first birth and poverty were mutually reinforcing. The worst outcomes were experienced by those who were poor *and* gave birth as a teenager' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999, p. 26, emphasis in original).

* * * * *

MOTHERHOOD

Although motherhood is highly valued in our society, there is a prescribed framework for its value; motherhood outside that framework has negative associations and can be seen as deviant. The marital status of a mother has become less a source of stigma but the age of a mother is seen as significant, not just in terms of individually deviant behaviour but as a source of social pollution (Schofield, 1994, p. xii).

When discussing teenage motherhood it is more usual to concentrate on the *age* of the young mother and the attendant issues (such as welfare, education and health risks) but in the process almost totally ignore her experience as a mother. As being a mother goes towards (partly) defining that person I see an



examination of the relevant literature important to the overall discussion of teenage mothers. Schofield (1994) claims that the link between motherhood and maturity is a fundamental issue and asks: 'is becoming a mother evidence of having previously become a mature adult or is the process of becoming a mother in itself a maturing process?' (p. 31). Schofield concludes that 'motherhood has a very comprehensive impact on a woman by confirming her adult female identity' (p. 32). It is a point with which Arendell (1999) agrees: 'mothering and gender in the West are deeply constitutive of each other [and is] a primary identity for adult women ... women's gender identity is reinforced by mothering' (p. 4). It is clear that for many people womanhood and motherhood 'are treated as synonymous identities and categories' (Arendell, p. 4) a claim that comes from the observation that 'it is women who do nearly all mothering work' (Arendell, p. 3). Another issue, subsequent to that of adult identity, is the "sacrificial" nature of modern motherhood (Rothman, 1991; Brown, Lumley, Small & Astbury, 1994). For many women the lack of fit between the reality of mothering and the "idealised expectation" of motherhood often cause stress (Schofield, p. 32). These aspects of motherhood will be discussed in the following section. Giving consideration to the prevailing images of young mothers in our society is important in order to place young mothers in their social and psychological context. This is because of the role motherhood plays in the 'imagination and sense of identity of young mothers and also the role these images play in determining how families, schools, or even people at the bus-stop react to the idea of a fifteen year old mother' (Schofield, p. 31).

Despite the long tradition of thinking about mothering that has shaped many women's ideas of what it means to be a mother, indeed, what it means to be a woman, Chodorow (2000) acknowledges the important place of the father in the parenting of the child but argues that 'we need to recognised that fathers are not mothers' (p. 3). Chodorow notes that the changes to the family, "rightly" advocated by the second-wave feminist movement, loosened 'women's maternal identity' (p. 1) but warned that in so doing 'we have



neglected to recognise mothers as themselves, as mothers' (p. 3). According to Chodorow the benefit of providing a "facilitating environment" in which to mother isn't just for the child, but extends to the mother as well. It is this environment, and this perceived "deeply felt" need to mother, that in the case of teenagers is often denied them. The discussion of motherhood in this sense, then, is limited to older mothers. It casts into an "other" space the teenage mother (Luttrell, 2003).

It is hardly surprising to note that the vast majority of writing on motherhood is by women, and even less surprising perhaps that much of the discussion on motherhood centres on women. Susan Maushart (1997) argues that this is the case because 'men do not experience it' (p. 40). She continues:

male researchers have not perceived motherhood as a 'primary experience' for the simple reason that men do not mother. Men get mothered. Consequently, motherhood has usually been examined as something that *happens to* people, and almost never as something that people *do* (p. 42).

This has implications for policy makers when considering the mutual obligation of single mothers receiving welfare payments. If mothering is seen as something that "happens to" people rather than as something "people do" then the "work" aspect of mothering is denied, meaning that out-of-home employment is deemed much more important. Yeatman (2000) claims that for women receiving government benefits it is 'no longer acceptable for [them] to discharge their social contribution through primary parenting' (p. 10), a situation she calls "discriminatory" and "prejudicial".

Over the past two centuries Western society has seen the rise of the "good mother" which has allowed "mother" and "woman" to become almost synonymous. Boulden (2001) notes the desire of young mothers to be "good mums" but that the:



... ideals of “good” parenting promoted by the media, replete with an abundance of material possessions, endless patience, and romantic notions of maternal love and satisfaction come into conflict with the reality of poverty, anxiety, isolation and despair about the future (p. 13).

Sharon Hays (cited in Kelly, 2000) calls these the “cultural contradictions of motherhood”:

In a society where over half of all mothers with young children are now working outside the home, one might well wonder why our culture pressures women to dedicate so much of themselves to child rearing. And in a society where the logic of self-interested gain seems to guide behaviour in so many spheres of life, one might further wonder why a logic of unselfish nurturing guides the behaviour of mothers (p. 40).

Badinter (1980), writing of the myth of the maternal instinct, examined the rise of the ideal mother from the eighteenth century, an image which would have a ‘tenacious hold’ (Luttrell, 2003, p. 95) for the next two centuries. It was a time in which the ‘child would become the centre of the mother’s attention [and where] the woman would agree to sacrifice herself so that her little one could live, and live better, at her side’ (Badinter, p. 169). This view of mothering was a clear departure from the distant mother-child relationship of generations before and much was made of the bond between mother and child: ‘not to love one’s child had become an inexplicable crime. A mother was loving – or she was not a real mother’ (Badinter, p. 178). Feminist critics have called this the “myth of maternal omnipotence”, a myth, according to Luttrell (2003), which has to do with a ‘false perception of mothers, a view that the sole reason for a mother’s existence is to gratify her children’s wants and needs *and* that she has the power to do so’ (p. 95). Luttrell posits three reasons why this is problematic:



Firstly, it sets up social expectations about maternal practices, that mothers have “natural” instincts or propensities for caregiving and self-sacrifice. Second, it ignores the extent to which social forces and the environment shape the conditions under which children are raised and develop. And third, it masks a mother’s own subjectivity, her distinct range of feelings, motivations, needs and wants as a person. The myth of maternal omnipotence holds up a standard for mothering and maternal-child bonds that is impossible to achieve (p. 95).

It is this myth of maternal omnipotence, which is difficult for older women to navigate, that young mothers feel the need to fit (Boulden, 2001). The traditional way of thinking about mothering, the role of the mother and the self-sacrificing nature of motherhood are deeply ingrained in current thinking (Young, 2000). The “new” awareness that developed in the eighteenth century - that the mother was in the best possible position to take on the tasks of raising a ‘good Christian and a good citizen, a person who would benefit himself and society’ (Badinter, 1980, p. 205) - was demonstration enough that it was in her “nature” to fulfil these duties. Probert (2001) claims that the “classic sacrificial discourse” of the 1950s is being revisited into the new millennium, a discourse that is not ‘respectful of difference or choice’ (p. 15). It seems then that the place of the mother in our society is still not settled, and it is into this unsettled context that teenage mothers must fit. One area in which this is worked out in our society is that of mothers increasingly being denied the “choice” to either stay at home or engage in paid employment.

Julie Stephens (2000), responding to articles and letters to the editor in the *Age* newspaper sparked by Michael Leunig’s comments on motherhood and mothering, distilled the arguments raised for one side or the other of the stay-at-home vs working mother debate into a definition of motherhood as ‘either “pleasurable” or as a form of enslavement’ (p. 35). Kitzinger (1978) claimed that childbearing is seen ‘as an interruption of [women’s] real lives’ and that



children are viewed as 'a temporary constriction preventing desired experiences' (p. 22), a view also expressed by Bolen: 'in our society, childbearing and child care hinders participation within wider society' (p. 49). Many of these desired experiences which childbearing hinders derive from the world of work. Stephens argues that the notion of 'motherhood as loss or threat permeates much contemporary discussion' (p. 35) and goes on to suggest that 'the logic of the market has penetrated our ideas of motherhood' (p. 35). For many women, their identity is gained from the work they do outside the home and has become reliant on 'market ideologies of work' (Stephens, p. 35).

The debate continues to rage between "stay at home mothers" and "working mothers" and it's still usually presented as a dichotomy (Young, 2000). Feminists and conservatives alike have highly polarised positions with feminists variously depicting working mothers (by which they mean mothers who are engaged in employment outside the home) as 'heroines or as victims' (Young, p. 3). Similarly, conservatives 'go back and forth between depicting them as victims forced into the labour force by feminist bullying and high taxes, and as villains who put their personal fulfilment above their children's well-being' (Young, p. 3). The polarisation of the debate in these terms harks back to the image of the "ideal mother" which arose in the eighteenth century.

Probert (2001) argues that the 'progress towards gender equality has stalled' (p. 1) and quoted Australian statistician and family researcher Peter McDonald regarding young people in their 20s learning about the labour market first hand: 'they experience a system that does not value or reward those who have children. Indeed it very obviously penalises those who have children, particularly women' (cited in Probert, p. 2). Stephens (2000) poses the question: 'how can anti-family work practices ever be challenged if work continues to be understood as the source of all meaning, fulfilment and control?' (p. 35) while Kitzinger (1978) declares that being a mother is an exciting occupation, that a woman needn't feel as if she can't have another



career as well, but 'it is a pity that she should feel she ought to because she is 'only a mother' (p. 230).

Given the literature surrounding young mothers often suggests that their lives are diminished, the outcomes for their children are limited, they raise "football hooligans" and "delinquents", and they cost the taxpayer large sums of money such choices may not be available for the future. Yet the dominant views of motherhood –being an "ideal mother" and sacrificing herself for her children remain. It is a conflicted space indeed.

BECOMING A MOTHER – GIVING BIRTH

With the increase in reproductive technology and the ethical and legal barriers to surrogacy being chipped away, more and more ways of becoming a mother are available. Along with the traditional ways of becoming a mother (giving birth, or adopting a child) we now see the "genetic mother" who donates her ova and who may or may not give birth to the child and the surrogate mother, who either provides the ova to be fertilised (Schwartz, 1991) or who rents her womb (Rothman, 1988). Despite the propensity for reproductive technology to "commodify" motherhood (Rothman, 1991) and the hijacking of motherhood 'by medical science and technological innovations' (Keary, 2000, p. 13) the experience for many women who choose to mother starts with the birth. It is easy for those who haven't experienced giving birth (and that includes men as well as women), or for those whose experience was some years ago, to forget or not grasp the immensity of that experience (Schofield, 1994). Sara Ruddick (1991) confesses that she 'failed to read the facts of birth and so got [birthgivers'] experience quite wrong' (p. 37). When we don't allow, as Ruddick didn't, for the experience of giving birth we risk denying a fundamental part of a birthgiver's experience. Ruddick finds that it is 'simply impossible to comprehend mothering in the world ... without acknowledging the ubiquitous and tenacious connections among being female, giving birth, and mothering' (p. 37). She goes on to claim that 'birthgiving



women ... suffer when, in a defensive reaction, they or other people minimize the complexity and activity of birthgiving or fail to acknowledge the dependence of children and mothers upon the birthgiver's successful execution of her work' (Ruddick, p. 37). Schofield (1994) claims that 'young women who become pregnant while at school are not only discriminated against by virtue of their age, their sex and their pregnancy, but their accounts of their own experiences are too often discredited' (p. 132). The support of an educational institution around the time of a mother giving birth can be a crucial factor in when, or if, she returns to education. Kitzinger (1978) claims that contemporary attitudes to childbirth, which removes it from "normal life process" turns it instead 'into a clinical condition, a pathological event, like an appendectomy or having an impacted wisdom tooth' (p. 18). One consequence of this, of course, is that there is a belief that the new mother will return to work, or education, as soon as the "condition" is dealt with. The *experience* of mothers is that raising a child is not a "condition" that can be "fixed" or operated on so that she can resume her "normal" life. The way this plays out in the lives of the young mothers in this study will be explored in Chapter Four.

SUMMARY

In this literature review I have sought to examine the most pertinent literature surrounding teenage mothers within the dominant framework of the "wrong-girl" discourse (Kelly, 2000). I have discussed how the young mother has been objectified as problem, and examined the social context in which she lives. I have also briefly considered issues linked to motherhood and education – as her roles as mother and student help define her (at least for the purposes of this study). In the following chapter the research process will be described.



As mentioned in Chapter One, there is a silence in the literature: the voices of young mothers are often not heard. The “gap” therefore that this study seeks to fill is through addressing the need, identified by Probert and McDonald (1998), to recognise the realities of young mothers’ lives, especially those mothers who combine education and family, through hearing their voices tell of their experiences. There is then the possibility to legitimise the voice of the young mother so that her life can be viewed more positively as “mother”, rather than viewed negatively as “young” mother. In seeing lives from this unique perspective more may be done by school systems to meet the educational needs of those who combine those realities.



Three: The Research Process

**Researching lives is always a delicate affair,
often highly intrusive ...**

(Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. viii)

This chapter opens with a description of the way various researchers have influenced how this study was conceived and undertaken. I have borrowed from a range of research processes, and a number of researchers in the fields of narrative and life history research have been influential in shaping my understanding of not only this study, but the process of research as a whole. In the data collection phase I tended to borrow most heavily from a narrative life history approach, in that I conducted interviews over a period of time with participants, as well as spent time with them more informally, forming close relationships with them and, in some cases, with their children. I asked for their life stories in conversational, though guided, interviews, often opening with “tell me about ...”. The participants responded by recounting their experiences, attitudes, beliefs and life events which, in some instances, they had not previously shared with others. In the re-presentation of the data I departed from the narrative turn, insofar as I didn’t feel comfortable constructing “stories” about the participants of the study. I am not a published author, nor a “creative” writer, plus it seemed that story writing could be a “writing about” process which is what I wanted to avoid, and as my intention has been to allow the voices of the mothers to be heard, I have presented the data almost in its raw form. Here my major influence has been Patti Lather (1997), and to a lesser extent the notion of portraiture detailed by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Davis (1997). I discuss this style of re-presentation in more detail later in the chapter. I also outline the issues with which I dealt in developing this study and tell of the dead ends and diversions



I encountered along the way, as a means of illustrating the research journey and why some paths were taken, while others were abandoned.

RESEARCH INFLUENCES

The researchers who influenced this study include: Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) who write about life history and narrative; Ellis and Bochner (1996; 2002) who provide alternate ways of writing ethnography and autoethnography; Tierney and Lincoln (1997) who encourage us to “reframe the narrative voice”; Eisner (1998) on seeing, rather than looking, as an artist might; Clandinin and Connelly (2000) on narrative inquiry; Denzin and Lincoln (2000) who provide a multitude of voices on conducting studies, on interpreting them, on writing them up; Cole and Knowles (2001) who stress the importance of contextualising the life being studied, and to all the authors contained in those publications (such as Polkinghorne, and Laurel Richardson, and Susan Chase). Of course the history of qualitative research goes back much further than the citing of these authors suggests, but these contemporary researchers bring the new tensions and concerns within qualitative research to our attention. For many it has been their life’s work – they have come to their understandings slowly, working through the issues carefully, discussing them with like-minded people, defending their methods to those who are not like-minded, and they have fought many battles. That’s not to say that those opposed to this type of research are always convinced (or always wrong), but the body of knowledge on qualitative research, on ethnography, autoethnography, life history, narrative, and of the blurring of genres is readily available, already well-buttressed, well-defended. While it is not the task of this report to defend the research field, it is important for me to outline the particular ways my research journey has been shaped by researchers in the field.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) acknowledge the resistance to qualitative research, but then summarise their arguments by claiming that:



Qualitative research is many things to many people. Its essence is twofold: a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of postpositivism (p. 8).

Polkinghorne (1997) claims that 'the acceptance of qualitative methods into the mainstream allows for encouragement that a change in the research report format is possible' (p. 4). Tedlock (2000), specifically discussing ethnography as part of the qualitative mix, has claimed that while ethnography has long been 'enshrined as a theoretical orientation and philosophical paradigm within anthropology' it has more recently been adopted:

... as a useful methodology in cultural studies, literary theory, folklore, women's studies, nursing, law, planning and even industrial engineering. Wherever this has happened, a key assumption has been that by entering into firsthand interaction with people in their everyday lives, ethnographers can reach a better understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviours of their subjects than they can by using any other method (p. 470).

Researchers, such as Carolyn Ellis, 'began to advocate research and scholarly writing as ... being emotionally involved with what we study; showing details instead of telling abstractly; and, evoking readers' experiences and feelings in addition to analytic closure as a proper goal of research' (1997, p. 128). Ellis 'came to feel that while personal narratives should be based on facts, they cannot be completely determined by them' (p. 129) and felt that in 'telling our stories [we] might encourage others to speak their silence as well' (p. 134).

Researchers like Denzin (1997) have also been influential in the way I have approached this research process, and, just as importantly, influenced my thinking about new ways of writing, which:

...undid old dichotomies such as fact and fiction ... and journalism and ethnography. It is doubtful that we can go back to the age



where such easy dichotomies so automatically operated. [T]he storytelling framework ... emphasises conversation, hearing, and listening as the chief participatory modes of knowing and learning about the world. In this view, public opinion is formed through discussion, conversation, and storytelling (p. 157).

There are other considerations, of course, when deciding how to write a text, considerations that go beyond the sometimes “dry” voice of the academic who strives for neutrality and objective distance. Tierney claims that:

If we are to believe the vast majority of life histories that exist, those individuals whose lives have been reported are among the most grammatically correct and logical speakers we know; they speak in complete sentences and they develop ideas in chronological sequence. Academic rules help to shape life stories to such an extent that narrative texts cannot be seen as other than cocreated (2000, p. 544).

Thus, I learn from researchers who have spent time working through some of the issues I’m grappling with, which means I have the benefit of the thoroughness of their thinking. I feel fortunate that I’ve come to my project at a time when many of the issues have been articulated by others, worked through as it were, by not only thinking about the research process, but by being engaged in it. When I read Cole and Knowles (2001) I am encouraged, because of the clear articulation of the processes they’ve been through in order to come to a conceptualisation of life history research, that my research has a place in the research world, and that others – well-respected researchers – have come to their understanding slowly and with great care. For me it means I can rely on their thoughtful deliberations, instead of having to re-do all that work on my own. I feel part of a community of researchers, learning from those who have “been there, done that”. For instance, Cole and Knowles state that:



To remove oneself from the messiness and complexities of lives is to become devoid of the erotica of life. We have puzzled about this. We want to shout from the rooftops encouragement for life history researchers to articulate clearly, within the definitions of their work, their humanness – the fundamental assumptions, experiences, and passions behind their inquiries – as an authentic way to engage in and represent the complexities of their findings. To do this is to honour oneself, those who are the focus of inquiries, and the journey or journeys taken. Such a position will not only engage the readers (or viewers), but will also make clear the foundational underpinnings of the research (p. 48).

The problem for me, is that I read about this world of “new writing”, of what Denzin (1997) calls “messy” texts, of the cocreation of texts, as Tierney (2000) describes it, and question how far I can go because I am writing a doctoral dissertation. I feel that I am tip-toeing over the edge, afraid to plunge headlong, and so while I take certain risks, they’re cautious ones. I feel that there is enough legitimacy in the processes described above, the ways of not only conducting the research, but writing it up, for me to share in the “new” writing, in the creation of a multivoiced text that seeks to not only legitimise the voices of young mothers, but seeks to legitimise my own within the research (academic) world.

Throughout the rest of this chapter I describe the way I conducted the research project, the concerns with which I dealt, and detail more closely the framework within which the research was conducted. It must be understood that writing it up in this manner presupposes that there was a well-thought out procedure, which always went according to plan. This, obviously, was not always the case.

Cole and Knowles (2001) assert that ‘there is no protocol, no neatly defined way of proceeding, no template, no cookbook for sound, innovative life



history research' (p. 71). They do say, however, that 'the development of a sound life history research project is likely to arise from a combination of intentional, rational, and intuitive thinking and action coupled with unplanned, fortuitous experiences such as those that are serendipitous' (Cole & Knowles, p. 57). This can be both comforting and unsettling at the beginning of such a project – comforting because when things aren't going according to plan there is the sense that there can be another way forward, but unsettling in terms of not necessarily having a plan that works the way you expect. At the end of the research process it is easy to think back on the process as something neat and consolidated, which belies the false starts, the dead ends, the stepping into unknown territory and being frightened of what might be faced, that actually took place. In my own research journey there were moments of despair, of being faced with challenges I wasn't sure how to tackle, and loads of uncertainty, that isn't reflected in the following account. If I could write the actual journey of my research process, rather than the clinical version, I feel that I would give a more honest account of what has transpired over the preceding four years, but it would be messy, full of contradictions, of not knowing, of feeling lost. There were, of course, a few "a-ha" moments thrown in. It is the "a-ha" moments that kept me moving forward.

Polkinghorne (1997) claims that when the presentation of research is broken down into a 'logically ordered justification of results [it] disregards the processes of discovery and decision that are essential to the actual production of the research' (p. 4). Throughout this chapter I do not want to disregard the process of discovery inherent in the research project, for it is the process that enabled the project to be formed and reformed, and which became essential in framing the study in its present form. This doctoral dissertation began with my own story, so it is to autoethnography that I turn first when outlining the specific approaches taken to this study.



AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography has been described by Cole and Knowles (2001) as placing 'the self within a sociocultural context ... [using] the self as a starting or vantage point from which to explore broader sociocultural elements, issues, or constructs' (p. 16). Speaking of the "hostile atmosphere" surrounding those who work in the area of autoethnography Sparkes (2002) contends that there is a 'universal charge of self-indulgence' levelled against autoethnographers but stresses that 'writers of autoethnographies and narratives of the self need to be aware that their writing *can* become self-indulgent rather than self-knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing, or self-luminous' (p. 214).

As the starting point for this study was my own story I was aware of the label often attached to studies of this nature: that of self-indulgence. On the other hand I did not want to be seen as an impartial observer in the lives of the young mothers. I was sensitive to the differences between the young mothers' experiences and my own, but I have also acknowledged my own feelings, views, attitudes, and interests that helped guide both the direction of the study and its form. Luttrell (2003), in her work on teenage mothers, acknowledges the 'growing interest in more closely examining the emotions of the researcher' (p. 161) but notes that 'to speak of the "observer's" own emotions and feelings and how these connect up (or don't connect up) with the "observed" is still highly suspect, whether one is concerned about science or authorship' (p. 161).

Cole and Knowles (2001) state that we:

... research who we are. We express and represent elements of ourselves in every research situation. The questions we ask, the observations we make, the emotions we feel, the impressions we form, and the hunches we follow all reflect some part of who we are as person and researcher (p. 89).



In placing my own story at the beginning of this doctoral dissertation I have acknowledged the elements of myself that have impacted on this study.

NARRATIVE AND LIFE HISTORY RESEARCH

If narrative, as Polkinghorne (1997) asserts, is the 'most appropriate for describing human actions' (p. 13), and if 'stories and narrative ... provide meaning and belonging in our lives' (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1) then a research project with a basis in narrative was essential in bringing to light the stories of the lives of young mothers. Life history research has been interpreted in various ways but Cole and Knowles (2001) describe its broad purpose as one of 'gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans' (p. 11). Narrative and life history are obviously closely linked. Plummer (2001) states that life history 'gives prominence to [a] unique story and story line' (p. 132), while Linde (1993) refers to the life story as an expression of our 'sense of self: who we are and how we got that way' (p. 3). Clandinin and Connelly assert that through narrative inquiry 'people are looked at as embodiments of lived stories' (2000, p. 43). It was both of these elements – that of life history and of narrative (with the somewhat overlapping areas of story and allowing for the uniqueness of an individual's experience) – that saw me borrowing heavily from narrative and life history research processes, particularly in the data collection phase of the study. I took heed of Tierney (2000) though, who argues that:

...the simple "naming" of silenced lives is insufficient. ... We ought not fool ourselves into thinking that simply by adding a few voices here and there our work is done if we have proven that omitted characters from official histories have representational value. Life histories are helpful not merely because they add to the mix of what already exists, but because of their ability to refashion identities (p. 546).



SUBJECTIVITY

Just as there are unique features of life history and narrative research processes, there are also distinctions between those processes and other forms of qualitative research. One significant difference identified by narrative and life history researchers is that of subjectivity. Bill Ayers (quoted in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995) sums up this difference, when he claims that:

Life history and narrative approaches are person centred, unapologetically subjective. Far from a weakness, the voice of the person, the subject's own account represents a singular strength. Life history and narrative are ancient approaches to understanding human affairs – they are found in history, folklore, psychiatry, medicine, music, sociology, economics, and of course, anthropology. Their relative newness to us is a reminder of how often we tail behind (p. 118).

In the same vein Emihovich (1995) claims that 'stories do not pretend to be objective because they deal with emotions, the irrational part of behaviour; they tap into qualities of imagination and fantasy' (pp. 39-40). Weil (1996) doesn't specifically address subjectivity, but powerfully acknowledges the need for the "academic writer" to have a presence, not only in the writing, but in the research process. She argues that 'a disembodied academic writer is far more intimidating than a living breathing person who puts herself and the raw material of her own struggles actively into [the] dialogue' (Weil, p. 231). If there is a need for a living breathing person in the writing of the research paper, then there must be a living breathing person involved in the research process in the first place. This limits the possibility of an "objective" account, and, as Cole and Knowles (2001) describe, a 'life history interview is an interaction between the narrator and the listener [where] the subjectivity of the one merges with the subjectivity of the other through the research process' (p. 149). Cole and Knowles further claim that a 'fundamental shift has pushed



researchers away from dichotomies of ... subjectivity-objectivity to an acknowledgement of an intersubjective realm of being and meaning that places [life history researchers] squarely in the research frame' (p. 14). It is important, they claim, for the reader of a research account to know who the researcher is and the vantage point from which she operates. Louden and Wallace (2001) point to the texts produced by 'most university research' as "pretending" that they are not 'shaped by an author's hand'; a pretence, they go to on say, which allows for a 'tale but no teller' (p. 73). It is for reasons such as this, Louden and Wallace conclude, that the 'search for standards in narrative research – like understanding itself – remains, in principle, and irretrievably, incomplete' (p. 76). In this study therefore, there is no claim for objectivity. My story is placed purposefully at the beginning of this doctoral thesis with the view of clearly articulating my vantage point and allowing the reader some insight into my personal history, which has been influential in the way I have conducted this study.

INTERSUBJECTIVITIES

Spender (quoted in Reinharz, 1992), states that 'at the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge' (p. 7). As I dealt with different women, who had differing perspectives on life, there is no notion that I have produced something that seeks to find "one truth". In this way the research process with which I worked aligns with feminist thinking. It does in another way too (if I'm to take Spender's view of feminist thinking as a guide). Spender outlines one important difference between patriarchal knowledge and feminist knowledge: 'feminist knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understandings' (cited in Reinharz, 1992, p. 7). In this regard it was important that I concentrated on exploring the lives of young mothers, as patriarchal knowledge has sought to validate "the experience of only half the human population" and adapt that to the other half (in other words to women). There is no male equivalent of teenage pregnancy and



child bearing, therefore I needed to use a method of research that validates women's experiences and produces knowledge that highlights, rather than hides, the contradictions and differences inherent in the lives of young mothers. Narrative life history research, while not being a uniquely feminist research process, has been influenced by feminist practice.

Of course there are other distinctions, other areas of similarity and difference between life history and narrative research, but it is this notion of life history being a way to examine a life through story that I used as a basis for this research work. Therefore, the analysis process has produced individual portraits telling about individual lives. I have not made an attempt to place the stories together, nor to look for common truths, but have allowed each portrait to stand on its own.

Before I discuss the specific process of this study and the research issues with which I dealt in constructing and undertaking the study, I feel it is important to briefly describe the original intention in studying young mothers and their re-engagement in education, as that story helps make sense of why I eventually conducted the study in the way I did.

LEGITIMATE VOICES: THE STORY OF A DEAD END

The original intention for this study was to explore the motivations behind returning to college of a group of young women who attended the Young Mothers Program at Lansing College (a senior secondary college in Tasmania, the southern most state of Australia). The Young Mothers Program was a program designed to be a "one stop service" for young mothers – where they could access health information along with information about government benefits, child care opportunities, contraception, nutrition, and further study options.

I had wanted to conduct group interviews, to seek out views on a range of issues commonly associated with young motherhood, to attend classes with



young mothers, to see them interacting with their children, their teachers and with their peers. I also wanted to follow up with individual mothers, to ensure that they weren't silenced in the process. I imagined the Young Mothers Program to have a space all its own, with an area for feeding and changing a baby, with toys for toddlers, and a study area set aside for the mothers. I had expected child care to be available so that when the mothers had to attend class they didn't have to go off-campus to access child care. I also expected a common meeting of the mothers in the program as a means of passing on information, of organising a playgroup, or outings, or guest speakers. But the program didn't run as it was originally intended – for a number of reasons: funding, staffing, physical location within the college, child care issues, and a lack of interest by other support and welfare based agencies. The intention was there to cater for the needs of young mothers – but the political and educational will were missing.

As part of the Young Mothers Program the girls did recreational activities: fishing trips were organised, as were walks in the park and swimming. These were activities suggested by the college staff member who acted as co-ordinator of the program and by the college chaplain. The mums also had the opportunity to do woodwork and sewing – to make Christmas and birthday presents for their children. They mostly enjoyed the craft work – but as they couldn't have their children in the wood work room these activities became problematic in light of the lack of on-site child care. They could see less relevance in the fishing and swimming activities – especially as they weren't able to have their children with them in the pool, or at the water's edge. Attendance at these sessions was low; often no one turned up.

The lack of child care became a bigger issue, one that a lot of time had been spent on trying to solve. The mothers' space was moved from one part of the college campus to another in an attempt to meet the requirements of the child care registration board. The college never met those requirements. Changes to staff, and more importantly, changes to senior administration of the college



saw the program receive fewer resources and so the will to keep fighting for child care was lost. With the service run down to this extent it finally collapsed.

When I finally came to the realisation that I couldn't do what I set out to do I began to look elsewhere for study participants. I rang high school and college principals across the state. They reported that they didn't have any pregnant or parenting students at their school, or if they did they didn't want another person coming in and "disrupting their program". I found it amazing that Tasmania has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the country and I couldn't find any – or none whom I was permitted to contact. The principal of the distance education school wasn't prepared to grant me permission to conduct a study in his school. He told me that parents send their pregnant daughters to that school because they wanted to remain private and anonymous. Having me talking about them (*or to them?*) would bring it (*the problem?*) out into the open. He wasn't prepared for that to happen (Principal, personal communication, September, 2001). Other people were making decisions for the young mothers – I wasn't able, in the majority of cases, to get through the wall of adults to find out if the young mothers wanted to participate. I had a meeting with a District Superintendent, who assured me she'd speak to school principals and get back to me about those who expressed interest. I never heard from her.

I drew a number of conclusions:

1. There were no pregnant or parenting students attending Tasmanian schools
2. Principals wanted to safeguard the privacy of those students who were pregnant or parenting
3. Pregnant students left education before announcing their pregnancy so the school had no role to play in the life of the young mother
4. Girls left school early and then became pregnant, so again, didn't show up on the school's radar



5. There was a degree of shame and/or secrecy surrounding teenage pregnancy
6. Young mothers didn't want to share their stories
7. Tasmanian schools weren't catering to the needs of young mothers

This story of the initial difficulties I dealt with in gaining permission to conduct this study in Tasmanian schools highlights some of the attitudes towards teenage mothers and their needs as individuals (not just as mothers) and of making teenage parents (students) visible in Tasmania. Melanie Campbell (1999) had a similar experience in New South Wales:

My first idea was to collect my own data by way of structured interview and questionnaire. I wanted to talk to young mothers, school staff and health workers. Due to the problems associated with gaining both access and ethics approval, however, I decided to focus on the analysis of data collected by other researchers, rather than attempting to collect data myself (<http://alex.edfac.usyd.edu.au> conference paper).

My thinking didn't run to more creative solutions, so I doggedly kept seeking participants in the various Tasmanian school systems.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

I applied for, and was granted, approval to conduct the study by the University of Tasmania's Social Sciences Ethics Committee and by the Tasmanian Department of Education's Ethics Committee (on the proviso that permission be gained from principals before conducting research in schools). An information sheet and a consent form were submitted as part of the application process and were also approved. I subsequently devised an information sheet for my benefit, to enable me to record basic information about each participant. This sheet was given to each participant upon consenting to be part of the study. The sheet asked for a name by which the young mother



wanted to be known, and asked her current age, her age when first pregnant, whether she was pregnant or already a mother, the name and age of her child and with whom she was living. It was on this sheet that I recorded the mother's phone number. The signed consent form and the completed biographical information sheet were collected from each mother before the first interview began and were filed in my office at the university.

My initial criteria for the study participants was that they had to be either pregnant or already a mother, they had to have had a child by the age of twenty and they had to be engaged in education of some kind. The seven participants all met those criteria. Although Robyn and Anne-Marie are older they were pregnant as teenagers. I have included them in the study to provide additional depth in terms of exploring the longer life story of a teenage mother. The haphazard nature of participant selection worked in my favour in the end. It meant I ended up with seven individuals; seven unique young women who weren't part of one particular young mothers group. They came from a range of social backgrounds, and locations around the state.

PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCHING A SINGLE LIFE

Yvonna Lincoln is quoted in the Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) text as describing life history as 'the history of a single life' (p. 115), while Linda Rogers, in the same text, claims that life history is designed to 'explain, describe, or reflect upon a life – making meaning of a person's life' (p. 115). This accords with Cole and Knowles' (2001) view that life history is about 'coming to know how individuals walk, talk, live and work within [a] particular context' (p. 11). As I sought, through guided interview, to uncover stories of young mothers' lives and thereby collect a "great deal of information" (Weiss, 1994) I adopted the "less is more" principle advocated by McCracken (1988) in relation to the number of participants involved in the study. Weiss (1994) notes that the sample size of a study such as this 'is likely to rely on a sample very much smaller than the samples interviewed by



a reasonably ambitious survey study' (p. 3). Cole and Knowles (2001) assert that 'if we accept the subjective and intersubjective nature of human experience and meaning-making ... then concerns about "sample size" and representativeness, purity of "truths" told, and generalizability of research findings to populations of people become nonissues' (p. 65). Thus I feel justified in including only seven participants, although of course this limits the study in terms of it not being a representative sample of teenage mothers in Tasmania. For this type of study however, I do not consider this to be a problem. Plummer (2001) is one of many who claim that qualitative researchers are not so much concerned with representativeness as they are more interested in 'samples that are information rich' (p. 132).

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The selection of study participants ended up happening in a seemingly undisciplined way, but one that was still firmly rooted in the authenticity of the project. Participants came to the study through a combination of self-selection, referral, serendipity and persistence. I had one study participant from the young mothers' group I initially intended studying, who chose to be involved in the study; one other who came to that group after my involvement stopped, but as a referral from the co-ordinator of the program; three were referred to me by co-ordinators running programs in various educational institutions, who had heard an interview I did on radio about the study; one because I persisted with my inquiries on pregnant and parenting students with a senior secondary college in the south of the state and one pregnant student was willing to be involved; and one who, as a mature age student at university, heard about my study and asked if she could participate.

RELATIONSHIPS

In life history and narrative research the relationship between researcher and participant is a "much closer" relationship because of its more personal and



intrusive nature (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). Therefore, there must be an “authentic” relationship between researcher and researched (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Elements of this authenticity, according to Cole and Knowles, are ‘mutuality and common purpose, including trust, respect, acknowledgement of roles, appropriate experience for the task at hand, willingness to reveal, and time and energy to put into the activity’ (p. 69). Plummer (2001) argues that:

... a good relationship between the researcher and the subject is important. Life history research, perhaps more than any other, involves establishing and maintaining a close and intimate relationship with the subject ... where there is an underlying dislike, lack of respect or hostility between the two people, this is hard to do (p. 136).

The notion of relationship established between researcher and participant goes beyond the data collection phase of the inquiry: ‘it is imprinted as well on the final product, the research portrait’ (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 160).

Ellis and Berger (2003) argue that the ‘interactive interview context requires an interviewer who listens empathically ... identifies with participants, and shows respect for participants’ emotionality’ (pp. 469 – 470). This is different from “interviewer self-disclosure”. According to Reinharz and Chase (2003) ‘many feminists choose research topics that are deeply personal [and] some argue [that] interview self-disclosure can put the interviewer at ease, thus helping the participant to tell her story’ (pp. 79 – 80). Reinharz and Chase go on to question though ‘to what extent – and why – that personal connection [should] play a role in the research relationship itself’; and more tellingly ask ‘when does self-disclosure indicate openness to others’ experience ...and when does it indicate that the researcher prefers to speak rather than listen?’ (p. 80). Reinharz and Chase (2003) concede that ‘traditional social science has rendered women invisible’ (p. 73) and this is even more pronounced in the field of teenage mothers. Much is written *about* them; little is written using their insights into their own situations. In this sense I did not want to be



merely a researcher, studying from a distance. I wanted the participants to know there were points of connection between us. How much I disclosed about my own experience depended on the interview context, and on the questions participants felt free to ask. It was my intention that the collecting of data be a “collaborative” process, in which meaning was constructed in an environment where ‘researchers connect their own experiences to those of others and [thus] provide stories that open up conversations about how we live and cope’ (Ellis & Berger, 2003, p. 471). An element of disclosure, or openness, on my part proved necessary. I determined how much self-disclosure was appropriate on the basis of the relationship developed with each participant.

