

**‘Becoming’ a Teenage Mother in the UK**  
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## Abstract

In recent years teenage pregnancy and parenthood have been topics of much debate within academia, government and the media in the UK. The contemporary problematisation of teenage parenthood has meant that young mothers have been the subject of a number of recent policy interventions. This thesis examines the issues which confront young mothers in the context of these social policy interventions. It provides an overview of the literature debating the conceptualisation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood as a significant social problem. In addition, it traces the development of policies aimed at reducing the incidence of teenage pregnancy and supporting teenage parents. The thesis involves a qualitative study of young parents and their responses to these problematising discourses and the policies they have stimulated.

Qualitative research methods are used to examine key 'decisions' and 'choices' made by young women as they 'become' mothers. Participant observation was conducted in three young parent support groups in the South East of England. This was followed up with a range of interviews and focus groups to elicit a deeper understanding of motives and influences behind key 'decisions' made by young parents. The discussion of 'decisions' are divided into three areas. Firstly, contraceptive and reproductive 'decision-making'; secondly, the 'decision' to continue with a pregnancy; and, thirdly, 'decisions' relating to relationships, education and employment made by the women once they have 'become' mothers. This allows a sense of the women's 'paths' to 'becoming' mothers to emerge.

This thesis adds to the emerging debate which challenges the contemporary problematisation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood in media and policy discourses. The focus on young women's 'decisions' provides a unique approach to examining the experiences of teenage parents in relation to policy. Consequently this enables a valuable insight to emerge of the ways in which social policy is experienced by those it is designed to support. Frameworks of gender and constructions of 'good' motherhood are employed to understand how the women engage, resist and manage social policies aimed at shaping their behaviour. As such, some assessment can be made of the 'successes' and 'failures' of policy approaches to teenage pregnancy and parenthood

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## Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated

## Abbreviations

AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CRB	Criminal Records Bureaux
CSA	Child Support Agency
DCSF	Department for Children Schools and Families
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DoH	Department of Health
EET	Education Employment and Training
EMA	Educational Maintenance Allowance
GCSE	General Certificates of Secondary Education
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Educational Authority
NCT	National Childbirth Trust
NEET	Not in Education Employment or Training
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SPAN	Single Parent Action Network
SRE	Sex and Relationship Education
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TPIAG	Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group
TPS	Teenage Pregnancy Strategy
TPU	Teenage Pregnancy Unit

## Chapter One: Introduction

In 1991, Ann Phoenix published her groundbreaking book ‘Young Mothers?’ which drew on a longitudinal study with teenage mothers in Britain. Phoenix identified the problematisation of teenage pregnancy in public, media, government and professional discourses. Her work represents an important shift in thinking with regards to teenage pregnancy. She argued that it was;

...overly simplistic to conclude that early motherhood had clear, unitary effects on young women’s prospects...where it did seem to have negative effects there were always particular factors, other than age, which were adversely affecting young women’s lives (Phoenix 1991:246)

Since this point, a number of academics have joined Phoenix in questioning the inevitability of a teenage pregnancy problem and exploring the experiences of teenage motherhood. In particular see, Lawson and Rhode 1993; Luker 1996; Kelly 2000; Smith-Battle 2000; Arai 2003a; Selman 2003; Bonell 2004; Pillow 2004; Smith-Battle 2005; Duncan 2007; Smith-Battle 2007; Arai; 2009; Duncan et al 2010. During this period of debate, specific policies have been developed which have a direct impact on the lives of young mothers. These have attempted to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy and ameliorate poor outcomes of teenage motherhood. This introduction and following chapters outlines these research findings and policy developments.

In 1991 Phoenix “...aimed to provide an account of women’s experience of motherhood and reasons for becoming pregnant and having a child in their teenage years” (pg13). She argued that; “...an understanding of the social contexts in which particular women live is...crucial to an understanding of how (and why) early motherhood affects lives as it does (pg246). It is this argument which underpins the aims of this thesis. Twenty years since ‘Young Mothers?’ was published there remains a need to understand the social contexts in which teenage mothers ‘decide’ about their lives and futures. Although the policy landscape in which teenage pregnancy occurs has changed somewhat, the wider ‘moral panic’ context is relatively unchanged. The prevailing view persists that teenage pregnancy poses a significant social problem.

Phoenix and others have made robust arguments regarding the problematisation of teenage motherhood. Nevertheless, the focus of academic debate tends to centre on the socio-economic contexts of young parents. For instance, Arai (2003a) draws attention to structural factors such as poverty, lack of opportunity and low expectations as explanations for teenage pregnancy. She further notes that, for some young women, there is a "...genuine desire for the maternal role" (pg213). Arai links this to the earlier transition to parenthood amongst working class young women. This thesis does not discount the importance of considering the class position of young mothers. In order to fully understand the social contexts of young women's decisions and lives, however, this thesis focuses on gender. In particular, gendered expectations around motherhood and the mothering role are noted as a further means by which to explain teenage pregnancy. The thesis also takes into account the wider context of political changes, representations of teenage motherhood and resulting policies. Most importantly, it examines young mothers' accounts of how they interact with policy aims and interventions.

This thesis therefore provides a refreshing contribution to the current debate. It expands understandings of the social contexts of teenage pregnancy and motherhood. As with Phoenix (1991), this research investigates young women's feelings and experiences both prior to and once they have become mothers. Orientations towards pregnancy, feelings about abortion and the reflections of the young women on their lives as young parents are also examined. It is interesting that, despite the changes noted above, the women in this research reported similar reasons for their pregnancy and subsequent decisions as in Phoenix's research. This thesis, however, explores the rationales and influences behind these reasons by highlighting the personal and social contexts of the women's lives. This introduction will now outline the context and areas of interest for this research in more detail.

## **1. 1. The ‘Problem’ of Teenage Pregnancy**

Teenage pregnancy rates in the UK are often cited as a source of concern (Arai 2009) and we are reminded that the UK has the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in Western Europe (The Independent 2009; Family Planning Association 2011). The 2009 ONS figures reveal the total conception rate for women in England and Wales aged under twenty to be 57.3 per thousand women (ONS 2011). The conception rate for those aged under sixteen age group stands at 7.5 (ONS 2011). Concern about the numbers of teenage pregnancies were key in leading the previous Labour government to conclude that teenage pregnancy required addressing (Stronach et al 2007). Teenage pregnancy figures are often presented as a problem in themselves (Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley 1993). Nonetheless, government intervention also stemmed from a conceptualisation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood as a serious social problem. This understanding came from research (outlined below) which indicated that there were a number of poor health and social outcomes for teenage mothers and their children. This section will briefly outline the main points underlying this argument. The following chapter will attend to this literature in more detail.

Teenage pregnancy has been associated with a range of health implications for mother and baby. This includes anaemia, pre-eclampsia, eclampsia, premature delivery, miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Luker 1996; Kaufman 1999; Chen et al 2007). Babies born to teenage mothers, especially for mothers aged under sixteen, tend to have low birth weights and there is an increased risk of infant mortality (Botting et al 1998). High levels of postnatal depression have been found amongst teenage mothers (Irvine 1997; Leishman 2007) and mental health problems often continue into later life (Ermisch 2003; Wiggins et al 2005; Hawkes 2010).

In terms of social outcomes, becoming a mother whilst a teenager has a negative impact on that mother’s educational attainment (Wiggins et al 2005; Raab and Henderson 2010). Relatedly, teenage mothers are less likely to be in employment (Berrington et al 2005) and when in employment, tend to be low paid (Chevalier and Viitanen 2003; Goodman and Kaplan 2004; Fletcher and Wolfe 2008). Consequently, teenage mothers are more likely to

rely on benefits (Goodman et al 2004; Hotz et al 2004; Berrington et al 2005; Wiggins et al 2005) and are often living in poverty (Hobcraft and Kiernan 1999; Berthoud and Robson 2001; Ermisch 2003; Wiggins et al 2005). Similarly, the children of teenage parents have also been found to have lower levels of educational attainment (Francesconi 2007). Lower levels of educational qualifications have also been found amongst the children of teenage mothers (Wiggins et al 2005; Francesconi 2007). Research indicates that children of teenage mothers are more likely than those of older mothers to have accidents. This includes poisoning, burns (Botting et al 1998), falls and swallowing substances (Berrington et al 2005).

Many of the issues and outcomes noted here have been linked to the class position and deprivation experienced by teenage mothers (Luker 1996; Chevalier and Vittenson 2001; Berrington et al 2005). Furthermore, a number of researchers have disputed the extent of the problems associated with teenage motherhood (Phoenix 1991; Wilson and Huntington 2006; Duncan 2007). The following chapter outlines literature which supports the above assertions as well as that which contests them. Nevertheless, successive governments have accepted and responded to evidence which indicates that teenage pregnancy and parenthood are a significant health and social problem. Furthermore, sensationalist stories covered in the tabloid press and media reports emphasise the perspective that teenage pregnancy represents a substantial social problem. This is the context in which the research in this thesis has been conducted. It is acknowledged here that the problematisation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood has implications for the lives and experiences of teenage mothers and their children. This thesis explores these experiences in light of the problematisation of teenage parenthood. The following section sets out the areas of interest.

## **1.2. Areas of Interest and Theoretical Framework**

This thesis has three principal lines of inquiry. Firstly, influences and rationales underlying 'decisions' made by young women on their paths to becoming a teenage mother. Secondly, the thesis is interested in the development of official government policies and approaches designed to prevent teenage pregnancy and support teenage parents. Thirdly, the ways in which teenage mothers' negotiate with, resist and position themselves in relation to

representations of teenage parenthood are examined. This final area also takes into account teenage mothers interactions with relevant social policies, political processes and institutions involved with addressing the ‘problem’ of teenage pregnancy.

Considering these areas represents a significantly new approach to understanding the lives of teenage mothers. As noted above, this thesis is interested in the development of policy interventions with teenage parents. Nevertheless, this is not a standard policy analysis of the ways in which interventions have been designed and formulated within government. Instead, this thesis provides a unique examination of the ways in which the problematisation of teenage pregnancy has crept into the political consciousness and informed policy approaches. Furthermore, this thesis documents teenage mothers’ lived experiences of policy interventions. The thesis focuses on teenage mothers’ negotiations, resistances and challenges, not only to policy, but also ideologies, processes, welfare systems and institutions embedded in policy interventions.

The thesis acknowledges the stigma attached to being a teenage parent (Graham and McDermott 2005; Yardley 2008). Although other researchers have begun the process of challenging the problematisation of teenage pregnancy which underlies this stigma (see for example Duncan et al 2010), this thesis makes a significant contribution to the debate. The addition of the policy analysis described above adds a new lens through which to see both the problems faced by young mothers and the problematisation of teenage pregnancy. In addition, this thesis combines this focus with an examination of young women’s ‘decisions’ on the path to ‘becoming’ a teenage mother. This brings together the ‘decisions’ and experiences of young women prior to, during and post pregnancy. The pulling together of these, usually separate, strands of inquiry enables themes of influence to be identified at each stage of ‘becoming’ a teenage mother. Consequently, this study contributes a distinctive perspective on the ‘decisions’ and lives of teenage mothers which fits into the current genre of recent literature questioning the problematisation of teenage pregnancy.

This thesis is informed by the theoretical and analytical approaches of social constructionism and feminism. Social constructionist perspectives help to understand why teenage pregnancy

has come to be defined as a significant social problem. As such, this thesis is concerned with 'representations' and 'discourses' of teenage pregnancy and parenthood. Throughout this thesis, representation refers to the ways in which these phenomena are talked about in the main stream media. Most importantly, this work is concerned with the ways in which young mothers are routinely presented in a negative light. Whilst similar, the concept of discourse is understood here as incorporating, but not solely reduced to language. Discourse is considered important in terms of the construction and shaping of knowledge. Both of these concepts are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

The application of social constructionist approaches and related concepts in this thesis are, then, integral to the underlying challenge to accepted 'knowledge'. The influence of feminist perspectives plays a similar role. Feminist theory and methodology are utilised here to challenge dominant understandings and to bring to light fresh understandings of the experience of teenage motherhood. These theoretical underpinnings are discussed in more detail in the methodology chapter of this thesis. This chapter will now go on to outline the research aims.

### **1.3. Research Aims**

In the course of the investigations reported here, the thesis has four aims;

- To identify the development of social policies designed to prevent teenage pregnancy and support teenage mothers and to document the responses and reactions to them in a group of teenage mothers
- To explore the perspectives and 'lived' experiences of young people who have become teenage mothers through qualitative research methods and qualitative analysis of the data
- To explore and articulate the 'decision-making', resistances and survival of a group of young mothers

- To take into account existing research which highlights the social positions of teenage parents and add an examination of the impact of gender on the path to and experience of teenage motherhood

These aims have been met by conducting original research with teenage mothers in the South East of England. Participant observation was carried out in three young parent support groups and was followed up by twenty-three in-depth interviews. These methods enabled an exploration of the lives and experiences of a unique sample of young women. The following section outlines how the thesis, as a whole, meets these aims.

#### **1.4. Mapping the Thesis Structure**

The following chapter discusses research and literature which outlines the debate surrounding teenage pregnancy and parenthood. Key anxieties around health and social issues which arise from research in this area are addressed. The chapter also attends to arguments which link these anxieties to wider poverty and disadvantage rather than teenage pregnancy. Such work argues that it is these experiences which explain the challenges faced by young parents. Instead a number of ‘underlying anxieties’ are positioned as being integral to understanding the problematisation of teenage pregnancy. Accordingly, this chapter briefly outlines the social constructionist approach to the debate and challenges moral panic approaches to teenage pregnancy. The chapter concludes by placing the researcher and this thesis within the existing debate.

Chapter Three traces the development over time of policies designed to prevent teenage pregnancy and support teenage parents. This chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive account of policy. Instead it analyses the way in which government approaches and policies draw from and reinforce representations of teenage parents as a social problem. The chapter starts by examining the post-war era. At this point, the focus on mothers and unmarried mothers in particular, is a significant point of interest. The chapter then examines the emergence of a teenage pregnancy ‘problem’ in the 1960’s and 70’s. New Right concerns

relating to the underclass, promiscuity and the family are then discussed. The chapter concludes by detailing the Teenage Pregnancy Report and the resulting strategy introduced by the Labour government under Tony Blair. It is the approaches and policies introduced here which frame the experiences of the women in this study. It is for this reason that policy beyond this period has not been given detailed attention. This chapter links the 'underlying anxieties' noted in the preceding chapter to the development of policy in this area. The chapter also provides the political and discursive context in which pregnancy and mothering occurs for the women in this research.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the methodology and methods used to collect data for this study. The chapter starts by discussing the rationale for using qualitative research. It then goes on to outline the key theoretical approaches and concepts framing the thesis as a whole. As has already been noted above, this thesis is informed by social constructionist and feminist perspectives. The rationales, benefits and limitations of these approaches are discussed here. This section also includes definitions of the concepts of 'representation' and 'discourse' as referred to throughout this thesis. The chapter then goes on to discuss the rationales for using qualitative methods which draw on feminist methodological approaches. The participants and groups in which the research was conducted are detailed. This is followed by an account of the research process and the researcher's personal reflections. The chapter concludes by discussing the ethical considerations taken and limitations of the research.