In the majority of cases I sought to establish a relationship with the young mothers from at least one point of connection – I too am a mother. Most of the interviews occurred with the child/baby present and so talking about their stage of development, or engaging with the child allowed for any initial discomfort to subside. Talking about shared experiences (not as in sharing my experiences, but having a knowledge of common experiences – pregnancy related problems, childbirth, difficulties in getting ready for school each day, homework hassles) also put the mother at ease and allowed her to share more readily and more fully. I didn’t want the mothers to feel that they were in a “test” situation having to provide “right” answers.

Over time the relationship I had established with all seven mothers changed (partly because the more we met, the more we got to know each other) and because, as well as interviewing the young mothers, I observed them being mothers, in their own homes, when their children were asleep, hungry, fretful, seeking attention, bored, wanting a playmate and tetchy at the presence of a stranger. I also observed them as a mother – remembering my own interactions with my children when they were small. I found myself longing for that time again. It coloured the questions I asked, the way I asked them, the responses I made. With one mum in particular I found myself responding



to her as a maternal figure. The relationships I therefore developed over time with the participants in this study were far more important than some notion of data bias, or of that relationship “skewing” the data. The “data” were the mothers’ stories, the parts of their lives they felt comfortable sharing with me, and the parts they felt were significant. It was only through a close relationship between me and the young mother that that openness was achieved.

As many of the participants in this study were still in their teenage years, I took note of Eder and Fingerson (2003) who claim that ‘when interviewing children, it is essential that researchers begin by examining the power dynamics between adults and youth’ (p. 34). What this meant for the interview procedure was the setting of a tone that made it ‘clear that all participants ... can effectively raise questions ... and understand that answers are not meant to be conclusive but instead serve to further the agenda for discussion’ (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 19). It was important for me then, to ensure that the participants in my study (those whose voices are re-presented) were aware of this aspect of the interview process; that they had the capacity to ask questions, to share in the “control” of the interview.

TRUST AND MY (PRIVILEGED) POSITION

I came from a privileged position, in relation to the young mothers in this study. I am an older, educated, professional woman; I represented a world that is largely unknown to them. It was not my intention, however, to come from only a position of “power” or “authority”, but more as researcher/mother and grandmother who has a limited understanding of aspects of their lives. I did not want the young mothers to feel that they had to behave or speak in a certain way because “someone from the university” was coming to interview them. It was vitally important that I established rapport and a sense of trust with the young mothers. It is their stories I wished to tell – they had to trust that I would re-present their experiences in a light that was not damaging to who they are or to the integrity of the lives they lead. Miller and Glassner



(1997) outline some of the important elements of building rapport: these are 'establishing trust and familiarity, showing genuine interest, assuring confidentiality and not being judgmental' (p. 106). Based on this premise and my sense of not wanting to come from a position of power, or distance, my intention was to form a closer relationship with the young mothers than critical distance or academic neutrality allow for. I did this in a number of ways, but mostly through being upfront about my attitude toward teenage motherhood, and through sharing a limited amount of my own life story (often in the drawing up of the time line I gave a very potted history of my own time line to use as an example). I also "talked" to the mothers before we launched into the interview, so that they felt I was relating to them as a person, rather than just as a "subject" of research. Being honest and personable stood me in good stead for relatively quickly developing positive relationships with the mothers.

WHO AM I?

When exploring the nature of the relationship I wanted to establish with the young mothers I found a divide in the literature on research methods between those who advocate "distance" (see for example McCracken, 1988), and those who encourage a closer relationship between interviewer and interviewee; who see the interview as a site for the co-construction of knowledge (see for example Oakley, 1981). In Mishler's (1999) work on craft artists he spoke of the "storied" nature of lives and concluded that these stories:

... are produced through our dialogue, co-constructed in the ongoing process of our trying to make sense of each other. An important implication of this orientation is that analysis of life stories must be attentive to the specific contexts within which they are produced, for example, to the interviewer's role in the achievement of a coherent story (p. 15).

Throughout the interviews I was aware of guiding the conversations, but the mothers realised I was there for a purpose and so readily entered into that



aspect of my visit. It was interesting to note that when the interview was over there would often be a change in energy – a feeling of the “performance” being over – and there was often a verbal acknowledgement from the participants of my role in allowing them to tell a story that made sense of their life.

FRAMING THE PARTICIPANTS

One of the biggest complexities I addressed as the study progressed was the multiple subjectivities of the interview participants. Some are adolescents; they are all mothers; most are students. Luttrell (2003) encountered a similar problem in her work: she too ‘wrestled with how best to describe the girls. Whereas I would have referred to them as “young women” they called themselves “girls”’ (p. xiv). I have mostly referred to the young mothers participating in this study as participants, as that removes the “label”, and hence stigma, associated with both single mother and young mother, but where I have used “young mother” it is with a sense of honouring that role. Luttrell (2003) discusses how the labels we attach to certain groups can be ‘bones of contention among people ... nonetheless, these same labels have undeniable force in our lives’ (pp. xiv – xv). My goal, as was Luttrell’s, is to ‘take readers inside one such label – pregnant teenagers – to get up close and examine what it is like to live inside it so that ... personal meanings can be made more clear’ (2003, p. xv).

I did, however, begin with the idea that the participants in my study were “students”, and I ostensibly viewed them that way: that would make my study fit within the area of education, and I am, after all, an educator. I had an agenda. Whether I realised it or not however, and to be quite frank I didn’t realise it until I was deep within my study, I had objectified the young mothers in my study from the outset, when it had been my intention all along to avoid that. They became a commodity; not because I deliberately made them that way, or assigned them to that end, but I saw them through the eyes of an educator, of a researcher. Writing about women’s experiences in this



way, especially experiences which are outside those which 'reflect men's dominant perspectives' (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 11), meant that, initially at least, I ignored the more subjective nature of the study, and, more importantly ignored my own feelings on the matter. Luttrell (2003) describes her own feelings when dealing with the realities of young mothers' lives and I am comforted by her honesty. I was, initially at least, working in conflict with myself: I hadn't wanted to see the participants of my study as objects, but throughout the interviews with them I'd allowed the end point of the interviews, to some extent at least, cloud the way I conducted the interviews. Richardson (cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 2003) claims that 'research interviews ... are usually conducted for research audiences [and] questions and answers are formulated with the analytic interests of researchers in mind' (p. 20). I admit that I did the same: I thought about the outcome of the interviews – how could I use this piece of information? How does this piece of information fit with what I've read so far? I didn't listen enough. And because I viewed, without meaning to, the mothers as students I tended to dismiss what they were all along: mothers. My study wasn't about mothers, it was about students, but then I found myself interviewing mothers, talking about motherhood, responding as a mother. I realised, almost too late, that this study *was* about mothers, not just young mothers as students.

I am not going to pretend that my interactions with these mothers and their children were anything but personal; full of personal meaning ... I did not put on the mantle of all seeing, but untouched, being. That would have denied my humanity. I am in this research project – not merely a spectator of it. I fully intended to commit the sin of being 'too personal' (Behar, 1996, p. 13). My study tells the stories of young mothers, and as such it does not seek to analyse 'impersonal social facts' (Behar, 1996, p. 12).



INTERVIEW / GUIDED CONVERSATIONS

Cole and Knowles (2001) refer to “guided conversations” rather than “interviews”. This notion of having a conversation with young mothers appealed to me, a conversation guided by my research intentions, their circumstances and life stories. Plummer (2001) on the other hand prefers to call the life history interview an “open interview”, rather than a conversation as he says the term “conversation” belies the passivity of the researcher. This open interview is ‘not what most people expect of an interview so that it makes the task difficult at the outset: there are no clear prescriptions as to how the subject is expected to behave. Often the subject is expected to take the lead rather than merely responding to a series of cues given by a questionnaire’ (Plummer, 2001, p. 142). I have called the interactions I had with the mothers “interviews” but it is with the understanding of the open, though guided, nature of the interview, that I do so.

One useful checklist for thinking about the interview has been provided by Gordon (cited in Plummer, 2001). Gordon suggests eight questions which should be asked:

How should I introduce myself? How should I explain the purpose of the interview? How should I explain the sponsorship? Should I explain why he [*sic*] was selected? How to discuss anonymity? Should any extrinsic reward be mentioned? How should the interview be recorded? How open are we going to be? (p. 139).

It was this level of preparation, plus the ways the research ideas and assumptions and conceptions had been ‘articulated and rearticulated, refined and refined again’ (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 72), that provided the “guiding” for the interactions I had with the young mothers.



COLLECTING LIFE STORIES

The collecting of life stories requires a 'distinctly more personal [approach] than other types of qualitative investigation' (Hatch & Wienewski, 1995, p. 117). For some of the participants in this study collecting life stories was relatively unproblematic. Anne-Marie, possibly because she was older, had a store of stories she was prepared to share with me, but some of the other, younger participants seemed more unused to telling their stories. This meant I worked differently with particular participants. Nikki, for example, while not a reluctant participant, didn't tell "stories" about her life; after spending time with her I found it more appropriate to gather her experiences through a more traditional question / answer interview.

In his 1994 work *Learning from strangers*, a rather functional "how to" guide on qualitative research interviews, Weiss makes a number of claims, gives justifications if you like, to the basic question: "why interview?" One reason is because interviewing 'gives access to the observations of others' (p. 1); another is that we can learn, through interviewing, 'about people's interior experiences' (p. 1). He goes on to say that 'most of the significant events of people's lives can become known to others only through interview' (Weiss, 1994, p. 2). Reinharz (1992) likewise claims that feminist researchers 'find interviewing appealing' as it offers access to 'people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher' (p. 19) and that interview research 'explores people's views of reality' (p. 18). McCracken (1988) has said, specifically of the long interview, that it's 'one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury' and that interviewing can take us into 'the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily existence' (p. 9). Miller & Glassner (1997) argue a similar case when they claim that interviewing 'provides us with a means for exploring the points of view of our research subjects, while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality' (p. 100). Holstein and Gubrium (2003) claim that 'few would dispute that interviewing is the most widely used technique for conducting systematic social inquiry [and] put simply



interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives' (p. 3).

An interview is something with which we are all familiar (primarily from television and radio), and having worked in radio for many years I thought I knew what interviewing was. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) call it a 'ubiquitous feature of everyday life' (p. 4), but despite its familiarity it is not an uncontested practice in research. Mishler (1986) attempts to see a common understanding in the writing on interviewing, but concludes that the 'instances of indirectness and implicitness presume that we all "know" what an interview is ... and that although there may still be technical problems interviewing is essentially nonproblematic as a method' (p. 10). Likewise, Oakley (1981) likens interviewing to marriage: 'everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets' (p. 30). On the surface the interview is a shared moment in time where the interviewer asks questions to which the interviewee responds. In this sense it is as if the interviewer were 'mining or "prospecting" for the facts and feelings residing within the respondent' (Holstein & Gubrium, p. 12). Information, in this view, is located within the respondent, and it is the task of the interviewer to "extract it" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

But discussion has raged as to whether the interviewer and the interviewee remain as passive as this view seems to suggest during the exchange of question and answer. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) suggest that 'treating interviewing as a social encounter in which knowledge is constructed means that the interview is more than a simple information-gathering operation: it's a site of, and occasion for, producing knowledge' (p. 4). It is an active exchange, where knowledge is constructed. Ellis and Berger (2003) takes this notion further when they claim that the:

... interviewing process becomes less a conduit of information from informants to researchers that represents how things are, and more a sea swell of meaning making in which researchers



connect their own experiences to those of others and provide stories that open up conversations about how we live and cope (p. 471).

LOCATION

The place of the interview was an important consideration (Reinharz & Chase, 2003). A school or college office could represent an inhibiting formality; the cafeteria doesn't allow for privacy; an empty classroom would contain the interview to a certain time (which isn't necessarily a negative aspect), it also allows for privacy and doesn't have the same air of formality that an office would have. I ended up using various sites for the interviews: school classroom, school library, an office at a community drop-in centre, but mostly the mothers' homes.

PERIOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Apart from Tammie, I interviewed each mother at least three times, usually in their homes, often with at least one child present. The period of data collection spanned two years with some mothers, although typically data was collected over an eighteenth month period. Cole and Knowles (2001) mention the importance of working with people over a period 'of at least several months for the purposes of gaining in-depth insights into an area of mutual interest' (p. 65). I also spent periods of time where I got to know the mothers outside of the formality of the interview situation. They were times of relationship building and allowed me to observe the mothers being mothers in a variety of situations – going Christmas shopping, hospital visits, playing at the park.



RECORDING

I recorded each interview on either a micro-cassette or on to minidisk. I then transcribed the interviews, usually, although not always, before the next interview. The transcriptions, which were word processed and subsequently saved onto CD, were provided, in printed form, to the participants throughout the duration of the study for them to check, with the understanding that if any details were wrong, if I had misrepresented, or misheard, anything they'd said, they could correct it. If there were issues raised throughout the interviews that they weren't happy about being included in this report, I gave them the opportunity to highlight those particular passages. There were no such passages however. The audio recordings will be deleted, in accordance with the Ethic's committee guidelines, after a period of five years as will the transcripts of the interviews, which are currently held in my office, on CD and the university file server, at the University of Tasmania.

Recording the interviews meant that I didn't have to take notes, which could have been more off-putting than having a recording device sitting between us. It meant that I was better able to tune in to how the young mother was feeling, how comfortable she was in answering a particular question, and I was able to watch for clues from her body language.

MEMBER CHECKING

Member checking is a necessary component of the research process (Kvale, 1996) particularly when using interview as the prime method of data collection. Member checking of the interview transcripts enabled the participants to maintain control of the data they provided, and thus how their experiences were translated, analysed and then portrayed (Poland, 2003). This process increased the probability of the data obtained being a true representation of the participants' experiences (Poland).



At the conclusion of the study each mother was given a copy of her particular portrait as written in this report and all asked if they could keep the copy. The portraits proved to be a valuing of the mothers' experience and a validation of her as a whole person.

FIRST MEETINGS

The initial meeting, the information I presented about the nature and purpose of the study, the way I represented myself and my role in the 'achievement of a coherent story' (Mishler, 1999, p. 15) were considerations I dealt with sensitively and thoughtfully. My first question therefore, in preparing for the initial interview, was "who does the participant think I am?" I found myself in a unique position, and one that posed a quandary. My purpose in conducting the study was twofold: I wanted the dominant social construction of young mothers, as previously discussed, to be challenged, but I was also fulfilling a personal goal by working towards a PhD. I felt, in a sense, that I was using the mothers for personal achievement. I felt compelled to be upfront about this. If I was to establish a sense of trust with those participating in the study, I had to be honest with them. Were they then to be co-constructors of knowledge? Was the interview a 'site of, and occasion for, producing knowledge' as Holstein and Gubrium (2003, p. 4) claim? I had a bigger agenda at work, but the question of how I constructed the interviewee still remained. Were they to be "subject", "respondent", "participant"? The term "participant" can be applied to both the interviewer and the interviewee 'when the interview is more symmetrical or ... when the respondent is empowered' (Mishler, cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 19). This highlighted 'their collective contribution to the enterprise' which emphasises 'a more fundamental sense of the shared task' and saw the interview as a 'form of "collaboration" in the production of meaning' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 19).



Janelle was familiar to me from her attendance at the young mothers group and initially we met at the coffee shop across the road from the college and chatted about being a mother and what life was like for her. I didn't record that conversation but took notes. As part of my involvement with the young mothers group all the young mothers had received information sheets about the study and consent forms. Janelle therefore had written information about the study and had filled in and signed the consent form, which had been returned to me. She had also filled in the basic "biographical" information form. It was on this sheet that I recorded, with her permission, her phone number for future contact. When Janelle had finished year 12 I contacted her by phone and she invited me to meet with her at her home. I met with Janelle four times over the course of two years, three times at her home, the other time at the college. On two of those occasions her son was present.

I was told about **Louise** by the principal of a college in the south of the state and after she made contact with me (I wasn't permitted to contact her directly) we spoke on the phone about the nature of the study. After agreeing to see me for a follow up discussion and arranging a time for that meeting, Louise invited me to her home, as she lived out of town and had no means of transport. She also agreed to me recording her phone number for future use. I visited Louise at the arranged time and went through the information sheet and consent form with her. As the school year was over and she was no longer a student, I no longer needed approval from the principal. The first meeting with Louise was recorded on audio tape which was subsequently fully transcribed. I conducted four interviews with Louise, each time in her home, with her son present on each occasion.

I had maintained contact with the new co-ordinator of the Young Mothers Program and during one of our conversations she informed me of a young mother who had recently enrolled in Year 12. **Octavia** contacted me (again, I wasn't permitted to make first contact) and agreed to meet with me. We met in the young mothers' room at the college, where the co-ordinator introduced



us. Octavia's daughter was with her on that occasion. I went through the same procedure as with the others, discussing my study with her, providing her with the information sheet and the consent form, which she signed, and she completed the biographical information sheet. I met with Octavia three more times: once at the college (in the library) and twice at her boyfriend's house, which she used as a place to study.

I first met with **Nikki** at a local school sports carnival where she was in attendance as a volunteer ambulance officer. The information passed to me via the school had originally indicated that Nikki would be at the college, but upon arriving there I found that she was on duty in the next town. As I didn't want to miss the opportunity of meeting with her I felt it important to meet under those more unusual circumstances. Nikki signed the consent form but it wasn't until our next meeting that I asked her to complete the biographical information sheet. I met with Nikki three subsequent times, each time in her home with her children present.

Anne-Marie, was not part of the Tasmanian educational system, but was part of a return to study skills program at her local Neighbourhood House. The coordinator of the program had contacted me after hearing an interview I conducted on radio. She had sought permission from Anne-Marie to pass her phone number on to me. I rang Anne-Marie and we arranged to meet at the Neighbourhood House. A friend of Anne-Marie's was also present. I recorded that first meeting, which lasted an hour, but haven't used any of the data for the purposes of this study, as I have had no further contact with Anne-Marie's friend. I met with Anne-Marie four times, each time at her home. On two of those occasions her youngest son was present, and once her partner was present but in another part of the house.

The co-ordinator of a student support group from another college had also contacted me after hearing the radio interview, and he told me about **Tammie**, who I then met at the college library, in a private study room. We met a



second time at the local youth drop-in centre, again in a private room, and with the knowledge and consent of the centre's co-ordinator. On that occasion Tammie's daughter was with her. When I next went to contact Tammie her mobile phone number was no longer connected.

Robyn heard me discussing my study in a university seminar and shared parts of her story with me. We met a number of times informally, before agreeing to meet at her home for the first interview. Robyn was keen to introduce me to her husband and youngest son on that occasion and was also concerned about the place of the interview in terms of comfort and seclusion. We conducted the interview in the study, a room which assured privacy and no interruptions.

INITIAL INTERVIEW

The initial interview was one which I carefully guided. I wanted certain information (age when pregnant, attitude to pregnancy) but it didn't matter in what order the information was given. It was a time of discussing in more detail the study, the expectations I had of the participants (time, a willingness to share personal stories with me), and the ways in which young mothers have been regarded as "scapegoats" for society's ills. It was a time of reassurance that while they were sharing private information with me which would eventually be turned into a doctoral dissertation, their identities would be kept confidential and they would remain anonymous. There is an extra sensitivity to this in Tasmania, which is relatively small (in terms of population) and closely connected. Throughout subsequent conversations, as can be seen from the portraits presented in chapter four, the topics I raised with the mothers tended to be ones relating to their specific circumstance – it would have made no sense to only discuss Anne-Marie's first pregnancy with her, when her life-story continued so far past that point, just as it would have been nonsensical to not discuss issues of drug use with Tammy just because others may not have had the same experience.



A TIME LINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

At the beginning of the first interview with each participant I asked her to construct a time line of significant events (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) from either the moment she was first pregnant, or from one or two years before (depending on her status as a mother, her age and the situation she was currently in). This time line formed the basis for the initial interviews. As well as using limited parts of my own time line as an example, I gave suggestions as to the sorts of things that could be included (taking a pregnancy test; visiting the doctor; telling parents / partner; finishing school) and so was presented with a range of starting points. This meant that the interviews were structured differently depending on what each mother saw as significant in her life, and the particular situation she was in. It also provided a visual representation for me to grasp some more of the context of each mother's life, and proved more important in some interviews than in others. For instance, Nikki wasn't someone who talked a lot, and so "seeing" the events on her time line prevented me from having to scratch about for ways to uncover her story. Anne-Marie on the other hand was more able to tell her story, without much reference to the time line. It was also useful for reigning in those stories that tended to cover aspects outside the boundaries of the study. The time lines therefore provided a direction for the initial interview. They also had unintended consequences ... in one instance the young mother relaxed when the line I drew wasn't straight and she laughed at my inability to draw a straight line; and for some, remembering events and having to think of the order of events sharpened their memories of the time in which the event occurred, and the people connected with that event.

ARTEFACTS: PHOTOGRAPH ELICITATION

Another important way of easing into a more comfortable relationship with the young mothers was to ask to see photographs of them during their pregnancies or of their babies (Barrett & Smigiel, 2003). This wasn't always



possible – it depended on the location of the interview, and the mother remembering to bring some photos if the interview wasn't at her house, and it also depended on how comfortable the mother felt revealing even more of her life to me. One mother was quite open about discussing her eldest daughter, and showed me some photographs of her as a baby, but she wasn't as willing to show photographs which included her other children. As her privacy was paramount it was not an issue I pushed.

There were instances when the photographs proved important in uncovering attitudes that may not otherwise have been revealed. An example of this is when Louise indicated the changes in her body from the time before she was pregnant to now, which led to a conversation on body image.

SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEWS

Each subsequent interview was based on the stories that had emerged from the previous interview, filling in any gaps in their stories, but the interviews also allowed a sense of "going deeper" into the life event, or an exploration of the attitudes surrounding that event. As my relationship with each participant developed, there was a sense that they shared more readily with me, plus aspects of their stories started to make more sense to me as I was able to put it into a context of what I already knew about the mother and her situation. This was important, as it meant I didn't have to go over old ground each time, in establishing, for example, how different people figured in the participants' lives.

WRITING

In determining how best to (re)present the life-stories I collected I borrowed from, and was influenced by, a number of sources. These sources tended to move me away from the narrative turn which the methods I employed for data collection may, more naturally, have led. Collecting life-stories from



participants does not necessarily lead to the writing of stories in presenting the data, but as the language is the same (i.e. the use of the word “story”) some confusion is bound to arise. I therefore refer to the (re)presentations of the data as portraits, and in doing so have borrowed from Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). I discuss their influence later in this chapter, but first want to detail ways in which other researchers, particularly Norman Denzin, have influenced my decision to present the data in this way. Denzin (1997) argues that:

...messy texts move back and forth between description, interpretation, and voice. These texts erase the dividing line between observer and observed. In them, the writer is transformed into a scribe who writes for rather than about the individuals being studied. Still, these texts make the writer’s experiences central to the topic at hand (p. 225).

The notion of writing *for* rather than *about* individuals spoke to me, as one of my intentions was not to write about teenage mothers in the way many other researchers have. It is the mothers’ voices that I want to be heard, and for me, that meant presenting the data in almost a raw form – straight from the transcribed interviews. Lather and Smithies (1997) employed this method of presentation to great effect in their work on women living with HIV/AIDS. In that text Lather asks: ‘Are we talking *about* these women? *for* them? *with* them? We *should* be uncomfortable with these issues of telling other people’s stories’ (p. 9). After writing, and re-writing, the stories of the participants’ lives in a variety of ways, I felt that the only honest way forward was to use large sections of the interview transcripts. Presenting the data in this way meant that the process for its construction (the interview process) was made explicit, while providing a sense of the personality of the mother. I realise that in presenting the data in this way I am not able to represent the expression, the gestures, the pauses and stumbles along the way, and so in this regard, the portraits are incomplete. They are also clearly constructed. My hand is all over them, but in allowing the transcribed interview data to be so



prominent in the portraits I have sought to maintain the integrity of the life stories participants shared with me.

Collecting life-stories, therefore, is one thing; deciding what to do with the material is another. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to the dilemma of the writer who 'wonders whether to write a research text with individual mini-biographies of participants or to look at common threads and elements across participants' (p. 143). I have sought a compromise and so have written of shared experiences (such as pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding), which is not exactly the same as the "common threads and elements" of which Clandinin and Connelly write. Rather it is a way of understanding that while these mothers are unique in their own way, with individual experiences, there are points of commonality between them. There are also clear commonalities between the participants and all those who give birth and decide to parent their children (to use the term "mother" here doesn't take into account those who become mothers through other means, such as adoption and surrogacy). When teachers and educational policy makers seek to address the needs of young mothers in our schools (their needs as mothers, as well as their needs as students) these common experiences may prove important as a starting point for discussion. I could have discussed the relative age of the fathers to that of the mothers, and drawn that as a common thread; I could have used drug use as a "theme"; or the experience of domestic violence, but I did not see the reduction of the data to themes such as these as consistent with the study's aims. Along with writing of shared experiences I have also written a separate "portrait" of each mother.

Presenting others' lives in the way I have presented a number of ethical dilemmas to which I now turn.



ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Luttrell (2003) outlines three dilemmas ethnographers face in writing their texts: one of which is “appropriation”:

How and where do researchers draw the line in using their subjects’ voices and life experiences for their own purposes as authors? Who benefits from the research, in what ways, and according to what rules of fairness or relations of power? (p. 166).

I could have written the following series of young mothers’ experiences in the first person; autobiographically, as a ghost writer (Rhodes, 2000). In fact, I’ve written them, and rewritten them many times. Luttrell (2003) puts it neatly when she says that in her ‘elusive search to get it “right”, my main aim has been to keep the girls’ stories and self-representation at centre stage’ (p. xvii). This was a major concern for me as well. I have decided to make myself, as the researcher and the writer of the text, explicitly present, unlike Rhodes (2000) who ‘rather than being explicit ... is hidden ... like a ghost’ (p. 511). My explicit presence gives my text a disrupted feel; it’s not like reading a story from beginning to end, without any reference to the author of the text. I am the author, and I am present, posing questions, explaining why I went in a particular direction with my questioning, and why I might have pulled back at certain times from pursuing a particular thread of conversation. The portraits then are multi-vocal – my voice as researcher is mixed with the mother’s voice, but then there is also my voice as narrator/author.

Each time I gave the participants of this study a transcript of the previous interview, I was acutely aware that I was representing them through the writing – that this was their *life* on the page. Clough (2004) writes of the same dilemma in the article *Theft and ethics in life portrayal: Lolly – the final story*. He has written a series of stories based on his research of “bad lads” and in this, the final story, writes:



the stories mostly reflect [the narrator/researcher's] experiences of encountering and trying to make sense of the lives he records for a living ... it is clear that "making sense" means fitting these lives into the researcher's own personal world of experiences and values; and as the stories (separately) unfold he is always found in some sort of struggle to understand the relation of personal and professional (Clough, 2004, p. 376).

Clough's final story emerges therefore as a response to questions and criticisms he has encountered from others of writing his research as stories.

Clough writes, that at the heart of his fifth story (the "final story"),

is the ethnographer's dilemma – the conscious theft of glimpses of people's lives in the interests of research. We steal in the name of research. We often report – without permission – those critical incidents, and because we suitably disguise and anonymize, we justify our theft. We see it as an ethical response to the reporting of research (2004, p. 376).

For me the ethical dilemma of which Clough writes highlights what I was most troubled by in (re)presenting the data: I was writing other people's life-stories.

Richardson (cited in Rhodes, 2000) reminds me that 'no matter how we stage the text, we – the authors – are doing the staging', (p. 513). How we do the staging is a question I struggled with over multiple writings and re-writings of the text. Other questions that ethnographers have been asking for years are ones with which I too had to deal: 'those dealing with ethics, with "truth", with balancing "fact" and "fiction"' (Richardson, 2001, p. 37) and with avoiding 'decontextualised life stories that serve to romanticize and idealize the "voices" of research participants' (Goodson, cited in Cary, 1999). I did not want to romanticise or idealise the experiences of these young mothers' lives but neither did I want to choose 'rigor over imagination, intellect over



feeling, theories over stories, lectures over conversations, abstract ideas over concrete events' (Bochner, 2001, p. 134). Bochner goes on to claim that:

... the narrative turn moves away from a singular, monolithic conception of social science towards a pluralism that promotes multiple forms of representation and research; away from facts and towards meanings; away from master narratives and towards local stories; away from idolizing categorical thought and abstracted theory and toward embracing the values of irony, emotionality, and activism; away from assuming the stance of the disinterested spectator and toward assuming the posture of a feeling, embodied, and vulnerable observer; away from writing essays and towards telling stories (pp. 134 – 135).

It is these aspects that I want to capture through the portraits of the participants found in Chapter Four.

PORTRAITURE AND VOICE

In formulating my stance of how best to present the data (in terms of how comfortable I felt in writing participants' life-stories) I turned to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) who explore the use of voice in their work on portraiture. They outline a sequential move through voice as witness through to voice as dialogue while acknowledging that the 'boundaries between these orientations are highly permeable and overlapping' (p. 87). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis claim that 'voice is the individualistic impression of the researcher on the portrait [and is] therefore omnipresent [and] ubiquitous' (p. 106). Voice as dialogue, has been described as that which sees the researcher's voice either explicitly present in the text, or 'heard through implicit expression. ... In instances such as this, voice as dialogue functions as a muted tone in the portraiture fabric's weave – making the dominance of other threads both possible and prominent' (p. 122). I have tended to use both



explicit and implicit expression in the portraits, depending on the context of question and response, but in either case there is a 'sense of dialogue that has constructed the narrative throughout the portrait' (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 123).

While I was interested in legitimising the voices of the participants, I was not interested in attributing psychoanalytic interpretations of the stories the participants told me about their lives. This felt too close to judgement for my liking. I turned to Lather and Smithies (1997) who write: 'we weren't here to interpret and say this is what this really means. We were here to try to figure out how to put a book together that would let you speak your own stories' (p. 235). I was interested in re-telling the experiences the mothers spoke of, and from the picture built up through the portraits and the accounts of their shared experiences, to come to an understanding of what life is like for young mothers. This was in order to stimulate deeper thinking about the issues they raised, rather than just putting the young mothers in a box marked "problem" and, imagining that all young mothers have the same experience, backgrounds, and educational aspirations, provide educational programs on the basis of what are commonly held "truths", which might bear no relation to the reality of young mothers' lives.

Luttrell (2003), writing about pregnant teens in the United States, 'encourages readers ... to mine the material for alternative analyses' (p. xvii). The questions I have may be different from questions others would ask. Here are some of mine: Is there a place in our current educational system to accommodate young women with this range of daily experiences; who have competing priorities; who don't move through the 'normal' sequence of events from childhood to adulthood? If not, what changes may need to be made, by teachers, senior staff, policy makers, bureaucrats, and / or politicians in order for this accommodation to happen? When society focuses on the stereotype of the teenage mother and view her from a deficit model as 'problem' what happens to those teenage mothers who don't fit the stereotype



– in terms of public opinion (and hence issues such as stigma), and policies that impinge on her daily life? These are some of the questions I find important, but I imagine you'll have your own.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I have detailed the research journey, and the influences of that journey, and have described the research process, both in terms of data collection and (re)presenting the data.

In Chapter Four I present the young mothers' individual portraits, which are arranged in random order. There was no overt reason for this: it was merely a means of ordering the portraits so that I didn't give weight to one over the others. A discussion of shared experiences is also contained in Chapter Four, with some suggestions as to how the issues raised might be useful in generating discussion by educators on the provision of education to meet the needs of young mothers as both student and mother.



Chapter Four: Legitimate Voices

**What cannot be disputed is that unmarried mothers are people about whom much is said and concluded, but from whom very little is heard. Too often, amid the din of public ridicule and rage, these women's voices are lost, pushed so deep into the background as to fade away
(Ludtke, 1997, p. ix)**

In this chapter I present the mothers' life-stories – their portraits. It is one thing to tell your own story, to expose yourself to the eyes of a stranger, but quite another to decide to open another's life to the gaze of others, and even more so when those others may be quick to judge.

Each portrait has been constructed slightly differently, as each of the participants is different, and my relationship with each of them varied. Some of the mothers' life-stories flowed better than others. Robyn and Anne-Marie, as the older mothers of the study, were able to look back over a much longer time frame and so came to the task from a different position to the younger mothers. Luttrell (2003) had the same experience, which she describes as a "naïve assumption" that the pregnant teens participating in her study 'would have a storehouse of life stories to share ... that they would narrate their pasts in light of the present as the older women [I'd studied previously] had. But I quickly learned otherwise' (p. 148). I, like Luttrell (2003), 'shouldn't have been surprised that the girls' life stories [were] emergent and disconnected' (p. 148). As Luttrell says

as adolescents, their "life story" – the "This is who I am and how I got that way" version – was evolving. Developmentally speaking, adolescence is understood to be a stage of life during which young people solidify their self-understandings and social identities ... I especially like the way Chris Mann (1998, p. 82), who collected life histories from working-class British girls, puts it: "their lives



are not remembered in tranquility in the calm waters of late maturity but described in the full flood of experience, riding the rapids of tumultuous feelings” (2003, p. 148).

Thus, the life-stories Robyn and Anne-Marie relate are both more extensive and more reflexive than the other mothers’. While Anne-Marie, in particular, still has small children, and so could be said to be in the “full flood of experience”, she’s obviously had much more time to contemplate and come to terms with her life. Both she and Robyn also have more distance from being a teenage mother than the others.

WOMEN’S STORIES

Reinharz and Chase (2003) argue that one of the elements in the “missing tradition” of interviewing women includes ‘the holding of untested and unexamined assumptions about women’s lives’ (p. 75). This is even more true in the area of young women, specifically young mothers. The writing on teenage pregnancy and mothering tends to be *about* them, with judicious comments scattered throughout from the mothers themselves. The writing about young mothers, as mentioned in Chapter Two, is also predominately negative, at least in the popular press (which is so influential on people’s attitudes) and that of conservatives from both sides of the political fence. Phoenix (1991) says this negative focus is ‘because little attention is paid to the circumstances in which most mothers under 20 live’ (p. 86). My study set out to illuminate those circumstances, but primarily from an “insider” perspective, rather than the “outsider” perspective so common in most of the writing on young mothers. The outsider perspective becomes the ‘dominant social construction and [is] more likely to be explored and taken seriously than the accounts produced by mothers under 20 themselves’ (Phoenix, 1991a, p. 86). The participants in this study weren’t just women, they were also predominantly adolescents. Eder and Fingerson (2003) provide a ‘clear reason for interviewing youthful respondents [and that] is to allow them to



give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives' (p: 33). I have attempted to give credence to the (mostly) suppressed experience of young mothers through allowing their stories to emerge.

To further contextualise the participants I have included demographic details which emphasises their different family and social backgrounds, life experiences, and attitudes. This information highlights the problems in attempting to stereotype young mothers, but also the difficulty in developing programs for a homogenous group, when they clearly cannot be grouped in such a way.

* * * * *

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Age at first pregnancy

Four mothers (Louise, Anne-Marie, Robyn and Tammie) were 16 at the time of first pregnancy, each of them (apart from Robyn) turning 17 before the birth of the child. Nikki was 17 when she became pregnant but had turned 18 before the birth of her child. One mother (Janelle) was 18 when pregnant and one mother (Octavia) was 19 when her daughter was born.

These then aren't the "babies having babies" which is common rhetoric in the United States, but in the Australian context they are still highly visible, and part of the group commonly stigmatised and stereotyped. What also sets these young women apart is their re-engagement in education of some sort after the birth of their babies, even if having left education before falling pregnant.

Number of children

Four of the mothers (Louise, Janelle, Octavia and Tammy) had one child, one mother (Nikki) had two children (to the same father), Robyn had three



children (to two fathers) and another mother (Anne-Marie) had five children (to four different fathers).

Relationships with fathers

Two of the mothers (Louise and Nikki) were in relationships with the father of their children. Children of three mothers (Janelle, Octavia, and Anne-Marie) spent regular time with their fathers. The father of two of Robyn's children has very little contact with them; the father of her youngest child lives with them. The father of Tammie's daughter was in prison.

Fathers

The father of Anne-Marie's eldest daughter is unknown. Fathers of three of the mothers' children (Tammie, Janelle and Octavia) were significantly older than them. Tammie's, Nikki's and Janelle's partners were five years older, while the father of Octavia's daughter was 18 years older. The father of Robyn's two eldest children was three years older than Robyn. Louise's partner is roughly her age.

Housing

Two mothers (Anne-Marie and Tammy) live in public housing (although at the time of the study Tammie had moved in with her mother, while still technically renting the housing commission house). One mother (Octavia) lives with her parents; one mother (Nikki) is living in a house her and her partner are buying, and two mothers (Louise and Janelle) are renting privately. Robyn and her current husband own their own home.

Work and Education

One mother (Tammie) initially left school at the end of year 9. Four mothers (Robyn, Janelle, Louise and Octavia) finished school during or at the end of year 10. Louise completed year 10 by distance education, and then attended college for years 11 and 12. One mother (Nikki) completed year 10, then spent four years at senior secondary college, mostly studying part time. Two



mothers (Janelle and Octavia) returned to senior secondary education after a significant break. During that time away from education they both worked. Octavia completed a traineeship in viticulture before returning to complete year 12. Robyn worked as a seasonal fruit picker and in a supermarket, but has been a teacher's aide for the past seven years. None of the other mothers have been engaged in the paid workforce.

Three mothers (Louise, Janelle and Octavia) completed year 12 – Louise completed it while pregnant and Janelle and Octavia returned to complete years 11 and 12 after the birth of their babies. Janelle is enrolled in an Art, Craft and Design course at TAFE. She is also completing a course in business management through distance education. Octavia is enrolled at university, studying viticulture, and Louise sees herself continuing with further education after a two year break spent being a full time mother.

Nikki completed a year 12 Vocational Education and Training certificate course in Community Services while pregnant with her first child and then enrolled part time in year 13 undertaking another certificate course. She is also a St John Ambulance officer volunteer.

Anne-Marie finished school at the end of year 10. She enrolled in a return to study course at the university during the period of this study, but after a few months dropped out. She is now exploring other educational and employment options.

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Three of the mothers (Tammie, Octavia, and Janelle) had ensured they would not have any more children for a number of years by having a contraceptive device implanted in their upper arm. These are effective for five years. Janelle subsequently had hers removed after adverse side effects and so has an IUD which is effective for five years. One mother (Nikki) and her husband have taken steps to ensure they don't have subsequent children by investigating more permanent means – Nikki's partner is seeking a vasectomy (their age, however, may be against them). One mother (Anne-Marie) has had a hysterectomy, and one mother (Louise) is taking the contraceptive pill.

Transport

Four mothers (Robyn, Nikki, Octavia and Janelle) own their own cars. The other three mothers (Anne-Marie, Louise and Tammie) don't have their driver's licence and are reliant on public transport or on friends and family.

Social Security

Two mothers (Tammie and Anne-Marie) are reliant on the Supporting Parents Benefit, while Anne-Marie also receives child support from the fathers of her children. Two mothers (Janelle and Octavia) receive government benefits as students. One mother (Nikki) is provided for by her partner and receives no government benefits. One mother (Louise) receives some government benefits, in the form of Parenting Payment (Partnered), but is also reliant on her partner, who is an apprentice (and hence on a relatively low income). Robyn is in full time paid employment, as is her husband.

Family Background

Four of the mothers (Louise, Robyn, Janelle and Octavia) have parents who are still married to each other. Louise and Octavia's parents are all engaged in full-time work; mothers of the other participants do not work outside the home. The parents of three of the mothers (Nikki, Anne-Marie and Tammie) are divorced: Tammie's parents divorced while she was a baby; Nikki's



parents divorced when she was in her teens and Anne-Marie's parents divorced when she was in her mid-twenties. Anne-Marie's parents are Catholic, and Janelle's parents are Seventh Day Adventists. The others didn't stipulate any religious leaning. The mothers of four participants (Nikki, Anne-Marie, Robyn and Janelle) were teenage mothers – Anne-Marie's and Robyn's mothers marrying while pregnant. Louise's mother had been pregnant at the age of 17, but after deciding on an abortion, involuntarily miscarried.

Across the state

Two mothers live in a large metropolitan area in the south of the state; three live on the north-west coast (two in smaller towns and one in a city). Two mothers live in the north (one in an urban environment close to the city centre and one in a small hamlet, closer to the coast).

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PORTRAITS

The following section contains the participants' portraits, arranged in random order. Following the portraits is a discussion which presents the shared experiences of the mothers involved in this study, with a view to demonstrating how these experiences are no different to those all mothers face. The ways these experiences, and therefore young mothers, are viewed as "different" or "other" are also discussed.



Chapter Four: Legitimate Voices

**What cannot be disputed is that unmarried mothers are people about whom much is said and concluded, but from whom very little is heard. Too often, amid the din of public ridicule and rage, these women's voices are lost, pushed so deep into the background as to fade away
(Ludtke, 1997, p. ix)**

In this chapter I present the mothers' life-stories – their portraits. It is one thing to tell your own story, to expose yourself to the eyes of a stranger, but quite another to decide to open another's life to the gaze of others, and even more so when those others may be quick to judge.

Each portrait has been constructed slightly differently, as each of the participants is different, and my relationship with each of them varied. Some of the mothers' life-stories flowed better than others. Robyn and Anne-Marie, as the older mothers of the study, were able to look back over a much longer time frame and so came to the task from a different position to the younger mothers. Luttrell (2003) had the same experience, which she describes as a "naïve assumption" that the pregnant teens participating in her study 'would have a storehouse of life stories to share ... that they would narrate their pasts in light of the present as the older women [I'd studied previously] had. But I quickly learned otherwise' (p. 148). I, like Luttrell (2003), 'shouldn't have been surprised that the girls' life stories [were] emergent and disconnected' (p. 148). As Luttrell says

as adolescents, their "life story" – the "This is who I am and how I got that way" version – was evolving. Developmentally speaking, adolescence is understood to be a stage of life during which young people solidify their self-understandings and social identities ... I especially like the way Chris Mann (1998, p. 82), who collected life histories from working-class British girls, puts it: "their lives



are not remembered in tranquility in the calm waters of late maturity but described in the full flood of experience, riding the rapids of tumultuous feelings" (2003, p. 148).

Thus, the life-stories Robyn and Anne-Marie relate are both more extensive and more reflexive than the other mothers'. While Anne-Marie, in particular, still has small children, and so could be said to be in the "full flood of experience", she's obviously had much more time to contemplate and come to terms with her life. Both she and Robyn also have more distance from being a teenage mother than the others.

WOMEN'S STORIES

Reinharz and Chase (2003) argue that one of the elements in the "missing tradition" of interviewing women includes 'the holding of untested and unexamined assumptions about women's lives' (p. 75). This is even more true in the area of young women, specifically young mothers. The writing on teenage pregnancy and mothering tends to be *about* them, with judicious comments scattered throughout from the mothers themselves. The writing about young mothers, as mentioned in Chapter Two, is also predominately negative, at least in the popular press (which is so influential on people's attitudes) and that of conservatives from both sides of the political fence. Phoenix (1991) says this negative focus is 'because little attention is paid to the circumstances in which most mothers under 20 live' (p. 86). My study set out to illuminate those circumstances, but primarily from an "insider" perspective, rather than the "outsider" perspective so common in most of the writing on young mothers. The outsider perspective becomes the 'dominant social construction and [is] more likely to be explored and taken seriously than the accounts produced by mothers under 20 themselves' (Phoenix, 1991a, p. 86). The participants in this study weren't just women, they were also predominantly adolescents. Eder and Fingerson (2003) provide a 'clear reason for interviewing youthful respondents [and that] is to allow them to



give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives' (p. 33). I have attempted to give credence to the (mostly) suppressed experience of young mothers through allowing their stories to emerge.

To further contextualise the participants I have included demographic details which emphasises their different family and social backgrounds, life experiences, and attitudes. This information highlights the problems in attempting to stereotype young mothers, but also the difficulty in developing programs for a homogenous group, when they clearly cannot be grouped in such a way.

* * * * *

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Age at first pregnancy

Four mothers (Louise, Anne-Marie, Robyn and Tammie) were 16 at the time of first pregnancy, each of them (apart from Robyn) turning 17 before the birth of the child. Nikki was 17 when she became pregnant but had turned 18 before the birth of her child. One mother (Janelle) was 18 when pregnant and one mother (Octavia) was 19 when her daughter was born.

These then aren't the "babies having babies" which is common rhetoric in the United States, but in the Australian context they are still highly visible, and part of the group commonly stigmatised and stereotyped. What also sets these young women apart is their re-engagement in education of some sort after the birth of their babies, even if having left education before falling pregnant.

Number of children

Four of the mothers (Louise, Janelle, Octavia and Tammy) had one child, one mother (Nikki) had two children (to the same father), Robyn had three



children (to two fathers) and another mother (Anne-Marie) had five children (to four different fathers).

Relationships with fathers

Two of the mothers (Louise and Nikki) were in relationships with the father of their children. Children of three mothers (Janelle, Octavia, and Anne-Marie) spent regular time with their fathers. The father of two of Robyn's children has very little contact with them; the father of her youngest child lives with them. The father of Tammie's daughter was in prison.

Fathers

The father of Anne-Marie's eldest daughter is unknown. Fathers of three of the mothers' children (Tammie, Janelle and Octavia) were significantly older than them. Tammie's, Nikki's and Janelle's partners were five years older, while the father of Octavia's daughter was 18 years older. The father of Robyn's two eldest children was three years older than Robyn. Louise's partner is roughly her age.

Housing

Two mothers (Anne-Marie and Tammy) live in public housing (although at the time of the study Tammie had moved in with her mother, while still technically renting the housing commission house). One mother (Octavia) lives with her parents; one mother (Nikki) is living in a house her and her partner are buying, and two mothers (Louise and Janelle) are renting privately. Robyn and her current husband own their own home.

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Janelle

“What’s your name?” asked the curly haired three-year-old who stood in the doorway as his mother opened the front door. “My name’s Sharon, you must be Jacob” I replied. “I’m watching Kermit” he told me as Janelle, his mother, ushered me into the lounge room. Jacob sat on the couch and told me about the characters in between singing along to the songs. He laughed when Kermit fell into the pond, then climbed onto my lap through the “scary” part. “What’s that?” Jacob asked, looking at my face. “It’s called a mole” I tell him as I gently dissuade him from trying to pull it off. “Can I jump on you?” he asks as Kermit finishes. “How about we do a drawing” I suggest and we sit at his table and draw with the textas and stamps Janelle brings from another room. Jacob asks for something to eat and is given a fruit bun, then an apple when he again becomes restless. When Kermit finishes he takes the DVD out of the machine and puts a Wiggles video on. He sits eagerly on the couch and immediately engages with the singing and dancing. He tells me they’re doing “fruit salad”. Janelle is very concerned about Jacob’s behaviour and seems keen that he be on his best behaviour in front of me. When I tell her that I have five children and now two grandsons and that I’m very used to young children’s behaviour, she relaxes a bit, and the more I engage with Jacob the more comfortable she seems.

Janelle lives alone with Jacob and has lived in the same house for almost three years. Across the road are Jacob’s paternal grandparents who, Janelle says, provide a great deal of support. Jacob’s aunt now lives there too and Janelle’s brother lives close by. These people make up the bulk of Janelle’s social contacts. She has one other female friend (Pauline) she’s close to, another young mum she met at the college’s young mums group. Janelle is paying off her car and though the house is quite sparsely furnished it’s clean and tidy. She has a television, stereo, DVD player, microwave and computer and describes herself as *very good at budgeting*. She doesn’t *drink or smoke or do*

drugs, so the money she receives as her fortnightly (student) benefit is used carefully.

This is my first “official” meeting with Janelle, although I had met with her a few times in the previous year when she was a member of the young mothers group at college. I’d met with Janelle again in November 2002, just after she’d completed year 12, and we went through a lot of preliminary information at that meeting. It is now August 2003 and I have a transcript of the November conversation and ask Janelle to look over the printed version to see if I’d fairly represented her. After reading for a while she commented that it was *like reading my life*. Janelle is now 24 and in her first year of Art, Craft and Design at TAFE. She plans to finish that at the end of next year, do the Advanced Diploma course the following year, then go to university to do teaching. She’d like to become a photography teacher at college or TAFE – in the *adult sector* as she put it.

Janelle is a slim young woman, with very long, dark hair, hanging in almost ringlets down her back. She’s dressed casually in jeans and a long sleeved t-shirt, and socks. There are art works hanging in the lounge room, a large painting of her and Jacob in one corner, and another painting hanging over the fireplace. Janelle is quietly spoken but shows no reluctance to talk about her life, although certainly doesn’t “rabbit on” or talk at length of her experiences. This seems to me to be more to do with a lack of social contact with adults, a lack of practice at telling her own story, than a reluctance to do so.

While Janelle seems happy to share her life experiences with me she seems to be more reluctant to share her emotions ... she was still very upset about the recent break-up of her relationship, although she seemed to be embarrassed to admit that. The boyfriend Janelle had just broken up with had begun to smoke a lot of drugs and his behaviour had become violent and abusive, especially towards Jacob. *Since the break-up it’s been ... I’ve been feeling stressed I guess ... home life’s better for Jacob and I because he was getting to the stage*

where he didn't want to come from his dad's if Stuart was going to be home, he didn't want to come home from crèche if he was going to be here, so ... that's why I thought there must have been something up, and yeah, so now he's a lot happier. She tells me that he constantly put her down and would demand silence while watching the television or reading the paper. ... *he was just more trying to be in control, be you know, when the news was on, "shut up, the news is on" ... me and Jacob couldn't make a noise and if we tried to talk to him he'd just go off and swear and carry on so like a lot of the time I didn't say a lot.*

Janelle's determination to attend TAFE, to continue to the Advanced Diploma level, and then to go to university to pursue a career in teaching is testament to her strength, a strength I don't think she realises she possesses. She talks about her fluctuating levels of self-confidence (especially in regard to her relationship with Jacob's father) and I find myself wondering if those she's close to actively encourage and praise her. Very early in our first conversation Janelle told me about the time she discovered she was pregnant and she talks about being *always depressed* and how she *didn't have much self-confidence at all*. She attributes this to her relationship with James, who she'd been seeing for six years before falling pregnant with his child. She tells me how he used to lie, and cheat on her, and how their life together was characterised by constant moves, including to Melbourne and back to Tasmania - at one time she moved back home with her parents ... *we moved like, all different houses ... 'cause we'd keep, you know, on again, off again, on again, off again, that sort of thing ... and James cheated on me again so I thought, nuh, I'm going away and his sister was over in Queensland so I just went straight over there*. James finally followed Janelle to Queensland and she was initially taken in by his "sweet talk". She quickly became disillusioned after a week or two by him being an *arsehole* again, but fell pregnant in that time, and from feeling that *everything was really good because I was about to do a course to be a pharmacy assistant and was*

feeling alright then, and then he came over and I'd gone back into the no confidence, all depressed thing again...

Finding out she was pregnant wasn't a very happy time ... I couldn't fall pregnant the whole time I was with James, 'cause I never used contraception for the six years I was with him, and I never fell pregnant and because I decided I didn't want to have children, 'cause I was living with his sister and her son and I found out how difficult it was, I didn't want to have children anymore and then ... yeah ... I found out I was pregnant ...but I didn't really believe in abortion so I just thought 'oh well, if it's happened after all this time it must've been meant to be' because I mean, once in six years was pretty spectacular I guess. It must have been meant to be, whether it was for me to sort of move on with my life or whatever ...this theme is one Janelle returns to throughout our conversations.

Even though Janelle wasn't happy in the relationship with James she returned to Tasmania with him, and again moved out the bush ... I was very isolated. It was always just me and I had to wait for him to get home cause he'd always be out and I wasn't allowed to leave the house, not do anything ... I was always depressed at that stage. Janelle goes on to qualify this in a way she has throughout our conversations ... it's as if she doesn't want to be too pessimistic about her life, she doesn't mindlessly look on the bright side of things, but seems intent on painting a more balanced picture than she perhaps felt at the time. After telling me of being depressed at that stage, and of mentioning depression a number of times she continues: I mean I was happy ... some things were happy, like I started doing antenatal classes, except he wouldn't come with me, so I had to take Mum ... so that was alright ... but I don't know, I just don't feel like he was living up to his role that he ... that I assumed he'd take on. I just thought having a baby would change everything and it didn't ...not for him, anyway.

It is Janelle's understating of her reactions, her emotions, her situation that make an impression on me. We were talking about what she was planning on doing with her life before she found out she was pregnant, then moved on to discuss the time when her pregnancy was confirmed. When I asked her about the decision she made to keep the baby and the sorts of things that might have come into play (and here we talked about the financial aspects of being a single mother) Janelle dropped the word "devastated", almost casually, into the discussion ... *that's another reason I was devastated because I thought, I can't do the course [the pharmacy assistants course] now I'm going to be this big fat horrible thing ... and I had no knowledge that you know ... I didn't even start showing until I was six months pregnant, so I could have done the course, like because we had to do on the job training as well and I could've done that and had that finished and they wouldn't have picked that I was pregnant.*

It's the downplaying of the "devastation" that strikes me and the juxtaposing of "being depressed all the time" with "I mean, I was happy". To me it shows her strength, that she's not going to allow this situation to get on top of her, that despite her life not going the way she wanted it to go, she can still find the good moments, even if that is taking her mother to antenatal classes when her boyfriend won't go with her.

After Jacob was born Janelle was still trying to move away from Jacob's father. *I moved in with mum, again ... and yeah, I was going to try and find a place on me own but I couldn't manage to find one though ... James moved out again, he moved up ... um ... closer to the coast, out the bush out there ... and he said, come and live here, so I went up there, but nothing had changed, he was working more then and, like nights and days and whatever but he wouldn't hold Jacob and he wouldn't like bond with him and then he decided that he was going to grow drugs and I wouldn't let him and he was going to do it anyway and that was it for me I just sort of lost all ... everything for him, and I thought, nuh and I told him ... oh, first I left and then he come back and*

got me and then I got home, no, I can't stay here anymore I'm too depressed, I don't want to be here, and I told him ... he had two weeks to get a car because he had heaps of money, two weeks to get a car then I'm going, and so he did that, bought a car then I left ... the next day he had a new girlfriend, that was the one he had the baby to ... and I just moved back in with mum, probably stayed there for a month and then moved out on my own ...

It was good and bad on me own at first... it was really only bad because I was hassled all the time by James, all the time and like his parents lived across the road so he'd go there, drop his girlfriend off over there and just start harassing me, like "oh you're looking good, come up in the bedroom" he'd grope me, he'd do this that and the other and ... he's 28 now and he's going out with a 15 year old and she found out she was pregnant after three months of seeing each other and he just rang up and said, is there any chance for us, I'm like, no, he's like, "Cheryl's pregnant, I just want to know if I should tell her to have an abortion if there's any chance for us", and I'm thinking ... but like when I first moved out on me own he tried to kill himself at one stage, this was just before Christmas ... my brother was there and his new girlfriend, they found him, he tried to strangle himself with his weight bench, you know the weight cord ... but he was unconscious and whatever but ... I was a bit upset about that, I couldn't really sleep for a couple of days, I was crying all night, then I saw him at Carols by Candlelight and he was absolutely fine ... I was quite relieved. He was there with his new girlfriend and I was like, I can't believe you'd do that and then be just fine about it. I thought he'd done it because of me, because I left him, he'd done that, it was for my benefit ...like a punishment.

I move the conversation on to ask Janelle about the experiences of being a new mother. *Oh, the first sort of three or four months ... I didn't want him ... had post natal depression so I just ... didn't want him ... and I was living with mum which was ... helped me I guess ... I guess I felt physically I was stuck with this moron for the rest of my life because I've got a son to him and ... so I*

was a bit resentful through that ... mum would take Jacob sometimes but most times I just had him, you know I felt it was my problem. I'm stuck with him, so she'd have him sometimes and that sort of helped living with her but when I was out on my own most of the time I'd just be stuck with him.

I didn't want to do anything for the first twelve months of Jacob's life 'cause I just wanted to give him all me attention ... so I didn't do anything, and plus James is like "you're not doing anything until he's two" all this "you be his mum" "he's gotta have one parent, at least one parent, looking after him" so ... it was sort of pushed on to me. In the end it was my choice for at least one year to spend the first year bonding with him sort of thing ... so I spent all day every day with him for a year without doing anything ...

It was upon meeting a former boyfriend that Janelle realised she wanted to do more with her life: I guess he acted as catalyst for some other things to happen in my life, and I went back to school. When she first went back to college I was only doing ... art and photography and the young mums in education ... 'cause I wanted to still spend time with Jacob even though I was studying so it was like part time college and then spending all this extra time with Jacob doing fun things ... for him, that sort of helped him. I initially enrolled at another college but they didn't have enough space for me ... they said, try the other college, and I said, no I don't really want to go there, 'cause the first one I tried have a crèche ... but I rang the other college anyway, and they said 'we've got a young mum's program' and I'm thinking, well I don't really want to do that, but then I thought, oh yeah, I'll do that and two courses and just drop one of the other courses that I was going to do ... and so I did that, met the lady and she sort of enrolled me and then I started coming, but then like, I was the only one coming for a while, so I didn't want to do it, apart from the PYPs group, that was included in it, I didn't want to do it ... then other people started coming and then Kay took over and it's been good since then. The way it was, it was things for us ... without the children ... and you can't find day care anywhere and it's like ... so it was a bit pointless

coming ... 'cause you couldn't find a babysitter or whatever. Why get a baby sitter so you can go for a ride on a bike or go fishing or do your sewing class or something? Why ... you know, it just seems like you're not getting anything out of it, you're not getting recognised for doing the course, so what's the point? But now it's like, we've got our own playgroup for the kids and kids come and that's educational for them and then we have recreation where we take them swimming or go for a walk with them, which is good ... and it's better for them, and then we've got the young mum's group in the afternoon and then we have playgroup or have people come in like the cooking demonstration all that sort of thing, it seems better now that we can have our children with us so they do things with mum, especially new mums want to spend time with their kids, they don't want to leave their kids and do all this ... do some sewing ... I mean if they could do some sewing with the kids there then they'd do it ... if we had the child care here as well, we'd be able ... and that's advisable, but if we've got to find child care goodness knows where out there, and there's no where out there, then there's no point ... but we've got a working with children group as well, we include that in our young mum's every three weeks or whatever, we look after kids, we'll just sit there and watch, or we can join in as well, because they've got 20 – 30 kids there which makes it better for us ... they have all different activities set up all around the room and they go from one activity to the other and they have stories and puppet shows ... yeah so that was really good for us 'cause our group's only small, like our playgroup, so it was good for us to do that as well.

One of the benefits of returning to school for Janelle has been the social contacts she's made, limited though they are: *I started seeing one friend that I did have since I was five, so I see her on and off, like she was mum's best friend's daughter ... so I sort of saw her, not so much any more ... um ... best way's coming to school ... I'd sort of see the same ones every week, I've sort of made one good friend out of it ... so that's good ... she sort of came back this year as well ... so we spend every Monday together and whatever ... so I've at least made one good friend [laughs] ... but my friends from high*

school, I've seen them probably once every eight months, but I'm glad I'm not with them, 'cause they're all into needles and all that sort of stuff now so ... probably that's the one good thing that being with James isolated me away from that did do, because I'm not saying I would have been peer pressured or whatever, but they are ...

Janelle describes the balancing act she performs as a student and a mother and the pressure she feels under to be a "good" mother: *one of my friends from school, like a male, and he was asking me you know what do you do, like do you work, and I said no, I'm a full time student, and he said, yeah I knew that, but are you working as well, and I said, no I have to spend some time with my son, and he's like don't take offence, I was just saying, I thought you might have had a part time job as well ... student, and a part time job and a mum, it's hard enough to go to school and be a mum ... you've got to be flexible, if Jacob's got parties to go to, or like the Wiggles concert was on the other day, so I had to take him there, I still want to be a good mum.*

What about more children? *Relationships are too ... I don't know if there are any nice guys out there [laughs] to tell you the truth, so I don't want to be another single mum with two kids ...*

I ask about her motivation for returning to college, given that she's well past compulsory school leaving age and had indicated that when she left at the end of year 10 she had no desire to continue to college. *It doesn't feel like you have that much of a life, that's why ... going to school and whatever was good for me because I would get out and do something with the rest of the world instead of sitting at home with this kid all day, all night ... I was never going to college before ... I didn't ever want to go to college, I hate school, rah rah rah, don't know what I want to be, got no idea but I love it now. When I first went back it sort of helped that my art teacher was also my high school teacher at the end of high school, so there I was pretty happy. I'd gone in on the first day of school, sat down and he sort of looked at me and like "Oh!*

Janelle" and that made me feel good, he remembered me ... he knew that I had a child and if I couldn't come in one day I said can I work at home, and he was like yeah go for it ... he was really, really supportive, he'd give me things to take home and whatever, and he'd always help and anytime ... like, some days I couldn't come, like I had young mums or something, I said "can I do this course on a different line" and he's like yeah, you know he's fine with that, same with the photography teacher, she was lovely, she was like, bring Jacob in we'll take some photos and do this and do that ... so she was really lovely as well ... so I had an excellent year last year, it was great ... in terms of the support and everything and I done really well ... got an award for art so that boosted me confidence.

I ask if art and photography were subjects she'd done at high school: Yeah, I did all art and design graphics at high school and that's which way I wanted to go ... but of course, when I left grade 10 and started looking for work ... sales assistant [puts on a voice, then laughs] and that's about it, that's all that's around and so I sort of lost it, so I didn't do art for years, and then after having Jacob and it was sort of made possible for me to come back to school and do art again, I thought I could be a photographer or I could do something in the way of art ... and that's what I did and then after last year I loved photography so much I thought I'm going to do that again, so I've come back and just ... and I've only done photography in the VET course where you go on the job as well ... which is good 'cause I've got some work experience this year ... and I'm going to do that and the young mum's course ... but I did really well, I got two awards this year for it, which was good and I really excelled in it.

Janelle completed year 12, winning, as she said, two awards for her work and enrolled in a TAFE Art, Craft and Design course. I asked why she wanted to keep going with education: *Just being able to find a job in something that I'm ... that I know a lot about ... in the arts ... because I found when I was at college everyone used to come to me about photography, they used to come to*

me about everything ... how do you do this, what do you do with this ... and I loved explaining to them and helping them and that's why I sort of thought well maybe I could go that way ... I knew TAFE was going to be a lot easier on me than university was, especially having a young child so that's why I decided TAFE instead of uni.

I think people don't understand why I'm going to school ... they're like, you know "well you could have a job and being getting money" and it's like, yeah I could be in a dead end job or I could have a job that I want ... sometimes I think, yeah I'll just get a job, I'll give up school ... but then I think I just wouldn't get back to school, I could be in the same job for years to come and still not get anywhere.

* * * * *

Janelle completed a diploma in Art, Craft and Design half way through 2004 and is continuing with the business course she was also enrolled in.

Nikki

On a windy November afternoon I found a spot to park in a crowded car park at the Dulverton Sports Ground. It was the local high school's sports carnival and the sounds of students cheering each other on greeted me as I wandered through the gates. I could hear a frazzled teacher on the PA system trying to get order into the Grade 7 100m race, which was obviously due to start any minute. Coloured bunting was strung around the ground and clumps of children were being organised to participate in a range of activities. It seemed that some of them were reluctant participants; the image of a sheep dog rounding up recalcitrant animals sprung to mind when I looked at the teachers who were doing the organising. I had no trouble spotting the St Johns Ambulance that Nikki was in charge of that day, and made my way through a crush of young people, all claiming injury of one sort or another in an effort to avoid throwing a javelin, or running around the track. Nikki shooed them away and they went cheerfully enough, no doubt scheming of the next strategy for sports carnival avoidance.

I introduced myself to the slim young woman in uniform, who shyly responded with a quiet hello. As well as being a volunteer ambulance officer Nikki is a student at Bentham College, a senior secondary college in the next town. A member of the senior staff at Bentham had contacted me the previous week upon hearing of my study through a radio interview. I didn't know much about Nikki, except that she is the 19 year old mother of two children: three-month-old Jack and two-year-old Eliza. Eliza is currently with Nikki's mother, and Jack is asleep in the back of the ambulance. I come to realise very quickly that Nikki doesn't think there's anything worthy of a closer look at her life as a teenage mother. She's an incredibly pragmatic young woman, who just gets on with it: "it" being motherhood, study, work, ambulance training, housework, and her relationship with her partner Daniel.

While Nikki and Daniel, the father of her two children, aren't married, they live a very settled life together. Daniel is in full time employment and they're buying their own home.

As this first visit was merely for the purposes of introducing myself and inviting her participation in the study we arranged to meet at her home the following week. When I arrived I found a well-kept house and garden. Inside, the house is spotless – there was no sign of the breakfast dishes left in the sink, no piles of washing waiting to be folded and put away, no toys scattered around. The children were both having morning naps: I could tell immediately that Nikki has a routine and that life is structured to ensure everything goes according to plan. I asked Nikki about this, as it's the uppermost thing in my mind upon entering the house: *When I get up in the morning I clean the house. My children don't sleep at the same time, this is a rare occasion [laughs] um ... yeah, my housework's done if Eliza's asleep, or if Jack's asleep. I just get up and do the daily thing, dress the kids, do the housework, and go.*

I was a bit concerned with Nikki's reticence in answering my questions and realised that this wasn't going to be the same sort of conversation I'd had with other mothers: it was to be much more of a question / answer type interview. I started at the same point I started all the conversations – with the time line of significant events Nikki had prepared for me. It turned out to be a very useful tool in this interview as it gave a visual indicator of what Nikki considered significant in her life and allowed me to ask questions specifically related to the time line, as asking her to "tell me" about the events didn't let forth a torrent of stories, as I'd hoped it would. This interview was much more of a 'mining for information' (Gubrium, 2003) than the interviews I'd already conducted with other young mothers. The structure of the interview then, followed closely the time line, allowing me to find out, in a relatively short space of time, the chronology of events leading up to Nikki's first pregnancy. It also helped to contextualise Nikki's life for me: Nikki is the eldest of five

children and she mentions that she *practically helped mum bring up my youngest sister* and that she spends a lot of time with her mother *because we get on really well*. I ask about the level of support her mother provides and if she thinks she could have done what she's done without that support – Nikki's mother drove her to and from college until Nikki got her driver's licence, as well as cared for Eliza when she could no longer accompany Nikki to school: *oh ... yes and no ... I mean if I didn't have mum there to support me, Daniel's parents were very supportive as well*, but on saying that she does acknowledge the support her mother has given her. Her parents separated four years before and Nikki said of her father: *I don't speak to him ... he didn't find out I was pregnant till basically I had Eliza. He didn't really care that I was pregnant ... like, he went ... he thought I'd ruined my life but ... but then he comes here and sees I'm here and thinks "well, no she hasn't" but yeah ... we don't get on*. Nikki moved out of her parent's home at the age of sixteen because of *conflict*. *I went to Sydney because my parents broke up and I'd had enough of it. I lived in Sydney with my mum's family, for eight months, moved back home and there was six of us in a three bedroom house and mum's boyfriend moved in as well, and as we don't get on, I moved out. Her boyfriend was very ... um ... and still is ... very jealous in a way. He didn't like the fact that I was pregnant and when Eliza did come along Mum spent a lot of time with us and he didn't like that, so it's been good that she's actually stuck by me and not him ... now she sticks by him, in a way.*

Of her mother's reaction to the news of her pregnancy Nikki told me that *my mum was fine*. The biggest hassle for Nikki in being pregnant was *because I was so sick I couldn't finish the year ... that was the only sort of hassle ... yeah, I couldn't actually finish the year at school ... I spent most of the time in hospital*. Nikki's pregnancy was characterised by sickness, something that her grandmother and mother had both suffered with when they were pregnant with daughters. *Anything I ate I brought back up and for the whole pregnancy I probably kept one piece of toast down ... everything I ate it just come back up instantly, so that was basically the sickness ... because I had nothing in ...*

like, I hadn't eaten anything I was passing out as well. The changes to a woman's body when she's pregnant are something that affects some mothers more than others. Unlike other mothers in this study, Nikki wasn't concerned with any weight gain: I was 53 kilos and I went down to about 46 ... the day I had Eliza I think I was 51 kilos. Nikki breastfed both children because she hated the idea of making up bottles.

Nikki tells me that her ambition, to do nursing or something similar (aged care youth work), hasn't been stopped by the arrival of her children, but the way she's planning on achieving that goal has changed: *No, no, no, it hasn't stopped me, I've just gone in another direction ... really I've gone in a cheaper way, I mean if I went to uni it would've cost me a fortune to do it through TAFE and everything ... I'm still getting the same qualification ... so ... yeah I haven't really changed that plan*

Despite Nikki just wanting to get on with life, her friends weren't very supportive of her: *see if I wasn't sick no one would of known I was pregnant right up to the day I had her, but because they knew I was sick and I was barely there, I sort of got the cold shoulder. I got "her life's over, she's got a child, her life's over, she can't come out and party, she can't do this she can't do that" yep and basically that's ... yeah ... what I got. Not even my best friend was supportive. I ask what it was about her situation that her friends couldn't handle. Was it just the fact that she couldn't go out with them anymore? well I could [laughs] I don't ... um ... I'm not real sure, I mean ... it's really hard like, my best friend, you know, hundreds of times, "ooh I think I'm pregnant" you know, like, attention seeking ... um and you know I'd talk to her and everything when it would be my ... when I was ... I think it was a bit of jealousy thing too ... because at that stage we'd bought the house and it was like "ooh, she's got everything" you know. Are you still friends? NO! Nuh, it's quite funny, I went out one night to the Warehouse and I seen her out there ... and she looked at me really weird as if "you shouldn't be out, you've got a baby" and ah ... she was very ... and then she come up and she tried to*

be friends with me and I kind of [makes a dismissive gesture] go away [laughs]. After I had Jack, I think he was two weeks old, and we decided, like, he's right, my sister looked after them for an hour and we went out for a full hour, it was only an hour ... and I got looks from everybody ... I really did and I was only there for half an hour and I said "oh, let's go" ... but I mean we stayed for the other half an hour because [Daniel] said 'oh don't worry about it' but people knew I had Jack and yeah, I was the worst person on earth because he was only two weeks old.

I ask how she handles these instances when the stigma of being a young mother is keenly felt. *Oh well [philosophically] ... I've learnt to ignore it now. Has it changed what you do? No, but as Eliza got older people didn't worry you know, but as soon as I had Jack it was "she should be home looking after her children" "she shouldn't have a life".*

Among the mothers in this study Nikki and her partner are the only ones buying their own home. I ask Nikki what prompted the decision to buy instead of to keep renting: *it probably would have been because Daniel didn't like the fact that I was renting a unit ... he probably would have bought a house ... we were looking before ... beforehand, but not thinking it was serious ... and then um we decided oh well we may as well ... we were going to Western Australia ... that's the only thing the whole pregnancy did stop ... we were going to Western Australia, he had a job lined up and everything up there and I was going up there to look for work on the mines ... but because I was pregnant we decided to stay, so ... we were going up there and buy a house, so ... at the moment we're looking at buying another house ... renting one out and buying another.*

The time line showed that Nikki and Daniel had become engaged. I ask if they're now married. *No, no ... we got engaged ah, yeah, we've got wedding rings [laughs] but that's it ... ah, we probably never will get married, I mean*

... we're in no hurry, it doesn't mean anything really ... a piece of paper and that's it [laughs].

The pragmatic streak I'd noticed in Nikki was especially evident when she talked about preparing for the birth. One of the events on her time line was a baby shower and I asked if she received a lot of presents for the baby: *No, my baby shower, because I had a Tupperware baby shower, they put money in an envelope and I bought Tupperware stuff with it. Because I didn't need any baby stuff, I'd already bought most of the baby stuff through the pregnancy, so I didn't need anything, so I decided to have a Tupperware shower which was even better [laughs] I got quite a lot out of it.*

I invite Nikki to tell me about buying things through the pregnancy, if that came about because of being organised or through forward thinking: *I love shopping!! [laughs] I'll confess I love shopping ... yeah, so whenever I seen something I liked I bought it.*

Nikki returned to school in the latter stages of her pregnancy with Eliza, to complete a Community Services Certificate. She tells me that towards the end of her pregnancy she felt a bit better and as she was only at school five or six hours a week she felt she could cope. She "had to" leave school four weeks before the baby was born: *the teachers preferred me to leave ... four weeks beforehand ... simply for safety reasons basically ... it didn't worry me. Once the baby arrived she went to school with Nikki. she come with me ... she come with me for basically till she was crawling which would have been about four, five months, and then mum had her. Everyone was quite good, I found one male teacher who didn't like the idea of it ... I don't know why because I was no where near him. How did she cope with a baby and going to school four mornings a week? Yeah, alright, rather be doing something through the day than sit at home with a baby [laughs] it wasn't that hard, I mean basically she slept most of the time, for the first few months. The other students? Oh, everyone loved it. We had one boy and he had a disability and he found it a bit funny ... um ... yeah, but he was a bit weird like that all the*

time, so ... he was ... shouldn't bring kids to school ... yeah he was a bit, a bit like that he was but everyone else was fine with it ... like I'd sit in class and feed her and everyone else was fine with it but he was the only one who had a problem. The teachers were great.

I ask why it was important that she return to school, well, because I didn't want to just sit at home ... I still wanted to do what I wanted to do ... Daniel had a bit of a ... at first when I had Eliza, Daniel was a bit "you should be staying at home looking after this baby" he was a bit like that, but that's how he's been brought up ... but two months into the course he was fine ... he's found that I've been able to handle it all I think that was his main problem ...but I couldn't sit round home all day ... even now I mean ... later today I'm going into Devonport to shop ... I just can't stay at home ... I've just got to be out ... even on weekends I just have to go for a drive somewhere or I just have to go out. I really couldn't stay at home and be a stay home mum ... I'd drive myself mad, I think.

Nikki's time line shows that she's been in and out of education, particularly college, since 1999. I ask why education is so important to her. I just want to reach my goals I think. I think that's basically ... I want to do nursing or something you know along that line, so that's basically why I keep returning. People'll get sick of me soon. I had no financial support for going to school ... no assistance at all, had to pay for my own course, had to pay for everything, so it was a very expensive thing to go back to school. Yeah, it worked out very dear ... but because I'm a mother and couldn't do full time, I could really only do part time ... no one would assist me because I was a part time student ...