The following three chapters concentrate on discussion and analysis of the data gathered. They include some additional analysis of academic literature to supplement the conclusions drawn and identify the distinctive findings of this research. The data is presented in a chronological format in order to retain as much of the women's narratives as possible. Chapter Five presents an examination of contraception and reproduction 'decisions'. The discussion in this chapter centres on attitudes to, openness about and responsibility for contraception. A key finding is the way in which gendered constructions of acceptable sexual behaviour continue to inhibit effective contraception use. The chapter also presents a commentary on the ways that stigma attached to teenage pregnancy may impact on accounts of contraceptive use by teenage mothers. Goffman's work on stigma and face-work is utilised to add fresh understandings of

the women's narratives. The chapter concludes by examining the women's orientations to pregnancy. That is, the idea that a pregnancy and parenthood may, on some level, be 'chosen'. Whilst socio-economic explanations discussed elsewhere (SEU 1999; Arai 2003a) are not discounted, it is argued here that love, personal relationships and family are also important factors.

Chapter Six begins with an examination of the women's reactions to the discovery of their pregnancy. This attends to the way in which negative representations of teenage pregnancy impact on the women's reporting of their reaction. All of the women in this study took the pregnancy to term, nevertheless, their thoughts on abortion and (to a lesser extent) adoption are noted here. Research conducted elsewhere with young parents has already noted the prevalence of anti-abortion sentiments in the 'decision' to continue with a teenage pregnancy (SEU 1999; Arai 2003a; Lee et al 2004; Cater and Coleman 2006). This thesis adds further understanding to these explanations by drawing on work which discusses ideas of 'legitimacy' (Bock 2000) and 'responsibility' (Greene 2006). That is, the way the framing of teenage pregnancy by official policy discourses as problematic impacts on the young women's 'decisions' and presentation of those 'decisions'. As with the previous chapter, intimate relationships and family ideals emerge as important influences on the young women's 'decisions'.

The final chapter identifies two key areas of 'decision making' expressed by the women in this study. Firstly, the chapter looks at 'decisions' relating to the women's paths in education, employment or training. New Labour placed education and employment at the heart of policies aimed at supporting teenage parents. This chapter provides an understanding of how the women interacted with this policy priority. Discourses of 'good' motherhood and the continuing influence of gender roles are highlighted as important factors. The second area of 'decision-making' in this chapter looks at the women's relationships with the father of their children. Narratives around leaving or staying with the fathers of their children are examined here. It is demonstrated here how love, family ideals as well as contemporary discourses of 'good' fatherhood and mothering impact on decisions to leave or remain in a relationship. Negative representations of teenage motherhood and the pre-pregnancy experiences of these

women mean that these ideals are more persuasive. These representations have not been given sufficient consideration in the research literature to date. This is especially important to consider for those women who had been in a relationship characterised by violence. The chapter concludes by briefly discussing the notion of ‘survival stories’. This is an examination of the ways in which the women present themselves in light of the challenges they relate. This builds on the ideas expressed in previous chapters to draw attention to the deep seated effects of negative representations of teenage motherhood on young women’s sense of self.

The ideas and arguments touched upon here will be drawn out throughout the following chapters and returned to in Chapter Eight of the thesis. This closing chapter will summarise the points made and reflect on the conclusions drawn here.

## Chapter Two: The Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Debate: A Literature Review

The conceptualisation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood as a significant social problem is a topic of much debate. This chapter provides a review of the literature which outlines this debate. The aim is to identify the main issues underlying the problematisation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood. Related literature can also be found in the analysis chapters of this thesis where it is discussed in relation to specific findings.

Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley (1993:62) note that a multitude of concerns are “bundled up together in the gestalt of ‘the problem’”. This chapter will attempt to separate them by examining key concerns in turn. As will become clear throughout this discussion however, many of these issues are interrelated. Firstly health concerns relating to pregnancy, childbirth and parenting are addressed. This is followed by an examination of social anxieties relating to parenting, education, employment, housing and relationships. Health and social concerns related to the children of teenage mothers are also explored. Research which notes some of the positive outcomes of teenage parenting is then discussed. The chapter concludes by briefly considering social constructionist arguments. This helps to explain why the ‘problem’ of teenage pregnancy is often presented without reference to the underlying debate.

### **2.1. Health Issues in Pregnancy and Childbirth**

This section concentrates on the health implications of teenage pregnancy and childbirth. As noted in the introduction, teenage pregnancy has been shown to increase the risk of a number of medical conditions for both mother and child. Evidence also indicates that teenage births are more risky. For instance, it is more likely that a teenage birth may result in a premature delivery (Jolly et al 2000; Kaufman 1999; Chen et al 2007), miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death (Luker 1996; Chen et al 2007). Risks for second teenage births are also considerable. Smith and Pell (2001) found that the risk of premature delivery and stillbirth was three times as likely in a second teenage birth. Maternal death also becomes a more likely possibility in very young mothers (Hudson and Ineichen 1991).

Lawlor and Shaw (2002) point out, however, that the health implications of teenage pregnancy are more complex than is often presented. Osborne et al (1981) in Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley (1993) argue that anaemia is the only significantly increased complication during pregnancy. Gupta et al (2008) found that, except for preterm labour, obstetric risks for teenage mothers are low. Further, the occurrence of premature birth may be linked to the erratic nature of early menstruation and unreliable reporting of period timings (Cunnington 2001). This, Cunnington argues, can make due dates inaccurate. Risks also cannot be assumed to be equal for all teenagers. Jolly et al (2000) point out that risks decrease as the teenager ages. The risk of babies with a low birth weight is also argued to only be significantly higher for women under the age of seventeen (Gupta et al 2008). Chen et al (2007a) point out that immaturity of the uterus and cervical blood supply can cause infection. In addition, in cases where the mother continues to grow during pregnancy, she and the foetus may compete for nutrition. Health risks would then be higher for younger teenage mothers who are still developing themselves.

It is also argued that age itself is not a significant risk factor for negative health outcomes. When social factors are taken into account, age is not a predictor of perinatal outcomes (Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley 1993). Instead a large proportion of these outcomes appear to be linked to poverty, as they are with older mothers (Luker 1996; Irvine et al 1997). Specifically, miscarriage has been found to be independently linked to socio-economic factors (Cunnington 2001; Hillis et al 2004). Behaviours such as smoking and drinking during pregnancy have been found to be more prevalent in teenagers and are also argued to account for some poor health outcomes (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Chambers et al 2001). Stress (Luker 1996) and poor nutrition (Chambers et al 2001) which are also linked to experiences of poverty have important implications for health during pregnancy. Furthermore, lack of social support may contribute to poor general health and well being (Botting et al 1998).

Where good quality ante-natal care has been accessed, many risks are reduced if not eliminated (Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley 1993; Irvine et al 1997; Botting et al 1998; Kaufman 1999). Gupta et al (2008) found, however, that anaemia was more common amongst young mothers even where good antenatal care was utilised. Nonetheless; there is an;

“...accumulating body of data strongly suggests that when young mothers *do* get access to routine healthcare...a very large proportion of health risks disappear” (Luker 1996:117-118). It should be noted however that this is not straightforward. Teenage parents tend to present late to clinics (Jolly et al 2000) and are more likely to be poor attendees (Hudson and Ineichen 1991). It has been noted elsewhere that stigma attached to young parenthood deters teenagers from accessing key services which may be of help (de Jong 2001; Craig and Stanley 2006).

Research has also, however, drawn attention to positive health outcomes associated with teenage pregnancy. For instance, younger maternal age can also protect children from diabetes (Graham and McDermott 2005). Women under eighteen are less likely to require interventions during childbirth (Gupta et al 2008). They are also no more likely than women aged eighteen to thirty four to have stillborn or underweight babies (Jolly et al 2000). Kaufman (1999) reports that obstetricians often note that young mothers appear to have shorter and easier births. Furthermore, they are less likely to require a caesarean section (Botting et al 1998). It is also pointed out that older mothers are not immune from increased health risks (Lawlor et al 2001). Nevertheless, there is a relative silence around the health risks of these groups despite their extensive use of health services (Wilson and Huntington 2005). Kaufman (1999:26) notes there is; “no clear-cut data on which to base a determination of the ‘perfect’ age to carry a healthy pregnancy”. Nonetheless, the assumption that teenage births are inherently more risky prevails.

## **2.2. Teenage Mothers and Mental Health**

Hudson and Ineichen (1991) point out that emotional problems are common amongst teenagers. Pregnancy, however, can be a trigger for a range of mental health problems which can lead to suicide or self harming (Leishman 2007). This includes postnatal depression (Irvine 1997; Leishman 2007) but teenage mothers are also more likely to suffer from poor mental health later in life (Ermisch 2003; Wiggins et al 2005; Hawkes 2010). Berrington et al (2005:21) found that teenage motherhood is associated with a higher occurrence of ‘malaise’. This was measured by self-completion questionnaires; “...relating to the presence of symptoms of anxiety and depression...and somatic symptoms of emotional distress”.

These outcomes have been explained as being linked to teenagers' psychological development. The teenage years are characterised by rapid development and change. Irvine (1997) argues that problems arise when young women are trying to cope with these changes alongside hormonal developments occurring during pregnancy. Turner et al (2000) cited in Leishman (2007) argued that personal resources and attributes may be key to young mothers being able to adapt psychologically to these changes. Other authors draw attention to factors such as poverty, social support and educational attainment which existed prior to pregnancy (Berrington et al 2005). These are argued to impact on mental well-being. Smith-Battle (2005:834) argued that teenage mothering contributed to a pre-pregnancy despair where lives had been "marked by oppression and exclusion". Nonetheless, when antecedent factors are controlled for, Berrington et al (2005) found that age of motherhood was still significant. They explained this by the poor circumstances which teenage mothers continue to experience in adulthood. This is similar to other research which links poor mental health to poor living standards (Ermisch 2003) and material circumstances (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Hawkes et al 2004). Poor mental health in young mothers has been found to have negative effects on parenting (Irvine et al 1997) and children (Berrington et al 2005). The following section will now turn to examine children's outcomes in more detail.

### **2.3. The Health and Well-Being of the Children of Teenage Mothers**

Babies born to teenage mothers are argued to face a number of health issues from the outset including lower birth-weights than those born to older mothers (Botting et al 1998). Russell (1982 cited in Hudson and Ineichen 1991) found this was especially common amongst mothers aged under sixteen. Children may be more likely to suffer from congenital anomalies (Botting et al 1998). There is also an increased risk of infant mortality (Irvine et al 1997; Botting et al 1998) which Chambers et al (2001) suggest is 60% higher than that in older mothers. Children's pre-school health does not appear to be adversely affected however. Hawkes (2010) examined a range of health outcomes including acute illnesses such as asthma and being overweight at pre-school. She concluded; "having a teenage mother does not significantly affect the chances of a pre-school child experiencing poor health" (Hawkes 2010:79). Similarly, Wiggins et al (2005) examined data relating to children aged under

fifteen. They found that having a teenage mother made no significant difference to physical health and childhood injuries.

It is argued by some researchers that some of the poor health and well-being outcomes for children are the result of 'deficits' in parenting. For instance, teenage mothers are less likely to breastfeed (Botting et al 1998; Kaufman 1999; Wiggins et al 2005). Breastfeeding is argued to have an important protective advantage for babies (Hudson and Ineichen 1991). Furthermore, Hudson and Ineichen (1991) draw links between feeding practices and a mother's relationships with their children. They argue that difficulties with breastfeeding impacts on their ability to bond with their children. Young mothers may also exhibit "unusual feeding practices" which can be detrimental to their children's health and development (Kaufman 1999:29). Teenagers' abilities to parent well and cope with the demands of motherhood are a significant element of the debate surrounding the 'problem' of teenage parenthood. This will be discussed in more detail in the following section. Firstly the developmental and social outcomes for the children of teenage mothers are examined.

As the children of teenage mothers grow, they are more likely to suffer developmental problems (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Luker 1996). Terry-Human et al (2005:3) found in their US study that children born to teenage mothers had "lower levels of school readiness". This included communication skills, emotional and physical well-being. Children of teenage mothers have been found to be more likely to have behavioural problems (Luker 1996; Berrington et al 2005) and be hyperactive (Hawkes 2010). Berrington et al (2005) found that better parenting skills were associated with fewer behavioural problems. Research from the US and UK indicates they also tend to have lower levels of educational attainment (Terry-Human et al 2005; Wiggins et al 2005; Francesconi 2007).

Whether these are direct results of the age of the mother is debated however. Berrington et al (2005) point out that many developmental outcomes such as vocabulary and fine motor movements are no different to the children of older mothers. Furthermore, when background factors are accounted for, the effect of age appears to diminish. Hawkes (2010) looked at a range of outcomes for the children of teenage mothers. In terms of vocabulary, school

readiness and behaviour she found that, compared to mothers who had had their first child before the age of twenty five, there was no significant difference in outcomes. The difference was significant when comparing mothers who had been aged twenty five and over however. Nevertheless; “once the differences in prior family experiences are taken into account – these cognitive differences disappear altogether” (Hawkes 2010:77). Similarly, Terry-Human et al (2005) found socio-economic status was significant to poor outcomes. Nonetheless, Hawkes (2010) did find that teenage motherhood did have an independent effect on hyperactivity. Terry-Human et al (2005) and Francesconi (2007) draw attention to the impact of lone parenthood on the outcomes of the children of teenage parents. Francesconi (2007) found it exacerbated the likelihood that children will have low levels of educational attainment.

#### **2.4. A Parenting ‘Deficit’?**

As touched upon above, poor health outcomes have been linked to ‘deficits’ in the parenting of teenage mothers (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Kaufman 1999). This idea is one source of anxiety regarding teenage childbearing. Hudson and Ineichen (1991) claim that teenage mothers are less likely to provide adequate physical or emotional care for their children. According to these authors, teenage mothers spend less time talking to, looking at and playing with their children. Accidents and hospital admissions have been found to be more likely amongst children of teenage parents (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Botting et al 1998; Berrington 2005). Again, the risk increases here for the children of ‘very young’ teenagers (Hudson and Ineichen 1991). Hawkes (2010), however, found no significant difference between the children of teenage and older mothers in terms of health service use for accidental injury.

Critiques have also been made of young mothers’ disciplinary styles. Hanna (2001:459) found that teenage mothers in her study; “enforced strict and harsh disciplinary practices...this became more punitive as the children became more mobile and inquisitive”. She added that mothers held unreasonable expectations of what children should be able to do. Perhaps most worrying, Luker (1996) notes that some studies claim there is a link between teenage parenting and child abuse. Hudson and Ineichen (1991:101) note that; “extreme stress and

non-coping may not be the norm, but neither is it uncommon...consequences can lead to...rates of abuse and neglect far higher than among the general population". It has been suggested that, rather than age, a number of other factors may be significant to perceived higher rates of abuse. For example, a male partner's 'coercion' of the mother (Lee and Guterman 2010), stress and mental health issues (Black et al 2001; George et al 2008). Furthermore, it may also be significant that teenage parents are more likely to be under surveillance from health and social workers. Reporting bias may then be a factor (George et al 2008). These factors are also noted by Kelly (2000:39) leading her to conclude that; "...maternal age does not appear to be a prime determinant in child abuse and neglect".