As a St Johns Ambulance volunteer Nikki is kept busy with weekly training and rostered work at local events, at Christmas time there's heaps ... I think I had one day in two weeks free and that was weekend and all ...sometimes it's "do I really have to go?" but, I mean I just do it. I've got so much out of St

Johns, so I don't mind giving it back as well ... I mean, they've just sent me to Adelaide, actually that was another ... they sent me to Adelaide in January [2002] for the State Championships. The "I just do it" comment sums up Nikki's attitude, not just to her work with St Johns ambulance, but her attitude towards the way she's perceived as well. I've got friends who have got children ... same age as me, and oh, snotty noses and dirty clothes and you go to their house and I won't put my children on their floor because it's filthy and oh it's just ... yeah ... when I see them I make sure mine are nice and clean, most of the time. I find it really hard being a teenage mum, two children, people look at you and think 'bludger' you know living off tax payers money and it's none of that, I mean I don't ... oh you know, single mother ... drugs, you know all that sort of thing ... you know, they see me ... that's how I feel they see me and yeah ... they think you don't look after your children sort of thing ... yeah, I go in to town and always take my children ... I hate going in to town without my kids ... because you get the weirdest looks, even if you're slipping in to get milk you get them ... people wonder where they are ... you know you're not looking after your kids ... and I mean ... I see their point, I mean there are ... I've got a few friends who are mums and don't have anything really ... you know ... they don't look after their kids and that, so I can see where they are coming from ...but I'm not like that. I can't stand that attitude that young mums can't look after their children.

Octavia

At our first meeting 21-year-old Octavia arrived with her 16-month-old daughter, Lane. Lane isn't walking, but shuffles along on her bottom, and is dressed in purple pants, sandals and socks and a pretty, long-sleeved top. She looks very well cared for. Her hair was in a baby ponytail on the top of her head and she has big blue eyes.

Octavia is an attractive young woman, dressed in jeans and a polo neck jumper. She wears no makeup except for lip-gloss. Her long dark hair is loose and comes down to her shoulders. She's articulate and not shy or reserved in any way. She is quite open to talk and at the end of our meeting thanked me for giving her the opportunity of being involved in the study. Octavia has plenty of goals and ambitions which we talked about in more detail at our second meeting, a week later in the Young Mother's room at the college. Lane was with her father on this occasion. Robert, Lane's 35-year-old father, has two children from previous relationships: a 20-year-old daughter and a seven year old son. He's recently had another daughter with his current partner.

Octavia seems very sure of her future, in terms of knowing what she wants to do. She hasn't let having a baby stop her plans ... they've only slowed them down. She's a very strong young woman and this comes through as she talks about her relationship with Lane's father, her return to college, and her plans for overseas travel and work.

Octavia and Robert had been together for four months when Octavia discovered she was pregnant: *I usually use protection and this one time I didn't.* Octavia went to the doctor to confirm the pregnancy, after doing a home pregnancy test, and picked up information about termination – *my automatic response was to get rid of the baby, that was automatically in my*

head "oh my goodness, I'm pregnant, my life is going to stop, I'll never be anything, I don't want to do this". I always thought if I was young and unmarried I just thought I'd never keep it and like my best friend, she's just had an abortion and a lot of my other friends have had abortions. But the next day I couldn't think of anything worse ... it was like my whole life I've been taught to take care of my responsibilities ... and I thought I've only been with Robert for four months but anyway, he was over the moon. It's interesting that at this point Octavia doesn't mention how she felt. She certainly felt obligated to "take care of her responsibility" but beyond that she doesn't say. What she does make clear throughout our conversations is her determination to not let this pregnancy stop her plans for her future: *Lane was not a pre-meditated pregnancy, it was like "oh my goodness, I'm pregnant" and I knew before, because I left my job and I was on the dole, I knew I wanted to go back to school, so I was going that year actually, then I found out I was pregnant, so I thought "oh well, I'm still going to go" and Mum's like "no, no, just give yourself six months, because you'll just ... you'll run yourself into the ground, it's a lot of hard work". So I waited six months and I got bored and Robert and I split up and I got depressed and then I went to school.*

Octavia describes her relationship with Robert as being difficult from the start ... *not long after we met he lost his job, it was like his whole life fell apart ... all his friends disappeared and I was the only one left and I felt sorry for him in a way, and I stayed with him, moved in with him, then we moved to his mother's ... I didn't get along very well with her, but we stayed there four months. We were actually going to travel around Australia together, but I got pregnant, so that was the end of that. I wanted to get married, I thought the responsible thing was to get married and everything like that but he thought ... he used to say 'some women you marry and some women you sleep with' he always used to say that, I don't know if he thought I was just someone he slept with. Again, forefront in Octavia's mind is the "responsible" thing to do, despite the fact that she engaged in unprotected sex.*

They moved from Robert's mother's place to Ferndale, a small community twenty minutes north of Hampshire. Robert still wasn't working and Octavia kept breaking up with him ... he used to sleep in front of the TV most nights ... and I thought, I'm not going to hang around here, I'm 20, I'm not 35, or 40 ... I've got my whole life to live and you're set in your ways, you know your ideals, you know your values, you set your ideals for life and mine are still growing, you know, I'm still changing and he's like "she's sweet, she's cool" so when we moved in together it was like, because he didn't have a job, I had to get a job for him. I wrote his application letters, fixed up his resume and he was like "nuh, don't want to get a job" ... he was lazy.

There was also emotional turmoil for Octavia, some of which she puts down to pregnancy, but she also talks about Robert's lack of emotional support ... we just didn't get along, we just argued and he used to make me cry nearly every day, we'd go somewhere and he'd always make me upset, everyday ... and I was pregnant and my emotions were up and down, but yeah he used to make me cry all the time. It was very lonely, I've never been more lonely, and I'm not lonely now and I haven't had a boyfriend for 16 months, but I was very lonely and angry and anxious. Octavia's relationship with Robert ended about three weeks before the birth – I never thought we'd stay together anyway because we were just so different.

Even though Ferndale was quite a distance from the city Octavia says that living there wasn't isolating – I had my car and he had his car, and it was a nice area, we looked over the water, but he would have liked to isolate me more if he could've. It's an interesting comment, and one that echoes Tammie's and Janelle's experience. Octavia remains strong in the face of this older man who wants to direct her life more closely. When I was pregnant I went and did swimming, antenatal swimming and fitball and he used be to like, "how dare you go out, I don't get to go out" and I'm like, "well, that's your choice, you know I want to go do these things, I want to keep fit, and if you don't want to do something, well I can't help that".

While Octavia was determined to remain fit throughout her pregnancy – *I used to walk four kilometres everyday, trying to keep fit* – in the 15th week of her pregnancy she discovered a slight hitch to that plan: *I had an ovarian cyst, which was the size of an egg and it was growing at the rate of a baby. The doctor discovered it when I had the first internal examination and he said to come back in one month and he'd check it. I went back and it was a lot bigger so he said it'd have to be removed. I thought they'd do keyhole surgery but they can't because they can't blow me up with gas because I'm pregnant, so I came out of theatre with this whopping great scar across my stomach ... I was in for about four or five days and after that I had to rest for six weeks. Things didn't get much better: I kept getting sciatica in my legs ... I had really bad constipation – that was even worse than labour in some ways – I had fluid, I went from 60 kilos up to 84 kilos and couldn't stop it, couldn't stop the weight going on. I started eating really healthy, I took all the vitamin tablets: the women's formula, Blackmore's pregnancy ones, calcium, iron, you name it I was pumping it into me and I was drinking ... I had this real bad craving for oranges and mandarins and orange juice ... but no, it wasn't too bad, apart from stretch marks, and I've got a varicose vein now ... oh, and my boobs are just not the same anymore [laughs].* These changes to her body don't seem to have fazed Octavia. I'm beginning to think that not a great deal does. She certainly doesn't talk about, or display through incidental remarks, concern with the changes her body went through. At the beginning of this conversation she mentions having come from the gym, so there's an awareness of her body and the importance of keeping fit, but no anguish.

Despite Octavia having very definite plans for her future she went in to labour *with nothing. I didn't go in there with a plan.* Even though she read about labour she *felt the best way to have labour is be to unprepared because you have so many expectations ... what it's going to be like, how long it's going to take to dilate.* Her description of labour was quite graphic ... she talks with no air of melodrama of the doctor who got the forceps *jammed inside me and*

she pulled them apart and it was just like ... at this point Octavia makes a painful sound! She also talks candidly of her parents being present at the birth, along with Robert, who just sat there, and spoke of the experience of her father being present, of my dad sitting in the corner like he just wanted to get up and get the forceps and pull her out ... and I'm thinking 'my dad could see everything as I'm having the baby' but at that stage you don't really care though ... ah, that was funny. My mum said if she'd seen labour like I went through she wouldn't have had children ... she said it definitely put her off, none of hers was that bad.

Octavia was living at Ferndale up until the time of Lane's birth and although her and Robert had ended their relationship he stayed on, *sleeping in the lounge room or out in his camper van, until the birth just in case something happened ... but after that he moved out. I stayed there for three months, had a bit of trouble with him ... he was really wanting to get back together and I'm like "I don't love you ... that might be hard to hear but, you know, we don't get along and I don't love you". I wanted him there because of course you just want someone there, but I knew it wasn't going to work so I just ended it. It was something that her parents had wanted for some time: they never liked Robert; they just thought that we were too different, that he was not the man for me. They're like "rack him off" and I said, "Well as much as that'd be fun, he's Lane's father ... whether you like him or I get along with him, he's her father". It's not my decision to say Lane can't be with him, because what am I going to say to her "I didn't like him so you can't see him?" or "your grandparents didn't like him". I said, "you can't, he's her father, she needs to have contact with her father, whether he's good for her or not, she'll make the decision herself when she's old enough". Mum's like "oh well, he's married, the step-mother, she'll be horrible to her". I said, "we'll come to that when we come to it, at the moment she's fine". She's 24, and has just had a baby. He likes them young I think, all his girlfriends have been young. When I look at me and her I just think maybe she must have been the*

marrying type [laughs] ... I was the young rebellious sort I suppose – I was the sleep with type – the one you don't settle down with type.

Her strength is something that becomes more evident the longer I spend with her: I ask where it comes from. Octavia merely answers: *myself* then when I ask if it's always been part of who she is goes on to elaborate. *Yeah, I'm a pretty strong person. I suppose I'm a pretty blunt, forward person, if I've got something to say I'm going to say it, but I'm not like ... I know I'm tactless, but I'm not rude. People think I'm selfish sometimes, but I say, "look, no one's going to help me get where I am" I said, "sometimes you've got to tread on people to get where you want to get, I'm not going to be one of the ones that gets trodden on". Mum's like, "you're selfish now", I said, "no. I'm focussed. There's a difference. I'm not selfish, I pay my rent, I help in the house, I see my friends, I go out, I do everything I did before, it's just that I have a goal, this is where I want to be and I want to get there. That's not selfish, that's just focussed". Mum reckons I got real selfish but I don't know, maybe it's because of Lane. It's like, I've had guys want to go out with me and I'm just like – you don't meet my criteria, my standards are very much raised and even though they love Lane and play with her and stuff it's just like ... I want security, I want to know that someone's going to be there the next day and they've got a job and they've got a car. I don't know, I suppose my strength comes from myself. I just picked myself up and thought I'd better get on with my life, and I did. This determination to just get on with it hasn't been held back by a baby: It's only made me go more I think. Before, it was like I'm going, I'm going and now I am ... like it's made me actually do it. Before it was like I'm going to do this, I was sort of a "gunna" and now it's like I'm doing it, so yeah, a year later and I get through school, sleep deprived and all. It went so fast ... mum and dad don't look after Lane much, when I study she's with me, she's playing with her toys, she annoys the crap out of me, maybe mum will come home a bit early from work and she'll have her for an hour or something, but when exams come I had to pay my sister to come over and babysit so I could do my exams. It was pretty shocking. I'm like, "mum, can't*

you look after the baby, I'm busy, I've got exams", mum's like "that's your problem". But I got through it; you get through it because you have to. I just think I'm a pretty strong person, but actually I was thinking the other day sometimes strength isn't that good, because I have so many things in my head that I don't know what I feel inside anymore. I know what I want, sometimes you strive for it and you think, I don't want it anymore. Like, you have so many upheavals and things to get over, you think "I don't know if I can be bothered to do this anymore", you think, maybe there's an easier way out. Mum says I've become really hard and I said, "mum I haven't got time to be mucked around" and she goes "yeah, but you've just ... you just have no patience for people, it's like it's either this way or it's nothing, you have to be more patient with people". I said, "I've had being patient with people Mum, all my friends want my patience and my time and my ear to listen – for me to listen to them." When I had Lane I cleaned out my closet I suppose, I got rid of a lot of friends that just used to drain me. I thought of everyone else and what everyone else has done, my friends and stuff ... but now I look at myself and I'm doing more than they are and they don't have children. Maybe having Lane's made me think I want to hang around positive people, people that are getting their career and stuff together.

In 1996, before falling pregnant, Octavia had finished Year 11 at Hampshire College and the next year began a traineeship in viticulture – *my main aim was to become a wine maker or work in a winery, not necessarily go to uni because I couldn't think of anything worse than spending four or five years getting an education ... I just wanted to get a job and get money ... so I did the traineeship, went to TAFE and got certificate two in viticulture. I got four weeks holiday every year, the pay wasn't that bad; it was better than an apprenticeship, so it was good because I learnt a lot and it helped me decide what I want to do. I had a boyfriend at the time who was moving to Cairns and I wanted to go with him, but I'm glad I didn't because otherwise I would never have been furthering myself to be a wine maker. Then I went to a winery and had a bit of a problem with the boss over some safety matters so I*

left. I decided I'd get into horticulture – but there's not a lot of work in horticulture in Tasmania, it's crap pay and crap bosses and people just want you for a little bit and then they just say they don't need you, we'll call you when we need you and it was like "yeah, whatever". I eventually got a job picking flowers but I got pregnant during that time and because I was in hot houses I couldn't work ... so I left and just decided to bum around on the dole ... and was bored out of my brain!

When I came here, to college, at the beginning of the year I started doing French, but it was on the opposite side of my school days so I had to come all week basically ... and I learnt it for six weeks and it just got too hard. Mum goes, "you're taking on too much", I said, "no, I'm not, I'll be fine, I'm going to France, I need to learn French" ... but it just got too much. I just couldn't do everything, English, Maths, Science, French, gym, running around doing everything, breastfeeding, I just went "blaaaa" ... and just started crying and mum goes "are you alright?" and I'm like "I just can't do it anymore" [in a mock crying tone]. This was only like March, April, you know, here's me trying to do everything at once as usual. So I dropped French and I thought "nuh, I'll put France on hold for a while" and then I was talking to the winemaker and he said "you're not really going to get a job there unless you've got your Bachelor of Science", so I thought well, next year, I don't know, the end of next year, maybe not this year, next year I'm going to learn French for a couple of years at TAFE as well as do uni and work and look after Lane, we'll see how it goes. At the end of it I'm going to go to France because I'll have my piece of paper and I'll be able to speak French, enough to get me by, and I'll take Lane and she can go to school and speak French. I just want to work with wine and to travel.

Octavia completed Year 12 at college and the following year enrolled in an interstate university course, studying for a Bachelor of Science in Viticulture, which she is doing by distance. She is very strict with her time – setting aside two full days a week to study, three to work, and still has time for socialising

and spending time with Lane. She is in a new relationship and continues to move ahead with her life. The way Octavia has dealt with a difficult relationship with an older man, with being a teenage mother, with returning to complete her secondary education while breastfeeding, and enrolling in university is testament to her strength and determination. She hasn't let having a baby deter her from her path, it's just made her more determined to continue along it.

Louise

The block of flats is being painted so I walk carefully around the big tins of paint and up the dark stairwell, making sure I don't touch the wet walls.

Louise had said her flat was the end one, closest to the road, and I notice the open front door and hear music coming from there, so guess I've found the right place. Louise doesn't get up when I knock on the door, but invites me in from her position on a bean bag. She is 17 years old and six months pregnant and lives in the two bedroom flat with her partner, the baby's father. The light in the flat is minimal and there's a man painting the door frame, and the walls outside. His presence doesn't seem to bother Louise, she talks freely enough, but I'm aware of his presence and his lack of regard for her privacy. Louise is sitting cross legged on the bean bag reading a book on pregnancy and child birth, and there is a pile of other, similar, books near her. Louise turns the music down. "Would you like a cup of tea?" she asks after we go through the preliminary introductions. I accept her offer and as she stands see that her pregnancy is clearly visible in her long wispy dress; her feet are bare and her hair hangs loosely down her back. We talk about why I wanted to meet with her and generally about her pregnancy. I feel nervous – I am very aware of my position as an academic (to be totally truthful I am more aware of my position as an older woman) and don't want to give the impression that I'm here to judge her, or to make her jump through some sort of hoop; to provide "right" answers to my questions. I describe my study and its scope and allow Louise some insight into my stance on teenage pregnancy and parenting. Once we get the preliminary details out of the way (name, age, who she lives with) I ask Louise to draw up a time line of significant events of the previous two years. I wanted to go back far enough to get a cursory insight into Louise's life – her relationships, her attitude to schooling, and her attitudes to the future. It is these events that I use as a starting point for our discussion.

Louise draws up the timeline then on my invitation to tell me about those years she launches into stories of a Texan boyfriend she had at that time. In subsequent interviews Louise feels that the boyfriend is not relevant to her story and is surprised that she spoke so much about him. As the story of the Texan boyfriend is intertwined with other aspects of Louise's life – schooling, moving from the island on which she grew up into a more urban setting, drug use, relationships with boys, and finally her experience of domestic violence – I see it as an important part of her life as it helps to illustrate Louise's adolescence, so with her permission I have included extracts here.

Growing up in a rural, close knit community on an island off the coast of Tasmania has helped shape Louise's attitudes to life, and to parenting. These attitudes are evident when she talks, after the birth of her son, of her distress that she couldn't keep the afterbirth (as the women on the island do). I notice a strong streak of practicality in Louise, but that becomes most obvious when I meet with her again after the birth of her son. But let me go back to Louise's time line. She dropped out of school at the end of year 9 but *I didn't want to just sit around and do nothing so my parents enrolled me in Year 10 with the Tasmanian Open Learning Centre and I did distance education and finished year 10*. Louise cites a number of reasons why she dropped out of her local high school: *it wasn't a very good school, a lot of the teachers weren't in it to be teachers they just you know, just wanted a job ... it wasn't a very nice place to be. And I was involved, you know I was smoking heaps of pot and drinking heaps of alcohol and I didn't really give a shit about school ... but I had this big wake up call and thought "shit I better finish school" because my mum always said to me "you've got three years left of school and then you've got the next seventy years to never ever go to school again" so I said "yeah, it sounds pretty good, I better go finish it" ... so yeah, I finished year 10. I did really, really well in distance education, got really good marks. I was really proud that I finished that.*

When Louise finished Grade 10 her father's job took him off the island, to a large metropolitan area of the state. Louise and her sister moved in with him, along with Louise's boyfriend. Louise explained that the move hadn't signalled a separation of the family: *my parents have been together for something like thirty years ... they were together I think 13 years before they got married and they've been married 18 years. It's a long time, but dad had to move off the island just to go to work, it was full time. My boyfriend Clem moved in with us and was supposed to go to college, but he didn't ... he was really unreliable. He had a bad upbringing, I blame his dad. Clem was pretty abusive ... he got really violent, he never went to school, he'd run off every pay day, go take drugs with his friends and then come back on my pay day, which really pissed me off, and then yeah towards the last three or four months of our relationship he got really, really violent ... he didn't hit me across the face that many times, but he was kicking me in the stomach and I remember once standing with my arms out bawling my eyes out going "please just cuddle me, give me a cuddle" and he stood there kicking my hands, trying to break my fingers. Then one day I'd been scamming money ... I just used to go round "do you have a bus fare?" asking people for bus fare ... I had to scam money for pot, and I got money and then everybody I knew in the city, all of the dealers I knew, had no pot, everybody was dry. Clem sent me out looking, he just sent me out on the streets asking people for pot ... but there wasn't any and I was too scared to go home because he was there and I knew he'd hurt me ... but I went back and he hit me across the face and I was bleeding all over the carpet. Anyway, I broke it off with him and lived on the streets for a couple of months. I could have lived with my dad, but I was pretty fucked up. I was finding it really hard to get over Clem. I never wanted to let this guy go, I just wanted to make him happy, but yeah eventually I just gave up and went back to my dad. I applied for a housing place and went to Colony 47 and they got me this place. Basically the only reason I got this place is because I was enrolled at college, but by that time it was too late to go back to year 11, school had finished by the time I got this place ... but I went back to year 12.*

It's really cheap rent, so yeah, it was a good place for me and it's good being so close to school, but it's bad in a way because I'm not with my parents, they don't make me get up and go to school, I have to learn to motivate myself ... like, I'm late for every class.

The motivation Louise spoke of was strong enough within her to encourage Jason (her new boyfriend) to return to college. *I met Jason at the end of January during the school holidays. We sat around, I think we were on dexies ... but I just told him all about school and how good it is and it's a good thing to do because it motivates you to keep yourself going – you don't sit around and be a bludger – and he really liked me, he thought I was really hot, I think he enrolled for both those reasons, to keep himself motivated and also so he could be close to me at school. And then, I don't know how, he moved in, he just kind of moved in [laughs]. He's such a good guy. We were never really that careful when it came to sex ... like, I've been sexually abused before and I always felt really dirty. I had an STD test and everything came back negative and I just felt so clean and so different in my reproductive system and then found out about a month later that I was pregnant. I did want kids and I wanted kids with Jason, I just didn't particularly want them right now [laughs]. But yeah, we were never really that careful about it, I think we were just 'if it happened it happened'. I think we always felt like we were lucky that you know we'd had sex 150 thousand times before and nothing had happened so why would it happen this time? But it did.*

Louise speaks of the confirmation of her pregnancy and of her excitement in telling Jason, which stands in stark contrast to the feelings with which she faced her mother. Louise's mother reacted in the way many mothers react to the news of their teenage daughter's pregnancy: with shock and with immediate plans to deal with the situation through abortion – *I said, "I have something to tell you but I don't want to because you've made it really hard", and she said, "oh god, you're not" and I said, "yes I am" and she said, "well*

what are you going to do?" and I said "I don't know" and she said, "good, you're going to get rid of it". Her mother also made continual comments to Louise about how her life will now change in a negative way, how she'll never be able to do what she really wants with her life – she wanted me to have a really good life and travel and not live the same life as her. Dad came round one day and said, "so your mum told me you guys are pregnant" ... he told me how him and my mum were pregnant when they were 17 but they decided they were going to have an abortion and then before she went for the abortion she had a miscarriage ... so he told me about that and just said, "it's happened to all of us, you're not the first". Mum was the one who said my life was over, I know she's only telling me the facts of how things are going to change but she's been so negative. Anyway, dad went back and told mum how her being negative all the time was upsetting me and she's been a lot better about it. I just felt like I needed my mum to support me and, she wasn't being very supportive, I just felt like she was being too negative.

Louise sees her pregnancy as the catalyst for getting her life back on track and despite her mother's warnings that *I couldn't get my life back ever, and that I'd stuffed things up, being pregnant has given me an excuse to look after myself. It was a big wake up call. A lot of my friends have said it's unbelievable how responsible I've been. That part of my life is over, but that was a bad part of my life anyway, so it was a welcome thing. I was happy it had ended that part of my life. It wasn't as if my whole life was over, I'm not dead, but yeah I saw it as the end of a chapter, but the start of a better one.*

Another way Louise found being pregnant changed her life was her decision to stop her drug use after the morning sickness had subsided: *before I'd actually gone to the doctor I was really ... just got really turned off cigarettes ... I quit, yeah, I just completely quit, went cold turkey, never smoked a cigarette for ages, they made me feel sick and horrible ... I was five weeks pregnant when I found out ... and I went and had an ultrasound three weeks later ... 'cause, yeah, 'cause I quit smoking for a month and then found out I*

was pregnant and then three weeks later found out I was eight weeks pregnant and then realised that being pregnant had probably turned me off smoking ... I don't know, smoking was a big thing for me, I'm proud that I quit ... [chuckles]. My boyfriend still smokes a bit of dope, which I don't mind, it's not as bad as heroin or something ... I don't smoke it ... I did for a long time and when I found out I was pregnant I stopped smoking skunk straight away I just went completely off the chemical stuff and smoked a couple of cones of bush every now and then. I mainly smoked it in the morning to help with morning sickness, it really did help, it just eased everything ... but yeah, eventually I just started feeling too guilty about even smoking bush, I smoked it without tobacco and just had a little, tiny, tiny little cones of bush and then I just felt so bad about it in terms of the baby's health ... I mean, I know so many women who smoke pot all through their pregnancies and have no complications but there is the possibility it could have had an effect so ... yeah, I just stopped smoking it.

Louise says she became healthier and happier throughout her pregnancy but she was still troubled by her mother's reaction: *I just felt like I needed my mum to support me and she wasn't being very supportive. I couldn't get my life back ever ... how it used to be ... but I actually feel a lot better, I feel healthier and happier.*

This conversation about eating more healthily and taking better care of herself led Louise to talk about how she feels about her pregnant body. Through the story that Louise tells to describe how she feels about her growing body, issues such as body image and eating disorders begin to become apparent. Louise reflects on how she used to feel about herself and throughout the ensuing conversation her ambivalence towards her body becomes evident and I'm reminded that while I'm talking with a pregnant woman, that pregnant woman is still a teenager, with many attitudes we ascribe to adolescents. *I feel like I look better, but I also think how self conscious I was before I was pregnant. I was really thin, I weighed like 47 kilos on a bad day, often I'd*

weigh 43 and a half and that was a good day for me. I was breakable thin, and I still thought back then I was fat, as every teenage girl does. But I was really self conscious about a lot of parts of my body and now I think about it and go, I was really sexy back then, I like my body back then. I don't feel like I'm that fat, I feel like I've put on weight, I've put on 20 kilos actually. I remind her that's she's having a baby! She laughs and says that it also depends on the clothes I'm wearing, because a lot of my clothes don't fit me anymore and I can't afford maternity clothes. I still fit into my size 8 jeans but they don't fit around my waist. Have you seen the belly belts? They're a life saver, so I can still wear my size 8 jeans with my belly belt but what used to sag around my bum is now filled out and it fills weird to actually wear pants that fit my bum.

The conversation moves to her teachers' reactions to the news of her pregnancy: *All my teachers are female except one who makes a joke out of everything so it doesn't matter what you tell him he's just going to make a joke, and I was expecting that from him but he was away at the time. He was my art teacher and he was away and I had a female teacher and I told her ... to explain absences and things. She was really distant from everybody so she kind of didn't really get that involved. My photography teacher was great ... took me a little while to tell her because I didn't get along with her very well, we still don't really, we clash ... she's a beautiful woman, she's a really good teacher, but she's a real bitch when she wants to be and that's my problem as well, I can be a real bitch. I love her, she's a great woman, absolutely fantastic, but we just clash, we have personality differences. It was mainly me, like she'd say things and I'd react to it, it was never really her provoking or anything, it was usually my problem but I told her eventually and she was really supportive and I asked her if there was a danger to me being around chemicals in the dark room and she said probably not but there's not enough evidence, so I chose to do digital photography. I got some really good work done. My other teacher was my sewing teacher and she was really good,*

really supportive, which is really funny because she's like 60 something ...I thought she'd be very judging but no, she was really great.

Throughout this conversation many issues were raised – either incidentally by Louise or deliberately by the way I guided the conversation. One of the most significant of those is the one surrounding who gets pregnant and their decision to keep the baby. Louise could be viewed as a drug user, a victim of domestic violence, a high school drop out, a “troubled” teenager and some could say that it’s hardly surprising that she became pregnant – her first sexual encounter was when she was 13, and as she says she’d *been biologically ready to have a baby since the age of 12*. She admits to not using contraceptives, to having a fatalistic attitude towards pregnancy – both could be interpreted as the irresponsible characteristics of the teenage mother stereotypically described in much of the literature surrounding teenage pregnancy and in the media. But to characterise Louise in those ways, to attach those labels to her and put her in the box marked “problem” fails to address another side of pregnancy – her emergence as a mother, and the way she’s grown into that role.

I met with Louise again after she’d had her baby, Thomas, and had moved to an area further from the city but closer to Jason’s workplace. They now live in a three bedroom house surrounded by trees and glimpses of the water. Thomas is eight and a half months old, a lovely little boy with huge eyes, and no hair. He’d just woken up as I arrived and was bouncy and happy – eating his lunch as he interacted with his mother. Louise had put Thomas in a high chair where he sat eating some stewed apple, then some custard. He waved at me and smiled a number of times – not bothered by my presence. Louise still breastfeeds Thomas – about three or four feeds a day, but *chucks him on the boob* whenever he’s really tired. *It acts like a dummy - he doesn't have a dummy - I tried to give him one when he first started teething. I never really had anything against them, but I just put him to bed and he cries himself to sleep and if he's too tired I put him on the boob. He doesn't have a bottle ...*

he won't take one. He drinks from a cup rather than a bottle. It makes sense to wean him from the breast to a cup.

It is this "sense" that constantly emerges throughout my time with Louise and her son. It's evident in the decisions she makes and especially in her care of him. Thomas is dressed in a short sleeved jump suit; his feet are bare. It is a warm day and the house is comfortably heated. Thomas sits independently, crawls, and pulls himself up on the furniture and walks around, hanging on. He walks over to me, and taps on the keyboard of my laptop. Louise distracts him with squeaky toys. His hand-eye coordination is good; he reaches for the toy and grasps it immediately. When Louise changes his nappy she again distracts him with a toy as he rolls around.

I sense a marked contrast in Louise from six months ago. She seems much more settled into the role of motherhood and has shaken off the remnants of the rebellious teenager I encountered at our first meeting. Louise is a loving, playful mother but is also sensible. There was no sense of helplessness, no "I don't know what to do when the baby cries" feeling ... she recognised when Thomas was hungry, when he wanted to be breastfed, when he needed a sleep. The routine seemed fairly set ... when he became obviously tired, she kissed him, told him she loved him, put him into bed, and shut the door. Thomas cried for a few minutes, then went to sleep. She didn't rush in there to fuss over him as if unsure what to try next. She didn't agonise over what to do with an obviously tired baby. She allows Thomas the freedom to explore his environment, to play with toys gathered in a pile near the window, and to interact with her while she talks to me.

I immediately feel more comfortable with this more mature young woman sitting opposite me. It's as if there's been a transformation in her and her confidence in her mothering has grounded her even more than her pregnancy. In our first conversation Louise had spoken of Jason enrolling in college and from one of the vocational courses he was doing he was able to gain full time

employment in the automotive industry. This employment, and their reliance on public transport, eventually precipitated their move to this new house. Louise and Jason continue to live together – him as an apprentice and her as a full time mother.

I ask Louise to “fill me in” on what had happened in the time since we last met and she talks about the move, and about the last few months of her pregnancy: *I had a bit of fluid retention, not much, not like some women, and I almost got anaemic, because I was a vegetarian before, but I started to eat bits of meat and they put me on iron tablets ... but that was it really. I went to every doctor's appointment I was supposed to go to. Thomas was really, really big. He was nine pound 11 and as you can see I'm not a very big person and Jason, have you met Jason?* I indicated that I'd met him briefly at the end of our first interview. *Well, he's not very big either, although he was quite a big baby, but I partly blame Blackmores [laughs] because I was taking the pregnancy and breastfeeding formula and I think that helped him grow so big. I think it was good for him, it helped him grow big and healthy and strong.* Louise had also done “preg-nastics”: *you could start it whenever, like it was every Monday and Friday. It was pelvic floor exercises mainly but it was also strengthening the physical body so you can labour for longer, like doing leg exercises. It was really good; it made me feel better about myself. Being a big fat blimp but still fit, so that really helped with the labour. In the labour ward I knew that I had to take charge; I'd been told by so many people that you have to be firm and tell the nurses what you want, so I did and I suppose it was an alright labour, there were no complications. It just took ages ... from when my waters broke to when he was actually born it was 21 and a half hours. After he was born I actually got really upset thinking about what they do with the placenta because most women I know, because I'm from the island, will bury it under a tree or they'll freeze it and give it to the child when they're old enough to do something with it themselves ... as far as I know they burnt it, which just makes me feel sick, makes me feel really bad because it's the last thing that joined me and Thomas together, physically, so*

that really upsets me to think about that ... we didn't get to bury it – oh well, I suppose worse things have happened.

I suggested she'd know for next time, and then asked if there was going to be a next time ... yep, Jason and I have been talking about it actually. I don't want to have another one for a while, because I want to get back into school and all of that, but I also want Thomas to have a companion. I put it to Jason when Thomas was a couple of months old, that I wanted to have another one in a couple of years, then when I'm 30 or 35 have another one or two. Jason didn't like the idea of that though. He was like "we're going to spend our lives bringing these two up then bring two more in to the house" which I understand, but I'm like, "what am I going to do when the kids leave?" I'll be nothing. It's a telling comment, but one I'm sure Louise will think more about as Thomas gets older and she's not so enmeshed in motherhood. She goes on to tell me *I think I told you last time that I'm intending to take a year off, but now I've got Thomas I realise that a year probably isn't long enough. I mean he's nearly a year old now. And I knew it was going to change my life, but I just thought he'd be mature enough to leave with other people when he was a year old, but I don't think a year is long enough for him to get to know me, or me to get to know him, so I'm thinking if he's two or three, or maybe even wait till he starts school I'll go back to school myself. I was thinking of doing a child care course because I mean, that's what I'm doing, I'm caring for a child so it would help me learn about child psychology and how to handle situations that are going to occur anyway... so I'm thinking of doing something like that, just to keep my self worth up.* Again, it's a telling comment. I ask about child care facilities at the colleges and Louise tells me that there used to be child care available but they stopped it now. *The whole bottom floor of A Block used to be given over to child care but they just don't do it anymore. I've got heaps of friends in the area who don't have classes all through the day so I could leave him with them if I wanted to even just to do part time school, so I've got options. There's things I can do now if I want to, but I'm happy being a mum at the moment.*

I ask about ambitions she might have had before she fell pregnant: was there something she particularly wanted to be or do, any aspirations she might have had? *Yeah there were a few things I wanted to be. I hadn't quite made up my mind. I wanted to do photography. I wasn't sure where I wanted to go with it, like I wanted to do it for pleasure, like art sort of stuff, but I sort of thought I wouldn't get very far with it so I wanted to do maybe weddings or even child photography. I've been taking Thomas to some studios and having photos done and they're just so much fun, so yeah that sort of thing. And dance ... always wanted to do something with dance, either a dance teacher or something like that, and massage, so I hadn't quite made up my mind. She grins cheekily and says but I've been thinking more about doing massage, but I don't want to massage yukky, wrinkly old people! I thought I'd get into sports massage and massage sweaty muscly men – that'd probably be the best I think [laughs]. Jason wasn't very impressed when I told him that!*

With marriage rates across the population declining I ask if it's something they've considered. *We've talked about getting married and Jason would say things like "when we're married" and "when you're my wife" and things like that and I just said to him one day, Jason I never really wanted to get married because I don't want to get divorced, I just don't want to go through that shit, and he said "well I'm the same, I don't want to get married, then get divorced, so if I get married it's for good" and I thought, ok, cool, well maybe I do want to get married then [laughs]. I suggest that Louise has a good model for marriage in her parents: yeah I used to feel guilty because I was the only kids at school pretty much whose parents were still together, so I thought I was a bit abnormal. I've actually thought about it quite a bit, because my parents are so good together, and I've had just a great upbringing ... but Jason has had different, like his parents broke up when he was eight or nine.*

When Louise is talking about her relationship with Jason I forget about her age. It's not as if I'm sitting there thinking, this is an 18 year old who's

discussing her relationship with me; her age isn't an issue at all. It makes me think about how when policy makers and others insist on attaching the word "teenage" to "pregnancy" or "parenting" they put young mothers into a special box – as if they're somehow different from mothers who are no longer teenagers. Louise is dealing with relationship and mothering issues earlier than others, but that's not to say that she's doing it badly on account of her age. It's not to say that she's "different" or that a solution needs to be found for her "problem". It's one of the contentious issues surrounding the labelling of teenage mothers as a problem needing a solution that we focus on the age of the mother, rather than the fact that they're mothers and / or partners. The other thing that comes to mind is that when adults talk about relationships, they sometimes sound like adolescents. The angst they feel over their bodies changing can sound very much like the angst teenagers feel; the same could be said regarding their concerns over partners still finding them attractive, about their self-worth when their jobs aren't going like they want them to. It's easy to attach a label that seeks to denigrate, or dismiss, how a young mother is dealing with her situation, but conversations like the one I have with Louise about her relationship with her partner shows that it's not a useful, or just attachment.

Jason and I have sort of drifted apart in the past couple of weeks and he woke up on the weekend, and said "you don't love me much anymore, do you?" and that was such a shock. I started crying and said "what have I done to make you feel that I don't love you?" He said "oh you just don't come near me much anymore". You know, when I think about it, when we first got together we'd spend twenty minutes just looking into each other's eyes, smiling, and we don't do that anymore. We can't sit and stare because Thomas is at our feet – and it's true, like Jason would go to bed at 9:30 and Thomas wouldn't go to bed till 10:30, so I'd have to stay up with Thomas. I suppose I got into the routine of having Thomas up and fell back on blaming him for keeping me out of bed, and also because I'm breastfeeding, I'm just not in the mood for sex. It's like "sex again, we did that last month" [laughs]. So that was

partly, I suppose why I delayed going to bed "is Jason asleep? Cool, I don't have to have sex". But I don't want him to resent Thomas and I don't want him to resent the choices we've made. It's really hard on him, it really is and I suppose I've blamed Thomas for a few things too, like keeping me out of bed, when it was partly me. Like I could have put him to bed at nine – it was probably TV shows I want to watch "no I want to watch CSI", "no, Survivor's on" [laughs] Gosh, my relationship's more important than the bloody television.