Luker (1996:130) argues that concerns regarding teenagers' parenting abilities are linked to assumptions about an adolescent 'nature'. She notes that young parents are assumed to be; "...immature, egoistic, and emotionally and psychologically unprepared to raise a child". It is questioned as to whether teenagers have the intellectual maturity to make important parenting decisions. For instance, Clark (1999:11) argues that; "...mothers are themselves still children", this, she notes, means their ability for understanding is debatable. Similarly, Kaufman (1999) argues that teenagers have poorly developed reasoning which leads to poor or misguided decisions. Hudson and Ineichen (1991:87) further speculate as to the impact of the 'nature' of teenagers; "teenage parents...are often unwilling to adhere to professional advice, being of the age when they want to rebel".

Assumptions of poor parenting imply that there is a point at which teenagers will become adults who are ready for parenthood (Luker 1996). As Kaufman (1999:25) notes however, "...fitness for parenting cannot be defined by the attainment of a certain age". She adds that it would be 'absurd' to assume that adults would necessarily have eschewed life experiences which impact on parenting abilities. Given that teenagers have historically been successfully raising children across the world (Luker 1996) an assumed adolescent 'nature' may not be significant. Neither may a parenting 'deficit' be particular to teenage parents. Accordingly, Berrington et al (2005:25) argue; "...no significant differences were found in parenting skills between teenage and older mothers".

A number of academics and researchers point to the influence of other factors. Young mothers in Formby et al's research (2010) reported that being a single parent was more significant to the practicalities of caring for children. Poverty and deprivation have also been found to be significant to poor health outcomes for the children of teenage parents (Botting et al 1998; Hudson and Ineichen 1991). Hudson and Ineichen (1991) note the lack of facilities in places where teenage mothers often live can impact on diet. In turn, health and well-being is often affected. Berrington et al (2005) found that adverse behavioural outcomes for children were related to the mother's mental state. This is then linked to material and social circumstances. Experiences of poverty for mother and child will be discussed in more detail below. Nonetheless, Irvine et al (1997) argue that the rate of infant mortality is higher for teenage mothers even when socio-economic factors are accounted for.

Attention has also been drawn to the constructed nature of 'good' mothering (see for example Graham and McDermott 2005). Concerns that there is a parenting 'deficit' amongst teenage mothers are then resting on normative and constructed ideals of 'good' parenting. As noted above, the likelihood that teenage mothers bottle rather than breastfeed is seen as indicative of a parenting 'deficit' or at least a failing in their ability to 'protect' the health of their children. Consequently breastfeeding can be seen as an important element of 'good' mothering. This is despite the inconsistent findings behind the hegemonic 'breast is best' discourse (Wolf 2011). Discourses of 'good' motherhood and their impact on teenage mothers are a key part of the findings in this thesis. Accordingly, these ideas will be discussed in much more detail in Chapter Seven. This chapter will now move on to discuss some of the concerns which underpin the defining of teenage parenthood as a social problem.

## **2.5. Education and Employment**

As noted in the thesis introduction, having a child during the teenage years is argued to have negative effects on educational achievements for the mother (Berthoud and Robson 2001; Chevalier and Viitanen 2001; Hotz et al 2004; Wiggins et al 2005; Raab and Henderson 2010). This is particularly the case for younger (aged sixteen) teenage mothers (Berthoud and Robson 2010). Nevertheless, it has been pointed out that dropping out and educational failure predates

rather than results from teenage pregnancy (Phoenix 1991; Selman 1998; Fergusson and Woodward 2000; Arai 2003a; Bonell et al 2005; Wiggins et al 2005; Cater and Coleman 2006). Furthermore, Luker (1996) notes that pregnancy may provide an official excuse for young women who have already become disengaged with the education system.

It can then be questioned as to whether pregnancy is a significant cause of educational failure as claimed by the SEU (1999). This is not to say that that a pregnancy is not insignificant however. Berthoud and Robson (2001) found a 'strong indication' that education does not progress beyond the birth of a baby. Whilst policies have been enacted to address this issue, research indicates there are still significant barriers. Evans and Slowley (2010) found evidence of pregnant teenagers being 'encouraged' to leave school by staff. Even when schools are supportive, returning to education following the birth of a child is challenging. This is even more so if young mothers go on to have additional children (Luker 1996). For all parents, the need to find suitable and affordable childcare can be difficult. Furthermore, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, education and employment can conflict with mothering responsibilities. These issues and outcomes for young mothers are an important consideration as poor educational attainment limits opportunity and is likely to impact on employment.

Teenage pregnancy has been shown to negatively affect women's engagement with the labour market (Phoenix 1991; Berthoud and Robson 2001; Chevalier and Viitanen 2003; Goodman and Kaplan 2004; Berrington et al 2005). This may not be a straight forward relationship with teenage parenting however. As Berthoud and Robson (2001) point out, childbearing decreases the chances of all women being in employment, not just for teenagers. Motherhood at any age damages career prospects and lifetime earning potential (Phoenix 1991). Furthermore, women with younger children are less likely to work (Berthoud and Robson 2001). These authors argue that rather than age, lone parenthood and low educational attainment were more helpful in explaining why teenage mothers were less likely to be in employment. These conditions may also explain why rates of pay for teenage mothers tend to be low (Chevalier and Viitanen 2003; Goodman and Kaplan 2004; Fletcher and Wolfe 2008). Given the pre-pregnancy disadvantage of many teenage mothers, however, "...remaining childless...would do little for the majority" in terms of career prospects and earning potential (Phoenix 1991:221).

Longitudinal outcomes appear more positive however. “Teen mothers may actually achieve higher levels of earnings over their adult lives than if they had postponed motherhood” (Hotz et al 2004:713). The specific age of the mother at childbirth is also significant to the experience of labour market disadvantages. Goodman and Kaplan (2004:30) found that; “the effects of early motherhood at age 30 are larger for females falling pregnant between 18 and 20 years old than those falling pregnant before age 18”. The authors suggest a number of possible explanations for this. Firstly, that the effects of a teenage pregnancy may diminish over time; secondly, that most mothers experience some levels of poverty whilst children are young and teenage motherhood merely brings this forward. Or, lastly, younger mothers are more likely to be living with family who can offer vital support.

The potential that teenage mothers’ relationship with the labour market is likely to lead to poverty (discussed below) is a real concern. Nonetheless, their absence from the labour market may not necessarily be an issue in itself. In their examination of Scottish data, Raab and Henderson (2010:18) found that most young parents reported their economic activity as “looking after the home and family”. Traditional ideals about mothers remaining in the family home with small children persist (Lupton 2000) notably amongst teenage mothers (Phoenix 1991). Consequently, teenage mothers’ desires to remain at home for a period of time *could* be read as positive or even desirable. Nonetheless, balancing parenting ideals of staying at home and the need to be financially secure is a key site of tension for teenage mothers (Phoenix 1991). Furthermore, it is worth noting the class and age based assumptions surrounding this ‘ideal’. These issues as well as related literature will be discussed in detail as part of the analysis in Chapter Seven.

## **2.6. Poverty and Disadvantage**

Given the above discussion it is perhaps not surprising that teenage mothers are more likely to rely on benefits (Goodman et al 2004; Hotz et al 2004; Berrington et al 2005; Wiggins et al 2005). This is often a temporary situation (Luker 1996; Hotz et al 2004) and in the UK benefits go some way to mitigate experiences of poverty (Goodman and Kaplan 2004). Nonetheless, teenage mothers often live in poverty (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Hobcraft and

Kiernan 1999; Kaufman 1999; Berthoud and Robson 2001; Ermisch 2003; Wiggins et al 2005).

Teenage mothers' and their children's experiences of deprivation are a significant concern. As discussed above, living in poverty has been linked to poor health, well-being and a lack of parenting resources. Policies aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy stem from an assumption that teenage pregnancy and parenthood cause poverty. This was a key rationale behind New Labour policy (Daguerre and Nativel 2006). "In relation to both health and socioeconomic circumstances, early pregnancy was described as leading inexorably to social exclusion" (Arai 2009:76). The relationship between teenage parenthood and poverty requires some examination however. Teenage mothers tend to come from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds (Garlick et al 1993; Kiernan 1997; SEU 1999; Chevalier and Vittenson 2001; Arai 2003a; Ermisch and Pevalin 2003b). Consequently, comparing the outcomes of this group with those who do not have children as teenagers is problematic. Furthermore, it is questionable whether teenage parenthood has a significant effect on experiences of poverty and exclusion. Indeed, teenage parenthood is argued to be more a symptom than a cause of poverty and disadvantage (Phoenix 1991; Daguerre and Nativel 2006; Arai 2009; Hawkes 2010; Duncan et al 2010). In this case, the impact of teenage motherhood on poverty may be overstated (Chevalier and Vittenson 2001).

As noted above, pre-existing disadvantage is an important factor in accounting for some of the poor outcomes for teenage mothers (Seamark and Lings 2004; Hawkes et al 2004; Wiggins et al 2005; Hawkes 2010). This includes mental (Kaufman 1999) and physical health (Raab and Henderson 2010). The; "...importance of teenage motherhood may in fact be small compared to the role that prior disadvantage plays" (Goodman and Kaplan 2004:29). Pre-selection factors do not entirely eliminate the negative effects of teenage motherhood however (Chevalier and Viitanen 2001). It is also important to note that teenage parenthood may have a cumulative effect. Teenage motherhood has a compounding effect on previously existing disadvantage (Hawkes et al 2004; Daguerre and Nativel 2006). Parenting may then make a difficult situation additionally challenging (Luker 1996). Furthermore, "experiencing economic disadvantage in childhood and in adulthood combine across the life course to create

health inequalities” (Berrington et al 2005:23). Raab and Henderson (2010:19) report that teenage parents reports of ill health in later life is, “inextricably linked” to experiences of poverty.

Crucially, however, poverty and disadvantage are not solely experienced by women who become teenage parents. When this is accounted for; “...teenage mothers are no different from older mothers in being more likely to experience negative outcomes...” (Wiggins et al 2005:59). Furthermore, if teenage mothers come from poorer backgrounds, delaying childbirth into the twenties may not improve these outcomes. As Luker (1996:129) concludes;

Though no one would deny that the more financial resources a parent can bring to a child the better, there are scant grounds for thinking that postponing a birth will help the average teen mother accumulate a lot more of those resources

## **2.7. Housing and Relationships**

Two related points are also worth considering here. Firstly, experiences of poverty are mediated by society’s response to teenage parents and provisions of support (Ruddick 1993; Bonell 2004). This includes the ability for families of low income to access good, affordable housing. Teenage parents are most likely to be living in local authority housing (Allen and Bourke Dowling 1998; Berrington et al 2005; Wiggins et al 2005) in poorer areas (Hawkes 2010). Whilst this conveys some advantages in terms of affordability and security, local authority housing is far from ideal. Teenage mothers are often placed at distance from family and friends (Chambers et al 2001). They are also more likely to express dissatisfaction with their neighbourhood (Berrington et al 2005). Consequently, loneliness and isolation become additional issues to cope with (Hudson and Ineichen 1991). Allen and Bourke Dowling (1998) point out that when women move from the family home to live independently, they are often reliant on benefits. Living away from the family home is then likely to increase experiences of poverty, even given the relatively cheap rent of local authority housing. The uncertainty of waiting for council housing was also found to be a significant source of stress by Formby et al (2010). Ermisch (2003), in looking at the long term effects of teenage parenthood, found

young mothers were less likely to be a homeowner later in life. The problems with housing may not then be temporary.

Secondly, family size and composition are also important influences on the way poverty can be avoided or mediated (Goodman and Kaplan 2004). Teenage mothers are less likely to be married at the time of birth than older mothers (Luker 1996; Berthoud and Robson 2001; Ermisch 2003; Terry-Human et al 2005; Hawkes 2010) but may be in a relationship or cohabiting (Berthoud and Robson 2001). Allen and Bourke Dowling (1998) found just under half of their sample of eighty four women were no longer in a relationship with the father when their baby was a year old. Lone parenthood is not necessarily a permanent situation however. The likelihood of living with a partner or being in a relationship increases as women move towards thirty (Goodman and Kaplan 2004; Raab and Henderson 2010). Nevertheless, they are less likely to marry (Ermsich and Pevalin 2003) and relationships do not appear to be as stable as those of older parents. Teenage mothers are more likely to become lone parents (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Berthoud and Robson 2001; Berrington et al 2005). The risks of lone parenthood in later life are also increased if childbearing was started before the age of eighteen (Ermisch 2003).

Single parenthood contributes to experiences of poverty and disadvantage for teenage mothers (Ermisch 2003; Goodman and Kaplan 2004; Raab and Henderson 2010). Being partnered does not necessarily mean that young parents will be economically better off however. Young mothers tend to form partnerships with men who are also poorly qualified (Berthoud and Robson 2001; Woodward et al 2004). Partners are also less likely to be employed (Phoenix 1991; Berrington et al 2005) and if they are, then pay tends to be low (Ermisch 2003). Marriage can also impact on young women's abilities to improve their own financial situation. Luker (1996) argues that marriage provides young women with socially acceptable roles as wife and mother. They are then less likely than single mothers to return to education.

Poverty and disadvantage are interrelated with housing and relationship issues. Without adequate resources, the chances of teenage mothers finding satisfactory housing are reduced. She and her children are then more likely to live in areas of deprivation and disadvantage.

Financial insecurity compounds feelings of stress and worry (Formby et al 2010). Economic insecurity, financial pressures (Cheal 2008) and labour market demands (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995) are argued to increase the pressure on family life. Such issues are particularly salient for young parents dealing with poverty and low pay. This may go some way to explain the high rate of single parenthood amongst teenage mothers.

## **2.8. A Questionable ‘Problem’**

This chapter has examined the complexity surrounding the claim that teenage pregnancy represents a significant health and social problem. The links to poverty made in many of the key areas of concern indicate that age itself may not be as pressing a problem as wider issues of deprivation. Evidence also indicates that women who give birth in their early twenties may face similar challenges (Francesconi 2007). As Ermisch (2003:i) notes;

Women starting childbearing in their early twenties are also less likely to be a homeowner and are more likely to have a lower living standard and to suffer from poorer mental health compared with women becoming mothers at ages 24 and older [by the age of thirty]

These outcomes may be explained by the similar pre-pregnancy disadvantages faced by women who have children in their early twenties to those who have them in their teens (Hawkes 2010). It is then debatable whether solely focusing on teenagers is an effective or legitimate policy. This position becomes strengthened when positive experiences of teenage parenthood are taken into account; firstly in terms of health and secondly, social outcomes. As was noted above, there are some health benefits to a youthful pregnancy. Kaufman (1999) adds that young parents have more energy and are able to recover from sleep deprivation more easily than older parents. At this point it is important to acknowledge the heterogeneity of experiences of teenage parenthood depending on age. In health terms; “...women who delay childbearing to their early twenties do not seem to fare much better than teenage mothers” (Berrington et al 2005:23). Phoenix (1991:251) found that there were large differences between younger and older teenage mothers. Those who had a baby aged eighteen and nineteen; “experienced the least problems with motherhood”. Age is particularly significant to an understanding of the health benefits or dangers of teenage pregnancy. Physical immaturity

is a key risk for mothers aged under fifteens (Daguerre and Nativel 2006). Whereas, having a baby as an older teenage mother is, biologically speaking, relatively risk free compared to mothers aged over twenty (Daguerre and Nativel 2006)<sup>1</sup>.