It is Louise's ability to be reflective to this degree that has a lasting impression on me. It's the same when I go back in late November for another meeting with her. After looking through some photo albums of Louise as a younger teen and then as a pregnant one, we talk about self image and how that's constructed. Louise wonders how Jason could still be attracted to her. *I think about the person I was when I got with Jason and how he was so attracted to me then and it makes me wonder how attracted to me he is now ... I still see him being in love with that other girl [her younger self] that skinny one who was taking drugs and he was attracted to that person and it makes me wonder if he's attracted to this one, and he tells me all the time that he is, but I just wonder if he tells me that because he has to, well, not because he has to but because, you know, I'm the mother of his child and he should, which is just ridiculous because I know that he really does ...it's funny, you think of all that stuff and then as soon as you verbalise it you think "stop being a dickhead".* It's this notion of verbalising your thinking in the way Louise describes that shows, again, her ability to be reflexive. It also shows me one of the positive outcomes of the study: that through sharing their thinking and their life stories, the mothers participating will feel a validation of their story and of themselves.

The photos Louise shows me of herself show the striking change in her features over the last few years. I wouldn't have recognised her from a photo taken just twelve months ago. After looking through the album and telling me

about the stories behind the photos Louise says *I think my face got a lot wiser all of a sudden, a lot more womanly sort of, less teenage-y. In a way I felt unattractive when I was pregnant because I put on a lot of weight in other areas of my body, but I also felt really beautiful, like an earth mother, like I was in touch with the earth and like any pregnant woman I've seen has just been so beautiful. I was also very proud of my tits ... I thought, yes, I finally have boobs! [laughs]*

I wanted to know if there were other things, apart from her weight, which gave Louise a sense of worth – or took that away. I mentioned that one of the stereotypes of the teenage mother is that of 'stupid slut' (Kelly, 2000, p. 27) and asked if she's ever viewed herself in that way. *I didn't think of myself as that but I thought everybody else did, and I still do. Like, I ... one of the things that motivates me to get on with my life and make something of myself is because I don't want people to think, oh she got pregnant at a young age, she must have been a slut. And yeah, I was quite worried about what other people would think, even my family, like my grandparents, they've told me, since they've met Thomas they've all told me that when I sent them the letter telling them I was pregnant they were all like, oh my god what has she done with herself, she's ruined her life, but now they've seen me with him and I've just completely changed they're happy that I've done it and I know they never would have thought I was a slut but ... I don't know how to explain what I think they would have thought ... irresponsible or something.*

I think I have disappointed my parents but I think for most of my teenage life I disappointed them, so when they found out I was pregnant I thought this is just the icing on the cake and I felt it completely ruined their thoughts of me and how they view me as ... that I could ever be anything, but I was like that anyway. I always felt, as a teenager, that I disappointed them no matter what I did. But they tell me that I haven't disappointed them, they tell me they love Thomas to bits, and they would have changed it, if someone gave them a chance to change it they wouldn't now, but maybe at the time. They're really

proud of me now and how well I'm doing as a mother. And I think they've realised the way I've changed and how much better off I am. I wouldn't be like that if I didn't have a child, I'd still be like the person I was back then ... yeah, they definitely know I'm better off with Thomas.

I ask how she feels about herself now. I feel a lot more mature and responsible and that I have something worth doing. I was talking to a friend at a party the other night and he said "you're really lucky Louise that you're one of those people who can have a child and really do it well". He said most people our age would be just so fucked but "you can do it, you're a really wicked mother". I wonder, aloud, where that comes from: I have always been able to know what's right and wrong, even though I did the wrong thing I knew I could always take responsibility if I wanted to, I knew how to do it, sometimes I just didn't want to. I hear about my friends who go out and party and they just have fun all the time, which I miss out on, but I have fun in my own ways, in different ways. I have fun looking after Thomas; I have fun teaching this person what life is all about. And I'm not really one of those people who likes going out. I don't like drinking, I used to love getting stoned but getting stoned and going out's not fun anyway, I just ... I'm over it, I'm over getting out of control. I just don't want people to see me as a bludger who looks after a baby but gets money from the government to do it, which I will be doing for the next few years, but eventually I will be going back to school, I will be getting a job, because I need to and because I want to prove people wrong. I want people to go "oh my god, Louise has done something with herself, she's not that drop kick person we thought she'd turn out to be".

* * * * *

I visit Louise one final time in July 2004, to have her read through this story. Thomas is now 17 months old and a happy little toddler. Louise weaned him when he was 13 months old which was difficult for her. She tells me of feeling a physical separation and I didn't handle it very well. Emotionally I

was cut up. When I see other mothers breastfeeding I get all teary. I thought about having another child as I felt there was something missing in my life but then I thought that it might not necessarily be a baby that I want, so I'm thinking about other options. Jason was also worried about the money – how we can't really afford to have another child. Next year I'm determined to do year 13 and do dance, photography and fashion design and then go to TAFE to do more with photography – like Art, Craft and Design. I want to finish year 13 because I want to feel that I've completed my education.

Becoming a mother has, for Louise, enabled her to turn her life around. The dire consequences attributed to teenage pregnancy and parenting haven't been part of her experience. Louise faces different challenges than the 18 year old who hasn't yet had a child, but her sense of responsibility, her practical common sense, her maturity and her ability and inclination to reflect on her actions will see her avoid the pitfalls that others prophesise will be in her path.

Tammie

She's late. I sit in the "Pink Room" of the college library wondering if Tammie will show up. It's November, 2002 and almost the end of the school year. The Assistant Principal had told me that seventeen year old Tammie (mother of 18 month old Angel) is a part time student. I wonder if today was a normal attendance day or if she'd come in especially to meet with me, or indeed if she'd come in at all. The door swung open and Tammie came in, wearing a long, floaty dress and black boots. She has a lively face and when she sits down it's evident that she's keen to communicate. Throughout our conversation she doesn't show any hesitancy in speaking with me about her life, at times touching on quite difficult and very personal issues. Tammie's mother was looking after Angel.

I'd been able to contact Tammie through a program run at Bentham College for "at risk" students. The Assistant Principal in charge of the program contacted me after hearing an interview I did on radio, and before my meeting with Tammie I'd spoken with him and with the three teachers who had a more hands-on role with the program.

Tammie's story is like one you read about in the literature. In some ways she's a "typical" young mother, if such a person exists. Her life has been characterised by family dysfunction, early school leaving, drug use, domestic violence, and of course, teenage pregnancy. Her parents separated when she was nine months old, although she says *they get along well, which is good and that her and her father have always been close*. Her relationship with her mother is more problematic: at one stage in our conversation Tammie says she doesn't want *Angel to hate me as much as I hated my mum*. Tammie speaks of a time *when me and mum used to get into full on punch ups and that's why I actually left home because ... I can still remember ... I pinned me mother up against the kitchen wall till she went blue and if my Nan hadn't of*

come through and actually dragged me away from her I know I would have killed her and that absolutely frightened me and that's when I decided to leave ... I didn't want to be up on murder.

When she moved out of home Tammie lived on the streets and at times with her Nan and Pop. She spoke of going to nightclubs around the Lewisham area at the age of 13 and how she *got caught a few times but there was a few times when I just walked straight in and they didn't even know.* She also mentions, in passing, about having been in trouble with *the law quite a few times but you know, I mean, since I've had Angel I've been well and truly out of trouble ... life's a lot better.*

Angel's father is five years older than Tammie, so when she fell pregnant he was 20. I asked Tammie about previous relationships and she told me about Tom", an 18 year old she met when she was 13. *Even though I wasn't living at home mum used to follow me around ... and threatened to have him up on statutory [sic] rape even though nothing was going on, it just seemed like it ... the good thing with Tom was that sex didn't come into it, it was just us spending time together, we could go for a walk and it wouldn't matter what we were doing just so long as we were doing it together ... and mum couldn't see that.* Tammie's relationship with Barry was different. When she first started going out with Barry she *depended on him a lot, like I depended on him for someone to talk to, I depended on him for money if I needed it ... if I needed to go somewhere he was the designated driver* but now feels as if she *shouldn't of depended on him as much as I did but I think it gave him a sense of security at the time, but he took it too far and I didn't even realise it ... until I broke up with him.* This dependency is something that cropped up again during our conversation, this time in relation to her mother. Tammie has had to cope with finding her own way for many of her early teens years and is now uncertain about accepting help or support from others. I sense that she wants to, that she knows she can't cope on her own, but then there's the

history of having to that's given her a streak of determination and a resilience to offers of support, even from her mother:

I depend on Mum too much ... to a certain extent ... like, especially when I broke up with Barry the main thing I wanted to do was get my own place. I love my mum to bits but we cannot live together ... and because, you know, I moved out of home and stuff ... I was used to being dependent, like I could depend on myself, I didn't need anyone else and Mum just kept on offering all this support and it's like, "mum, I'm a big girl I can do this on my own, I don't need your help", and without even realising I was pushing family, friends, and everyone away because I just didn't want to be close to anyone ... and mum said to me after a week, maybe two, after I broke up with Barry, she said "I think you need to go to a counsellor" I said "I don't need nobody's help, leave me alone, I'll be right, I'll get over it, life goes on". There are times now when I do ask for help, only if I really need it, whereas before ... there was no way I'd ask for help, and I think the main reason now that I do it is not so much for myself, but for Angel. Through my own selfishness I wouldn't ask anyone for help, so mum would just go and buy stuff and then I'd feel that I have to take it, which to a certain extent was good ... but now if I run out of money I'll ask mum for it and mum'll give it to me and then because I get paid weekly I'll pay mum back ... the only thing she won't do is give me money for cigarettes.

Tammie left school during Grade 9, at the age of 14. She fell pregnant at age 15 to Barry, after being with him for a month. Angel was born just after she turned 16. Tammie and Barry's relationship was characterised by violence, drug use, and Barry's control of Tammie's personal freedom. She talks openly about the drug use and seems ambivalent about it: *I'd smoked drugs before I got with Barry, gave them up, smoked drugs, gave them up and when I got with Barry it was the occasional smoke but then [when Barry moved in] because he was at my house all the time, like after a week [of meeting], he*

was there all the time, like he'd moved in without anyone asking questions ... that's when we started ... like, between me and Barry we was going through two – three thousand dollars a week in pot and that was our smoking let alone anyone else's ... the only way to pay off the debt considering we were only getting \$500 a fortnight plus we had to have money for food ... and Barry got quite a few threats ... and that's when he started dealing, to be able to make up the drug debt ... to a certain extent I think it was good, like the money that was coming in and we were ... we weren't trying to scrape all the time like we did, like we could go out and do the shopping and pay off the bills and still have money left over ... but considering the fact that it was drugs we was selling and he could've ended up in so much shit for it ... that was about the only side of it that I didn't like ... the money was coming in my hand so I didn't bitch about it [laughs].

Tammie gave up drugs during the pregnancy as her doctor told her that the baby may not survive if she didn't: *I'd been talking to Barry from when I found out I was pregnant that I wanted to give up the drugs before Angel was born, I didn't want her to see that me and Barry were nothing but druggies ... it was being told that she wasn't going to live, especially if I'd stayed on the drugs she wasn't going to live, it was scary and it gave me that extra push and maybe that was exactly what I needed. I've been around people since that have smoked that much and have offered [it to me] ... I've said you know, no, you can keep it ... which actually surprised me because I thought if someone offers it to me I'm going to take it but I haven't, I haven't smoked since then ... I'm very proud of myself ... the only thing I'll stick to is my cigarettes.*

Tammie's life with Barry was one he firmly controlled. They moved constantly, at one time Barry lived at a shelter in Lewisham while Tammie was sent to the women's shelter at Sandhurst before moving back in together to a house in South Lewisham. It was while living there, after Angel's birth, that their relationship ended: *I left Barry because of the violence. The day I actually left him he gave me a black eye ... and this was because he was*

coming down off "goey" [a drug] and he was scattering out something shocking and it was on the night before that he'd picked me up by the throat and tried to throw me out of the window ... and dragged me from one end of the house to the other ...

During a conversation about living with her mother, as she's currently doing, Tammie mentioned the level of control Barry had over her ... it was something she hadn't seemed to notice while in the relationship: *When I was with Barry if I wanted to go to the shops I had to ask ... and I had a time limit of going and time when I had to be back and Mum really spun out on how much I'd changed when I moved back in with her ... like I used to ask if I could walk out and check the letter box and stuff like this and Mum's saying "hello, I'm your mother not your boyfriend, it's alright to go and do what you want to do" ... we used to end up having big arguments over it because I wouldn't want to because I wasn't used to being ... I wasn't allowed to when I was with Barry, I wasn't allowed to go and see friends without him and normally they were his friends we were going to see.*

Barry is due for release from gaol in March 2003, but Tammie was to face him in court the day after our second meeting. She admits to being frightened: *if he's honestly as angry as what he wrote in the letter ... yeah, I know what his temper's like, it frightens me, there's not many people I'm frightened of ... but with Barry I'm a coward and I'm not ashamed to admit that.* Tammie deals with his threatening letters in the same stoical way she's coped with the others challenges in her life. Despite the tough start she's had to life Tammie says of falling pregnant at age 15: *I honestly thought that life had to get better ... I couldn't see it being any worse.*

* * * * *

Tammie's mobile phone is disconnected the next time I try to contact her.

Anne-Marie

I first met Anne-Marie at the East Bentley Community House in 2002. Her and Sally, a friend of hers, had agreed to meet with me and talk about their teenage pregnancies and early years of mothering. At that first meeting I did a lot of the talking, giving Anne-Marie and Sally information about what I was doing in my study and the sorts of ways they could participate. They were both undertaking a return to study course at the local TAFE – Anne-Marie planned to go to university the next year, while Sally indicated an interest in completing a TAFE course. Our conversation was far ranging, touching on issues like husbands/partners, children, what it means to be a mother, stigma associated with being a teenage mother, and I also asked Anne-Marie and Sally to complete a time line of significant events from the time they first fell pregnant. The conversation was recorded but I haven't used any of the transcribed material because it was more of an establishing interview to determine their appropriateness for my study. Because they were older mothers I wasn't sure at first if they'd be suitable participants; but after reading through the transcription of that initial meeting I decided to formally invite Anne-Marie to participate in the study.

I formally met with Anne-Marie again at her home some time later. Anne-Marie is a 34 year old mother of five children who range in age from 18 to 3½. Four of the children live at home: Emily, the eldest, moved out a week before the interview to share a house with friends, closer to her senior secondary college. Anne-Marie also lives with her current partner, who isn't the father to any of the children.

Anne-Marie enrolled at university at the beginning of 2003 to complete the university preparation program. She has one child, 3 ½ year old Nathan, still at home – the other children attend the local primary school.

* * * * *

I'm lost. I know I have the number of her house written down somewhere ... ah, yes, it's fallen on the floor. It's made me late, which I'm embarrassed about and my face is still glowing when I walk up the path. Anne-Marie laughs when she sees my embarrassment. "You dag!" she says as she puts out her cigarette and invites me in. Anne-Marie's long, dark hair is tied in a ponytail. She wears no make up and is a slim, attractive woman. I liked her openness and lack of reserve at our first meeting and again feel immediately comfortable with her.

After taking my shoes off and leaving them by the front door, I follow Anne-Marie inside, and sit at the kitchen table, preparing the recording equipment for the interview. Nathan is watching television at one end of the table, and seeks to engage his mother's attention periodically throughout my visit. He's not naughty or noisy ... just curious as to the presence of a stranger. At one point he asks for something to eat and indicates he wants something from the freezer. Anne-Marie opens it to show him a range of frozen vegetables he can choose from, but he spies the icy poles and asks for an orange one. Anne-Marie then sits him in the lounge room and puts a video on for him to watch. The kitchen / dining room looks over a large back yard where chooks can be seen scratching around; a dog lies by the back door and a cat wanders through the room, then sits on my lap. A budgie in a cage and goldfish in a tank complete the array of pets. A keyboard is beside the small television in the dining room, with sheet music lying on top; the "rules of the lounge room" are stuck on the wall beside the brick archway that leads into the formal lounge area. The kitchen table is long – able to fit the whole family around it at meal times and the placemats at each place attest to the fact that it's used regularly. There is the general clutter of family life; photos and certificates vying for attention on the dresser, along with school books, musical scores and knickknacks. The house has a decidedly lived-in feel, which is hardly surprising when there are four children needing space for work and play.

When Anne-Marie's partner returns, about an hour after my arrival, she seems less inclined to speak as openly, even though he goes to another part of the house. It's at this point that I feel it's best to go. We arrange to meet on the following month at her house. At this meeting Anne-Marie will read the transcription of the first interview and make any corrections or changes she thinks might be necessary. It will also be an opportunity for me to ask about any area I feel hasn't yet been covered. One such area is that of motherhood. We've touched on it, in relation to Emily, but not in relation to having four other children.

But let's go back to our second meeting – the first “official” interview. After we get the preliminary details out of the way I give Anne-Marie the transcript of our first conversation, the one in which her friend Sally was involved. As she reads through it she comments that she can't remember much of it, but then comes across a passage with which she clearly identifies. Her eyes fill with tears as she connects again with what she'd shared on that previous occasion. At other times she comments, “Oh, I remember saying that”. We talk about Sally and how she's moved to another part of town. At one time Anne-Marie and Sally spent a lot of time together – they've now lost touch.

Anne-Marie has completed her timeline of significant events and we look through that as a starting point for our discussion. I begin by asking her about her family life as a teenager. It's an important starting point as it is from within this context that her story fits. She tells me that she grew up in a *typical 70s family ... mum stayed home, she was a seamstress but worked from home ... she was always there at 3:30 in the afternoon with fresh baked bikkies, a good old fashioned mum ... and dad went off to work, he paid the bills, he was the quiet, lonely one that never discussed his problems ... a typical 70s family, painted a rosy picture on the outside, but it was all turmoil underneath. There'd been problems at home all my life ... my parents finally divorced when I was in my mid-20s, they finally realised they couldn't keep up*

the lie. Mum had been a young mother; she was 19 and pregnant when her and dad got engaged. Nan wasn't really impressed but what could she say? There were three of us kids, but mum lost 13 children.

Like many relationships between mothers and their teenage children there were arguments. Anne-Marie remembers a time when *mum and I had a run in and she just broke down and she said "do you want me to hate you" and I just fell apart, I was like, "no, don't ever hate me, don't ever stop loving me" ... it wasn't so much that I hated them, I mean I did but ... I was just totally out of control myself, and I hated myself more than I hated anyone else. Psychologists I've seen over the years reckon I was sexually abused but if I was I don't remember it. Talking to one doctor, he said that I've suffered depression since I was seven years old ... that's when I was supposedly abused ... that's when all the trouble started, at school and this sort of thing and epilepsy and, yeah, just a lot of things ... one psych mum and dad had spoken to showed them some material they used to work out patterns of behaviour in victims of child abuse ... and there's patterns that children display, teenagers, and then adult victims and from the age of about seven onwards I displayed every single one of them.*

Anne-Marie was 12 when she entered grade 7 at an exclusive Catholic Girls College in the Melbourne bayside suburb of Brighton. She was a *good student in the sense that I could do the work, I just didn't always choose to do it. I still managed to get straight As except for the odd subject I didn't enjoy ... and describes herself as a rebel ... I spoke my mind whenever I chose to and if I didn't want to go to class I didn't go to class and if I didn't like something ... like, I'd had an ongoing argument with my art teacher for four years and in Grade 10 she said something I didn't like in my exam so I walked out with four years' worth of theory, put it in the bin and set light to it ... that was the sort of thing they had to put up with. You had to request to go into Years 11 and 12 and they didn't want me back ... I was actually devastated when they told me I couldn't come back because the last three or four months*

of year 10 I'd actually knuckled down and decided that no, I do want to do something with my life and all the rest of it, so when they said I couldn't come back it was like I was totally devastated, you know, this is the end of the world type thing ...

Anne-Marie did something at the end of that year that changed the course of her life. She'd just celebrated her 16th birthday and *I got into a big blue with my folks on New Year's Eve because I wanted to go to a party and they said no, and on top of everything that had happened that year with school and everything, it was like, well, what's the point?* Throughout childhood one way Anne-Marie found of coping with difficult situations was to run – *that was the way I always handled things growing up ... something got too much I'd run, whether it was mentally run away from the problem or physically get up and run, that was the way I dealt with everything.* Anne-Marie handled this situation in the same way ... *I went to the party and came home six months later.*

In that six months Anne-Marie *was on the streets most of the time ... mostly don't remember, I was drunk or stoned ... I mean I remember bits and pieces ... I was pretty suicidal most of that time ... I really just didn't care any more ... I think in a roundabout way I was trying to drink myself to death.* Anne-Marie's parents *were trying to find me ... yeah I was on the missing person's and all that sort of thing ... I used to hang out at this pinball parlour, or games room upstairs, and would look down over the boulevard and I'd always see Dad at night walking the streets looking for me, and I'd just sit there and watch him ... it was like, nup, don't want to know you.*

Despite feeling “pretty suicidal” for much of the time Anne-Marie describes the experience of being on the streets as *fun ... I think for the first time in my life I actually had some freedom ... I was on the dole, at that stage you were able to get it at 16, so I just lived cheque to cheque and I'd blow it all on drugs and alcohol, and a bit of food ... what we couldn't get out of the dole*

cheque we'd flog. I used to hang around with the local street kids ... when everyone else had gone home to mum and dad we'd meet up. I didn't maintain contact with school friends, right through the four years of high school we'd all go out and party and all the rest of it, but I was a nut case, I used to have to take everything just one step too far ... so after a while most of them didn't want to get involved with me anymore.

Anne-Marie's six months on the streets ended in a way she hadn't expected ... I went for a drive with friends one day ... very blindly not asking where they got the car from and after a three hour police chase I sort of got the idea it was stolen. The fact that it ended in an accident didn't help matters. I spent the night in gaol. When I went to court my parents turned up and told the lawyer they couldn't guarantee I wouldn't take off again so I was put in remand. I spent two months in juvenile detention and then a month in a half way house. I was shocked when I went into the cells for the night ... I'd been in minor trouble with the law, you know, warnings and things like that, but that was the first time I'd ever actually been in gaol ... for that first night I was still in shock, I mean the accident we had ... we flipped the car six times and concertina'd it ... how we walked away from it I'll never know, and none of us received medical treatment, we were straight in the slammer ... and so I think that first night I was in shock. I can remember lying there cold but not really feeling much at all other than humiliation from the treatment from the officers 'cause they weren't very pleasant.

It was at the half way house that Anne-Marie found out she was pregnant. I wasn't really sure how far along I was. I hadn't had a period for six months so the doctor had a bit of trouble working out how pregnant I was. I was over the moon about being pregnant ... I rang Mum and asked if I could come home and she said they'd have to talk about it ... in the end they agreed that I could come home, on the condition that I break contact with all the old friends and get myself sorted out. So I went home. I found out that mum and dad had actually enrolled me in another girls' college and I'd been accepted, so I

could have finished Years 11 and 12 after all, and life could have been very different.

Anne-Marie feels that her early pregnancy was inevitable. *I'd been sexually active since Grade 7. I can't think what the technical term is ... but I was a slut ... so my parents had a pretty good idea that somewhere along the line it was going to happen.* Anne-Marie had described herself as being "over the moon" about being pregnant. I asked why. *Why was I over the moon about being pregnant? I don't think I thought it at the time, but looking back I think it was ... I think I saw this baby as being something that was just mine, something I could love ... I don't know, I really don't know what I was thinking at the time, I just knew I was really happy.* Anne-Marie's parents were dead set against abortion, but they asked me whether or not I wanted to consider adoption. *I said no, no way, and that was never brought up again, thank god. I don't know who the baby's father was. Because I'd been so off my face basically the whole time, and then we'd gone through the whole accident, court, remand, everything else, I sort of narrowed it down to a couple of choices, but I wasn't really encouraged to make contact and to pursue who the father was.*

Anne-Marie's parents helped prepare for the baby; they renovated their home to accommodate Anne-Marie and the baby and did the whole baby clothes-shopping thing. *Mum was very supportive of the whole pregnancy, you know, birthing classes that sort of thing. I only went to one or two birthing classes because I couldn't handle the fact that everyone else there were married couples in their mid 20s and older and here I was this 16 year old single mum ... and they really looked down on you in those days. Mum came with me for the birth. It was a horrific birth ... the baby was lying in the wrong position and with the way she was lying she actually snapped my tailbone coming out ... the labour itself was very invasive, not only did we have the big lights, stirrups, forceps thing going on, but we had student doctors come in for a sticky beak as well.*

Anne-Marie initially breastfed her daughter, Emily, and for that whole time she had colic and mum and I walked the floor for six weeks, until we put her on soy milk – she was lactose intolerant – and we never had a problem with her after that. Those first six weeks were really hard, there were times when I'd break down in tears because I was so tired ... I can remember many nights waking mum at 2, 3 o'clock in the morning and asking if she could take over for a while, 'cause I just had to go back to bed, I couldn't stay awake any longer. I just didn't have the coping mechanisms at that age to handle this crying baby all night ... but I didn't feel any resentment or anger towards her or anything like that, it was just, you know, I've got this sick baby I can't deal with ... how it would have been if I'd been on my own, might have been a lot different story, if I hadn't had someone there who could take her ...

Even though Anne-Marie had to deal with a crying baby and a lack of sleep she was as proud as punch of her baby ... like most young mothers though, I mean, a lot of it was the whole showing off the big baby doll type thing ... she was a really beautiful baby, who couldn't fall in love with her? Then I started to get itchy feet.

Anne-Marie stayed for almost a year, then things became too much ... I was starting to feel very trapped ... I mean, I was 17 and I needed friends, I needed those outlets and I didn't have them, and I suppose at that stage I started to get it ... resentment started to build. Resentment towards my parents a bit, but they weren't stopping me going anywhere, but my responsibilities to this baby were. I'd go shopping with mum, my sister was too young to be a mate, she was 11 when Emily was born, but I started going out and visiting some of my older friends from the streets and that ... started smoking again and started enjoying myself a bit and I suppose somewhere along the line I started to see Emily as being a barrier to me having a fun life ... I was pretty selfish, I think most teenagers are, going on my experience

anyway ... I think there was a part of me that felt, that yeah, I was entitled to enjoy life, I was too young to be doing this [motherhood] all the time ...

While Anne-Marie lived at home her parents encouraged her to be as independent as possible. She was on a single mother's pension and *I paid board, the whole thing. They supported me in other ways, but for the most part they were sort of encouraging me to try and look after my own affairs, 'cause as they said, you're not going to want to live here forever. Because I'd been encouraged not to keep contact with my street friends, and I'd lost contact with my school friends the only socialising I did was with church acquaintances which were mainly my parent's friends ... I went to Mass, I wanted to at that stage, I was enjoying being away from the pressure of being on the streets ... but unfortunately the problems from before I left home were still there and it was only a matter of time before they started to surface again.*

I asked about returning to school: *The whole idea of finishing year 11 and 12 went out the window. I don't think my parents saw that as an option, the whole idea of young mothers returning to school wasn't really open for discussion I think, not through anyone I knew anyway. I did try year 11 at TAFE, but I just couldn't handle the environment. It was too laid back and I didn't have the self-discipline to stick at it, I needed a school environment, so yeah, that went out the window severely.*

And over the period of Emily's first year there was a gradual accumulation of pressure building ... I started smoking again, started to go out and socialise with the old friends from the streets, pressure building at home between mum and dad and myself, and this growing resentment towards this baby who was starting to move around the house and become real demanding and, you know, who wanted "mummy" ... gone were the days when she'd go to just anybody, she wanted mum and mum didn't always want to be wanted ... sometimes mum wanted to kick back and watch TV or sit on the phone

chatting or whatever ... and yeah, I don't know what happened, something, something snapped inside of me one day ... on the day before her first birthday apparently, I can't really remember a hell of a lot leading up to the time ... I remember I got up to her or something and ... and she was crying ... and something inside of me snapped and I wanted to throw her across the room ... and that scared the hell out of me ... I sort of had her in my arms when I had this ... wanted to throw her and I ended up throwing her down on the bed and I walked out ... I hadn't ... not that I remember, I hadn't consciously thought about leaving, and even the day that I did I don't think I was going to move I just walked out and kept walking ... I grabbed my wallet I think and maybe a jumper ... I went downstairs to the laundry, jumped the fence and left ... Emily came out apparently, calling out for me, she'd seen me go down to the laundry and mum, who'd been in the kitchen, followed me down the stairs and I was gone. Apparently Emily was devastated, couldn't find mummy.

I didn't come back for about a year ... by that time mum and dad had moved to Tasmania.

I stayed in semi-regular contact so I knew they'd moved and they looked after Emily. They tried to find me: a month or so later mum come up ... I was stopping at some caravan park somewhere, I don't remember where that was ... tried to explain to me how hard it would be the longer I was away, the harder it would be to come back to her, but ... I mean, I often sort of said that she never tried hard enough ... I just didn't want to know, I wasn't ready to come back at that stage. I asked Anne-Marie if her parents were happy to look after Emily: it was more a fact that there was no way they were going to give her up to anyone else ... you know, this is what's happened, you deal with it ... this is our granddaughter, no one else is going to take her, you know ... I think, no, I know a part of mum hoped I wouldn't come back because when I did come back we had ... we had so many years of ... um ... struggle over Emily ... mum lost 13 children and ... so I think Emily was her last ... she

knew she was never going to have anymore, so I mean, obviously her kids had started to grow up and now she could do it all over again type thing.

This time Anne-Marie's experience of living away from home was different: I suppose it was different in the sense that this time, I mean I didn't really wander the streets ... I was, I suppose, a bit smarter ... I hooked up with someone at the caravan park ... hung out with them for a few weeks ... then I buggered up off to the Central Coast, met a bloke up there and we ended up shacking up together ... yeah ... I suppose I was, it was more looking after number one ... at any expense ... didn't really give a damn at that stage who's feet I trod on ...

I asked if she gave any thought to work throughout that year; she almost looked derisive, her casual tone belying her words: No that year I spent getting beaten up ... the guy I shacked up with was a mongrel. Thirteen times I walked out ... he'd always find me and bring me back. He would have been around my age, maybe a year or two older ... yeah he was just a real prick ... he was into this whole psychological abuse thing, break them down, get them under your thumb, and start ... oh, the rest of it ... I think he spent the first three or four months breaking down my will and the rest of the time beating the crap out of me ... when he didn't get what he wanted or just because he felt like it ... like the turning point actually for me was meeting up with a girl at one of the nightclubs, who was gay and we sort of became friends and she came round a couple of times for a visit and ... yeah he tried pulling his bullshit on her, he'd gotten ... what's the word ... he wasn't being so careful anymore ... I can't think what the word is ... and he let her see what he was like ... let his guard down a bit. And of course, she wasn't under his thumb and it was just like, who the fuck do you think you are, don't you dare start on me like that ... talking with her, I started to see what he was doing to me ... 'cause I was going through the whole thing, you know, it was all my fault, things I was doing, things I was saying, I set him off, I pushed him, you know, the usual domestic violence bullshit ... and um, you know I tried getting the

cops in, that didn't work. Mum and dad had moved to Tasmania by that time ... about half way through the year they'd sold up and moved to Tassie ... going home wasn't really an option because I wasn't ready to face Emily at that stage ... there was a big part of me that wanted to go home, but one of the things this guy used to use against me was the fact that I had left her, I was such a bad mother and all this sort of thing, so I had to come to terms with the fact that I wasn't as bad as he was making out before I could go home and try again ... when I did eventually go home it wasn't because I felt that I could be a good mother it was simply the fact that I had no choice, I was at that point where he was going to kill me if I stayed any longer ... I took off, I rang mum and dad from Sydney ... I asked them if I could come home. It was the hardest thing I'd ever had to do, was to admit that I'd screwed up again ... and at that stage I had started to mature a little bit ... and was becoming a lot more aware of what I was actually doing to other people ... and started to actually give a damn about other people ... which was a real first for a long time ... so yeah that was very, very hard. They weren't real receptive ... there'd been a lot of changes, their lives had finally started to settle down with me away and Emily had finally stopped crying for her "Anniemummy" ...

When I went back, the first couple of weeks were really hard because I don't think anyone really believed me, I think it was sort of like, oh yeah, you know, another one of Anne-Marie's bullshit stories ... yeah, they didn't really, sort of think that anything I was saying was for real ... until I broke down one night after a nightmare and mum found me in the kitchen just sobbing ... and I actually started to describe some of the things that I'd gone through, I think at that stage she started to believe me.

When I first went back Emily didn't know me and she was a bit stand offish. But after being back home and seeing her I think in that period for a few weeks it was like, you know, I would like to try and rebuild the relationship. She called mum "mum" but she called me "Anniemum" ... because that's what she'd refer to me as during the time I'd been away, I was her

Anniemummy ... and because my brother and sister were still at home and calling mum and dad "mum and dad" she just naturally just picked up mum and dad ... once I was back on the scene, like after a few months after things had started to settle down, they started to encourage her to call them grandma and grandpa. I was home about six months and Emily and I moved into a place down the road from them. Mum and dad sort of knew they had to let it happen, but no, they weren't very happy about the idea, they were worried for Emily, I don't think they thought I was responsible enough to look after her and at that stage I probably wasn't ... I mean, I fed her and clothed her and kept a roof over her head and all that sort of thing, but I was still at an age where I was very selfish still. I wanted to go out one night and I can remember saying to mum and dad, could you baby sit so I can go out to this night club and they said no, because they didn't want me to go there, and I said, fine, I'll take her with me, which of course I forced their hand, didn't I? ... just stupid things like that, you know, it was like I'll do what I want when I want and like you're going to stop me ... yeah, I met Emily's step dad when she was ... oh, about six months after we'd moved out of home I suppose and ... so she would have been about three ... and was with him for seven years, married for the last two ... and two more kids; a son in '93 and a daughter in '94. I left him a week after our daughter was born.

I was single with three kids and pregnant again a month later. I met up with a bloke and had a bit of fling, and we had Jade ... she was born in '96. We were, her dad and I were just good friends, we were both on rebounders and we knew it, but we were just enjoying each other's company and yeah, it was better than being lonely. For the first two years he came around every day to see her ... and then when I started going out with Nathan's dad he dropped it back to like access weekends and things like that and yeah she goes down every fortnight to see him, she's in regular contact with him, dotes on him, yeah, he's a good dad. Then I had Nathan in 2000. After not falling pregnant for seven years between Emily and Jim suddenly I was fertile!

Just as a life isn't made up of only one story, there are numerous ways to tell the story of a person's life. A chronological journey through a life, as I've just done with Anne-Marie's, is one way of telling her story, but there are other aspects that this type of journey doesn't cover. A life is more than a straight line from one child, or one significant event, to another, although Linde (1993) states that 'the very notion of a life story requires a notion of sequence' (p. 13). This ordering of events in a sequential way through Anne-Marie's life is one form of creating what Linde (1993) calls "coherence" which is 'created by speaker and addressee [and is not a] light matter [but rather a] social obligation that must be fulfilled in order for participants to appear as competent members of their culture' (p. 16). Coherence is not only a "social demand" but also a "personal demand": 'the coherence that we produce for social consumption bears a relation to our own individual desire to understand our life as coherent, as making sense, as the history of a proper person' (Linde, 1993, p. 17).

The sequence provides the bare bones of a story, but to get to know about Anne-Marie's life I need to look at the parts of the story that didn't come out in the first telling. There are other aspects worth investigating – attitudes; ambitions; experiences – which collectively illustrate her life and allow us, the reader, and her, the speaker, to begin to make sense of it. Telling a life story doesn't happen through one meeting: as Linde(1993) argues it is 'as we get to know a person [that] we expect successively more detailed life stories to be exchanged' (p. 7). Before our next interview I had transcribed our first interview and began the second formal meeting by handing her the transcript to read. When she'd finished I asked how it felt to read through the material. She took a moment to compose herself before replying: *Yeah, a little um ... had the cold shiver type thing going ... things there that I suppose I don't think about very often, you know, yeah okay it happened but we're not going to dwell on it ... the ... I think too ... at the moment I'm involved in a domestic violence art project and that's been opening up a lot of doors as well so yeah ... so all these childhood things coming back.*

I felt immediately that this interview was going to be different; less a moving through a series of “events”, more moving into the personal realm of how these events affected her personally. One of the areas of interest to me throughout this study has been that of motivation; ostensibly the motivation to either continue at school, or return to it, but also the motivation to become a mother; the motivation to remain a mother; the motivation to move in a certain direction in life. Anne-Marie’s earlier experiences of rebellion at school and towards her parents, her drug use, early pregnancy, domestic violence, and then the relatively quick succession of pregnancies have shaped her and in effect have determined her attitude to life and hence her life path. Because Anne-Marie is older than most of the other mothers in the study her experience is interesting in that she’s moved through a lot of the issues the other mothers are still experiencing and so provides a different perspective to the younger mothers. But because those earlier experiences were difficult, she’s still finding ways of dealing with them. Involvement in the domestic violence art project is one way of working through the issues. Ethical considerations come crashing in: am I, as researcher, with my external agenda, disrupting Anne-Marie’s life, causing her psychological harm? Is the re-telling of her earlier experiences giving her pain? I asked Anne-Marie if there was a sense that she wants to close the door on the past, or if it was healthy to have it open and airing it out?