In terms of social outcomes, evidence suggests that having a child can provide some young women with a motivation to succeed academically (Phoenix 1991; Cater and Coleman 2006; Hosie 2007; Smith-Battle 2007; Alexander et al 2010; Evans and Slowley 2010). Teenage parenting can be a positive, rewarding experience which can deter young people from negative behaviours (Seamark and Lings 2004; Wiggins et al 2005; Cater and Coleman 2006; Chase and Knight 2006). Similarly, having a baby as a teenager can be an important 'positive turning-point' (Arai 2009; Formby et al 2010). Lee Smith-Battle followed a cohort of young mothers in the US for twelve years. She found that for some women, pregnancy and motherhood proved to be 'transformative' (Smith-Battle 2005). Returning to her cohort aged thirty Smith-Battle found a marked variation in their lives and stories and argued that their lives were not predetermined by an 'early birth'.

The debate outlined above suggests that the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy and parenthood is more complex than is often assumed. As Duncan (2007) notes, there appears to be a 'disjuncture' between policy and research evidence. Furthermore, there is also a 'disjuncture' between consternation about teenage pregnancy rates and points at which rates have been at their highest (Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley 1993; Selman 2001; Bonell 2004). As is discussed in the following chapter, teenage pregnancy did not emerge as a social problem until relatively recently (Pillow 2004). It is then significant to question why the problematisation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood overlooks these 'disjunctures' in evidence and statistics.

In answer to this, it has been argued that, rather than teenage pregnancy and parenthood per se, a range of wider issues are at the heart of concerns. Arai (2009:109/114) notes; "...anxiety about teenage pregnancy masks usually deep-seated social fears...it touches on many and

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that increased maternal age is also linked to risks for mother and child (Luke and Brown 2004). For instance, mothers giving birth for the first time over thirty five are more likely to suffer from diabetes or hypertension (Katwijk and Peeters 1998; Joseph et al 2005; Delbaere et al 2006)

various sensitive issues”. These issues vary over time and lead to teenage pregnancy being defined differently depending on the current economic, political and moral context (Pillow 2004). The following section will now pick up some of these underlying anxieties by drawing on literature coming from a social constructionist perspective. The theoretical framework of social constructionism as a tool to understand the problematisation of teenage parenthood is discussed in more detail in the methodology chapter.

## **2.9. Underlying Anxieties**

Murcott (1980) draws particular attention to prevailing ideologies of childhood. She argues that teenage pregnancy challenges the dichotomy of adulthood and childhood. This is tied up with conceptualisations of adolescence as a time of assumed immaturity and sexual innocence. The phrase ‘children having children’ continues to resonate despite most teenage pregnancies occurring amongst eighteen and nineteen year olds (Kelly 2000). Such language draws on and reinforces assumptions around the maturity and capability of teenage parents. Holgate and Evans (2006) note that there is confusion surrounding ideologies about adolescent sexuality. Young women are variously depicted as relative innocents or subject to increasing sexualisation. Concern about teenage pregnancy can then be explained in part by an understanding of teenage sexuality as ‘inappropriate’ (Selman 2001).

Murcott (1980:8) further notes that; “biologically a child becomes an adult earlier and earlier, socially a child becomes an adult later and later”. The period of dependency during adolescence is becoming protracted (Holgate and Evans 2006). Longer periods are spent in education and being dependent on parents and family. Consequently, it may be that there is a need for the recognition of a period of ‘emerging adolescence’ which stretches into the twenties (Arnett 2004). Such an understanding overlooks the experiences and opportunities of many young people, especially those from working class backgrounds (Bynner 2005). Nevertheless, teenage parenthood represents a conflict with changing social expectations of adolescence. Similarly, Wilson and Huntington (2005) argue that teenage parenthood is problematised because of a divergence from changing social expectations. They argue that there is growing pressure on women to participate in higher education and the workforce

rather than mothering. When this is seen as the norm, young parenthood appears out of step with contemporary womanhood. In contrast to these life paths for young women; “childbearing...is accorded little value by society” (Wilson and Huntington 2005:68).

Relatedly, ideologies of motherhood are important in the framing of teenage motherhood as problematic. Accepted ideals of the standards and timing of motherhood have an important resonance (Holgate and Evans 2006). This includes the assumption that motherhood should occur within a marital context (Harrison 2003; May 2008). The emergence of the ‘problem’ of teenage pregnancy has been linked to its separation from marriage (Selman 2003). As seen above, teenage parents are more likely to be single parents. Anxiety regarding teenage pregnancy is also then linked to wider concerns about the traditional family.

Holgate and Evans (2006) note that there has been an increased policy focus on economic independence especially in relation to families. As can be seen from the above discussion, teenage mothers are, at least for a time, economically dependent on the state. This reflects wider concerns about the role of welfare and costs to the state. The ‘problem’ of teenage parenthood is often framed by discussions of welfare dependency, social exclusion (Wilson and Huntington 2005) and the underclass (Arai 2009). Consequently links are made between the provision of support and the assumed prevalence of teenage parenting. “In blaming the welfare system, many people blend pragmatic concerns with moral ones” (Luker 1996:126). These moral concerns were reinforced by New Labour’s depiction of paid work as being in opposition to dependency (Duncan 2007). Motherhood is not seen as an alternative form of social inclusion despite evidence that many young mothers experience it as such (Graham and McDermott 2005). Furthermore, Arai (2009) notes that the ‘chief’ concern for both New Labour and the preceding Conservative government are perceived costs to the state. As Hudson and Ineichen (1991:168) argue “vast sums of money are spent annually supporting a generation of young and inexperienced parents and a generation of potentially deprived children”. It is then questioned as to whether there is a value in these costs, especially in times of austerity or recession, furthering the construction of teenage parenthood as a social problem.

## **2.10. Concluding Thoughts**

This chapter has outlined the key areas of concern related to teenage pregnancy and parenthood expressed by government, the media and social policy agencies. It has demonstrated that there are a number of poor outcomes for young mothers and their children. Nevertheless, experiences of pre and post-pregnancy disadvantage have been shown to affect these outcomes. Consequently, the point has been made that evidence of a teenage pregnancy problem is “not particularly compelling” (Wilson and Huntington 2006:59). As has been noted above however, differences are evident between younger teenage mothers who are still developing mentally and physically and older teenage mothers. Mothers aged under sixteen are more likely to suffer from health related issues as well as face greater social challenges. Nonetheless, the evidence does not support the view that teenage pregnancy in itself is a social problem warranting considerable concern (Phoenix 1991; Duncan 2007). This is supported by accounts of positive experiences of youthful parenting and evidence which indicates parents in their early twenties have very similar outcomes. Given this, it can be argued that a more general policy focus on poverty and disadvantage may be more advantageous. This focus would address the compounding effect of having a teenage pregnancy for young women from disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, by not singling out teenage parents for policy intervention, the stigma attached to being a teenage mother may reduce.

This chapter has also drawn attention to some of the underlying anxieties which help to explain the problematisation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood. This thesis therefore joins the debate in arguing that teenage pregnancy itself is not the cause of a number of poor outcomes. It is recognised, however, that being a teenage parent can have a compounding effect on pre-pregnancy poverty and disadvantage. Nonetheless, it is further argued in this thesis that it is also important to consider the effect of official government approaches and policies. The ways in which policy makers interpret the ‘problem’ of teenage pregnancy has a bearing on the aim and focus of related policies. This thesis adds an understanding of the ways in which the development and implementation of key policies impacts on the lives and experiences of teenage mothers. As such, this work is able to build on the arguments made by Phoenix (1991) and, latterly Arai (2009).

It is argued here that it is more appropriate to discuss the problems faced by young parents rather than a teenage pregnancy 'problem'. Nonetheless, as shown at the beginning of this chapter, the government position is somewhat different. Therefore, the thesis will now move on to outline some of the key policies aimed at dealing with the teenage pregnancy 'problem'.

### Chapter Three: The Development of the Policy ‘Problem’ of Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood

The previous chapter demonstrates the debate surrounding the defining of a teenage pregnancy and parenthood as a significant social problem. Despite this debate, successive governments have enacted social policies to deal with a teenage pregnancy ‘problem’. This chapter provides an examination of the historical development of this ‘problem’. In addition, government approaches to teenage pregnancy and related social policies are attended to. This is not a comprehensive historical account but an analysis of key points and social policies as they attempt to deal with teenage pregnancy and related ‘problems’.

The chapter specifically examines policies starting from the post-war period to those introduced under Tony Blair’s Labour government. This is not to say there have not been points of influence outside of this period. For example, illegitimacy and bastardy became the subjects of concern and policy intervention as part of the 1834 Poor Laws<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the focus of the thesis is on teenage parenthood and so the post-war period is, perhaps, a more appropriate starting point. It is here where key shifts in discourses surrounding illegitimacy can be detected. This shift in focus from child to mother set alongside the introduction of the welfare state can be seen to lay the ground for more contemporary problematisations of ‘the’ teenage mother.

As noted above, this chapter concludes with an examination of teenage pregnancy and parenting policies enacted by the New Labour government. There have been policies and proposals after this period from both Labour and the subsequent coalition government. Nevertheless, it is argued here that this is a significant period to end the chapter with. Firstly, this is because of the importance of this particular period for teenage pregnancy and parenthood policies. It was under this government that ‘The Teenage Pregnancy Report’ was published. Van Loon (2003:10) describes this as, “perhaps the single most influential recent

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this legislation in relation to unmarried motherhood and illegitimacy see, for example, Henriques (1967) and Cody (2000).

document on the issue of teenage pregnancy in the UK”. Secondly, policies formed in this period directly affect the lives and shape the experiences of the women in this research. This chapter concentrates on four key periods. Firstly, the chapter examines the post-war period. The chapter then moves on to discuss the emergence of teenage pregnancy as a social problem in the 1960’s. Thirdly, ideas and policies emerging from the New Right are focussed on. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a discussion on New Labour and the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy.

### **3.1 Post-War Britain**

The ‘post-war period’ is defined here as loosely spanning from the mid-forties through to the 1960’s. Lewis (1992) identifies the end of World War Two as a key point of ‘public anxiety’ about the family. It is particularly significant to examine the way in which policy concerns relating to the family moved to focus specifically on the mother at this point. The role of mother and her relationship with her children were subject to a number of policy proposals and interventions during this period.

Four key areas have been identified which shape contemporary understandings of the social policy ‘problems’ such as teenage parenthood. Firstly, The Beveridge Report and resulting inception of the welfare state. This is important here because of the way in which it defined the ‘ideal’ role of women as being dependent on a husband. This had (and still has) important ramifications for the way in which women who were ‘detached’ from a male breadwinner were viewed. The chapter then moves on to look at the emergence of the idea of ‘problem’ families. The discounting of class in favour of parental (or mothering) responsibility is interesting here. These ideas remain influential in the problematising of diverse family types today. The chapter then provides a picture of illegitimacy in the 1950’s and provides some explanations for changes in attitudes towards lone mothers. This includes an examination of psycho-analytic theories prevalent at this time.

### *The Beveridge Report*

The Beveridge Report came out of a hope for a new social order when the Second World War came to an end (Smart 1996). Published in 1942, it paved the way for the creation of a welfare state based on a contributory insurance system. It was designed to replace the remnants of the Poor Law, including the ethos which had undermined it. The insurance element of Beveridge's proposals meant support for those in need would be seen as a right. Although the Report and subsequent legislation addressed a number of different groups (or insurance 'classes'), it is those proposals relating to women and mothers which are of particular interest here.

Whereas the previous Poor Laws only referred to mothers in relation to unmarried motherhood, Beveridge focused on married women and mothers (Spensky 1992). Upon marriage, Beveridge proposed that women's independent claim to benefit in respect to their contributions ended. This was based on assumptions that married women would become housewives and that benefits would be shared with a marriage partnership, women were assumed to then be dependent on their husbands. Like the 1834 Poor Law before it, the welfare state proposals of 1942 were based on the ideal of the two parent, male breadwinner model of the family (Lewis 2001). It was recognised in the report that married women had vital roles to play. Firstly, wives provided services to husbands which enabled them to be employed outside of the home. Secondly, women had childbearing and childrearing responsibilities. This was underpinned by a desire to rebuild family life and so encouraging reproduction was considered an important aim. The decrease in the birth rate led Beveridge to be concerned that; "...at the present rate of reproduction, the British race cannot continue" (Beveridge 1942:154). The role of mother was then integral to post-war Britain. "Her role was to be the good wife and fecund mother" (Smart 1996:51).

There were, however, some attempts to recognise the importance of mothering and unpaid caring work (Spensky 1992). Beveridge had wanted to include lone mothers in the social insurance scheme in recognition that caring work continued after separation. The proposal did not, however, come to be included in the final legislation. Consequently, divorced and separated mothers were rendered vulnerable to poverty. Unmarried mothers were also a

particularly vulnerable group following legislative changes. This group was not eligible for the insurance scheme and so were obliged to claim national assistance. This was a meagre means-tested allowance akin to those administered by the Poor Laws (Spensky 1992). Page (1997) argues that these proposals meant there was a modest improvement in the economic position of young single mothers. It gave them an; "...opportunity to secure an 'independent' existence albeit an impoverished kind" (Page 1997:156).

It was significant, however, that these provisions were funded by the state rather than through contributory insurance payments. National assistance was seen as a "residual and diminishing safety net for those not covered" (Measor and Williamson 1992:60). As Beveridge himself put it, "it must be felt to be something less desirable than insurance benefit" (Beveridge 1942:141). There was then little dignity in claiming national assistance. Furthermore, there was a distinct difference between the treatment of widows and women who had become lone parents "other than by widowhood" (Beveridge para.347). Widows' pensions came as a right through their husband's insurance contributions. Divorced, separated or unmarried mothers were subject to an investigation of means and needs however. In addition, allowances would be curtailed if they entered into another relationship. Single mothers had their "...sexuality...under constant scrutiny, unlike widows who were considered to have fulfilled their contract and were free to do what they would with their bodies" (Spensky 1992:106). The distinctions made here can be seen as a reinstatement of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor underlying the previous Poor Laws. Furthermore, they also distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' mothering practices.

The way in which unmarried and lone mothers were provided for following Beveridge had far reaching consequences. "The fact that women were defined as ideally dependent, however, inevitably lead to a punishing attitude towards those who did not conform, especially unmarried mothers" (Spensky 1992:106). Furthermore, the provisions "...failed to meet the economic needs of large numbers of women" (Measor and Williams 1992:65). These authors argue that these aspects of his plan have contributed to the continuing poverty for a significant number of women.

Beveridge's ideal of married women as housewife and mother was to be more fitting for pre-war family life (Lewis 1992). Changing social conditions, such as the post war increase in illegitimacy, had not been taken into account (Smart 1996). Anxieties, nevertheless, changed. Following a resurgence in the birth rate, concern centred on the well-being of families. More specifically, "...attention was focused squarely on the issue of 'adequate mothering'" (Lewis 1992:11).

### *The Problem Family and Mother*

The emergence of the 'problem family' further highlights discourses surrounding 'the family' and mothering. The term developed following World War Two evacuations which drew attention to the poor condition of many city children (Levene 2006). It was quickly picked up by the Ministry of Health, social workers and eugenicists sparking debate and investigation for a solution (Welshman 2006). The 'problem family' was defined by health professionals based on descriptions such as a disorderly home and 'badly' spent income. The class and gendered basis of the assumptions of what constituted and caused a 'problem family' are inescapable. That many of the 'failures' of such families were due to poverty was largely ignored (Starkey 2000). Instead family failure was conceptualised as an individual and personal failing (Lewis 1992).

Moreover, although the debate centred on families, what was often being referred to was a problem mother (Starkey 2000; Levene 2006; Welshman 2006). Lewis (1992) recalls a report by The Women's Group on Public Welfare. The 1948 report concentrated on the 'problem family' and concluded that the competence of the mother was key. The 'appalling ignorance' of some mothers was thought to be a particular issue. As a result, social interventions and instructions were aimed specifically at women and mothers (Levene 2006). This included the appointing of home advisors in some parts of the country to teach mothers basic home and childcare skills (Welshman 1999). In contrast, literature in the 1940's rarely considered the father's role (Lewis 1992).

As noted above, and illustrated here, the post-war period was a time where anxiety about the family began to focus much more on mothers. Furthermore, there was a change from emphasising the child (bastardy/illegitimacy) to highlighting the mother (unmarried motherhood). Change was reinforced through legislation and it was recognised in the 1959 Legitimacy Act that illegitimacy was not the child's fault (Jones 1959). Provisions were also made for legitimacy to be restored following a marriage of either parent (Kiernan et al 1998). Such changes may have been a reflection of shifting discourses relating to female sexuality and changing patterns of illegitimacy. The following section will now go on to look at this in more detail.

### *Illegitimacy in the 1950's*

Smart (1992) sees the 1950's as seeing a marked change with regards to a female sexuality discourse. There was "...an apparent liberation of female sexuality in discourses of sex" (Smart 1992:48), nevertheless, sex remained linked to marriage as it was seen as a means to sustain the family. But, Smart argues, this was the beginning of the break between sex and reproduction. The 1950's also, however, marked an, "...emergence of a new pattern in the incidence of illegitimate birth, associated with youth, urban living and sophistication" (Gill 1977:20). Births to unmarried mothers were considerably more prevalent in the 15-19 age group during 1940's and 50's (see appendices). Gordon (1997) also notes the frequency of illegitimacy for the under twenties during this period. The percentage of live illegitimate births to this age group had risen from 12% in 1951 to 28% in 1958 (Gill 1977). Nevertheless, unmarried motherhood, rather than age, continued to be the main focus of concern.

A large majority of the teenage births at this time either took place within marriage or preceded marriage (Kiernan et al. 1998). This may indicate why teenage was not a focus for concern. Married teenage parents were still able to meet the expected norms of parenthood. As Cook (2007:7) notes, "...marital status was crucial to the interpretation of teenage pregnancy". When teenage parents married, their age ceased to be problematic (Gordon 1997). Where marriage was not an option, many teenage mothers went into mother and baby homes and had the baby adopted (Spensky 1992). This effectively hid the 'problem'.

The principal image of women throughout the 1950's was of the contented mother and housewife (Spensky 1992). This was reinforced by economic and cultural developments. The 1940's and 50's saw full employment and a rise in wages (Gill 1977). Consequently young people were able to set up home independently more easily than in previous generations (Cook 2007). Half of all women were married by 20 in the 1950's (Furstenberg 2000). These trends reinforced the idea that young unmarried mothers sat outside of expected norms. Constructions of these norms of womanhood placed the unmarried mother as socially deviant. Unmarried mothers, alongside the more generic 'problem family' became part of the casework of family social workers (Kiernan et al 1997). Furthermore, as Phoenix (1991) notes, references to 'illegitimacy' continued into the 1960's. This was fuelled by discourses which depicted uncontrolled female sexuality as 'dangerous'. This essentialist discourse linked women's reproductive capabilities to instability and hysteria (Smart 1992). These discourses reinforced concerns about the mother's role (Lewis 1992). Influential here was the burgeoning popularity of psychology and specifically psychoanalytic theory.

### *Psychology and Unmarried Mothers*

Psychological understandings of unmarried motherhood were beginning to dominate at this time. Nonetheless, it would be misleading to argue that these were the only discourses available. Cultural explanations were also in existence. These were generally applied only to black unmarried mothers however (Phoenix 1996; Gordon 1997). In the US, black illegitimate pregnancies were viewed as a problem of morality linked to race (Pillow 2004). Socio-cultural factors did not achieve the popularity or interest that psychological explanations attracted (Kiernan et al 1998). Social workers were more likely to adopt highly regarded medical and psychological disciplines (Gill 1977).

Of particular influence during this period was the American, Leontine Young. Young theorised that unmarried mothers wanted to have a baby and went to some lengths to attain this goal. She argued this desire stemmed from an unhappy childhood and home life dominated by one parent (Young 1954).

The serious problem of the unmarried mother is that her urge for a baby has been separated from its normal matrix, love for a mate... The normal woman does not have to have a baby regardless of the cost to herself or others... (Young 1954:37)

Young's research was heavily criticised for over generalised findings and methodological shortcomings (Gill 1977). It nonetheless continued to inform social work practitioners into the 1960's (Kiernan et al 1997). Also popular at this time was the work of John Bowlby. Bowlby's Attachment Theory had been used to argue that a child was best placed with its mother. The same argument was not, however, applied to unmarried mothers (Kiernan, Land et al. 1998). Bowlby argued that the evidence suggested that unmarried mothers were neurotic and that an illegitimate child was a symptom of psychological illness (Bowlby 1953).

These constructions of unmarried mothers meant that adoption was put forward as being in the best interests of the child. Any desire expressed to keep an illegitimate child was taken as further evidence of instability and poor mothering (Spensky 1992). Wong (1997) argues these ideas shifted the opinions from one of blame to sympathy. Indeed, psychological explanations did lead to greater sympathy than in previous decades (Gill 1977). This did not, however, mean that stigma and shame were eradicated. The psychological discourse placed responsibility onto the individual mother for her situation (Luker 1996). A young girl faced rejection and derision which could only be avoided by entering a mother and baby home (Clark 2008). Such homes operated on decidedly punitive grounds (Spensky 1992).

### **3.2. The Emergence of Teenage Pregnancy: 1960's and 70's**

Unmarried motherhood remained stigmatised throughout 1960's America (Luker 1996). A marked shift from an emphasis on illegitimacy and unmarried motherhood to teenage pregnancy is argued to have occurred at this point however (Arney and Bergen 1984; Wong 1997). Teenage birth rates in the UK peaked in the period 1966-1970 (ONS 2006). Similarly, US rates were at their highest during the 1960's (Ventura and Freedman 2000). Rutter (1979) argues illegitimacy amongst this age group was particularly noteworthy. Teenage illegitimacy rates rose after 1968 and started to decline into the 70's in contrast to overall illegitimacy rates which were falling from 1966 (Rutter 1979). Yet an 'epidemic' of teenage pregnancy was not

'discovered' in the US until the 1970's (Luker 1996; Vinovskis 2003). The identification of teenage pregnancy as a social problem can then be seen to be out of sync with the facts (Gordon 1997; Vinovskis 2003).

High numbers of teenage births are argued to reflect the number of teenagers at this time due to the baby boom (Ventura and Freedman 2000). Moreover, they also paralleled adult fertility rates (Vinovskis 2003). Increases did not then deviate from the behaviour of the population as a whole. They were, however, seen as distinctive due to a growing recognition of a separate and significant period of adolescence. Furstenburg (2000) argues that adolescence is created by keeping young people in full time education rather than pushing them into the adult world of work. "... [T]he problematic features of adolescence and the transition to adulthood are structured and maintained by social institutions." (Furstenburg 2000:897). Adolescence was recognised as a distinct phase in the early 1900's, but was not yet equated with the teenage years (Weeks 1981). Koffman (2009) notes that the term 'teenager' was first coined in America in the 1940's. It then became popularised in Britain during the 1950's. The term 'teenager' began to take on a specific meaning;

...a person mature in body, often sexually active, but not economically prepared for the formation of a new family and viewed by the adult community as not emotionally prepared either. (Gordon 1997:261)

The recognition and use of the term 'teenager' can be used to explain the growing recognition of 'teenage pregnancy' (Vinovskis 2003). Teenage pregnancy becomes presented as problem when it is seen to disrupt this 'normal', if complex, transition to adulthood (Arai 2009).

Although a contentious claim, the 1960's has often been referred to as a permissive era (Weeks 1981). This is due to a perceived increase in sexual activity, particularly amongst teenagers (Gill 1977; Lewis and Kiernan 1996; Land and Lewis 1997; Wong 1997; Ventura and Freedman 2000; Vinovskis 2003). This was considered significant in regards to age, but also because of its occurrence outside of marriage. The use of adoption and mother and baby homes was still significant during the 1960's (Vinovskis 2003). In addition, from 1968, many teenagers were utilising newly passed abortion laws (Lewis and Kiernan 1996). Lewis and

Kiernan (1996) argue that the retention of the link between marriage and parenthood prevented a 'moral panic' from occurring. In the UK and US, most teenage parents were, at least before the birth, married (Lewis and Kiernan 1996; Ventura and Freedman 2000; Vinovskis 2003).

It was the case then that the majority of teenage pregnancies were consequently rendered invisible by adoption and abortion or legitimised through marriage. Selman (2003) argues this explains why high levels of teenage pregnancy did not provoke serious concerns. But this may also be explained by a less punitive discourse surrounding female sexuality. Promiscuity leading to the contraction of VD was the main focus of sexual discourses (Weeks 1981; Lewis and Kiernan 1996). Female sexuality in general was viewed less problematically;

What was taking place was a redefinition of female sexuality in terms of its possibilities for pleasure, for enjoyment unbounded by the old exigencies of compulsory childbirth or endless domestic chores (Weeks 1981:258).

It was assumed that women would still become 'responsible' wives and mothers (Wong 1997). Concerns emerged when teenage sexuality began to transgress dominant discourses surrounding women's roles and 'the family'.

The 1970's marked a key changing point in the structure of the family as marriage trends started to transform. In the UK, the average age of marriage was rising whilst the frequency declined; divorce and cohabitation were also increasing (Lewis and Kiernan 1996). Similar trends were also found in America (Luker 1996). Pregnant teenagers in particular were ceasing to marry, either before or after the birth (Gordon 1997; Wong 1997). Adoption rates fell and the use of homes for unmarried mothers declined (Gill 1977; Spensky 1992; Kiernan et al 1998). This was partly linked to the legalisation of abortion (Selman 2006). In addition the legalisation of the pill for unmarried women in 1968 caused a reduction in illegitimate births and adoptions (Clark 2008). Clark notes that, although illegitimacy figures did rise again, there was no corresponding rise in adoption rates. Young women were then less likely to give their babies up for adoption (Gordon 1997).

This is where the link between marriage and parenthood began to break and teenage pregnancy began to be discussed as a problem in its own right. Lewis and Kiernan (1996) argue that this separation prompted the resurgence of a moral panic regarding unmarried mothers. The 'normal' family was still considered to consist of two married parents. Young parents, however, had difficulty in meeting these expectations (Phoenix 1991). They then become the subject of particular criticism, linking their 'deviance' to their youth. The increased availability of abortion and contraception also introduced the idea that women had control over their fertility (Cook 2007). This worked to construct teenage mothers as having 'chosen' to become parents.

Norms were also changing with regards to the lifestyles of young people and especially women. Parenthood could now be delayed with contraception (Cook 2007). In addition, the school leaving age was raised to sixteen. As a result, it was expected that longer periods would be spent in education. This was especially the case for middle class young women (Gordon 1997). In 1979 a group of cross-party politicians met to discuss the needs of pregnant school girls and school girl mothers (Miles 1979). Changing educational expectations were then significant for the problematising of teenage parenthood. The emergence of second wave feminism and economic changes also meant more women were taking employment outside of the home. Formal education was becoming more essential, leaving those without (such as teenage mothers) at a distinct disadvantage (Harari and Vinovskis 1993). This worked to further highlight the 'choices' of young people who took life courses differing from the new 'norm'.

In the US, in addition to concerns regarding the family, poverty and the rising cost of welfare were beginning to raise questions. In 1950's America, welfare costs had been low and teenage parenthood was not raised as a related issue (Vinovskis 2003). The introduction of AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and various other measures to combat poverty meant welfare costs rose. Whilst this was not solely attributed to teenage parents, questions began to be raised regarding support costs.

Harari and Vinovskis (1993) note that teenage pregnancy rates had been decreasing at this point. Nevertheless, teenage parenthood became identified as a “fundamental cause of poverty” in the US (Luker 1996:108). In 1975 Congress began hearings on teenage pregnancy. This was followed by the Alan Guttmacher Institute pamphlet; “Eleven million teenagers”. The title of the pamphlet was misleading however. The eleven million teenagers referred to sexually active adolescents rather than teenage birth or conception rates (Selman 2003). The use of the term ‘epidemic’ in the publication was not challenged and reinforced social concerns regarding welfare costs (Vinovskis 2003). Consequently, this was a key starting point in the shaping of a moral panic over teenage pregnancy in the US (Gordon 1997). Links between teenage pregnancy, poverty and the welfare state were not made in the UK at this point. But, as with psychological explanations for unmarried mothers, American ideas began to filter over. These were to become highly influential throughout the 1980’s and 90’s.

### **3.3. The New Right**

The 1980’s and 90’s are a key period in which punitive discourses regarding unmarried mothers in general, and teenage mothers in particular, reached a peak. Recently elected right wing governments in the UK and US vocally criticised these groups. New Right thinking linked unmarried teenage motherhood to a decline in morality and collapse of the traditional family (Selman 2003). These ideas were not solely the invention of this period however. Evidence for this way of thinking can be seen starting to emerge in the 1970’s.

A notable example was Keith Joseph. Joseph was a key ally of Margaret Thatcher in the setting up of the Centre for Policy Studies. Together they embarked on the development of free market liberalism. Joseph argued that a ‘cycle of deprivation’ existed in which a child would inherit particular lifestyles and values (Gillies 2007). He argued that socialism was taking responsibility away from the family and this resulted in social problems such as teenage pregnancy (Durham 1991). Joseph’s theory has subsequently been challenged by extensive research (including his own), but at the time it carried considerable weight (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992; Gillies 2007).

...our human stock is threatened...a high and rising proportion of children are being born to mothers least fitted to bring children into the world and bring them up. They are born to mothers who were first pregnant in adolescence in social classes 4 and 5. Many of these girls are unmarried, many are deserted or divorced or soon will be. Some are of low intelligence, most of low educational attainment. They are unlikely to be able to give children the stable emotional background, the consistent combination of love and firmness which are more important than riches. They are producing problem children, the future unmarried mothers, delinquents, denizens of our borstals, sub-normal educational establishments, prisons, hostels for drifters...A high proportion of these births are a tragedy for the mother, the child and for us (Joseph 1974)

There was a marked emphasis at this point on the individual. This is in terms of enabling individuals needing to make their own choices to maximum benefit by reducing state intervention. But also in terms of individuals, rather than structural forces, being to blame. State provision for the less well off was argued to encourage idleness and fecklessness and undermine the choice and free will of citizens (Boyson 1971).