Um ... up until a couple of weeks ago it was putting a lot of pressure on myself and my partner ... because it's a fairly new relationship and he only knows bits and pieces he wasn't quite sure how to handle things. I started to get depressed again, I'm back on anti-depressants now ... but yeah, it put a stress there that I probably didn't need, I wasn't even really conscious of it at first, then I started to think, yeah I think this might be causing a few problems, it's been good though, the group I'm working with are all very supportive of each other, so we talk a lot, we've had a few sessions to try and sort a few things out, and how we're all feeling about it all. What I've found for myself

in the past is that ... to have it open at this stage and to just leave it like this, no, that's not healthy because you're opening up all these doors but you're not dealing with anything ... I've actually been given some books and I'm going back to counselling because I hit a point where I actually need to work through a few things so in that sense I don't mind those doors being open because I know that I'm at a point where I want to do something about it ... just having them open and not doing anything about it, no, that's not good. It causes stress, it causes problems, and then you know ... for myself anyway, depression gets worse and then you end up bottling it all up again anyway ... just to try and deal with it. For myself it was ... what was it now? ... it was 15 years ago for me, and there are some issues that I've dealt with but there are still other things that I haven't and you know, little things that can trigger off emotions and fears and certain looks from people

I feel it's important to include this material because it has ramifications on Anne-Marie's parenting, her relationships and how she views certain behaviour that her children exhibit: *You're constantly comparing your partner, looking for signs and symptoms as to whether or not he's like him [her former, violent, partner] and all this sort of thing and ... and even with your children, particularly as they're getting older with the boys, they start to display any sort of aggression and that and you've got to be really careful to remember, no they're only a seven year old boy, not a full grown adult who's consciously decided to belt the crap out of you, you know ... it's just a child who hasn't learnt to handle their emotions yet.*

I ask Anne-Marie if it changes the way she mothers: *It does. I'm ... I am just so hard on the kids if they start to show any physical aggression with each other, I won't tolerate it at all. Probably more so in the sense of controlling my own temper though because it stirs up a lot of anger within me ... one of my boys went through a period where he was just hitting his sisters all the time and he hit one of the girls in the stomach one day and he got into a lot of trouble for it. I came into the bedroom because I heard one of the girls crying*

and caught him doing it again, really laying into her but down in sort of the uterus area ... and, something inside of me just snapped and I just punched him and the fact that he'd just been in a car accident two weeks earlier didn't help matters much, and when he screamed, because I hit him in a tender spot, it sort of just, like "oh my god what am I doing?" but something inside me just snapped, it wasn't a boy hitting his sister, this was a man beating up a woman ... so things like that I've had to deal with over the years ... thank god I can say that never happened again ... I just wasn't aware that that could trigger something like that in me ... it does affect the way you mother.

Our conversation moves to relationships and the positive and negative consequences on the children of becoming involved in a new relationship. *From what I've been through my opinion is that one parent that's happy is far better than two that aren't. I don't care what anyone says about, you know, wait until the kids grow up and all the rest of it, because even in the best kept secrets and all the rest of it, the kids know ... and even if they don't work it out when they're kids they work it out when they're adults and it's devastating ... I can remember when my parents split up, my whole concept of marriage was totally shattered because I thought my parents had a good relationship and to find out that a large percentage of it was all lies ... it was like, well, what do I believe now? I look at other couples now and I think well, are they a happy couple now, or are they covering it all up as well, so you know, you base a lot of your relationships on what your parents were like and it's like okay, well everything I've learnt ended up in divorce, so what do I do now, so I think regardless of whether it's kids or adults you know, if it's not working, it's going to cause more problems.*

Anne-Marie's comments reflect the conflicted space the single mother is in – her attitudes reflect the dominant one of society (that it's wrong to have children to multiple fathers through a series of unstable relationships) but how then does she reconcile that with herself and her own experience? As Luttrell

(2003) posits, the questions Anne-Marie answers aren't her own; the issues she's dealing with are societal but it's the way they impact on her personally that is of interest. *I had gotten to the point after the fourth one where I decided no, I don't ... not so much I didn't want more kids, I did, I didn't want to have more kids to another father. The relationship with her dad didn't work out and it was like, you've got four kids to three different fathers you're not in a stable relationship, and even if you do meet somebody else you end up staying with that's going to be like five kids to four different fathers and it's like, no this is just getting ridiculous ... so ... and physically I'd gotten to the point where I wasn't coping with the stress of pregnancies ... but ... so I made a decision then that I'd get my tubes done and I wouldn't have any more ... well, while I was on the waiting list of course, I fell pregnant again, to Nathan's dad, who I'd started seeing a year or so later ... during that pregnancy as I said the other kids were still reasonably young. I did think, I did go through a lot of that, of I can start doing what I want with my life, but ... [she shrugs and sighs].*

For Anne-Marie being a mother is her primary role, although these days she doesn't necessarily define herself primarily as a mother: *I used to. Yeah I used to, if anyone said "what do you do?" I'd say I'm a mum, these days if I've got to fill out forms and they ask your occupation, I put down teacher because to me, even though I'm not a qualified teacher ... that's what I always wanted to do ... and yes I am a mum but I spend a lot of time educating my kids ... I teach my friends a lot of things ... and I thought, nuh, that suits me better than just "mum" I can live with that, even though I know ... it's a bit of a psychological ploy. I teach children craft, music, cooking, I teach a lot of things. When I get asked "where do you teach" ... oh, from home, other people's homes, small groups ... the thing is though that I am ... I don't have a degree, I don't have a piece of paper that's going to get me a paid job, but I can probably name a dozen people off the top of my head who would turn around and say I have taught them something ... and ... to me that's a teacher ... just because somebody else goes out there and gets paid to do it doesn't*

make them any better than me ... I can think of plenty of teachers I had at school that were totally useless.

Anne-Marie hasn't undertaken paid work in her adult life: *I've done voluntary work ... but I haven't had a paid job since I was ... 18, 17/18 I think ... I did contemplate a few times looking for a bit of retail work or something, but with the amount of kids I had to put them into care, would have totally wiped out any pay I could get. No, I'm one of these old fashioned people who would quite happily have a husband's support and just go out and do my own thing ... [laughs] ... unfortunately that doesn't always work these days ... I am very happy being at home, I probably wouldn't mind working in the sense of my arts and crafts, doing the markets, things like that but I've ... and there is a part of me that wants to work at some stage but I've always said that while I've got little ones at home I won't ... I wouldn't even do uni full time, that's why I tried doing it by distance ... because I think that was something that got drummed into me growing up that mums stay home and they look after their children. That's what my mum did ... and as much as I know now that that's not necessarily always the best thing I enjoyed it, I loved having my mum there after school, I liked that security of knowing that I could come home and she'd be there and that's what I want to do for my kids ... I don't condemn anybody else who doesn't do it, because I mean everyone has their own reasons for being out at work, and I mean I know there may come a time when I've gotta turn around and say to these guys, "look, I've gotta work and I'm not gonna be home when you get here" ... but at the moment you know, he goes to crèche a couple of days a week [indicating Nathan] for his own needs, you know, he needs that socialisation and particularly with his speech problems ... I enjoy the break but um nine times out of ten I'm down at the school doing parent help anyway, so it's like I'm still not getting any time off from the kids ... but yeah, you know, once he's at school I might look at more of a full time type of study arrangement.*

I started uni at the beginning of the year, just doing the preparation program ... yeah, well it fell apart with a big flop ... I got to the point where something had to give ... it was going to be my relationship, uni, or the kids, or me ... and I decided that uni was the only thing at that stage that I was prepared to actually let fall apart, three weeks later my partner and I broke up, so I should've kept uni [laughs] but that first three months ... it took me that long just to get my head around what the hell I was supposed to be doing, and it was just like, I can't deal with this pressure ... I was doing it through distance and initially I was going ok ... you know what I said about TAFE how I didn't cope with the unstructuredness of it all ... well, I could cope with that now, but I can't handle the whole trying to work at home type thing and still maintain the household, I get distracted by everything ... the few days that I did attend sessions at the uni it was like, this is fantastic I would work in this environment ... I didn't have a computer at that stage too, which didn't help at all, particularly as it was distance and everything was being emailed [laughs] ... I will eventually get back to it

The conversation ranges through the meanings of motherhood, filling in some more details of her life, the developing relationship with her parents, and parenting the second and third time round. As seen in the literature on young mothers, explored in chapter two, subsequent pregnancies tend to follow the initial one more quickly than the subsequent pregnancies of older mothers – this wasn't the case for Anne-Marie, where the age gap between her first and second children is seven years. I ask Anne-Marie about when she felt reconciled to the idea that she was a mother and able to cope with that role:

When Jim was born ... not until Emily was 7 ... I thoroughly enjoyed having him around it was um how would you put it um I dealt with all the baby stuff, it was like, nuh it's fine I can do this, I've done it before you know ... I fed him for three months but he was one of these kids that had an absolutely insatiable appetite and I hit a period when my milk dropped off a little bit and he just screamed and screamed and it was just like ... I put him on the bottle and because I wasn't feeding him enough my milk dried up, but he thrived on the

bottle, like he'd had a good start you know, he was fine ... and yeah it was just fantastic, we'd play, you know I'd get up in the morning and do the housework, and then we'd spend the whole day playing together and he was just the most adorable, happy child, you know he was a real pleasure to have around. A bit of a handful, I mean he never stopped [laughs] but yeah, he was great. The next one wasn't so crash hot, I fell pregnant with her ... Andrew and I had gotten to the point where um we were very close to breaking up, we'd already had a couple of minor separations ... and he decided to take off to a different state to look for some work and we'd follow him at a later stage when he found it and he did, we moved and moving away from the family, both families, biggest mistake we ever made ... we were isolated, on our own, in a new city and the whole thing fell apart, two months later I packed up and came back with all the kids, a week after the third child was born um and post natal depression set in um yeah so that was all very stressful um I don't ... yeah, don't remember a hell of a lot about her first year, I had another pregnancy not long after um and yeah I wasn't diagnosed with the post natal depression until Jade was two so I'd had it for nearly three years ...

Through this study I set out to discover what motivated young mothers to return to school, and I suppose in a way I became side-tracked by young mothers' stories. If we look closely at the realities of young mothers' lived experience we might be able to provide more realistically for educational opportunities, or at the very least think more deeply about why they may not decide to engage in education, or in some cases, work. From the literature on teenage motherhood and welfare it would appear that many people in society believe it's not acceptable for a mother to rely on welfare to feed and clothe her children, and so measures are put in place to ensure the mother "earns her keep" – she should not rely on the government as she may on a husband for financial support. So finally my conversation with Anne-Marie addresses education, and more specifically, the barriers to engaging with education.

Well obviously everyone's aware of the external barriers like child care and financial cost, I mean there is assistance for those but um at times it's still not enough, particularly if you've got a lot of children that need to be in care, um transport, for me that was a big kill, not having my own car because it just made it so much harder to get everyone to where they had to go and then to get myself there as well. These days, having a computer, that's also a big barrier if you haven't got one ... whether you study externally or not. Emotionally though um ... I found guilt was probably one of the biggest killers, guilt that I wasn't providing a better lifestyle for the kids so I felt I should go back to school and get myself a better career and a job so I can provide them with all those things I'd like them to have, but then guilt about leaving them and having somebody else raising my children. It's very Catholic, all this guilt [laughs] Oh god, it's terrible ... and I think I've been saying I'm a Christian for 15 years and denying all this Catholic thing and it's like, it's just there [laughs]. I think that for myself ... and that was from my experiences growing up ... lack of self esteem, you know, can I actually cope with the pressures of raising a family, housework, and the study and all that sort of thing.

I ask Anne-Marie if she had any doubt about her ability to continue with education: *um ... not so much the actual study, well yeah, I suppose when I got to go to the uni course I had periods where I'd look at things and think ... you know like panic, panic starting to well, you know ... how do I do this, because it'd been so many years since I'd you know, written an essay, or you know even read anything remotely scholastic, but no, I think I knew inside of me that I had the ability to do it um I just had to trust myself to you know take it one step at a time, my fear in not coping was more in my ability to combine everything and it was like ... I didn't want to see my kids or my partner suffering because I was doing all of this. Housework, yeah I can let that go, I've done that for years [laughs] but yeah more so I was concerned about my ability to cope with it all.*

It's not a subject Anne-Marie seems comfortable spending much time talking about and soon the conversation turns to being a mother – not that she changes the course of the conversation, but I ask a question that directs the discussion to the amount of housework the children do. My field notes suggest that I'm very aware of my position as a university educated woman, currently conducting a study for the completion of a research higher degree and for me it means not wanting to push the issue more than I do, because I feel as though I'm saying that I did it (studied) so why isn't she prepared to put more effort in to doing something similar. It's a clear instance of my position encroaching on the direction the conversation takes. I don't want to be seen by Anne-Marie as thinking myself "better" than her for the choices I made. The discomfort I attribute to Anne-Marie could very well be my own discomfort on this particular issue. We share a number of similarities – we both have five children; we both had our first child at the age of seventeen; we can both look at the issue of teenage mothering from a distance – but it's on this point of education where our lives, and subsequently our attitudes to mothering, are most noticeably divergent.

I put one final question to Anne-Marie before I draw the "interview" to a close, and that was about whether there's been a time in her life when she felt she was in control: [thinks] *um ... in some areas, yeah ...um ... but only to a certain degree because ... alright, okay, like for instance with men, with the DV experiences and that ... um ... I probably would say I'm eight in confidence in those situations that I wouldn't put up with certain types of behaviour and all the rest of it, but I've still found myself slipping back into old habits like blaming myself for problems that have arisen ... or um ... walking the tight rope trying to keep everything calm. The same with the kids, you know, I I'm ... a lot, a hell of a lot closer than I've ever been to um feeling confident about our future ... but um, I'm very aware that there are issues that I need to work through that are affecting my ability to parent them properly ... you know healthily ... and happily.* What about areas in which she feels she has little control? Her immediate, one-word response: *money.* Anne-Marie

pauses to gather her thoughts then clarifies her response: *Totally useless when it comes to money. And of course that puts a lot of pressure on ... living one pay to the next ... yeah, very much living one pay to the next ... you know quite often having weeks where you're having to borrow money or put things on tick or writing a cheque and hope the bank will cash it [laughs] I've got a very understanding bank manager ... [laughs].*

All my life ... I've never been any good with money. I think it might have started off as a bit of rebellion thing because my father's an accountant and was constantly on my back to budget ... um ... but no, I think a lot of that stems from a bit of conditioning when I started to get depressed in my earlier years I'd go out and shop ... a bit of comfort shopping sort of thing and as I got older and started to get a little bit more responsible it was quite ... I can't justify going out and spending this money on myself so I'd spend it on the kids you know, or I'd spend it on food. I mean I have the most expensive food bills, it's incredible. I mean it does get easier, I know I could do better, but yeah, I usually find some way of spending it [laughs]. I would say we're comfortable in the sense that we've got a nice home, the kids have all got reasonably decent clothes, there's food in the fridge, okay it may not always be anything real fancy, but they're getting their three square meals a day ... I can afford to have pets, and ... you know on the odd occasion we can afford to do a bit of a treat ... it's more in the sense that we've got no financial security in the future, there's nothing in the bank, there's no ... nothing there to cover us for emergencies, that's where it kills me, you know if the kids get sick and they need medicines and ... yeah planning for the future has been my biggest hassle now. I am gradually working things out ... doesn't help that we're both as bad as each other [her and her partner], just that he's on a better income so it doesn't show as much [laughs]. It's ... yeah ... that's something I think I'm probably going to struggle with until I've worked through a lot of these personal things because I'll get myself to a point where I'm just about out of debt and then I'll do something stupid and go on a big spending spree, it's almost like I don't deserve to have a better life. I think that was a lot of

um ... the guilt thing over the years with stupid things that I've done and you know, it's like I don't deserve any better. How far back it goes I'm not sure, it may very well go back a lot earlier, but um ... yeah ... so yeah money's probably the biggest area that I know I'm definitely not in control of. Other than that probably just relationships between myself and the kids, there's times when I still feel that you know we're border lining on ... a big family break up ... still times when I still feel like I'm losing control of the kids.

Anne-Marie's description of herself as a teacher had me thinking about the ways we present ourselves to the world. I wanted to gauge Anne-Marie's response to see if she saw herself reflected in any way – if the construction others created for her as teenage, or single, mother aligned with the view she had of herself. I spoke of the deficit model surrounding much of the literature on teenage mothers, of young mothers having little education, little money, little motivation to work, and of the statistics indicating that teenage mothers are likely to have a second pregnancy while still a teenager are more likely to have more children overall.

Yep, yeah well I think I fit into that category as well. I wouldn't necessarily disagree with a lot of what you said just then, I mean ... the financial side of it, I mean I suppose in some ways I was better off because I was on a pension instead of the dole, but I've never been able to get on top of my finances, you know, since I've had kids. I haven't worked since I was 17, I was in my thirties before I even considered going back to school ... as far as the drug and alcohol side of it goes, no that for me picked up because falling pregnant for me was like oh wow fantastic, you know, a reason to live. I mean I was suicidal before I fell pregnant, so yeah this baby gave me a reason to clean my act up and all the rest of it, and I mean I still went through the early 20s having a chuff and a drink on the weekend with mates but um I cleaned my act up a hell of a lot after I had her. I look at the difference between raising Emily and then raising the next four, because they sort of all came together, when I was from my mid 20s onwards. I made a lot of mistakes with Em, you

know, she was a truant at school, she was ... actually no, I'll rephrase that ... up to the age of seven she was a great kid, those first seven years you couldn't fault her, she had fantastic manners, good social graces, she was well behaved, it was only when her father and I divorced that she went right off the rails and when I became a single mum again she couldn't cope with it. So I mean, I don't know whether it was the fact that I was a teenage mum or the fact that I became a single mum again after being with her dad for you know, five years ... oh with her step father for five years ... but you know, Emily has grown up, she's never touched drugs, when I say that, she's never got into anything serious, you know she's tried a bit of the hooch and thought oh yeah you know, take it or leave it ... she's just started smoking cigarettes, which I could kill her for, but even with alcohol you know like she'd come home at 16 with a couple of friends and they'd have a drink and they were never drunk, you know, it was like, she always looked at what I'd done in my life and thought no way am I going to be like that, she's just completed year 12, finally got through her exams, off to uni next year and even though we have our personal clashes and her finances are shocking, 'cause I never taught her how to manage her money, in general ... like her teachers and that ... what a wonderful personality blah blah blah and all the rest of it, she's just disorganised financially and in her um work life and stuff, so there's things that she did miss out on but I mean, that could just have easily have happened from a 30 year old couple having a kid that didn't know how to organise their finances or who weren't sure how to discipline a child, or teach them self discipline. So I don't think that really has much to do with the fact that I was a teenage mum ... but I think probably the biggest thing with being a teenage mum was my own lack of confidence in myself so if I did make a mistake it was like the end of the world, you know, I hadn't developed that self confidence myself as an adult. I was a teenager living in an adult world and all of a sudden I had all these other responsibilities as well um so yeah that sort of made it really hard, you never sort of knew whether you were doing the right thing or not and I was very reluctant to go to anyone for advice because everyone looked down on you as a teenage mum.

I asked Anne-Marie how that manifested itself, the feeling that people were looking down on her because she was a young mother: *Okay, little things to start with, like when she was a baby if we'd go shopping and mum for instance happened to be pushing the pram everyone assumed Emily was mum's daughter ... the fact that I got kicked out of my youth group when I was pregnant because I was a bad influence on the Italian community, like all the kids who were in our church group, and the Italian parents didn't want their children thinking it was acceptable to be pregnant and part of the church still and all this sort of thing. A lot of the times it was just looks people would give you, you know, ranging from pity to sheer disgust, to outright comments about you know you should know better at your age, rah rah rah, you know ... I had one woman come up to me once and tell me off for you know having this child at my age and you know didn't I even consider adopting it out or anything and it was ... [laughs] ... I saw red. My own parents' attitude, particularly after I did leave Emily for a year ... yeah they've never really forgiven me for that.*

Anne-Marie talks of the pressure to ensure her children were always clean and well behaved: *that pressure, it did come from my parents; a lot of that came from society because you know, you hear people talk about housing commission kids, and I mean I've always lived in housing, except for once or twice, so you know there's this real stigma. You were always fighting to make sure that your kids were well behaved out in the street, that they weren't out there yelling and screaming, and you know, you're just fighting a losing battle, and of course then it's all happening within doors anyway [laughs] but I mean we had a comment made by one of my neighbours via the girls, that you know, has your mum calmed down yet, after I'd gone off at them one afternoon, and anyway, I said to Madison, I said what, you mean to tell me that such and such's mother has never yelled at the kids in front of you, and she said, yeah, she does it all the time ... and I said yeah ... but it's like we were the bad ones because we're over here in the housing commission place. I did get to a point I suppose four or five years ago where it was just like, yes*

I've made some mistakes, yes I know there are things I need to work on with the kids, but I could be doing a hell of a lot worse. I have spoken to other mothers who are married and buying their own homes and this sort of thing and a lot of times they mention the same sort of concerns. I think I do feel it more strongly ... I think the kids cop it more at school because of the stigma of being you know, poor or in housing. Oh yeah ... I've even had the kid across the road turn around, a lot of the time it comes through from the parents ... and make comments about you know, oh you're poor, you know, you don't own your house and things like this. If your kids are wearing clothes with holes out of the knees it's because you're poor, if their kids are wearing clothes with the knees out it's because they're bumming around the house and they're wearing their old clothes. There's a very big gap between the haves and the have nots and I think it's getting bigger. I think sometimes people probably look at me and think you know oh yeah living off the government type of thing. I've seen it in a lot of the schools around here, I pulled my kids out of one school because I just got sick and tired of the snobs and the attitudes that were starting to come through with the kids. The school they're at at the moment has a much broader spectrum of social and financial ranges and the kids seem to be a lot more accepting of each other. And it's hard, you know, I say to my kids, yes we are poor, 'cause by Australian standards you know we are living below the poverty line, I said now, turn around and look at our foster child in Africa, and I said, "now that is poor, we're doing real well by her standards" I said, "so what, so you haven't got DVDs in each of your bedrooms", I know kids over the fence who have got their own TV, video and DVD players. But yeah growing up when the kids were young it was, it was a real big stigma, you know, it was even down to things like making sure you kept the outside of your house clean, so that what you presented to the street didn't come across like some yobbo from 'in the housing estates' you know. But as far as how it's affected me personally though, I think ... I um ... I do have regrets about having Emily so young, I think ... she's had a really hard life because of my lack of experience ... but I don't know ... for me? I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Emily, and I've told

her that. I would not be alive if I hadn't fallen pregnant with her, because I was just so close to calling it quits, I'd had enough and um yeah, she ... even with all the trouble we had over the years she was just ... yeah ... she was what kept me going.

The work vs stay at home mother debate continues to make news and Anne-Marie's determination to stay at home interests me. *Um ... yeah it is [limiting], I started uni at the beginning of this year and I found that I wasn't ready to cope with the pressure of doing that and still trying to maintain the lifestyle I wanted with the kids, but then ... I suppose my attitude towards it is different now. It's like ... I'm only 35 years old, I've got another 40, 50, 60 years to do everything I want to do ... and I think that was, like when I came back after being away from Emily for a year ... initially I was running from a bad relationship but once I got back and sort of fell in love with her all over again because I'd pushed all those feelings down when I was away I just couldn't handle the guilt, you know, like what I'd done ... and um ... you know when we moved out into our own place and I think somewhere inside of me I promised her that I would never leave her again and that I'd always be there for her and for me that means being there. Not just financially or you know putting a roof over their heads, but it means actually being available to them ... so when I started uni this year I thought I'd gotten to a point where I could manage both, but I found I couldn't it was taking too much time out ... if I had less kids, you know maybe, but I was just wearing myself too thin, well I thought no, my needs can wait a little bit longer, and um, yeah you know, put it on the backburner for a little bit more time.*

And kids grow up so quickly. I mean I look at Emily, you know her 18th birthday's in January and she's moving to go to university, you know she's gone, she's been gone for the last two years, you know just in and out and I never thought I would miss her as much as I have because of all the fights, oh gosh she was a shocking teenager [laughs] but when she moved out I miss having her singing around the house, I miss the conversations that we had, I

just miss her presence, and I think you know, that has just gone by so quickly, and Jim's 11, Madison's nearly 10, Jade's eight and a half and Nathan's going to be starting school the year after next, I think you know it was only yesterday that they were all babies, but nuh, it's just not worth it, I want to be around to enjoy that.

When I ask how she feels about herself now, Anne-Marie replies: *Four hundred per cent better than I did even two years ago. I think I am finally starting to accept that I am a good person, that I am okay, and that even when I stuff up I'm still okay.* I ask if it feels like coming out of a long, dark tunnel. Her response is emphatic and immediate: *Oh god yeah! You know, to be able to get up in the morning and look in the mirror and to be able to actually say, you're okay, is just fantastic. I think it's been a combination of things. Partly just maturing, partly a lot of self discovery, I've done a lot of reading over the years, gotten involved with parenting groups, counselling, you know just to work through different issues, and I'm still in counselling and I'm still on anti-depressants, but it's been partly having good friends that see my good qualities and are quite happy to point them out to me when I can't see them.*

One of the things that hadn't come up in our previous conversations was the fact that Anne-Marie didn't have a car and couldn't drive. I'd noticed a car with L plates in the driveway as I'd come in, but had assumed it was Emily's car. Anne-Marie soon put me straight, but it gave me another insight into her life, and made me look again at some of the things I take for granted (in this instance, mobility).

I go for my licence hopefully next week or the week after ... I had a car accident when I was pregnant with Emily and that was it for me, I couldn't get behind the wheel, and I didn't really have any need to in those first couple of years 'cause I was living at home and in the city the public transport's fine ... down here it's been hard, particularly when I first moved down here because I was living in Shoalwater, but I was just too nervous and I didn't have anyone

who could teach me, I couldn't afford private lessons, it wasn't until I was with Nathan's dad and he started teaching me in his car and I started to get the hang of it, and because it was a manual ... I learnt to drive, but I couldn't develop the confidence I needed to handle traffic in town and all that sort of thing, and then when Andrew and I got together he's got an automatic and it was like 'oh wow this is easy' I was starting to focus on building my confidence up and now I'm zipping around everywhere ... it's like "oh thank you thank you". It's like 18 years! ... I just get a bus into town or I'll taxi it home, that sort of thing's not so much of a drama, but like Jade has piano on Thursday afternoons out at Lestra Road, now for me to get a taxi out there it's fifteen dollars, so it means I've got to organise other family or friends to take her out there, once every three weeks Andrew's home, so he can do it, and it's just a pain in the arse, you know. Madison wants to take dance lessons and singing lessons ... I don't know, some weeks um you know getting the odd taxi or bus here and there's probably you know a lot cheaper, but I know I had some weeks where I've forked out fifty, sixty dollars in taxi fares because I've had a lot of running round to do, but if I want to go shopping up in Cornell for the day it's only two dollars twenty to jump on the bus. And now the kids are at school and crèche it's not a big drama to do that. Mind you, whether I actually do that once I've actually got wheels is another thing. I've managed 18 years with five kids and no car and I thought it'd be just really nice to be able to offer the kids a little bit more now, to be able to say to them, yeah we'll go swimming tonight, we don't have to worry about the fact that Andrew's at work, and bearing in mind that I've actually got the money, we'll go out to the pool and have a swim. Things like that.

Is this significant or important? Is it relevant to a study that's supposed to be focusing on the influences that motivate a young mother to re-engage with education? Some would argue not, but for me, these "small" aspects of a mother's life help determine the decisions she makes for her children, and for her/ their future. If the reality of a mother's life is that she doesn't have access to transport, then she must overcome one more barrier to provide

experiences many of us take for granted: like walks on the beach, going for a swim after dinner, allowing her daughter to have singing and dancing lessons, or re-engaging in education (which would require travelling a considerable distance from her home). The way she feels about herself as a mother, and as a provider for her family, will then impinge on decisions she makes regarding her own personal fulfilment. While education may be seen by many as a vitally important component of their lives, something that's highly valued and expect others to value it just as highly, the reality for others is that mothering is the most important part of their life: being at home when the children get in from school, being actively engaged on a daily basis in their children's education, balancing the financial demands placed on any family and making difficult financial decisions based on the needs of the family at the moment rather than on the possible needs for the future – and still being willing to sponsor a child in a third world country. All the while feeling the pressure of not wanting to be classified as a “typical” housing commission family – the pressure of not wanting to be seen as a stereotype. The conflicted space of the teenage / single mother raising a handful of children outside the parameters of what's considered “normal” family life is alive and well in Anne-Marie. External pressures are brought to bear and become part of her motivation and add to her internal pressures; the message I get from listening to Anne-Marie talk about her life and her attitudes is “when it's time

She will when she's ready ... for the moment she's being a mother. Is that enough of a response though? For now, it will have to do.

* * * * *

I turn up at the now familiar house and ring the doorbell. It's July 2004 and I'm here to show Anne-Marie this mini-biography of her. I'm nervous: these are her stories, her life experiences I'm writing for others to read, and possibly make judgements on. What will she feel about what I've included and what

I've left out? Have I left out anything that helps to illuminate more clearly her situation, her attitudes? Have I allowed a glimpse of Anne-Marie to come through without relying on stereotypical representations? As Anne-Marie reads I sit quietly reading through other pieces of writing. When she finishes, she puts it carefully on the table, sighs and simply says "yes".

Anne-Marie asked for a copy of "her story", as she said it reflected eighteen years of diary writing – writing which she hadn't done herself. She also felt it was a valuable tool for her to explain her life to her children, when they're ready for that information.

In the intervening few months had anything changed for Anne-Marie? She still did not have her driver's licence; her rented fridge and television had been re-possessioned; she had not looked into full time work or education; her relationship had broken up five months before, but two weeks ago was re-established, but there were positives too. She was no longer on anti-depressants, which she felt was a very positive move, and her eldest daughter, Emily, was at university.

Anne-Marie's story highlights some important issues surrounding teenage motherhood: the place and relevance of educational provision in the life of a young mother; support networks; readiness for parenting; becoming a mother; fathers and other men; and the economics of being a young / single mother. It also highlights the complexities of generalising a life using reductionist themes that seek to homogenise young mothers into a single group with the same (or similar) needs, attitudes, values and experiences.

Robyn

“What’s your study about, Sharon?” asked Anna, before class officially started. Always willing to talk about my study, I told them it was about young mothers and education and went on to explain my perspective in framing the study in the way I had. I told them about the photo I’d found at Michelle’s house of me standing against the blackboard in Year 9 and being amazed at how short my uniform had been. The students laughed when I told them that Michelle had jokingly said, “No wonder you got pregnant”. Robyn’s head flew up from the notes she’d been reading, “It’s about time someone talked to young mothers about their experiences. It’s so easy to put them down and group them together and give them the idea that they only have one direction in life – which is down. I’ve felt like a failure all my life, because I had a baby when I was young”. She suddenly stopped talking, realising that she’d spoken openly about an experience she rarely shares with others. When the class was over for the day I asked Robyn to wait behind. After the students had filed out, I asked her if she’d be willing to participate in my study. She was keen to be involved and we organised a time for an interview.

Robyn and her current husband Jack live in a large brick house in the south of the state. Their 12 year old son Joseph is the only child still at home; Robyn’s two eldest children are both in their 20s and live independent lives, although as I arrive at Robyn’s house, Amy, her 23 year old daughter, phones to talk about a break-in at the rental property she owns. Their close bond is evident in the way the conversation progresses – although, of course, I could only hear Robyn’s side of it. Photos of the children adorn the walls and certificates of their achievements are displayed proudly, particularly in the study, the room Robyn feels is most appropriate for our conversation. It is school holidays and Joseph is watching television in the lounge room, but comes to meet me after encouragement from his mother. Robyn explains that Jack will be home soon, as he too is on holidays from his job as a police officer, although he had

been called in to court earlier that morning. Robyn offers me a cup of tea, which I accept, and turns the heater on in the room, to make sure we're comfortable. It warms the room quickly and as I start the recording she turns it off as it's quite noisy.

As with the other mothers I ask Robyn to create a time line of significant events to give me a feel for her background and the situation she found herself in, when, at the age of 16, she fell pregnant. Robyn is an articulate woman, who was able to share her life-history with me, without a great deal of questioning from me. I found that I only had to ask guiding questions, to which she readily responded.

I left year 10, with intention of wanting to do law ... I was at an all-girls school, Catholic all-girls school, so in year 10 I finished in November to start back in year 11 ... I was in two minds about whether I wanted to go back, then fell pregnant in the January of 1977 so there was no option, at a Catholic school you didn't go back if you were pregnant and I can remember running into, meeting a few teachers in between times, saying 'you're wasted, you're wasted not going back to year 11' but you're hardly going to sit there and say, in a school that says you sin if you engage in pre-marital sex, you're hardly going to say you're pregnant so I'm not coming back ... so, then I got a job.

I didn't tell the school that I was pregnant ... because in ... I remember my sex education in year 10 was nothing about how to ... contraception, because being Catholic you don't talk about contraception, it's all about you fall in love, you get married, then you have sex, if you do it the other way around you're committing sin and you'll be damned for it [laughs], and I can still remember the nuns, so yeah, I had sex and I was damned [laughs] and became pregnant.

My parents' response? Um, yeah I think because they paid all that money in school fees for me to go to a school and they just didn't expect me to be pregnant as 16 so they didn't really ... they didn't not support me, but they didn't ... they're weren't happy but they didn't say anything like it ... I was a disappointment obviously, but what can you say? My dad wanted me to have an abortion, or suggested I did. He said 'you can still get married' like it was the only reason I got married because I was pregnant and mum didn't really say anything much ... so the guilt started from there, the guilt that I'd done something at school or that I'd learnt at school that you shouldn't do it and I felt like I'd let everybody down, so to save face I got married in the May of 1977 to the baby's father. He was my first and only boyfriend. He told me he was sterile [laughs] and I was gullible, you know, nice little Catholic girl ...

I didn't find out for years later that my mum was pregnant when she got married. I was at her place one day and all the records were there: their marriage certificate and my eldest brother's birth certificate and they were married not long before he was born. They weren't so judgemental, but they weren't supportive either. I can never remember them saying 'okay this is what's happening, what do you want, what do you want to do, what do you want in life?' ... I think it was because this had happened to them and that's how you dealt with it ... mum would have been 18, which was probably pretty respectable at the time. Even when we were married a lot of my first husband's friends were getting married around the same time so they would have been around 19, 20 ... so ... yeah, it was pretty normal ... and because three years ... he was 19 which was heaps of difference to a 16 year old ... but I was more mature than he was.

He was 19 so he was three years older than me and he was already in the police force ... he was ... well he would have been graduated by then, because in those days you went in at 16 and so yeah they virtually take them straight from school with no worldly experience and ... yeah so he drank kerosene when he was a child and he remembers the doctor telling him that it would

probably affect his fertility later in life, so he really did believe that he was sterile, so you just didn't think ... "yeah okay, he's sterile" and because I was very naïve and as I said in school they didn't say now this is what ... if you're faced with this situation these are the precautions you need to take, you just didn't do it so that was just not regarded, so that was part of my education that I just didn't have much knowledge of, and mum being a nice Catholic person sort of didn't educate me well in those days, but ultimately it was down to me, [laughs]

I wonder now, like I kind of thought, especially then, they were going through this police academy thing, all these blokes together, and I did feel a bit of pressure because would he stay with me if I didn't have sex with him? But no, no, not really, no pressure as in age of the group, but you start to wonder how long you go in a relationship before you don't be sexually active with them, but it certainly wasn't one of those, you know, great heat of the moment things [laughs] ...

At the time I saw him as so much above me, and I'd do everything to please him ... I did see that younger, and just thought he was so ... because he was doing something he wanted to do in life ... I always thought he must have been intelligent and ... after we got married and I was doing nothing, and he was out working, he was doing something that ... because I was interested in law, I wanted to do law ... so I was always intrigued about the law side of his job ... but it took me ages to realise he was just a deadshit [laughs]. It's funny, isn't it, how you just put yourself down ... and he let me do that and never at one stage said 'oh you're really doing a good job', because while I was dependent on him, he felt secure and when I started to find my own, or want my own independence and things, starting to stand on my own two feet, he felt very nervous about that and yeah, then when I got to the point, well, yeah I can get by without him, I don't want to be like this any more, I don't want to, to lead this life, this isn't good for me, it isn't good for my children, that was the crucial factor, when I could see that I don't want my children to go down this

path and I can't change his ... I can't change the way he is, because he was very set in what he did ...and all he wanted to do in life was have fun.