The New Right emerged from the dissolution of the economic consensus and rising anxiety about the family. Near universal support for state regulation and insurance had begun to break down. Arguments emerged which depicted welfare recipients as lazy and calculating. Such sentiments are highly reminiscent of statements made to justify the ending of poor relief in the previous century.

In such a responsible society no one cares, why should they when the state spends all its energies taking from the energetic, successful and thrifty to give to the idle, the failures and the feckless? (Boyson 1971:5).

A number of related concerns emerged at this point. Problems surrounding economic expenditure were highlighted. Economic liberalism and the free market economy provided an answer to emerging economic concerns. The moral arm of the New Right addressed anxiety regarding the fate of the family. This, it was argued, meant addressing a permissive sexual culture and the erosion of traditional gender roles (Abbott and Wallace 1992).

The emergent 'problem' of teenage pregnancy tapped into all of these concerns. Although much focus was placed on lone parents, teenage pregnancy in its own right was beginning to be identified as a social problem in the US. There was, however, disparity between the degree

of concern and the actual rates of teenage pregnancy (Selman 2003). Rhode (1993) notes that childbirth amongst teenagers fell between 1975 and 1985. More teenagers were sexually active and becoming single parents, however. This indicates that concern was more likely to have stemmed from other factors. It was argued that 'liberal' approaches had been to blame for increases in teenage pregnancy and unmarried motherhood (Selman 2003). Further related 'issues' contravened some of the fundamental tenets of New Right beliefs; independence from the state, the 'traditional' family and chastity. Consequently, the New Right depicted teenage and lone motherhood as the epitome of what had gone wrong with America (Luker 1996). Rhode (2003) and Selman (2003) argue that the breakdown of the 'traditional' family, welfare dependency and increased sexual freedom were a more likely basis for concerns. Nevertheless, teenage pregnancy became a battleground for the New Right offensive (Joffe 1993).

Consequently, sex education rose up the agenda in the US and UK. The New Right in the US interpreted sex education as sanctioning permissive sexual activity (Joffe 1993; Selman 2003) and so began to promote abstinence. The UK did not follow this trajectory, but significant changes were made to sex education. The 1986 Sex Education Act introduced a moral element to the teaching of sex education which highlighted the importance of family life (Daguerre 2006). It also placed control of sex education into the hands of school governors. It was assumed that parents would then have greater control (Weeks 1981). This was part of the wider aims of the New Right to return power from the state to the family. The idea that the family was losing power and authority over children was exemplified by the Gillick campaign<sup>3</sup>.

### *Lone Parenthood, Teenage Pregnancy and the New Right*

Sexuality and family discourses led to growing concern over teenage parents during the 80's and 90's (Rhode 1993; Selman 2003; Daguerre 2006). Nevertheless, most pronouncements and policy proposals made at this time were aimed at lone parents. It was, however, 'young'

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<sup>3</sup> Victoria Gillick championed the campaign against the right of doctors to provide under sixteen's with contraception without parental notification (Weeks 1981). Although ultimately the campaign was lost, it mobilised significant support and media coverage (Durham 1991).

single mothers who were being referred to, and therefore also implicitly teenage mothers. This conclusion is illustrated by a chapter entitled “Single Mothers; the feminisation of poverty” in an American book; ‘The Underclass’ (Auletta 1983). This talks almost exclusively about teenage mothers. Furthermore, the Family Law Reform Act was passed in Britain in 1987. This acknowledged a growth in extra-marital fertility and ended the use of the term ‘illegitimacy’ in government publications (Selman 1996). Instead, the use of the term ‘lone parent family’ grew. As the majority of these were headed by women, however, this suggests lone mothers were the actual target. In many cases politicians and the media were expressly discussing ‘young women’ and ‘girls’ (see The Single Parent Action Group 1996). Elsewhere, teenage mothers were explicitly referred to. For example when discussing access to social housing Sir George Young spoke of, “the unmarried teenager expecting her first, probably unplanned, child” (Young 1993 cited in Selman 2003). In addition, the 1992 Health of the Nation Report included the reduction of teenage pregnancy as one of its aims (Arai 2009).

The use of the word ‘young’ within the discourse highlights the targeting of a sub-group of single mothers. Phoenix (1996) argues the government had underestimated the strength of rejection of negative constructions of lone mothers. This, she argues, was due to the number of people who were lone mothers or in close contact with a lone parent. Research conducted by The Single Parent Action Network (SPAN) following the 1990’s media furore. They found that many women made efforts to resist negative representations (SPAN 1996). Single parents came from many different backgrounds and circumstances. The incidence of teenage parenthood was (and is) more homogenous however. Older middle class single mothers were therefore more likely to be able to challenge stereotypes. Poor young mothers however, were unlikely to have the power to assert and utilise more positive discourses. This is not to say that there was a deliberate effort on behalf of the government to target a defenceless group. But the resistance to a discourse can redirect focus. As the decade went on the focus turned more specifically onto the teenage mother. SPAN note that in 1995, “the young single mother was shipped out again for yet another concentrated bout of media attention” (SPAN 1996:25). This culminated with reports which linked teenage mothers to the collapse of family life (Selman 1996).

### *Teenage Mothers, the Underclass and Dependency*

Negative images as well as the policy responses appear to follow a trajectory set by the US (Phoenix 1996; Roseneil and Mann 1996). This trajectory was particularly influenced by New Right philosophies and the perceptions of a growing underclass. The underclass is argued to be a discursive rather than an objective phenomena (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992). As such there was fluidity in the explanations and definitions applied (see Lister 1996). This meant that the term could be applied to include current fears and moral panics (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992). This can still be seen in contemporary UK with the ‘underclass’ being linked to youth crime (Kendall 2009), unemployment (Davidson 2009) and teenage pregnancy (BBC News 2009). Whilst the left defined the underclass as being a class excluded by structural forces whose position was exacerbated by Conservative policies; the political right defined it as a group who failed to utilise opportunity (Faulks 1998). Murray (1996) defined the underclass with reference to illegitimacy, crime, worklessness and a demoralised value system separate to that of the rest of the country. Furthermore, the underclass was subject to explanations of biological and cultural determinism.

Popular New Right thinking linked unmarried motherhood to the production of criminal, delinquent children and unemployment. Unmarried mothers and their children were placed firmly as members of an underclass (Roseneil and Mann 1996). David Willets MP identified three significant groups who he would include as members of an underclass, “the long-term unemployed, unskilled workers in erratic employment and younger single mothers” (Willets cited in Lister 1996). Auletta was claimed to be the architect of the term (Lister 1996) and made specific reference to teenage mothers. Auletta (1983) linked concerns about unfit families to teenage mothers. Welfare dependency, intergenerational transition of values and poverty as well as poor parenting were also associated with teenage mothers;

...welfare becomes the only world the mother knows...Many members of such families become resigned to dependency. Not surprisingly, teenage mothers often feel deprived of their youth and come to resent their children... [they] withdraw their love and neglect their children; others physically abuse or abandon them (Auletta 1983:73)

What differed between descriptions of the underclass and the poor was the application of New Right ideas of individual choice and responsibility. The underclass were argued to have voluntarily eschewed moral frameworks and market opportunities (Faulks 1998). Notions of dependency were implicit in the construction of an underclass (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992). Welfare dependency was identified in America as a dangerous problem in the 1980's (Lewis 1998). The idea that it encouraged undesirable behaviour and undermined the work ethic was espoused by key right wing thinkers such as Mead and Gilder (Fraser and Gordon 1996; Lewis 1998). This was considered especially problematic as it was thought that a culture was developing in which growing numbers would see benefits as a 'choice' (Murray 1990). Murray (1996) argued that the existence of support made the choice to have a baby feasible for young women. New Right thinking with regards to pathology and rational choice were applied and 'perverse incentives' theories became an accepted explanation (Selman 2003; Daguerre 2006). Young and lone parents were then positioned as a class of people perceived to be a financial drain and a moral threat. These implicit and explicit notions of dependency legitimised welfare cuts and demonisation.

In 1992, Peter Lilley revitalised the Conservative party assault on young single parents. His "I've got a little list" song became an infamous part of his speech at the 1992 Conservative party conference. His speech included socialists, left-wing councillors and irresponsible fathers as potential benefit 'offenders' (The Daily Politics 2007). It was, however, his inclusion of "young ladies who get pregnant just to jump the housing list" which can be argued to have been most influential. Peter Lilley's 'list' and the speech preceding it had been directed specifically at fraudulent claimants. Placing young mothers in this context would have done little to reassure the nation that supporting young and single parents was legitimate. The political climate at the time made it difficult to argue that young parents (or indeed any benefit claimants) had a legitimate right to welfare. In previous decades, the over representation of lone parents in the social housing sector was explained by insufficient private housing and need (Land and Lewis 1997). This explanation had become marginalised in favour of perverse incentive arguments, however. Social housing provision as well as the benefit system was thought to cultivate irresponsible and damaging behaviour (Dean and

Taylor-Gooby 1992). The logical conclusion of these arguments were benefit cuts for single parents.

The presentation of young and lone mothers as a financial drain reproducing the underclass at the nations expense continued throughout the 1990's (Daguerre 2006). Conservative politicians such as John Redwood, Stephen Green, Michael Portillo and Sir George Young continued to make speeches and pronouncements reinforcing these ideas. Public statements were interjected with a proliferation of press coverage (Linne and Jones 2000). The condemnation of young and single parents as part of the dependency debate reached a peak in 1993 (Roseneil and Mann 1996; Linne and Jones 2000). As noted earlier, however, the furore did not correspond with the numbers of teenage birth (see appendices). The increased coverage of young parent's access to welfare and housing resulted in policy initiatives such as the release of a green paper which restricted lone parents entitlement to social housing (Phoenix 1996). Policies focused on the individual (Rhode 1993) and aimed to remove perceived perverse incentives. Nevertheless, Daguerre (2006:68) argues that the Conservative approach during this period; "...can be described by the paradoxical combination of an aggressive rhetoric regarding young mothers and the absence of any significant policy initiatives in this area".

### *The New Right and 'The' Family*

Concerns over welfare payments to lone mothers were closely linked to the New Right preoccupation with the 'traditional' family. Welfare payments were seen to encourage alternative and inadequate family types which undermined the 'traditional' family. The 'traditional' family was presumed by the New Right to be the natural setting for needs to be met (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992). Pro-family arguments and movements in the UK and the US shared this perception of the 'right' type of family (Abbott and Wallace 1992). As had been the case in the Victorian era (Trudgill 1976; Weeks 1981) motherhood was placed on a pedestal. All those who did not match up to the 'perfect mum' image helped to establish a hierarchy of mothers (Douglas and Michael 2004). This renewed exaltation of certain forms of

motherhood led to 'other' forms of mothering to seem selfish. Working mothers, teenage mothers, poor mothers and single mothers all became problematic to notions of the family.

Families without fathers were thought to be inadequate at disciplining and parenting (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992; Roseneil and Mann 1996). Charles Murray argued single parent families produced children who were 'running wild' (Murray 1990: 33). These children were argued to be more likely to drop out of school and have a teenage pregnancy (Land and Lewis 1997). Single parents were therefore placed as responsible for the breakdown of the family, unemployment and criminal behaviour. This then reinforced the idea that they were a legitimate target for intervention, including benefit reductions in 1996 (Clark 2003). This was despite the fact that the use of outdated 'evidence' to support such claims of poor parenting (McIntosh 1996).

Government policy on single parenthood both fed and drew on media representations. The Single Parent Action Network collected newspaper coverage on single parents. This identifies a number of discourses applied to single parents including 'The Delinquent Child Raiser', 'The Scrounger', 'The Undeserving Drain on Society' and 'The Cause of Crime' (SPAN 1996). What is notably missing in these accounts and policy responses is any meaningful discussion of men's role in single parenthood. The decrease in marriage and the increase of lone motherhood also reflected the preferences of men (Fox Harding 1996). Yet the mother's 'choices' and subsequent lifestyle become the focus.

Nonetheless, financial responsibilities of fathers were highlighted by the formation of the Child Support Agency (CSA) in 1993. This was also part of overarching government aims to reduce welfare state costs and increase personal responsibility. The Child Support Act required lone parents claiming state support to go through the CSA in order to claim maintenance. The legislation was more about reducing dependency than providing financial aid however. Under the first incarnation of the agency, few lone parents appeared to benefit and some were rendered worse off (Fox Harding 1996; Clark 2003). It was also about enforcing responsibility on 'feckless' fathers (Fox Harding 1996). As Clark (2003) points out, however, the Act only considered financial responsibility. Clark argues that this supported the

traditional 'norm' of the male breadwinner and dependent female carer. Additionally it emphasised the difference between unacceptable state dependency and acceptable family dependency.

The introduction of the CSA did allow some focus to be directed at absent fathers. The backlash from fathers went some way to revitalise their image however (McIntosh 1996). A key theme regarding the position of men in relation to lone parenthood was one of concern. Murray (1990) noted that an absence of fathers meant that 'natural' male traits such as 'physical unruliness' develop unchecked. When women acted independently, the 'unattached man' was seen as a threat (Land and Lewis 1997). Children raised without a male role model were argued to enter criminality (Roseneil and Mann 1996). In addition, single parent families were seen to undermine the place of men in society. Without the 'breadwinner role' it was argued there was little incentive for men to work (Morgan 1999). As Dench (1998:17) remarked; "The family may be a myth, but it is a myth that works to make many men tolerably useful".

Weeks (1989) notes that the 1980's heralded a 'new moral agenda'. In the UK, the promotion of traditional families and moral values was seen as a backlash against 'permissive' 1960's legislation (Durham 1991). The New Right branded permissiveness as a cause and a result of family breakdown (Abbott and Wallace 1992). To the disappointment of many Christian and family lobbies, however, these ideas were more rhetoric than policy (Isaac 1994). Perhaps as a result of contradictions between withdrawing state responsibility and a desire to control morality. Nevertheless the rhetoric was powerful. This was made all the more so because there was little effective opposition to New Right morality arguments. Those who did make a stand were dismissed as being pro-teen sex and anti-family (Abbott and Wallace 1992).

### *Moving on from the New Right*

The New Right's moral and political stance make the 1980's and 90's a significant period for contemporary understandings of teenage pregnancy. The election of a Labour government in 1997, whilst arguably a distinctive change in direction, was no less significant. Tony Blair

sought a 'new politics' in his appropriation of 'third way' ideas. This, he argued, was founded on the principles of; "democracy, liberty, justice, mutual obligation and internationalism" (Blair 1998:28). Powell (2002) notes, however, that there is little agreement as to what the 'third way' consisted of. There is neither the space nor need to attempt to disentangle the strands here. Suffice to say that the 'third way' was largely about seeking a compromise between the old left and Conservative right (Giddens 1998; Blair 1998). There was then a focus on equality and social justice which had not been evident under the Thatcher or Major governments (Driver and Martell 2006). Furthermore, pragmatism rather than moralising were key to this new rhetoric. This was evident in the relative acceptance of different family forms (Driver and Martell 2002). Nevertheless, some of the old tenets of neo-liberalism remained. As Giddens (1998:25) points out, critics often decried the 'third way' as "warmed over neo-liberalism".