Responsibility is a big part of Robyn's story, the need to take responsibility: *I was the one who did it and I got pregnant so ... so you just cut everything else off ... friends, most of my friends went on to years 11 and 12 and uni so I lost contact with them as well, and from this stage on I got married and 'Ok I've stuffed this part of my life up so now I can just focus on being a good wife and a good mother'.*

With the need Robyn felt for concealment, I was interested in how she confirmed the pregnancy. *Roger, my boyfriend, took the urine sample along to his doctor and got it tested so it was all ... 'okay, everything's sort of secret, we'll do it this way, find out you know, you don't bring attention to yourself', yeah, it was hard because it was something that ... I felt disappointed, I felt a bit angry that I'd ... that I was so naïve, I felt a bit angry but then ultimately the responsibility ... I took responsibility for it, it was something you wouldn't really get excited about when it wasn't the future I wanted for myself, and the label, because only the tarty girls at school got pregnant and they all got expelled and there was one girl who had an abortion, but not the nice girls, nice girls didn't get pregnant ... they just didn't do that sort of thing ... and then meeting teachers who said 'oh what a waste not coming back to school' and you felt such ... that you'd let everybody down, so my life focussed completely from me to 'okay I'll be this really good wife' because my husband was working and I wasn't contributing anything, and focussing on this little boy who just became my life ... you know. We moved to Oakland, a small town about an hour from where I grew up, in ... probably just before he was born, 1977. My husband got stationed up there, so that was remote, I didn't drive, I was 17 and with this baby, miles away from home, and he kept leading a single life, he worked and he had all of his interests so I had this little boy, this baby who was everything, you'd just sit around and wait for him to wake up and clean the house six times a*

day and yeah, and then my circle of friends became older people who were 26 year olds who also had young children and the people who were in my age group were around having a good time and partying and were the type of people my husband was locking up and so yeah ... it felt like a whole section of my life was lost.

While I wasn't looking for emerging themes in Robyn's life-stories, in less than fifteen minutes' conversation, I picked up from Robyn's stories a theme of concealment. It was a theme Robyn returned to again and again throughout the conversation – the need she felt for disguise. As Robyn continued to relate the events of her life, the way this need for disguise shaped Robyn's life became more pronounced. The other factor that shaped Robyn's life was one of taking on board the responsibility of her actions – she felt that in having done the wrong thing, she needed to make amends.

You tried to fit this role of... you didn't want people to know that you were so young, you didn't want people to know you were scared, you didn't want people to know that you were ... and I didn't want to ring mum because hey, I got myself into this situation, so ... um ... yeah I virtually cut off completely from that other life and was just this little existing person who ... I had very little interests up there, other than the company of a few of the police men's wives, and they were so above my age group that I didn't fit anywhere. I felt really isolated ... socially, and um in every aspect ... like there was ...

I was probably lucky that I got to Oakland after we'd got married ... like my husband hadn't even told anyone there that I was pregnant, so ... like I turned up and the first time I met everyone I was quite big ... and you could see everyone 'oh, yeah, we thought so', um ... I don't know whether that was my feeling or ... but yeah, I took everything personally, but I definitely got married because I didn't want to go into hospital, I didn't want to have a baby without ... I wanted to hide that part of it, so disguise it in any way I could ... so that was doomed for failure, all the wrong reasons to get married, so then

um because everyone else just had another baby after two or three years, and I mean I loved this little boy, he was all I had, he was the focus of my life, so yeah, you have another one, don't you?

The life course trajectory of an adolescent is often circumvented by early pregnancy and child rearing. Robyn was acutely aware of the move from the life course of an adolescent to one of an adult, engaging in "normal" adult family-building practices, like having a second child while the eldest was still young.

I had a little girl – although she's not so little any more – but yeah, Amy was born three years after John. Because I didn't know any different, like with the marriage, because I felt responsible for the state that I'd kind of caused, and because my husband was a 19 year old too, I just let him lead his normal life of going out with the boys and footy and all those sorts of things, and thought that was my role that I should play, I should take the back step and because I'd caused all of this, it's okay for everyone else's life to be normal but not for mine, so I suppose I punished myself for it. And then we ended up moving down to Pineville when Amy was ... that was probably about 1982 we got stationed down there ... I didn't work or do anything before that because I was going to be the devoted mother ... my mum was not there sometimes when we got home from school and I always wanted to be home when my kids got home from school and my kids were going to have a good life even though, financially, in the situation we were in we had absolutely nothing, like everything was second hand, everything was given to us ... yeah so I was going to make amends for it, so when we moved to Pineville the kids were a little bit older so I started getting jobs in the apples and it was all like labouring type – unskilled jobs because I didn't have any qualifications other than year 10 – and you know, going to work in the local shop, and stocking supermarket shelves and felt a bit better because I was contributing to the income and in the mean time my husband was leading his normal life, probably never grew up from the 19 year old, but that's another aspect ...and

I was in this role of trying to make everything better along the way and it wasn't until ... we split up actually – 10 years later – I'd played that little good wife role and just got frustrated more along the way.

Knowing life had more to offer, but not quite knowing what, meant Robyn's frustration increased as the children grew older. Her level of personal satisfaction in the role she'd felt compelled to adopt, as part of making amends for the doing the "wrong" thing, was dwindling:

The thing that frustrated me the most about the role of being the good little wife was because I wasn't going ... I wasn't getting anywhere, you map your future out and you know you want to go in a direction, but you can't ... it doesn't matter if you take 20 years to get there but you need to be able to progress towards that and there wasn't ... it was always hit a wall, back; hit a wall, back ... sort of thing ... and you want to try and pretend you've got this happy family because you know, you've got a husband and you've got two beautiful children but it's not ... there's that big emptiness because you haven't done your ... there was no personal fulfilment ... none at all ...

Another aspect of Robyn's stories which catches my attention is the number of times she mentions guilt. Not being satisfied, not having a sense of personal fulfilment, in the role of mother and wife, was another source of guilt. *I had a lot of mixed emotions I think about not being totally satisfied in my role as wife and mother. You know, you look for satisfaction in every other way, but yeah, it's just not there so you just keep chugging, chugging along, and you feel guilty ... like that was the biggest step when we split up, I thought, 'no I just don't want to be this anymore', but you think 'okay now the children are going to be, as a result of you know, the beginning, your children are going to be the children of a single parent' so hey, you've just attached the stigma to them and you become divorced. So that's another stigma, and you think 'okay, you've stuffed another one up, you've stuffed this one up, where do you go from here?'*

Where Robyn ended up was a surprise to her, and the challenges along the way were more difficult, but ultimately more rewarding, than she had ever envisaged. *I ended up moving back in with mum. She had a flat under the house, and that would have been, when John was in year 3 and Amy was in Prep, so '85 or '86, and then they started going into the police youth club doing a lot of activities in there, and I started volunteer work in there and ended up with a job and ...there were a lot of training courses, like Kindergarten and things and I took on a lot of those. Every thing I did I had to ... the job had to come first when we split up because I got very little support from ... I think I was supposed to get ten dollars a week, but that wasn't forthcoming, so I had very little financial support from my ex-husband after that stage it was sort of on my own, like he'd come around and I'd end up giving him money, so it was pretty hard from then on financially so then I had to focus on getting a job and so ... Centrelink is the most degrading thing, having to go in there and say 'okay I've got ten dollars in my wallet, I've got two children, you know, help! Where do I go from here?' That's ... whether that's because of your pride level or they make you feel that way, it's like a deli queue at Coles, you know, you line up there, you take a number, you know 'number 34' and you know you're sitting there with people who ... mmm... you sort of think, 'well okay, I'm not like you' and you try to tell yourself you're not but you're always shoved into that category and to everybody else you're not seen as any different.*

So I didn't want to be on benefits, I wanted to get a job and I started working in there and taking school groups and that was really, that was great fun, and that was one thing, like the kids could come in after school, they could catch the bus, they had, like they could be there as well, so I could work and be with them so it was the perfect environment, and then I started life for me and started to meet people and all of a sudden I was somebody who existed but by the same token that was about all I felt I could do, to be able to work and consider them as well. Then I met my husband, my present husband, who was

yeah ... totally different, you know like responsible, reliable, all of those things you expect in a ... or all those things you want in a person and met him and then we ended up getting married and started then, thinking oh okay, oh, then we had Joseph. Joseph was born the year after ... we got married in 1991 and had Joseph in 1992 and we just got to the stage where we thought, like Jack had children and I had the other two, but there was part of it that was always missing you know like that, that real family ... that expectation that you were happy and you had this child because you both wanted one and so we were always talking about his children and my children so we felt we'd be disappointed later in life if we didn't have one of our own to share those things with, so we had Joseph and he was just like, you know, the perfect little boy and that was hard too because I had to share him, I didn't have to share the other two, they were just mine, but I had this father who wanted to cuddle him and that was hard ... and from then on I just thought 'okay, now my life is starting to take some direction' and enrolled to do a TAFE course, child care. That was disastrous, trying to do things externally through TAFE. I just felt like everything I did I hit a brick wall, from the time I paid for everything they kept on saying 'oh you can't get your stuff until you've paid your fees' and it was hitting a brick wall, and so I was like, this wasn't meant to be, something's telling me 'no, just go back to the role you feel comfortable in' and then I ... the community house down here I used to go down and do courses down there, just to get back into adult society after you've had children, and started volunteer work there in the child care centre and got a job as call-in there and my other two children were at Kieran [a co-ed Catholic school] and Joseph was at kindergarten and the principal asked me to go on the kindergarten committee there. So I went on to the committee and I'd done lots of volunteer work at the school and I got the job as the kindergarten aide and sort of went from there, and did a business admin course through the school, I did the teacher aide course. The teacher aide course I just put absolutely everything into it and along the way, like I've been there for seven years, along the way my teacher was away and I had relief teachers come in and they'd say 'you would make a really good teacher, it's

just a bludge coming in here to do relief, you do it all and we sit back and supervise' so I thought 'okay'.

I'd heard about the uni course, which was distance and I thought 'okay I can do that, I can be the mother and I can do something for me that doesn't make me feel guilty', which was what I felt all along the line ...it was guilt, guilt, guilt. I enrolled thinking I'd never get in because I'd failed at everything else so why would I do this, and I went around telling everybody 'I've got my uni thing'in but I have to wait to see if I'm accepted' and they're like 'oh you will be, don't worry about it', but they couldn't see that I'd lost a lot of confidence along the way and I thought 'no, no, this has got to be a downer too'. But I was accepted! I can't believe that I'm actually at university and I just love telling people that I'm at uni and people are saying 'oh how come you've left it so late' and you go back and think okay, that's why! Life got in the way. Here I am at 44 years of age and it's one thing I'm determined to succeed at.

There is an unmistakeable excitement in Robyn's voice as she talks about being accepted into a university education degree, but when she contrasts it with her attitude of having done wrong, and the lifelong implications of having done the wrong thing, her excitement is understandable.

All through life I tell people about my kids, and I'll say about John being 26 and they're like 'oh god you don't look old enough to have a 26 year old, you must have been a child bride, how old were you?' I say 'oh, 12' you know just to make a joke, so all along ... all through life you put yourself down and there'll always be the people who'll be sniggering about ... you know, 'thank goodness they made most of the Catholic schools co-ed because at least they'll know how to act around boys so they don't end up getting pregnant', and all the time you're sitting there, thinking 'okay, that's me again' it's like a scar, it's with you for life.

Robyn feels that the “scar” she carries has implications for her two eldest children. *I look at my ... like John's 27 and he's doing really well and he's got a great job and he went to university for two years, doing the police studies course ... yes, another police officer, sad isn't it? Joseph's going to be a doctor though. It's funny, isn't it? I look at Joseph now, like he only talks about going to university, because it's something I can give to him, like I couldn't with the other two and it was like, it wasn't spoken about much because it was just struggle, struggle to get through day to day, and you think, okay, I've really cheated them too, if their life had been different, if their life had been like Joseph they'd be at university now. Like Amy's 23 and she's on 52 thousand dollars a year, and she's done so well for herself, because she's very bright, she's done really well for herself, and I say to her, 'you'll be sorry later in life that you haven't gone to university', and she's like 'mum I couldn't just go to university and do uni for the sake of doing it, I'd have to do something that was relative to what I'm doing or my interest, maybe later on in life ... not everybody in life is hanging on going to university' and that's really hard for me to imagine.*

My sister is 14 years younger than me and she went to uni and she's got a commerce degree and I can remember sitting there in awe at her graduation, thinking 'oh that's all I wanted to do'. I just can't wait for that day ... I kind of feel a bit cheated too because it was always going to be her destiny and she got there and she's got two lovely children, and a happy family ... 44 is leaving it a bit late ... I'll be almost 50 when I finish!! [laughs].

The pressure Robyn feels to achieve at university is clearly evident when she tells of her reaction to getting assignments back. This is closely linked to her feeling that her wrong behaviour at the age of 16 has marked her life as one doomed to failure, and the success she is achieving at university is a surprise, but not something she takes for granted.

I still can't see the end of the goal ... I'm surprised I've actually passed things, but every time I get something back it's like ... I give everybody hell ... the first assignment I got back, I was ready to vomit [laughs] my legs were shaking so much, everybody was laughing at me, the table was going like this [wobbles table violent]... I don't think you ever get over that, I don't know what repairs that in between ... you don't ever get over the label that's attached to you at the beginning, of being a teenage mum, you don't ever get over it, you've let everybody down and that failure thing ... it's like I said, it's almost like your destiny's determined. I only got married because I didn't want that destiny, I wanted to disguise it as much as I could, but then I think if I hadn't of gotten married I was in no different a situation ten years later than if I had of got married and only had one child and maybe just got on quicker with just one child ... but there wasn't ... there wasn't any other way to go ... sometimes every now and then I feel a bit cheated and I say to people there was nothing there for me to go on to university and I know people say you have to make the most of opportunities but there was no opportunity there, I couldn't go back to school ... you'd hardly go to year 11 in a private college when you'd had this secluded little life, this sheltered lifestyle.

It was at this point that Robyn came to the end of her time line. She had moved from a 16 year old Catholic school girl, falling pregnant to the first boyfriend she'd had, to enrolment at university at the age of 44. The expectation these days, as we have seen from the literature, is that pregnant and parenting teens return to school to finish secondary education. But returning to school, to a Catholic school, in 1977 after having a baby, wasn't something Robyn had ever considered: *The thought of it ... it was the girls from the local public school that got pregnant, and they were so rough and you were too scared ... like I was too scared to walk down the street near those girls in case somebody looked twice at you and you got bashed up, you know ... because you're in that private school environment you sort of ... it is very sheltered, well it was back then ... so no, no, you couldn't go to school, you couldn't survive in a public school because you know you just weren't*

tough enough to do it, let alone being pregnant ... no, no you didn't want the world to know anyway ... it was all about covering up. If there had been something where you could have kept ... where you could keep being a child or a student ... but still have the responsibility ... knowing you've got the responsibility of this child but you could still go to school but knowing you had that support of people who are in the same circumstances, I think that network, if I look back and think, if I had that rather than have to slot out of one category and fit into another because there was nothing in between I would have gone back to school ... if there would have been that support there ... but there was non-acceptance of the situation, it was disguise, disguise, disguise, mask it all the way.

I guided the conversation to enable me to fill in some gaps and asked Robyn about the decision she had made to keep her baby. Her response highlights the complexities of making a decision such as this, and emphasises that research which seeks to identify psychological traits to explain a teenager's decision to keep her baby is often simplistic in conceiving the issue from this perspective. *Well, I didn't really have much choice because by the time it was ... I knew I was pregnant, I was vomiting, I don't know if that was ... [laughs] ... I don't know if that was fear of going to hell, the nuns coming back to haunt me ... so I knew I was pregnant right from the start, and trying to tell people that I thought I was pregnant, like trying to tell my partner, boyfriend whatever he was back then, I'm sure he had a title back then ... I don't think he was asshole back then ... [laughs] ... he was like 'we've only done it once you couldn't be' ... but it was well into the pregnancy before we had it confirmed ... so by that stage ... but I was never going to get rid of him, that wasn't an option for a start, Catholics don't believe in abortion and I kind of thought, well, okay, that's something I've done, I didn't have any right to stop this little life, and I thought ultimately everybody wants to be a mother, and I had ... like my sister's 14 years younger than me and I just adored her, she was the most ... I used to take her to school, she was fantastic, this little baby you could play with then give it back to mum [laughs].*

Robyn talks about the notion of punishment and again “making amends” figures in her talk, as does feeling the need to do this on her own because she was the one who did the wrong thing: *you’ve made your bed, you lie in it – suffer the consequences. And I was very determined that people weren’t going to turn around and say ‘look typical, the kid can’t look after the kids’ ‘can’t cope’ you know ... I’d cry on my own at home, I’d never ring mum and say ‘help’ or ‘I’ve had a shit day’. God, I remember when I brought John home from hospital, my husband went out to celebrate with the boys, because it was somebody’s farewell that night, and I was miles away from anywhere with the baby and he cried so I fed him and he cried and I changed him, and he cried and I fed him and changed him and he still cried, and I ended up going to the lady next door, they had a fish and chip shop, and I said I need a bottle of boiled water because that was the only thing I hadn’t given him that they showed you in hospital and she drove for miles to this other policeman’s wife to get this bottle -because she had a young baby too - it was like 11 o’clock at night and the train went over the road at Waratah so she couldn’t get back for another hour and we ended up falling asleep in the chair – it was about one o’clock in the morning and I remember that first night at home with this poor little baby and I just kept feeding him [laughs] ... but yeah, you just had to do it on your own, there was no other option because you couldn’t get upset or cry because you had to do it. This is your life, this was your destiny and you take ... and I had no way of knowing that everyone else goes through this sort of thing. I can remember going to people later, younger people, saying, be prepared, read ... I read every book you could imagine on the labour, the pregnancy but there was no book telling me what that first night at home was like, nothing, and yeah, you do everything they say and you get upset and the baby gets upset and you think, god what am I supposed to do?*

I felt like I had to do ... come out doing something good in life ... that notion of penance ... ‘okay, look I can do this, I’m a very good mother’ you know even if you walk down the street and have people say ‘oh you’re doing a good

job'. I got that from a couple of people who said that they had been in the same situation ... but because it's so hidden you think you're the only one ... and I just didn't hide it for no reason, like I felt that was the way society had it, that was the way you did it.

The notion of penance saw Robyn throw everything into my children, everything ... financially, time, everything, you know, just stop my life completely because I thought 'well okay, these are little people that I've created and they have a right' ... I never, ever ... I've never put myself before them ... there were times when we lived in this block of units when I was tempted to just pop next door and leave the kids alone, but I never, even now with Joseph, like when I pop down the street for ten minutes ... he's like "oh but mum I'm 12 now" and he's asked a couple of times when I've gone to the supermarket, because he hates being dragged around the supermarket, 'can I just stay on my own', and you just think 'oooh, what stage do you leave them?' and then when they ... and the big kids, when they did finally leave home, that was shattering, that was like empty nest syndrome, it was like they'd taken a part of me because all of a sudden, I'd thrown my whole life into them and they weren't here ... I mean they've been fantastic and they've given everything back and more ... at my 40th birthday they got up and made a speech and said how I was always there for them, and you think 'okay, it worked' and it was ... it was really hard work and I say to people that I'm lucky I've got two beautiful children and then I think, no it wasn't luck, it was bloody hard work. I actually, I can remember with food and things you'd never, like you'd go without, you'd make sure they had the things that they needed and you know, I paid for private education for them, with, as I said, with little support, probably none, and all those things and I used to say to them when they got older ... there was a period of about two years when their father didn't come near them, he was told he had to pay maintenance so he would bury his head in the sand rather than face his responsibilities ... and that was another thing too, I'd picked this dead shit partner, you know, [laughs] here's me with all these aspirations in life and I picked the biggest

loser ... he still lives at home with his mother and he's got nothing ... he's exactly the same now as he was when he was 19 and I think 'god, you know, not only have I stuffed up but I've picked the biggest loser' and you think 'oh god, do you want that for your kids, do you want your kids to see that?' so I had to work even harder so that they knew that my direction was the right way and not think that it's okay to go around and spend all the money and you know go to the pub and the TAB and do all those things ... trying to teach them responsibility. Teenage was the hardest ... when they were at teenage years - I was on my own then - and they'd been let down a couple of times by him he'd sort of say he'd come and visit ... and then didn't ... and you'd have to say 'life's hard, life's shit and I'm really sorry', and feeling guilty, and now it's gone from feeling guilty that my life's gone on hold to feeling guilty of the destiny that I've given them. But you can't turn around in life and say ... I got dealt a hand so I'll just stuff everything up ... you've just got to make the most of every situation and go for it.

Despite this sentiment – of just “going for it” – Robyn expresses a degree of trepidation, especially regarding her decision to attend university: *there was that want, but there was that ... 'no, I'd just fail'. To me, uni and intelligence go together ... even though I'd lost my self confidence there was a part of me that thought 'I am intelligent, I can do things well, but I didn't have a chance to prove it', so that was always there. I would look at people, like the teacher I work with at school ... I've been working with her for the last seven years, and I just thought she was so great because she had a university degree, she's a teacher! I remember going to school after my first assignment came back and said, 'I got a HD' [High Distinction] and she said, 'I never, all through uni I never got a HD' and I was like, no, no, surely you must have ... because everyone was so much higher than me ... and it was like just about everybody I talked to ... there was never anybody that I can remember that was ... that I regarded as less than me, they were all better than me, you know they'd gone to do nursing, or gone on, like all my friends from school, they'd all gone on and done their things and here was me ...*

And I've got to get over this thing of 'if it's not perfect it's a failure', like yeah I got one of the last assignments back and I had no idea what the tutor wanted, and then they changed tutors and the new one looked like she wanted something completely different and when I got it back I got a credit plus and there was another girl who had this particular tutor the year before and she said, oh that is so good, so when I first got it back I was ecstatic, but then I thought, it's not perfect, there were some negative comments on there ... like, 'your understanding of such and such', but I knew I understood it, why couldn't she see that I understood it, and then all of a sudden I went from thinking [excitedly] 'okay! I've got a credit plus!' to [downcast] 'oh god, I've got a credit plus' and I must drive people nuts, because I just feel like ... it's like you see anything negative ... you pick out the negative in it, and you don't see 'oh you've done this really well', I disregarded that and focused on the negative part of it, and thought 'oh yeah that's all you're worth, stuffed up again'. Everything I submit, when I send it away, I think 'oh god, that's good, I won't read it, I won't read it after I've submitted it', then I come back and think ... I'll be like this [shaking] the whole time and you get to thinking 'okay you've done it every other time, why can't you do it this time', and you have all these ... oh what if I've missed this completely, or what if I've done that ... and I don't have any confidence all the way through it, I'm muddling my way through all the way through, I'm enjoying it, and I'm loving the learning and I'm loving the reading, every time I read something, if I don't read a complete book I feel like I've missed something but you just can't do it, but I have to get over the if it's not perfect it's a failure. I don't know how you do that ... there's no way known I'm going to drop out of university, no way known ... and I'm not aiming to just get a pass ... stuff the credit plus ... that's not what I'm aiming for.

One of the other "trends" that emerged from Robyn's conversations was that of a pre-determined destiny that plays out for the young mother, and how she has tried to resist that in her own life. The attitudes Robyn came up against,

all those years ago, are still prevalent today: *It's something you don't brag about, you don't want to see that these sorts of things happen, you don't want to encourage it, so everybody who's pregnant when they're young must have wanted to be pregnant to get out of going to school or to get out of any future, that must be just what they want, so we'll leave them there ...and that's exactly how ...you just slot into that role. It was non-acceptance of it, you know if you were 15 or 16 and got pregnant then you were ... there was nothing ... the system wasn't there for that, so you didn't return to school, you weren't a part of that system anymore, you removed yourself from it ... if we turn around and we encourage pregnant mothers or young mothers into our schools what is that telling us, is that saying it's alright? Is that saying it's okay to go and get pregnant when you're 15? But there's nobody in there who seems to acknowledge that accidents do happen ... and I don't think it's fair to say make mistake, because if I'd have had ... been a little bit more aware it wouldn't have happened.*

There is the guilt and it is like a scar that you think if you just had someone along the way ... if you had someone along the way who could say 'okay, don't feel guilty, it's alright, you're doing a good job' if you had that support along the way, it would have been different. If you could have got on with your life, if you ... in amongst that ... dealt with your needs as well, then it would be ... I wouldn't been here at 44 thinking, 'oh god' ...and it was so funny, I was so surprised with myself at the last study day that I actually said about a similar situation, everybody must be thinking, 'oh god, there's another one' [laughs] ... and you tend to forget that that part of your life existed ... you still keep that part hidden ... you do, like every time someone says about it, like if the conversation comes up about someone being pregnant you try to steer the conversation away, or you make a joke about yourself ... I was 12 when I had my first one, ha ha ha ha ... and you just laugh it off like that

Robyn has described her mothering in terms of sacrificing herself and her needs, in order to provide the best possible life she could for her children. She says the pressure of being a teenage mother was different to being a mother at the age of 32, when she had her youngest son Joseph: *it's different, it was different with Joseph ...because it was ... you could say you were worn out, you could say you were tired, and you can say you can't cope, because that's okay, when things are normal, but when you're a teenager like it's all reflected on the fact that you're young, if you had more experience in life ... but in reality there's no difference at all, but because you could be yourself, like I could be myself with Joseph but I couldn't with the others because I had to be this resilient person who was determined that they were going to prove the world wrong, that my kids weren't going to be little bastards running around the street and they were going to be looked after properly and they were going to have a future ...*

I turn the conversation to ask Robyn about her attitude to teenage mothers – it's one thing to know you're "not like other teen mothers" and to feel society's wrongly-placed condemnation, but quite another to be non-judgemental in your own attitude to young mothers. Robyn considered my question and said thoughtfully, *yeah ... yeah, I probably think the same thing* then more forcefully said *no, no, because when I see little children who are nice and clean, whether the mum's 16 or not, I look at them and think, yeah they'll do it ... but when you do see these poor little children who you don't think there's a lot of hope for, that's different. I look at those in a completely different category, in fact if I saw a 16 year old pushing a pram with a clean looking child I wouldn't think of them any differently than I would of a 30 year old pushing a pram ... so I don't think the two connect ... you can be a good mother at 16 but you need ... to be a whole person you need that support ... you can do it, you can do it on your own but there's too many little scars along the way, and it's only really the determination that'll get you through it ... there are many times when I could have stopped and thought 'oh no, why not just go back where everyone's put me', but you've got to have that*

self drive and that makes me angry that that wasn't there, that opportunities weren't there for me ... and that people say you're not given opportunities, you've got to make your own. That's crap, because I would have sacrificed too much ... I couldn't ever see any possibility of doing it any other way and that makes me angry that there's no support there.

Even though Robyn is working in a kindergarten, I ask what she thinks the implications for schools are if they were to provide the support she felt she didn't receive. *You need acceptance for a start, acceptance and give these people an alternative ... I mean even the teenage mothers who maybe have never had any aspirations of doing anything in their life, who have only thought about being mothers ... why just stop the ... why just close the door for them, why not give them the opportunity to ... lots of them would have the determination ... lots of them wouldn't just want to be in that situation that they've found themselves in, so why direct it, why direct everybody down that 'failure, failure, failure, society's problem, statistic, on welfare, divorcee or whatever' why direct them down that path? It's just not fair to stereotype people and there needs to be opportunities ... so what if you've got five of them and only one gets steered in a different path, isn't that a success, isn't that an opportunity for that person and their children? There should be support and there's got to be acceptance ... it's no good saying that kids aren't meant to be pregnant when they're 15, well, okay, but they are, or 16 or 17, they are, so why isn't there something there for them? Some of the programs I've heard about they're not about the person, it's about what they can get out of the program ... look at the person first, give those opportunities to the person and like as I said, if only one person takes that opportunity it's worth it in the long run ... and by putting them down that path it's inevitable that's the way they'll go ... that's the way I thought I was supposed to go, that's the way my destiny was supposed to be and when it did happen it wasn't a surprise. It was like, here we go, another failure, you get to things in life but there's that determination that you're going to prove them wrong because you know you don't fit, you know that category doesn't fit ... even though*

you're made to feel it, there's something deep down inside you that knows. I'd always known I wanted to be a mother, I just didn't want to be a mother so soon and I adore this little boy but why do I feel guilty about it, why do I have to feel guilty, why do I have to go and get married, why do I have to cover up ... everyone else can run around, like with Joseph I could say 'hey I'm pregnant everybody' and I'd ring them up but with the first one there was no sense of celebration, it was like 'damn, oh you poor thing' ... and I think that's why we had Joe, because I wanted to make it all right, I wanted to have that ... the story book, I wanted to have the normal experience.

I tell Robyn of reading about the call to re-stigmatise teenage mothers and put the question to her that if there had been no stigma attached to being a teenage mother, would she push herself as hard as she does? *I always wanted to do the right thing at school, I would have been horrified to do the wrong thing at school but ... no, that's been the drive I think, but I don't know that a lot's changed Sharon, I don't know ... but I don't think the stigma has changed at all, I don't know ... maybe ... probably it's people from lower socio economic backgrounds because they don't have the awareness ... they don't have the options available to them ... they're very much put down that path, that everybody was when I was at school, you know, like mustering cattle, this is your track and this is where you go and maybe that's why that group of people have never taken a different path because of generation after generation thinking that that's where you go ... that's what life is ... and because I didn't fit, I think, because I knew I didn't fit that stereotype, I didn't plan to get pregnant, I didn't think 'okay, year 10, jeez I can't be bothered going to school anymore, I can't be bothered working, I think I'll get pregnant' I didn't think that ... that wasn't planned so how dare anyone say that that's what I did, how dare they think that, so I'll prove them wrong, it's only taken me 27 bloody years [laughs] to do it ... and then I get angry with myself, why didn't I do it sooner, why didn't I? ... and that's when I feel the pride, 'no, no that's alright, you had to do that job', you felt you had to do that job and that's okay to get to 44 ... and I know that if I hadn't done it now*

I would have died being really down on myself, I would have ... I'm not worried about getting to 50, shit I'm going to have a degree, I'm going to be a teacher, I'm not sitting back like some people I know who have had their families, thinking, "oh god, 50", I don't care, I'm here ... life's on the up and up ... I even have times when I'm proud of myself.

* * * * *

After reading this portrait of herself, Robyn cried. She told me that she rarely tells her story to anyone, and so it had "spilled out" of her. 'Reading it', she said, 'was like reading my life, and I cried. That's my life on the page. Thank you.'

Robyn's comments emphasised the need I had felt to (re)present the data in a way that illuminated the mothers' voices – their words, their stories, their silences.

SHARED EXPERIENCES

When sifting through the transcribed data from the interviews, I sought to uncover the issues that the participants felt were important in relation to their mixed roles of (new) mother and, for the most part, student. I obviously had issues I wanted to discuss with them, given I had research questions to answer, but I felt I had to give value to, and listen out for, shared experiences that were meaningful to the participants. It might appear that much of the ensuing discussion is “trivial” or the product of two women sitting down to share “birth stories”, but to dismiss these discussions is to fail to understand the realities of the lives of these young women. It means that policy makers, whether they’re in the world of welfare or education, will make decisions based on what *they* think is important, rather than taking into consideration the realities of these women’s lives. The discussion generated by these young mothers is similar to the experience of many new mothers; the point of difference with this study is the call for these issues to be taken into consideration when decisions are made about educational provision, and related issues such as child care, and the physical space provided within schools for young mothers’ programs. This research project is also a call to the expectations of a community who often fail to see the ‘mother’ for focusing on the ‘young’. I have to treat the issues raised by the young mothers participating in this study seriously and give them full value, because that’s the reality of their lives. This discussion isn’t a “thematic” look at the issues surrounding teenage pregnancy and parenting, but a “finding out” of feelings, reactions, and ways of coping that the mothers have in common, not only with each other, but with older women who become pregnant within a more “normal” time frame.

The following discussion primarily addresses Research Question Two, highlighting the issues which impact on the life of a young mother when she returns to education, and in doing so also addresses Research Question One.

ON BEING PREGNANT

I was absolutely over the moon about being pregnant ...Anne-Marie

One comment made by almost all the mothers participating in this study was one about pregnancy providing them with a reason to live, or a reason to live more healthily, or to move forward in their lives. Anne-Marie's reaction to falling pregnant was *like oh wow fantastic, you know, a reason to live. I mean I was suicidal before I fell pregnant, so yeah this baby gave me a reason to clean my act up. I think I saw this baby as something that was just mine, something I could love and um ... I don't know ... I really don't know what I was thinking at the time, I just knew I was really happy.* Louise expressed a similar sentiment: *I actually feel a lot better, I feel healthier and happier ... and I think I actually said to a lot of people that being pregnant has given me an excuse to look after myself ... has made me look after myself ...whether I want to or not.* Tammie, who fell pregnant at the age of 15, simply said: *since I've had Angel I've been well and truly out of trouble ... life's a lot better.* Nikki responded by stating: *In a way, having children... it's made me go in a different ... it's given me more opportunities yeah ... it's actually brought more opportunities for me.*

Robyn was pregnant at a time when the stigma of being a young mother was stronger than it is today. Her experience of "needing" to hide the fact of her pregnancy meant that she wasn't able to see a brighter future for herself. She felt cast into the role of wife and mother, and the stories she tells about her life show a young woman for whom life was about less opportunities, rather than the more opportunities being a teenage mother opened up for Nikki and other mothers. Robyn made the point that when we only provide the negative view of teenage motherhood we don't show young mothers that life can be positive. It might take a while, but life doesn't have to stay negative. The challenge for schools and policy makers is to turn the focus of discussion from

the “obligations” a young mother has to society, to “opportunities” we can provide for the young mother.

* * * * *

CONFIRMATION AND EXPLORING OPTIONS

I took two pregnancy tests ... the first one was um a like, self pregnancy test, and then two days later I went to the doctor to make sure ... Tammie

As for any woman who suspects she is pregnant, confirming the pregnancy is a time of anxiety and uncertainty. Options are explored and questions raised about the impact having a baby will have on any mother's life. It was the same with the participants of this study.

The majority of the mothers reacted positively to the news of their pregnancy. Tammie told me that *ever since I was young I always said that I wanted kids at a young age and I guess doing a test was just a curiosity thing, not so much because I thought that I was pregnant it was more ... I wanted to know what a pregnancy test was and how it all worked ... I just wanted to test it, it wasn't meant to turn out like this [laughs].*

Louise had decided to take the risk of pregnancy with Jason: *I did want kids, and I wanted kids with Jason, I just didn't particularly want them right now ... [laughs] ... but yeah, we never really were that careful about it, I think we were just 'if it happened it happened' ... I wanted to impress this person, I wanted to make him feel like ... I am wife material or you know ... I wanted him to feel like he wants to stay with me for a while ... so I started looking after myself a bit more ... still spent heaps on pot but not as much ... but I think, yeah, because of the pot and lack of food I was just really sick, I didn't consider it to be morning sickness ... and I went to the doctor one day with a list of symptoms and every time I'd say a symptom I just realised, "okay, I'm pregnant ... I have sore breasts and I'm pregnant, I'm throwing up and I'm*

pregnant" and then, he said 'well, this test says you're pregnant' and I was like "oh fuck, okay um ... thanks I've gotta go home and tell Jason" ...

Janelle wasn't as enthusiastic about the news as Louise was: well when I first found out I was pregnant I was living in Queensland and I went to the doctor with stomach ache and whatever and had an ultrasound and he said that I was pregnant ... I was a bit upset because my partner at the time – I sort of moved to Queensland to get away from him ... and then he followed me up there and then we weren't getting on then it was too late and I was ... I was devastated.

Like the others Octavia's pregnancy was not a ... pre-meditated pregnancy; but it was her sense of responsibility that saw her continue her pregnancy: I got a pregnancy test because I usually use protection and this time I didn't and I thought oh my goodness 'cause I'm not on the pill, I haven't been on the pill ... so I just used condoms and stuff but this one time I didn't and I knew ... I got a pregnancy test and it said I was pregnant and I went to the doctor's and he was nonchalant, you know, like oblivious to it all, and it was just like 'oh my goodness' ... I was a bit excited but I got the abortion clinic thingo while I was there 'cause I always thought if I was young and unmarried I just thought I'd never keep it and like my best friend she's just had an abortion and a lot of my other friends have had abortions. My automatic response was to get rid of the baby, that was automatically in my head 'oh my goodness I'm pregnant, my life is going to stop, I'll never be anything, I don't want to do this' and the next day I couldn't think of anything worse ... it was like my whole life I've been taught to take care of my responsibilities

Octavia wasn't the only one to mention abortion. Tammie was given a book by a friend who said "I think you'd better read it" ... and me and Barry both sat down and read this book together ... not realising that it was a Christian book ... and the pictures and ... it went into almighty good detail ... it just ... I found it absolutely disgusting ...it went through the whole process ... had um

... like all sorts of different stages and then about four or five different ways of having an abortion and it's also got the way they used to have abortions and how people'd try and do it themselves and ... um ... and stuff like this. Barry said "have you made up your mind" and I said "yeah I have" and I said "look, I'm going to do this with or without you" and that was just yeah, end of conversation, went back to the doctors ...

For Anne-Marie it was her parents who influenced her decision: *they asked me once if I wanted it ... I mean they were dead set against abortion ... but they asked me whether or not I wanted to consider adoption ... and I just said, no, no way. That was never brought up again thank god. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Emily, and I've told her that. I would not be alive if I hadn't fallen pregnant with her, because I was just so close to calling it quits, I'd had enough and um yeah, she ... even with all the trouble we had over the years she was just ... yeah ... she was what kept me going.*

While Janelle expressed a desire not to have children, when she found out she was pregnant she didn't consider the options. She firmly stated that: *I don't really believe in abortion ... so it must have been meant to be.*

Louise explained her decision to continue the pregnancy, and again, abortion wasn't an option she considered seriously: *I think what made the final decision for me to keep him was that I wanted him, I wanted to be a mother, but I think to start off with it was my state of mind, I knew that I'd never be able to live with myself if I had an abortion, just to think if I had of given him up, today I would be thinking "I would have had an eight and a half month old baby right now" whereas ... if I hadn't of had him I'd still be smoking heaps of weed, I'd be living in the flats, probably doing college but not doing as well as I could be. And then I told my mum not long after that, I never really kept anything from my mum ... and said I have something to tell you but I don't want to because you've already made it really hard ... and she said oh god, you're not ... and I said yes, I am ... and she said well what are you*

going to do and I said I don't know and she said good, you're going to get rid of it ... and yeah, I just said no, you can't just make that decision for me, just because I say I don't know doesn't mean you can say right, well you're going to get rid of it ... I couldn't handle the thought of having an abortion ... I don't think I'd be able to live with myself ... I'm not saying abortion's wrong you know it's perfectly fine for anybody who needs it but I didn't feel like I was able to cope with it ... so I decided to have the baby, although it was pretty much an entirely shared decision. In the final trimester of her pregnancy, Louise says: it's a beautiful thing to be pregnant.

What these conversations showed me was that there is no “one” reason young women become pregnant, nor one reason why they make the decision to become mothers. In Chapter Two I outlined some of the psychological traits that have been suggested as to why teenagers become pregnant. The focus of the Tasmanian Government's Teen Pregnancy Alliance is on exploring that very question, but by answering that question there is a tendency to show what is wrong with the teenager who decides to become a mother. Focusing on the negative in this way reduces the complexities associated with teenage pregnancy and motherhood to a monochromatic view of the issues. The snippets of conversation above show that there's a lot more colour to be seen, and hence more complexity, if we listen to the voices of those who have made that decision.

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PREGNANCY AND BODY CHANGES

My boobs are just not the same anymore ... Octavia

Pregnancy is a time for change in any woman's life; some are more prepared for it than others and some have more support than others. One of the issues when dealing with teenage pregnancy is often the lack of support available throughout pregnancy. The experiences the participants had of pregnancy are

similar to that of other, older mothers; yet school systems rarely take these experiences into account. There are two issues of particular importance here: one is the education system's expectation that a pregnant student continue her education as a non-pregnant student would, ignoring her changing body and needs, and the other is the level of support available generally to pregnant teens.

Louise is one of those women for whom being pregnant is a "blooming" experience. She acknowledges this, although her image of herself is still connected to her weight and the "body consciousness" of many teenage girls. Much of her talk about herself is contradictory; in describing herself she mixes how she thinks she looks with how she thinks others think she should look, all the while acknowledging that: *I feel like I look better ... but I also think how self conscious I was before I was pregnant. I was really thin, I weighed like 47 kilos on a bad day, often I'd weigh 43 and a half ... and that was a good day for me, and I was breakable thin ... and I still thought back then I was fat, as every teenage girl does ... but I was really self conscious about a lot of parts of my body and now I think about it and go I was really sexy back then, I like my body back then.* I ask Louise if she still feels sexy now [she is six months' pregnant]. *I do, I feel beautiful, like Jason tells me a lot that I am beautiful. I saw one of my mother's friends recently and her son said I looked fat, but she said "Louise you look so healthy, I wouldn't call you fat" ... and I don't feel like I'm that fat, I feel like I've put on weight, I've put on 20 kilos actually.*

Nikki had a completely different sort of first pregnancy to Louise. Her mother and grandmother were very ill each time they were pregnant with girls, and whatever that condition was also affected Nikki. She was ill and in hospital for much of her pregnancy and the weight gain Louise experienced was just the opposite in Nikki's case: *anything I ate I brought back up and for the whole pregnancy I probably kept one piece of toast down ... everything I ate it just come back up instantly, so that was basically the sickness ...*

because I had nothing in ... like, I hadn't eaten anything I was passing out as well. So I had a few trips to the hospital um ... and they'd put me on a drip ... ah medication ... give me Phenergan to keep things down, but that didn't help ... they wouldn't let me out till I'd kept something down ... in the end ... kept it down [laughs] just to get out of there I think, then I'd be back, so ... I was 53 kilos and I went down to about 46 ... by the time I had, the day I had Eliza I think I was 51 kilos.

Octavia too had health problems: I had really bad, like constipation ... that was so painful, that was even worse than labour in some ways ... I had fluid, I went from 60 kilos up to 84 kilos and couldn't stop it, couldn't stop the weight putting on, like I started eating really healthy, I took all the vitamin tablets: the women's formula, Blackmore's pregnancy ones, I took the raspberry leaf, six weeks before ... you know how you're supposed to take raspberry leaf, did you know that? It gets the cervix ready to dilate ... I was taking everything, calcium, iron, you name it I was pumping it into me and I was drinking, I had this real bad craving for oranges and mandarins and orange juice ... I think it was where half my weight came from because orange juice is really high in sugar and stuff ... but no it wasn't too bad, apart from stretch marks, and I've got a varicose vein now ... I kept getting sciatica in my legs and I'd be walking ... I used to walk four k's every day, trying to keep fit and it didn't work, I used to eat a Mars Bar a day [laughs] don't know why I went for a walk. In her fifteenth week of pregnancy Octavia had an operation to remove an ovarian cyst. I went in to hospital on the Thursday and I just thought they'd do keyhole surgery you know, but they can't because they can't blow me up with gas because I'm pregnant, so I came out of theatre with this whopping great scar across my stomach like as if I'd had a caesarean. I was in there for about four or five days or something. I felt a bit upset thinking I might lose the baby during ... but nuh, she was fine, she was good ... um, so yeah I've only got one ovary now, and after that I had to rest for a few weeks, six weeks.

Fitness was an issue for some of the mothers: Louise attended preg-nastics classes; Octavia walked, swam and did fitball classes; and Janelle attended antenatal classes with her mother as support person. Anne-Marie *went regularly to doctor's visits, I only went to one or two birthing classes because I couldn't handle the fact that everyone else there were married couples in their mid 20s and older and here I was this 16 year old single mum ... and yeah, they really looked down on you in those days, they didn't have single mothers groups then.*

It is undeniable that pregnancy is a time of great body changes but what provision do Tasmanian schools make for morning sickness, and other pregnancy-related health issues? When there is no state-wide or systemic policy for schools, as is the case in Tasmania, ad hoc provision must be made for the school to deal with a teenager who is going through a time of physical upheaval. There are a number of alternatives: distance education, early school leaving (as was Robyn's response), or as with Tammie, Nikki, Octavia, Louise and Janelle, returning to senior secondary education later. This may sound simple, but when the compulsory school leaving age is set at 17, and the welfare system works from a mutual obligation framework, then added complexities arise. (In Australia, Mutual Obligation is based on a concept that welfare assistance provided to the unemployed of working age should involve some return responsibilities for the recipients (Yeend, 2004)).

* * * * *

BREASTFEEDING

I'd cry every time I'd feed him and half me nipple was falling off ...

Janelle

In the same way that pregnancy means changes in a woman's life, feeding a baby is a big issue in the lives of all mothers, whether they make the decision to bottle or breast feed. Research suggests that many young mothers refuse to breastfeed because they consider their breasts to be a site of sexual pleasure

rather than a means of feeding a baby (Kitzinger, 1989, p. 390). There was much discussion with the participants about feeding, about the pressure some felt to breastfeed, about the joys, but also the difficulties of breastfeeding and developing a close bond with their baby. It was obvious from much of the discussion that arguments for breastfeeding had become part of their consciousness and even advertising campaigns were influential in their decision-making. There tended to be a defensiveness from some mothers who felt that breastfeeding was the “right” thing to do, but who couldn’t continue to breastfeed past a few weeks. If educational policy makers viewed the *realities* of young mothers’ lives, they may take into account issues such as the need to feed a baby, and the attendant issues – preparation and storage of bottles; places to feed in private, for example – when providing for their needs as mothers, as well as mothers’ educational needs. It is at junctures such as this where the intertwining roles of young mother and student have the potential to clash if those making educational provision fail to take into account the realities of young mothers’ lives, or dismiss these needs as the trivialities of life.

For many young women breastfeeding is something that’s distasteful. For many mothers, whether they’re teenage mothers or not, breastfeeding can be a painful time. For Tammie it was the former, rather than the latter, at least initially: *I was very much against it just 'cause I didn't think it'd feel right ... I really didn't ... like, I rang up this pregnancy counselling thing ... cause I was really, really scared about you know, the labour and everything afterwards ... um ... and you know I just fired questions at 'em, look you know what do I do, what's the best way to go and they were actually the ones that, that ... they were the ones that actually told me that you know breastfeeding is better for the baby ... um ... and it builds a closer relationships ... and I'm thinking, yeah right, you know, how can breast feeding build a closer relationship? And the other main fear that I had was that postnatal depression ... and apparently breastfeeding you know, it doesn't stop it but it you know, like it's not as big of a risk ... and that really, really frightened me ... I was ...*

'cause I'd always wanted a child and now that I had the chance to have one you know someone was going to tell me well, you know it's normal not to want your child just for a little while, it was like, nah, you know ... um ... but yeah like when I got out to the hospital they said do you want to bottle feed or breast feed, 'cause she was so little it was better to breast feed I said you know I'll try it and if I don't like it or I don't feel comfortable with it quite simply I'll stop it and yeah I was fine with it, I loved it ... loved it. I asked Tammie if it felt "weird" as she'd thought it would and she said: no, but I wasn't one for doing it like in public like I've seen many people who do it ... and yeah, like that wasn't me, like, often I'd bring her in here and that other little room, that was my place and Barry'd come in and make sure that everyone stayed out ... but I wasn't one for going in to public toilets and doing it, and I've seen people do that too, so you know ... well, you know I feel the same way about it as that TV commercial, you wouldn't eat or drink in a public toilet why make your kid? I just think it's wrong. Tammie stopped breastfeeding when her baby was three months old: mainly because me milk wasn't coming in enough for her and like, I really wanted to get back into school ... I had a breast pump thing ... and didn't realise that using a breast pump the milk does still come in, but not as much as you know, actually having your child there ... yeah like, she like she didn't take to the formula very well, got quite moody.

Tammie was not one for breastfeeding in public, unlike Octavia, who still breastfeeds her 16 month-old daughter: *I breastfeed everywhere, I breastfeed in the Avenue, outside Banjos and I wasn't obvious, and people wouldn't notice if they walked past and people I was sitting with, like my best friend and a couple of others, um, they were like, my breastfeeding doesn't bother my best friend because she's used to it, but other people are like ... but you know I was really discreet (I'm not going to hang my boobs out). A lot of people say "I don't know how you can fully breast feed" 'cause I've breastfed, I made my classes around my breastfeeding, like they're wanting to put me in other classes and I said, no I want to be that line, and I had to get*

her father to look after her around breastfeeding and the crèche around breastfeeding so it was all hard to get it all to go in, and then when I cut her feeds back I had to time it ...but it's easier than bottle feeding ... cheaper too.

Nikki has breastfed both her children, and in her usual no-nonsense way does it because she *hated* the idea of bottle feeding. She commented on the experience of a friend *who'd go to her bedroom and feed ... or she'd race home to feed, she'd never feed anywhere else.* Like Octavia, Nikki is discreet about feeding but doesn't comment further on the subject. Anne-Marie didn't find the experience of breastfeeding to be one that suited her first baby. She *breastfed for the first six weeks then I found out she was lactose intolerant ... mum said to the clinic sister, 'cause we'd tried everything else on the market at the time, she said "would it help taking her off the breast and trying her on soy milk or something?" and of course the clinic sister said "no, no don't be stupid, that won't work" ... 'cause mum had had similar problems with one of us I think, so we bought some soy milk, put her on the bottle, she slept through that night and we went back two weeks' later and told the clinic nurse what had happened and she's like "Oh, I really like to try these new things sometimes" ... never had a problem with her after that. Not healthwise anyway.*

Anne-Marie breastfed her second child, a boy, *for three months but he was one of these kids that had an absolutely insatiable appetite and I hit a period when my milk dropped off a little bit and he just screamed and screamed and it was just like ... I put him on the bottle and of course I wasn't feeding him enough so my milk dried up, but he thrived on the bottle, like he'd had a good start you know, he was fine.*

Janelle's experience of breastfeeding wasn't a positive one: *I had to have ultrasounds on me boobs everyday and that sort of thing, I had too much milk and mastitis and it was horrible and I was getting really depressed, that's when I moved in with mum, probably tried to feed him for two weeks he'd just*

cry all the time, 'cause I couldn't get him on so I'd have to go and express and then come back and I couldn't get him on all the time and he'd be full again and it was just a waste of time, and I'd cry every time I'd feed him and half me nipple was falling off and it was like, 'NO' and mum's like, go and get some formula ... so I did and I felt better after that ... I just couldn't feed him.

Louise displayed a determination to learn how to breastfeed properly before she left hospital: *I stayed in hospital for six days after he was born ... I think that surprised lots of people because the hospital was ready to get rid of me by the third day but I know so many people who come home after the third day and have problems breastfeeding and I wanted to get it right the first time and I just told them that. I just said no I'm not going, my milk hasn't come in yet, I don't know how to breastfeed properly yet so I'm not going until I'm confident, so I think the hospital was a bit surprised that I stood up for myself and just said I'm not ready to go home. I was also really scared of just taking him home and being alone with him, not having that button to press and call the nurses in, that was a bit scary but yeah it was mainly because I couldn't breastfeed properly yet and I just had to get that right and I haven't had a problem at all with breastfeeding.*

The issues raised here are multiple; from making the decision to breastfeed, to the support Tammie asked for from a pregnancy counselling service, to Louise's expressed anxiety about being alone with her new born baby, and Octavia planning her classes, crèche and other child care arrangements around her determination to breastfeed. What these issues illustrate is how immersed in motherhood these young women are, just as any new mother is. These teenagers have entered into the adult world of "mothering" often without the sanction of society. These conversations also show that going to school is not unproblematic. Any new mother needs time to adjust to her new role, but while we focus on the "teenager" rather than her role as "mother" we don't allow for the fullness of her experiences or the difficulties adjusting to being immersed in motherhood.

* * * * *

BEING A MOTHER

I don't see how a child could make your life unhappy – he just brings so much joy into my life ... Louise

Antenatal classes prepare a woman for the birth of her baby, but nothing seems to prepare a woman for motherhood. Deborah Lupton (2000) describes the love/hate relationship many first-time mothers have with their babies. The mothers who shared their stories with me expressed similar feelings, although they seemed more polarised: they either loved being a mother or were depressed and felt constrained in that role. This relationship was expressed in a number of different ways, from Anne-Marie's total withdrawal from her one year old daughter, to Louise's joy in being a mother – although she does acknowledge the difficulties it poses.

Anne-Marie walked out of home the day before her daughter turned one. Even though she'd been *proud as punch, you know ... like most young mothers though I mean a lot of it was the whole showing off the big baby doll type thing ... she was a beautiful baby ... resentment started to build towards the baby ... my parents yeah a bit, but they weren't stopping me going anywhere, but my responsibilities to this baby were ... I suppose somewhere along the line ... I started to see Emily as being a barrier to me having a fun life. The first six weeks was really hard. There were times when I'd just break down in tears because I was so tired ... I can remember many nights going waking mum up at 2, 3 o'clock in the morning and asking if she could take over for a while 'cause I just had to go back to bed, I couldn't stay awake any longer, I just didn't have the coping mechanisms at that age to handle this crying baby all night ... but I didn't feel any sort of resentment or anger towards her or anything like that, it was just you know, I've got this sick baby I can't deal with it ... how it would have been if I'd been on my own, might have been a lot different story, if I hadn't had someone there who could take her.*

When her eldest child was seven Anne-Marie had her second child. This experience was a lot different to her first. She was married, older, more confident in her ability to cope: *When I actually had him Emily was at school and we you know we'd spend every day playing and all this sort of thing and ... I actually felt um ... I felt comfortable being a mother, yeah everything just sort of seemed to click into place, so although I was still battling outside influences um and I still got nervous when other people came into the house or I had to face other people with my parenting skills, at home on my own I felt comfortable about what I was doing and um my ability to cope um so I suppose at that stage things started to change a bit. The next two girls I slid back because I had postnatal depression after both of them and I really struggled through that four year period.*

I ask Anne-Marie if there are times, with five children, when she feels that she can't handle it anymore: *Every day. Even now, even as a 34 year old who's done it and knows she can cope I still have days where I particularly look out at those mountains there and think "I just want to pack my bags and go, I've had enough, I'm tired" and it's all too hard, let somebody else look after them for a while ... I love them dearly, and I think that's normal and I don't think I've spoken to one mother yet who hadn't, when they've been honest, experienced those feelings of just wanting to pack it all in. I put the other three into foster care for about three weeks when they were little because I just got to the point where I just couldn't do it, I needed time out, and after a couple of weeks realised that no I don't want to give them up, I got help instead.*

Nikki is the only other teenage mother in the study who has more than one child, but the birth of her second child did no more to slow her plans than her first pregnancy did. Nikki wouldn't be drawn on her feelings about motherhood but thought that what a mother does should be done by everyone. A mother's job is to *look after your children, do your housework, do your*

daily routines, I don't think a mother should be any different to anyone else ... anyone really should know about feeding a family and nutrition, doesn't mean you have to cook and clean and feed anybody ... everybody's got to eat, I think a mother's just an everyday person really ... except they've just got children and responsibilities. I ask Nikki if there's ever been a time when she's felt overwhelmed by the amount of housework she has to do (her house is really tidy; there's no washing up on the sink, no baskets of washing sitting around the place, no toys scattered around except where Jack has been playing). She replies thoughtfully: *No, not really ... I just get up and do the daily thing, it's nothing different, it's just ... yeah ... Part of life?, I suggest ... yeah, basically.*

Janelle battled postnatal depression after the birth of her son: *Oh, the first sort of three or four months ... I didn't want him ... had postnatal depression so I just ... didn't want him ... and I was living with mum which was ... helped me I guess ... I guess I felt physically I was stuck with this moron [the baby's father] for the rest of my life because I've got a son to him and ... so I was a bit resentful through that.* The word "stuck" appears again when Janelle talks about the baby: *I felt it was my problem I'm stuck with him [the baby] ... It sort of helped living with mum but when I was out on my own most of the time I'd just be stuck with him.* After the postnatal depression had eased Janelle felt a change of attitude: *once he was sort of from three months on he was alright then, when he was you know smiling at me and "mummy" and you know that sort of makes you feel good ... so up until ... probably fifteen months excellent [laughs] I loved being a mum, I was happy, I was glad and then from 15 months onwards it was [makes a noise as though it was a real drag].* I ask her how it is being a mother now that Jacob's getting older. Her response is much more enthusiastic: *It's really good actually ... I'm really actually enjoying it now, especially ... well now that, like Stuart's gone it's making it, like Jacob and I are just together all the time so it's ... we do, like I went for a ride on my bike the other day and I haven't been for over a year and so I just put the baby seat on the back and Jacob jumps in there ... but we*

had a really good time and we're just going to start doing things together. I ask about the highlights so far of Jacob's three years. I don't know, just all the little milestones but probably seeing him growing into a little man, get his own personality. I ask if she likes him and she says: I do now, totally different ... different feeling to how I was before ... especially I guess, especially because he's ... now he's going with his dad I get the time apart to sort of reflect and see how much I miss him.

Anne-Marie also suffered postnatal depression but says despite that she *just always loved having babies in the house but yeah the stress got to me at times.* Her model of an "ideal" mother is her own mother: *I loved having my mum there after school, I liked that security of knowing that I could come home and she'd be there and that's what I want to do for my kids ... I don't condemn anybody else who doesn't do it, because I mean everyone has their own reasons for being out at work, and I mean that I know that there may come a time when I've gotta turn around and say to these guys, "look, I've gotta work and I'm not gonna be home when you get here" ... but at the moment you know, he goes to crèche a couple of days a week [indicating Nathan] for his own needs, you know, he needs that socialisation and particularly with his speech problems ... I enjoy the break but um nine times out of ten I'm down at the school doing parent help anyway, so it's like I'm still not getting any time off from the kids.*

On being a mother Anne-Marie says she's always been *happy to say I was a mum. I was always quite comfortable about the fact that I was a mum. There were times when I was angry about it and resentful but I don't think there was ever a time when I couldn't acknowledge it. Whether or not that was tied in with good or bad feelings you know depended I suppose on the situation at the time.*

Louise echoes the positive elements of that sentiment when she tells me that she is *just happy being a mum at the moment. I'm writing a letter to my friend*

and I was going to put in that I feel like I've aged ten years compared to her, and I know she's enjoying her life, but I know that she knows she's not getting anywhere, whereas I feel like I'm doing something.

The feeling of “doing something” is an important one. Western society tends to dismiss the role of a mother. It's common to hear “I'm just a mother”, and the pressure is on for women to combine work and motherhood, or in the case of teenage mothers, school and motherhood. But again, a teenage mother's unique experience, and the added complexities of her role, means that sometimes she gets caught up with being a mother. Of course, there are larger issues – for middle class women having an identity through work is often stronger than for working class women, but as this study didn't seek to address the issues in this way, I'll leave that as an area of further research.

* * * * *

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

Life's on the up and up ... Robyn

Octavia has refused to allow her role of mother to stop her plans for the future, although she does acknowledge that sometimes she longs for an easier journey. It seems to be only a fleeting longing though. Octavia is a strong young woman who hasn't been bowed by her experience of becoming a mother; *it's only made me go more I think ... you get through it because you have to ... I just think I'm a pretty strong person.*

Nikki has a focus of a different kind: *we're looking at buying another house ... renting this one out and buying another.* Even though they're very settled in their domestic and work life there are no plans for marriage between Nikki and her partner. She tells me about getting *engaged ah, yeah, we've got wedding rings [laughs] but that's it ... ah, we probably never will get married, I mean ... we're in no hurry, it doesn't mean anything really ... a piece of paper and that's it [laughs]*. There is one thing which Nikki

adamantly refuses to consider and that's another child. She told me that *we went to see the doctor last night [laughs] ... No more children!* I tell her of my experience of wanting a permanent form of contraception when I was a few years older than her but the doctor telling me I was too young to have "that kind of procedure" (even though I had four children) and she told me that *the doctor said we will face that ... that problem ... but that he said he'd fight it for us, he said he'd really push it, because you know we don't want any more than two.*

Tammie isn't keen to have another child in the near future. She has taken the step of having a contraceptive implant that will ensure five years of protection against another pregnancy.

Louise has thought about having another child, but wants to explore other options for personal fulfilment. I found it interesting though, in an informal visit to Louise that she mentioned how her identity as a mother wasn't enough for her. She knew that she was more than that – that she was a woman and that her role as a mother was only part of her identity. She was beginning to feel, now that Thomas is eighteen months old and becoming less dependent on her – she had recently weaned him – that she wanted an identity besides that as mother. Louise was the only mother to talk about this so articulately. What it means for her, is that the options she's exploring, have moved beyond wanting another baby.

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CHAPTER SUMMARY

The portraits, and subsequent discussion on shared experiences, capture the resilience of the young mothers participating in this study and of lives being changed by teenage pregnancy. These young mothers, who generally subvert the stereotype of high school drop out, all had different "reasons" for

becoming pregnant, and have unique life stories, but are similar in at least one way – they just get on with it. Their pregnancy and early parenting has been the catalyst for changes in their lives, but as Tammie said, *my life could only get better, it couldn't have got much worse*. Having a baby while a teenager is undoubtedly difficult, in some respects it may not be ideal, but for these young mothers, it has pushed them to change their lives in positive ways.

When we only look to the reasons for teenage pregnancy, or at the statistics, we miss a vital component. We miss the stories of young mothers' lives. It is these stories, in the social context of stigma, shame and the negative stereotype of the young, single mother that help us understand the lived experience of teenage motherhood and beyond, and which serve to illustrate the conflicted place teenage mothers have in society.

In the following chapter discussion centres on the issues which arose from the interviews, particularly as they relate to implications for educators and school systems. The chapter concludes with suggestions for areas of further research.



Five: Discussion & Conclusion

Even though I'd lost my self confidence there was a part of me that thought 'I am intelligent, I can do things well', but I didn't have a chance to prove it (Robyn)

The participants' portraits and the discussion of shared experiences highlights the similarity of experience these "young" mothers have with all women who become pregnant and decide to become mothers. A key finding from this study therefore is that teenage mothers are essentially mothers, with similar needs to all new mothers. We cannot divorce her from that role just because she is a teenager. The experiences teenage mothers have, the role they play in their child's life, the seeking of an identity within the bounds deemed acceptable by society (whether that's as student, adolescent, child, young mother), and their immersion in motherhood, particularly when they are a new mother, is no different to that of new mothers in their 20s, 30s or 40s. In "normalising" young mothers' experiences in this way, a lasting question remains: why are young mothers commonly problematised as a homogenous group, separate to women who follow a more traditional path from adolescence to adulthood? Grouping young mothers in order to create an "Other" to endlessly define, describe and dissect, and then use to blame for society's ills, all the while comparing her with those defined as "normal", not only fails to take into account the reality of their lives, but fails in allowing the young mother credibility and validation in her role as mother. It also fails to provide adequate support for the mother who also takes on the role of student.

When the messages from education systems, teachers, the media and families tell teenage mothers that their life is now "over", when we lay the burden of having made a "mistake" or a "bad" or "wrong" decision on them, we stifle the potential for opportunities that can help turn their life around. Life is



always affected by pregnancy and child bearing, no matter what age the mother is, but it doesn't follow that it's over. Moral judgements, particularly by educators, do nothing to further the opportunities of the pregnant student, nor show her that while life will never be the same again, it doesn't mean that it has to be the end.

When framed within the "wrong-girl" discourse (Kelly, 2000) these young women could be said to be the wrong girls having babies. Their contraceptive use was erratic, they weren't financially stable, they weren't in long-term or committed relationships, and many of them hadn't finished high school. Kelly calls for a reframing of the discourse surrounding teenage mothers and argues that 'conventional wisdom does not acknowledge that becoming a teen mother might, under certain circumstances, be a "good choice", given the ways in which the current economic and political order restricts other choices for young people' (p. 214). The participants in this study didn't choose to become pregnant, but they did choose to become mothers. Their right to choose motherhood is a fundamental right which cannot be denied them and a supportive environment (whether that's a school environment or a societal one) would be of greater benefit to young mothers and ultimately to their children, than one based on moral judgements.

In the same way, calls to return to a time of stigmatising young mothers in the hope of curtailing the prevalence of the "problem" is not useful for those who are already young mothers. The consequences of stigmatisation are felt throughout the mother's life (and described in some detail, particularly in Anne-Marie's and Robyn's life stories) and have a negative impact on the mother and her children. It seeks to hurt, and punish, those who are already mothers at an age when it is not seen as acceptable to be a mother, without producing any positive benefits for anyone.

Much has been said about single mothers and welfare and I have discussed in Chapter Two the continuing effect of 18th century thinking on welfare



provision and attitudes even in today's society. Welfare wasn't raised as an issue on its own by the mothers in this study, although the impact on daily life of being seen to be "poor" was raised by Anne-Marie. Despite the views of many in the community, which are usually, and strongly, expressed through the media, suggesting that young mothers have babies in order to "bludge off the government" none of the mothers in this study made a decision to become pregnant based on finances or the receipt of welfare payments. Anne-Marie, in particular, finds the financial side of life the one area in which she has little control and worries that she doesn't have a safety net if one of the children needs medical attention, but for the most part the mothers tended to be careful managers of their finances. Nikki and her partner are considering buying a second house as an investment. The issue of finance and welfare was raised by me as an issue rather than being something that the mothers felt important enough to discuss. This could have been because of the negative perception of "welfare mothers", or just that they were used to being reliant on parents or partners and saw a government benefit as the next step. The mothers' future plans indicate that if they're currently receiving a government "benefit" that won't always be the case.

Another issue deemed important by the mothers is that of contraception or subsequent children. The literature referred to in Chapter Two seems to suggest that young mothers have more children, often in rapid succession. This was not borne out in my study. Robyn had her second child as a consequence of family building: it was "normal" at the time to have a second child relatively close in age to the first. Anne-Marie has five children, but there was a seven year gap between her first and her second, and her second child was born within marriage. Nikki, 19 year-old mother of two, is in a marriage like relationship, and is the only other participant to have more than one child. She is determined to have no more though and has taken steps to ensure a subsequent pregnancy doesn't happen. The other mothers have made deliberate decisions about long term contraception, and all apart from Erin, who is in a stable relationship, have expressed a desire to have no more



children until they're "settled". This has implications for a return to study, or further study, and suggests that these young women are concerned for the future and the future of their children, through making responsible decisions about contraception, and about their future.

Of course, as this study is concerned with education, that was an issue I raised with the mothers. Most were passionate about the need to be educated to provide a better life for their child; Erin, whose baby was the youngest, was still immersed in motherhood. She found that because of the locality in which she lived, which had limited public transport, and her attitude to mothering, that she would return to education "one day", although she has already completed Year 12. At the moment, with a young baby, education isn't her first priority – her baby is.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

What motivated these young women to return to education? The simple answer is having a baby while a teenager but there is, of course, much more complexity to it than that. Because the reasons for falling pregnant in the first place were different, there can be no single answer for the decisions these young mothers make about their lives, but generally (apart from Anne-Marie) having a baby provided the catalyst for returning to education, and to make other life changes that also impacted on that decision: getting off drugs; getting out of damaging relationships; seeing the future in more positive ways in terms of ambitions and goals. These decisions impact because without making them, returning to education would have been even more difficult. In the case of Octavia, who had been determined to become a winemaker anyway, becoming a mother served as an extra push – she originally had not considered the possibility of attending university and now she is in her second year of the course.



For the young mothers in this study education is not the priority for all of them; for some, motherhood is. And so various issues become important; the new mother, whether she is sixteen or twenty six, is immersed in motherhood. Kitzinger (1978) spoke for many when she described the advent of a baby into a woman's life as one where she 'finds she is fixed with one role, that of a mother, and there is little choice left because of the infant's unremitting demands on her' (p. 23). There is no difference, in this regard, between young or older mothers. What's at issue is the call by policy makers, members of the media, and those in our communities who see the life of a young mother as diminished because she has a child, but who don't take that into account when setting out obligations of young, or single mothers, and who disregard the fact that a young mother is still a mother, enmeshed in the role of caring for the "unremitting demands" of her baby. Working women fight for the right to have paid maternity leave, so they can take time off from their jobs to care for their newborns. It seems that the same "right" isn't extended to the young mother, who is encouraged back into education or employment as soon as possible after the birth of her child. The timeline for the formal completion of education remains the same whether the teenager has a child or not.

How do schools deal with the particular needs of the pregnant or parenting student? If consideration is not given to the changing needs of the pregnant student, if there is no formalised policy (as there isn't in Tasmanian schools) for pregnant students, then barriers are immediately set up, either deliberately (the "We don't want those sorts of students here" attitude) or unthinkingly. The Equity Policy of the Tasmanian Department of Education makes no reference to pregnant or parenting students, and so ad hoc decisions are made by schools when they are faced with a pregnant student. As discussed in the Shared Experiences in Chapter Four this limits the response by schools and their preparedness to meet the changing needs of the pregnant student.



RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

What is life like for these teenage mothers? Difficult, to be sure. But ask any new mother what life is like and she'll invariably say the same thing. Caring for a baby is all consuming. It changes your life. Some would say that young mothers have added difficulties, and it can be seen from the stories presented in this study that that can be the case, but it does not necessarily follow that life has to be a downward spiral. Imagine what could be achieved if these young mothers had support (by educators, by parents and other family members, and by government policy). These young mothers have shown a determination, a maturity, and a sense of responsibility towards their role as mothers and as students as well as towards themselves. They are not just doing this (getting on with their lives) for their children, but they are doing it for themselves too.

When supported by school environments that allow for the differences these adolescents bring to the classroom, as Nikki's school did; when support systems are put in place (child care, relevant curriculum, understanding teachers) then life can be less difficult. But it also takes a certain resilience and determination on the part of the young mother. How we can foster that resilience and determination, how we can change attitudes of "life is over for the young mother", would make interesting topics of further research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study did not address the lives of younger mothers, those who become pregnant before the end of compulsory schooling, and life may very well be a different story for mothers under the age of 15. The access problems alluded to in Chapter Three prevented me from seeking participants who were enrolled in Grades 7 – 10. The study would have undoubtedly had a different feel if the focus had been on younger mothers, as they have less capacity to



make independent decisions about their lives than those just a few years older.

Another limitation of the study was the relatively short time span in which it was conducted. A more longitudinal study would allow for a greater insight into the lives of young mothers, to follow more closely their life path subsequent to high school graduation. A data collection period of longer than the two years this study allowed may show attitudinal change towards future life options and educational aspirations, especially in the case of mothers like Louise, who was pregnant when we first met. An extended data collection phase would further enrich the data, providing more than a “snapshot” of a life.

While the participants were drawn from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds the small number of participants limited the study in terms of identifying how much impact that background may have had on the mothers’ plans for the future. Including only seven participants, while keeping the study within the bounds of possibility, was a de-limitation, rather than a limitation. Widening the study base, in terms of participant numbers, may allow a more detailed look at a wider range of young mothers – in terms of their socio-economic backgrounds, their prior experiences of education, and their aspirations for their future and the future of their children. This may give more weight to the ability this study has to influence educators and educational policy makers.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Following from the limitations of the study, an area of further research could be to investigate younger mothers to see how early pregnancy impacts on their educational outcomes and their lives in general.



Another area for further research is that of investigating educational programs offered in Tasmanian high schools and colleges. This would allow a closer fit between the needs of school age mothers and the provision of education, in an effort to implement specific policies which address the needs of school-age mothers.

A more longitudinal Tasmanian project on mothers, like Robyn, who don't return to education till much later in their lives, could also be an area of further study. The factors influencing Robyn's decision to enrol at university twenty eight years after finishing Grade 10, which for her were very tied to being a teenage mother and therefore not having the opportunity to continue her education following a traditional path, could be investigated with a wider sample to see if others share her experience. The implications of a study such as this would apply to post-compulsory educational institutions such as universities and TAFE colleges. The motivational factors involved in a decision to return to education later in life could be investigated to determine if teenage motherhood is a determinant in that decision.

One final area of further research is that of the children of teenage mothers who re-engage with education. What are their educational experiences and outcomes, and how influenced have they been by their mothers' determination to return to some form of education?

CONCLUSION

One of the strengths of *Legitimate Voices* has been the inclusion of two older mothers as they have provided a more longitudinal view of the issues surrounding teenage pregnancy. It was interesting to note that both Anne-Marie and Robyn still feel the stigma of having been a teenage mother, and recognise the ways their early experience of motherhood continues to shape their lives, as it has continued to shape mine.



I cited Probert and McDonald (1998) in Chapter One, who claim that:

We will not be able to secure better futures for young women without recognising the reality of their lives and responding to their needs as mothers and workers in constructive ways rather than seeing their decisions and lives as the problem (p. 25).

This study has portrayed the “reality of the lives” of seven young mothers. It is up to educational policy makers and individual teachers to respond to the needs of all young mothers in “constructive ways” to ensure that their educational opportunities aren’t lost through indifferent and un-resourced school programs. This study can provide a starting point for a discussion, based as it is on the lives of young mothers who have re-engaged with education despite the lack of child care and specific resources. Not all young mothers will have the same motivation, opportunities or will to enter into such an endeavour. Schools should provide a positive space for young mothers, recognising their twin roles as student and mother.

I also cited Schofield (1994) in Chapter Two who claims that ‘young women who become pregnant while at school are not only discriminated against by virtue of their age, their sex and their pregnancy, but their accounts of their own experiences are too often discredited’ (p. 132).

This study has provided a space for seven teenage mothers to add their voices to mine, as a way of valuing their stories and experiences. It also provides a view that when we develop the photograph from the negative image first taken, we see a world of colour and complexity that is all too often overlooked. It is my assertion that if we allow the negative to be developed, the image of young mothers can be enriching.



Epilogue

Michelle lived our life.

She went to university after finishing Year 12 to study psychology, just as we'd planned. She worked for a few years and then travelled, just as we'd planned. She studied some more, gained a Masters degree, and then another one, and finally became a manager of a government department. Her life was interesting, and with the travel and study and work her horizons were expanding.

By the age of 30 I had five children, ranging in age from thirteen to three.

By the age of 30 Michelle was still childless.

It hurt her.

By the age of 35 Michelle had studied and travelled and worked.

By the age of 35 I had five children and a brand new university degree.

A year later, at the age of 36, Michelle finally became a mother.

Six months later, at the age of 36, I became a grandmother.

Now, at the age of 42, Michelle has two children, aged 6 and 5, and a job she hates. She'd much rather be a stay-at-home mum.

At the age of 42, I have two grandchildren, aged 5 and 4, and a job I love. My horizons are expanding.



Being a young mother was difficult, but as Michelle has found out, so is being a mother.

I have to agree with Tammie; life doesn't have to end for the teenage mother. With support it can get better.

* * * * *

Robyn, Anne-Marie, Nikki, Octavia, Janelle, Tammie and Louise have added their voices to mine.

This has been our story

Our text

Our voices

Legitimate voices

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