The emphasis on social inequality and injustice allowed different understandings of teenage pregnancy to emerge. This was exemplified by the Acheson Report on health inequalities. This highlighted socio-economic factors in the incidence of teenage pregnancy and noted the dominance of prevention programs based on individualist understandings (Acheson 1998). Furthermore, other 'stories' of teenage parenthood were also noted. "For many young women, pregnancy and motherhood are positive and welcomed experiences without long term negative outcomes" (Acheson 1998: Part 2 Section 8). It was this report which led to the publication of The Teenage Pregnancy Report in 1999 (Hoggart 2006).

### **3.4. The Teenage Pregnancy Report and Strategy**

Shortly after being elected in 1997 the incoming Labour government, under the auspices of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), commissioned The Teenage Pregnancy Report. This drew on research which linked teenage parenthood to a number of negative outcomes;

Teenage mothers are less likely to finish their education, less likely to find a good job, and more likely to end up both as single parents and bringing up their children in poverty. The children themselves run a much greater risk of poor health, and have a much higher chance of becoming teenage mothers themselves (Blair 1999:4)

Consequently, The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS) was implemented under The Teenage Pregnancy Unit (TPU). The TPU was established in 1999 as a cross-departmental unit to implement the SEU's recommendations in The Teenage Pregnancy Report. The Strategy's two main aims were to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy (specifically to halve it by 2010) and to support those who did become teenage parents.

### *Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy*

Three key risk factors for the incidence of teenage pregnancy were identified in the Report; 'mixed messages', 'low expectations' and 'ignorance' (SEU 1999). Mixed messages were argued to stem from the bombardment of young people with sexualised images juxtaposed with relative silence from parents and schools (SEU 1999). The second two factors, however, are most relevant to the arguments made in this thesis. The Report's focus on 'low expectations' was linked to ideas about social exclusion and poverty. That is, young women who experience poverty and social exclusion were more likely to become teenage parents. The SEU (1999:17) argued that "teenage pregnancy is often a cause and a consequence of social exclusion". This point was reiterated by The Independent Advisory Group for Teenage Pregnancy (TPIAG); "...those *most at risk* are young people experiencing poverty and live in areas where there are few employment opportunities." (TPIAG 2002:5 emphasis in original). It was concluded that some young people saw "no reason not to get pregnant" (SEU 1999:7).

Reducing poverty and exclusion appeared at the heart of a number of New Labour policies. This included the introduction of a minimum wage (1999) and Tax Credits (2003). In line with the government's prioritising of education, the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was introduced in 2004. The 'Care to Learn' scheme was rolled out for the 2004/2005 academic year and was specifically aimed at teenage parents. It covered childcare and transport costs whilst teenage mothers continued in education. How far the government went in dealing with social exclusion as a 'cause' of teenage pregnancy is open to criticism however. Duncan (2007) argues that New Labour were not as forceful in challenging the overarching structures of inequalities which were thought to lead to 'low expectations'. Furthermore, teenage pregnancy policy itself has tended to emphasise 'ignorance' and 'mixed messages'

explanations (Arai 2003a). Although, poverty and social exclusion continue to be acknowledged as important causes, the government's response to the initial TPIAG report stated, "Tackling teenage pregnancy is central to the government's work to prevent health inequalities, child poverty and social exclusion" (Bleas 2002:3). Teenage pregnancy continued to be presented as a cause rather than a symptom of poverty.

Focus remained on 'ignorance' issues; "...risk factors...are, ultimately, mediated through sexual activity and contraceptive use" (Every Child Matters 2006:12). 'Ignorance' explanations stemmed from the idea that young people suffered from a lack of knowledge with which to make effective decisions about sex and contraception. As a consequence, preventative teenage pregnancy policies concentrated on the idea of enabling 'better' choices and decisions through information giving. This was achieved by a national campaign including a series of adverts including a national helpline number (Ingham 2005). Improved sex and relationship education (SRE), sexual health services and access to contraception were also key elements (Every Child Matters 1998).

Selman (2001) argues that New Labour's approach was less "virulent" than that of the previous Conservative government. He noted that under John Major there had been "...an orchestration of public hostility towards young single mothers, much of which was focused on their abuse of welfare" (Selman 2001:142). The recognition of structural determinants of social exclusion by New Labour may support Selman's claim. Nevertheless, Tony Blair (1999:4) described teenage mothers as having, "shattered lives and blighted futures". Furthermore, policies focused on changing the motivations of young people which were seen to stem from social exclusion and poverty, rather than changing the circumstances (Arai 2003a). 'Risks' of sexual activity which individuals were responsible for managing were emphasised by policy (Carabine 2007). SRE which focuses on information giving then compounds this sense of personal responsibility. This is particularly problematic given that evidence suggests contraceptive, and particularly condom use, is not straightforward (Hillier et al 1998; Measor 2006).

In addition, contrary to SEU assertions, it has been questioned as to whether ignorance is a significant risk factor for teenage pregnancy (Allen et al 2007). Research conducted with young mothers indicates that, in many cases, substantial knowledge of contraception exists prior to pregnancy (Arai 2003a). Furthermore, it is argued that simply providing information is not an effective method of ensuring safer sex practices. Contemporary work in the area of health promotion argues that knowledge is not the critical issue in relation to sexual behaviour (Coleman 2001; Stone and Ingham 2002; Holland et al. 2004; Mullen and Westwood 2009). Health promotion activities based primarily upon cognitive approaches do not then have significant impacts upon behaviours. Even when armed with knowledge, young people rarely weigh up pros and cons attached to sexual behaviour. Luker (1996) notes that a specific decision to have sex for the first time is seldom taken. Passivity, she suggests, is a better explanation for the approach to sexual relationships. Without acknowledging these issues; “current policy approaches ultimately pathologise early pregnancy and childbearing” (Arai 2003a:202).

This chapter will now go on to examine the second arm of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy; policies designed to support teenage parents.

### *Supporting Teenage Parents*

Although not the only provision offered<sup>4</sup>, support for teenage parents was primarily defined as being to increase the numbers of teenage parents into education, employment or training (EET). This approach fitted into contemporary policy priorities. For example; New Labour’s welfare-to-work agenda and the conceptualisation of employment as a means to tackle child poverty (Innes and Scott 2003). The focus on ‘education education education’ (Blair 1996) and social inclusion are also significant. Tony Blair prefaced a 1999 SEU report on teenaged ‘NEETs’<sup>5</sup> by stating that employment was the “best defence against social exclusion” (Blair 1999:6). Cast in this light, education and employment are presented more than simply being

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<sup>4</sup> For instance the local authority groups in which field work was conducted for this study were formed as part of this support agenda.

<sup>5</sup> Not in education, employment or training.

about knowledge and income. They then become tools to achieve social inclusion, combat poverty and promote citizenship.

Consequently, reducing numbers of NEETs became a key concern for policy regarding young people (Yates and Payne 2006). Increasing participation in EET as part of the support arm of the TPS meant that there was also a more specific focus on NEET young parents. Perhaps unsurprisingly however there was a particular emphasis on the ‘education’ part of EET. The 1999 Teenage Pregnancy Report set out an action plan which included the requirement that parents under sixteen years old should return to education. Sixteen and seventeen year olds were to be given more support and encouragement to return to education or training. Furthermore, various schemes, grants and personnel were put into place in order to support this aim. For example, re-integration officers and Connexions workers were tasked with aiding young mothers into EET, supported by ‘Care-to-Learn’ and EMA. Nonetheless, the 2009 TPIAG report lamented that the number of mothers in EET had only increased by 11% since the strategy began (TPIAG 2009). Consequently, it was suggested that the needs of young parents’ should be considered in order that the agenda could be better implemented.

The rationale for increasing numbers of young mothers in EET came from an aim to; “improve the long-term outcomes for both them and their children” (TPIAG 2009:13). Duncan et al (2010) note that the 2007 report ‘Teenage Parents: The Next Steps’ encapsulates this policy priority;

...there is an insistence on education, training and paid employment as the sole legitimate pathway to social inclusion and to ameliorating the negative effects of young parenthood (Duncan et al 2010:8)

The emphasis on helping rather than judging young parents here can be seen as a relatively improved approach from the previous Conservative government. The provision of opportunities (such as support to re-enter EET) requires recipients to take ‘personal responsibility’ however. That is, young mothers are expected to make the ‘right’ choice and take up these opportunities. There is then still space for judgment. Indeed, Williams (2004) argues that teenage mothers have a requirement of moral responsibility placed on them to

obtain qualifications and skills and enter paid work. This can be seen in the inclusion of young mothers in the NEET category. Yates and Payne (2003) note the negative connotations of the label and argue it is problematic to assume that being NEET is necessarily negative. The authors draw attention to the diversity of young people who end up being labelled as NEET. For example, young people in a temporary transitional stage between school and college or college and employment. Significantly for this research they also noted that a third of NEET young people in their study were taking time out of EET because of parental responsibilities. This, they argue should not be seen as “socially irresponsible or undesirable” (Yates and Payne 2003:336). Nevertheless, defining young mothers as NEET supports assumptions that young parents are ‘doing nothing’ and being rewarded by the welfare state (Yardley 2009). This is part of the overall emphasis on paid work and the labour market as being key to social exclusion. As a consequence motherhood becomes devalued as a social role (Kidger 2004; Alexander et al 2010) and care becomes marginalised (Innes and Scott 2003). As Yardley (2009) points out, focusing on EET as support is not always out of step with the aspirations of young mothers. Research (including this study) suggests that young mothers often express a desire to return to education or employment (Cater and Coleman 2006; Hosie 2007; Duncan 2007; Smith-Battle 2007; Alldred and David 2010). Furthermore, it is arguable that this should be seen as the only or best option for mothers of young children. As Yates and Payne (2003:336) note; “...the choice to devote oneself solely to parenting for a time could arguably actually be seen as a positive choice”.

### *Successes and Failures*

This section concludes by attending briefly to the successes and failures of The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy noted in research conducted elsewhere. The section remains relatively brief and general however. More specific discussions of the effects and outcomes of policies form part of the analysis section of this thesis. Additional literature and research which evaluates and critiques parts of the strategy can also be found in this later chapter.

As has been discussed above, the first arm of the strategy aimed to halve the incidence of teenage pregnancy by 2010. This target was not reached; nonetheless, there have been some

decreases since the strategy was implemented. Ingham (2005) reported that in the first three years of the strategy, the rate of under 18's conceptions fell by 10%. By 2010, the rate of under eighteen conceptions had fallen by 13% (TPIAG 2010). Birth rates to teenagers had also reduced by 25% (TPIAG 2010). Although, Wilkinson et al (2006) point out that falls in teenage births rates were largely due to a rise in abortion ratios. Increases and decreases vary at a local level (TPIAG 2010). Ingham's early examination of the strategy's outcomes found that increases in conception tended to occur in areas of greater deprivation. This would seem to support Duncan (2007) and Arai's (2003) point that overarching social inequalities were not given sufficient emphasis. Nonetheless, the implementation of strategy does appear to have made some inroads here. Wilkinson et al (2006:1885) note that a decline in conceptions; "has been greatest in areas where there has been the greatest strategy-related expenditure per head". This included in more deprived areas (French et al 2007).

Whilst, the overall target of halving conceptions was not met, a number of successes are argued to have been achieved here. For instance, Ingham (2005:64) notes that; "a higher proportion of young people reported that their sex and relationship education had 'fully met' their needs". Allen et al (2007) found that improving communication between young people and their parents was key to reducing teenage pregnancy and improving sexual health. That the strategy has been argued to 'open up' England with regards teenage sexuality (Ingham 2005) can then be considered a positive outcome.

The second aim of the strategy was to provide support for young parents. It has already been noted above that a range of initiatives, funds and professionals were made available for this purpose. Kidger (2004) and Arai (2009a) both applaud these provisions. In particular, as noted by Arai (2009a) the setting up of support groups and enabling increased opportunity in education. Nevertheless, she goes on to say that the aim to; "...promote opportunities for, and offer support to, young mothers, has always played 'second fiddle' to the first aim; a reduction in teenage conception rates" (Arai 2009a:181). This perhaps goes some way to explain why another key government aim was missed. The strategy aimed to get 60% of teenage parents into education, employment or training. As Ingham (2005) points out, however, from 2002-2004 the 'rolling average' was 30% which was only 7% up from 1997-1999 figures. TPIAG

(2009a) reported that the number of teenage mothers in EET rose by 11% since the implementation of the strategy.

Reports on the effects of the strategy on entering EET are mixed with some successes noted, for instance in the Care to Learn Scheme noted in Chapter Two. A review of the impact of the scheme reported 8000 young mothers who benefitted from the scheme in 2008 and 2009 (Young People's Learning Agency 2010). 73% reported they would not have been able to participate without the scheme. The report also found that Care to Learn provided an important stepping stone to further learning and education. A Barnado's report (2010) indicates that the situation for younger teenage mothers is somewhat less positive however. Despite recommendations from the TPU, it was found that pregnant teenagers were being excluded from school. The authors note;

...teenage girls who become pregnant and leave school early form a group of hidden or unofficial exclusions. In some cases...there is evidence that some are encouraged, implicitly or explicitly, to make this choice (Evans and Slowley 2010:11)

As TPIAG (2010:1) concluded, the strategy enjoyed; "significant progress in reducing teenage pregnancy but also missed opportunities and disappointments". Certain sections of the media were more damning in their evaluation however. For example The Times reported; "A ten-year strategy costing millions of pounds to cut the "shameful" number of teenage pregnancies in Britain has failed to make any serious impact" (Bennett and Hurst 2010). Ingham (2005) notes that critiques of the strategy came from two key directions. This was firstly from the moral and religious right in the guise of media reports such as the one above and groups such as Family and Youth Concern. Anxieties included assumptions about 'permissive' sex education which did not teach abstinence and a belief that this amounted to an increase in state involvement at the expense of the family (Family Education Trust 2004). Pro-life campaigners such as Conservative MP Julian Brazier also expressed concern that the rate of teenage births were being cut at the expense of rising teenage abortion rates (Brazier 2004).

The second source of critique according to Ingham (2005) came from academics focusing on the way teenage parenthood was conceptualised by the government. Arai (2009a) argues that a

major negative consequence of the strategy has been the association between social exclusion and teenage pregnancy. Kidger (2004) also noted this issue and its potential effects. She was critical of the idea the underlying assumption of the strategy was that EET presented the only route to social inclusion for teenage mothers. "...By insisting in a conceptualisation of social inclusion that places the onus on the individual...New Labour does not place enough emphasis on the structural and contextual barriers to this" (Kidger 2004:295). The strategy does address some of the barriers to inclusion through initiatives such as Care to Learn. Nevertheless, as Prabhakar (2002:51) notes; "providing individuals with resources places obligations or responsibilities on them to make full use of these opportunities". There is then more scope for teenage mothers to be judged for not taking up opportunities made available to them. Such an approach also leaves no room for full time mothering as a valid option for young women (Kidger 2004). These critiques are addressed further in the data analysis section by examining the way the women in this study interact with policies focused on increasing EET participation.

### **3.5. Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has provided an outline and analysis of government approaches and social policies related to teenage pregnancy and parenthood. It has demonstrated the way in which these have emerged from related 'social problems' such as 'problem families' and unmarried mothers. Together with the previous chapter, this thesis has now provided the framework to understand the 'policy perspective'. This is key in understanding how the policies experienced by the young women in this research have come to be established and the concerns and aims underlying them. The data analysis chapters will build on this to provide an understanding of how policy is experienced and negotiated by teenage mothers. Before turning to the data, the following chapter will detail the methodology and methods used to conduct the research.

## Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods

This chapter outlines the methodological approach, theoretical framework and defines key concepts underlying the research. It also describes the methods used in the research process. The chapter begins with a discussion of the value of using qualitative methods for this project. It then goes on to discuss the theoretical positions taken and defines the key concepts underlying this thesis. Here, the value and limitations of social constructionism and feminism as frameworks are considered. The concepts ‘discourse’ and ‘representation’ as referred to throughout this thesis are also defined and discussed. It is important to emphasise that this thesis draws explicitly on feminist research practices. In particular, the political goals of feminist research (Fonow and Cook 1991), the recognition of the researcher as part of the research process (Acker et al 1980) and the way in which it deals with power in the research setting (Bergen 1993; Finch 1993). Established qualitative research traditions have also informed the methods used here. A period of participant observation was conducted in three young parents’ groups across the South East of England; Minton, Newtown and Pensford. Qualitative interviews were then conducted with 23 young parents. The chapter includes justifications for this approach. A descriptive account is also provided together with reflections on the researcher’s experiences. The chapter concludes with a summary of ethical considerations.

### **4.1. Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research has an established (and often conflicted) history (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Gergan and Gergan 2000; Snape and Spencer 2003). There is not space here to dissect and examine such a complex account of the development. Instead this section will set out the elements of qualitative research I have utilised and the benefits they bring to this study. Quantitative research has traditionally dominated the policy paradigm and official documents relating to teenage pregnancy. Arai (2003a) and Wilson and Huntington (2005) note an absence of research which privileges the ‘voices’ of young parents. It should be noted that

some qualitative research was commissioned by the Labour government however<sup>6</sup>.

Nevertheless, the assertions made in the Teenage Pregnancy Report (1999), for example, are based largely on quantitative research. The Report has subsequently been used to justify a number of policy 'solutions' within the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. The use of quantitative research in this area has been criticised for supporting stigmatised understandings of teenage pregnancy (Graham and McDermott 2005; Wilson and Huntington 2005). There is then an important role for qualitative research in enhancing contemporary understandings of young parenthood.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004) note the interpretive and subjective nature of qualitative research data. These points require some attention. As noted, qualitative research has a long and complex history. That qualitative research is a naturalistic and interpretive approach, is however, a widely held consensus (Snape and Spencer 2003). Bryman (2004) argues that qualitative research takes interpretivism as its epistemological position due to the emphasis placed on participants' interpretations of the world. This research draws on an interpretivist account of qualitative research;

The social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though those subjects were incapable of their own reflections on the social world (Bryman 2004:279).

Attending to the perspectives of young parents in this way places them as experts who 'know' about their own lives. Moreover, it allows different perceptions of their 'decisions' and 'choices' to become known. Current perceptions impact on policy responses to teenage pregnancy. It is, therefore, important that this research prioritises the knowledge and experiences of teenage parents. Qualitative research is ideally placed to enable new or different narratives to emerge. This is due to the prioritisation of the meanings participants attribute to their lives and the ways they make sense of experience (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004; Flick 2009). It is also, however, because qualitative research has the ability to produce rich and detailed data. Bryman (2004:280) notes that this is because qualitative research is

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<sup>6</sup> See for example "Living on the Edge: Sexual Behaviour and Young Parenthood in Rural and Seaside Areas" (LOTE) and "An Exploration of the Teenage Parenting Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Young people in England" (Every Child Matters 2008).

able to 'probe beneath the surface'. Neither quantitative research nor media representations foreground the context of the 'decisions' young parents make. Qualitative research can, however, provide a level of detail needed for the context of behaviours (or decisions) to emerge (Bryman 2004). This is especially important in order to make a challenge to contemporary constructions of teenage parenthood.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004) in particular, refer to the subjective nature of qualitative research. Qualitative research acknowledges the subjectivity of the researcher;

...research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity... (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:6)

It is further acknowledged that an objective reality can never be captured (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) and that affecting the phenomena under study is unavoidable (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). Instead, qualitative researchers highlight their place in the research process through the use of reflexive practices. Gergan and Gergan (2000) argue this demonstrates the researcher's place and personal investment in the research. Reflexivity means the subjectivity of the researcher becomes part of the process of knowledge creation (Flick 2009). Whilst this research stops short of auto-ethnography (Ellis and Bochner 2000), the researcher's reflections are included throughout this research. Reflexive and reflective practices are discussed in more detail in a later section.

Qualitative research has at its disposal a wide range of interpretative practices to gain an in-depth understanding (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004) note that qualitative research is characterised by multi-method approaches. Snape and Spencer (2003) draw on the idea of a toolkit approach in recognising researchers' pragmatic selection of a number of different methods. This research, as noted, has utilised participant observations and a number of qualitative interviews. This is not related to a particular affiliation to any one method. Rather, these methods were judged to be best placed to draw out the in-depth data required. As noted by Flick (2009) it is the context of the study which should determine the method. The interview strategies were, however, largely influenced by pragmatism. A pragmatic approach to methods is not unusual; usage depends on the context (Denzin and

Lincoln 2000). Thus the interviews within this research were variously conducted as focus groups, partner interviews and narrative interviews. This is explored in more detail later on in this chapter. Firstly, this chapter will discuss the theoretical framework and key concepts which underpin this research as a whole.

## **4.2. Theoretical Underpinnings and Key Concepts**

This section outlines the key theoretical approaches and concepts which frame this thesis. The rationale for taking these approaches and the limitations of each are also attended to here. The section starts by addressing the use of a social constructionist analytical perspective in order to understand the ‘problems’ of teenage pregnancy and parenthood. It then goes on to define the related concepts of ‘representation’ and ‘discourse’. The section concludes with a discussion of the feminist positioning of the researcher and the research.

### *Social Constructionism*

Chapter Two of this thesis explored the nuances and debates in research evidence about teenage pregnancy and parenthood. Evidence of positive experiences and outcomes of teenage parenthood were also discussed. These points demonstrated an interesting gap between research evidence and the problematisation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood. It was argued that this may be understood by looking at some of the underlying anxieties behind the ‘problem’. This argument draws on work coming from a number of academics who take a social constructionist perspective. See for example; Murcott 1980; Arney and Bergen 1984; Phoenix 1993; Rhode 1993; Luker 1996; Wong 1997; Hacking 1999; Pillow 2004; Wilson and Huntington 2005; Daguerre and Nativel 2006; Stronach et al 2007; Arai 2009. This thesis adds to this body of work and draws on social constructionist perspectives as a way to understand the problematisation and experiences of teenage motherhood. This section therefore outlines what this theoretical framework brings to the research. The implications and potential limitations of this approach are also acknowledged here.

Social problems are defined as such for a variety of different reasons (Hacking 1999). Taking a social constructionist approach enables an understanding of these reasons to emerge. For instance, by highlighting ‘underlying anxieties’, as has been done in Chapter Two. A deeper understanding can also be achieved by demonstrating the historical specificity of categories, concepts (Burr 1995) and in this case, problems. This social constructionist analytical approach was drawn on in Chapter Three which demonstrated the historical development of the teenage pregnancy ‘problem’. Exploring the emergence of a social problem by looking at historical and contemporary constructions does not establish cause and effect (Pillow 2004). It does, however, enable the social processes by which ‘knowledge’ becomes accepted to be opened up and examined. As noted by Burr (1995:4);

It is through daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated. Therefore social interactions of all kinds and particularly language, is of great interest...

Consequently, alongside policy development, the ways in which discourses and representations of teenage pregnancy and parenthood have changed were noted in Chapter Three. The concepts of representation and discourse are defined and discussed in more detail later in this section.

The use of social constructionist analyses and approaches in this thesis also has an important function in challenging taken-for-granted assumptions and ‘knowledge’ (Burr 1995; Pillow 2004). Whilst particular ‘problems’ may be socially constructed, the consequences are very ‘real’ for those who are being problematised. It is then important to challenge ‘knowledge’ which has the potential to result in stigmatising representations or proscriptive policy responses. Importantly, a social constructionist approach also works to shift the focus from the teenage mother to the, “arena of social and political discourses that construct and define the teenage mother” (Pillow 2004: 3). As Gergen (1999) notes, social constructionist approaches fit into theoretical perspectives which have a mandate to challenge the ‘truth’ and ‘facts’ of the dominant order. As such, taking a social constructionist approach accords with the feminist positioning of the researcher in this research. This will be discussed in more detail later on in

this section. Firstly, however, it must be acknowledged that taking a social constructionist approach is not without problems.

Social constructionist theories have epistemological implications, some of which need to be attended to here. Firstly, social constructionism is anti-essentialist; consequently, meanings rather than an objective reality is the focus of study. Burr (1998) argues that this aspect of the approach is 'liberating' because it enables the possibility of challenge, re-construction, and change. Secondly, social constructionism requires a relativist position to be taken. This too may provide a liberating space. A relativist position can provide a vision of an alternative not readily available from a realist stance (Willig 1998). Despite the potentials of the approach noted here, these epistemological positions are also potentially problematic.

A social constructionist perspective implies that there is no objective reality beyond language and construction. Whilst the invitation to challenge knowledge may have positive outcomes, this also has implications for denying experience. In the context of this research, which seeks to provide voice to young mothers, this can be considered highly problematic. Nonetheless, this thesis does not come from an extreme social constructionist perspective which may denote that reality is entirely dependent on structures of language. Instead, it is accepted here that the idea that experience is *either* socially constructed *or* real is a false dichotomy (Burr 1998). Discourse and the material world cannot be separated; it is the 'assemblage' of these two which constitutes social reality and experience (Brown et al 1998). For example, the experiences related by the teenage mothers in this research are produced by discourses around gender, sexuality and motherhood together with the material world in which the women live in. Including, for instance, the 'reality' of domestic abuse or inadequate housing. By not taking an extreme social constructionist position here, space is left for experience without denying the impact of discourse. This approach is, therefore, pragmatic and liberatory. As Burr (1998:20) notes, "If we accept this unity of discourse and materiality, then it becomes possible to challenge or resist social reality through changes in discursive practice".

In seeking to give voice to alternative discourses and challenge dominant knowledge, it is acknowledged, however, that social constructionism can lead to a slide into relativism. It then

becomes problematic in deciding between competing knowledge claims. This is especially the case when all positions are considered to have legitimacy (Gergen 1999) and validity (Burr 1995). Different viewpoints can then only be assessed in relation to each other. Furthermore, although social constructionism itself does not take this approach, it invites the inevitability of imposing a value judgement on which 'truth' is more valuable (Gergen 1999). Nonetheless, value judgements are also made from realist perspectives (Burr 1995). Burr (1995) further argues that this limitation does not necessarily mean that social constructionism should be rejected as an approach. She draws on Bury (1986) to argue that this issue has never been adequately addressed but that this should not detract from what is otherwise a useful tool. It is argued here that the ability to challenge dominant 'knowledge' and give voice to those who are routinely excluded from knowledge production outweighs concerns about value judgements. Moreover, as is discussed further on in this chapter, the idea that value judgements are unavoidable is neither problematic nor possible.

Epistemology aside, social constructionist approaches to understanding social problems have been argued to be accurate but not useful (Hacking 1999). Furthermore, it has also been noted that there is a tendency for this approach to overemphasise reasons 'behind' an issue, thus obscuring other understandings (Arai 2009). Consequently, Arai (2009:111) notes that it might be more useful to recognise that;

...teenage pregnancy has been constructed as a problem while, at the same time, recognising that it might be a problem but one distorted in everyday representations and magnified out of proportion

This approach is similar to the position taken by the researcher here in that it is acknowledged that teenage mothers do indeed face some very 'real' problems. For instance, the employment and housing issues referred to in Chapter Two. Nonetheless, the idea that this is inextricably linked to their position as *teenage* mothers is challenged. Contrary to Hacking (1999) it is argued here that social constructionist approaches are useful in exposing the context in which young mothers live. This then enables a deeper understanding of the 'decisions' and 'choices' of the women in this research to emerge. Nonetheless, in order for this approach to be useful it is accepted that action must not be limited to deconstructing discourses (Willig 1998). Whilst

deconstruction is important, demonstrating how dominant discourses impact upon teenage mothers (both negatively and by enabling their resistance) is integral to the aims of this research.

As noted above, the social construction of teenage parenthood as a significant social problem relies on particular representations and dominant discourses of teenage parenthood. As these concepts are referred to throughout the thesis it is important to disentangle what is meant by these similar, but distinct, terms. This chapter will now go on to outline these before returning to discuss the theoretical framework of the research by examining the feminist approach taken here.

### *Representations of Teenage Parenthood*

Representations of teenage parenthood (and specifically mothers) discussed within this thesis refers primarily to the ways in which the phenomena is talked about in the main stream media. In particular, this thesis is concerned with negative and stigmatising representations in the language and images used. Other authors have already pointed out the significance of some of the language used to describe teenage pregnancy and parenthood. For instance, the use of the word ‘epidemic’<sup>7</sup> in media reports has been challenged. Luker (1996) described the term as misleading when used to describe the numbers of pregnancies as out of control. Further, Gordon (1997:252) draws attention to the moralising and pathologising tone of the term which positions individuals and society as being ‘at risk’ from transmission. Daguerre and Nativel (2006) also highlight the problematic use of the phrase, “children having children”<sup>8</sup>. This they argue, reflects a moral judgement which denies young parents agency by positioning them as children.

Representations of young parents in the media, particularly those in the right wing press, are not the only explanation for the construction of a teenage pregnancy and parenthood problem.

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<sup>7</sup> See the 2010 Daily Mail article entitled, “We’ll never end our teenage pregnancy epidemic until we admit what’s REALLY causing it” for example.

<sup>8</sup> See David Cameron’s response to the reporting of a 13year boy thought to have fathered a baby with his 14 year old girlfriend (BBC News 2009).

As discussed in Chapter Two, a number of underlying anxieties are implicated in aiding this understanding of teenage pregnancy and parenthood to emerge. Caution should also be expressed in claiming too much power in media representation. Policy formation is not simply a result of media representations of a perceived social problem (Hunter 2003). The relationship between media representation, public reaction and policy responses is complex. Nevertheless, media representations of teenage parenthood should be considered significant. As Arai (2009) points out; “most people’s perceptions of pregnant and parenting teenagers derive *entirely* from media (pg39 emphasis in original). This may go some way to explain some of the negative reactions reported by young parents in this thesis<sup>9</sup>, and elsewhere (see Yardley 2008). Whilst media representations may not directly affect policy formation, they do, however, affect the climate in which policy is made (Hunter 2003). The publics’ reading of teenage pregnancy as a significant social problem is then also likely to be reinforced by policy makers’ reactions to teenage pregnancy and parenthood. That is, both in their policy responses and the language they utilise in discussing the ‘problem’. For instance see Gordon Brown’s key note address at the 2009 Labour Party Conference (emphasis added);

It’s time to address a problem that for too long has gone unspoken, the number of *children having children*. For it cannot be right, for a girl of sixteen, to get pregnant, be *given the keys to a council flat* and be left on her own.

From now on all 16 and 17 year old parents who get support from the taxpayer will be placed in a network of supervised homes. These shared homes will offer not just a roof over their heads, but a new start in life where they *learn responsibility* and how to *raise their children properly*. That’s better for them, better for their babies and better for us all in the long run

The construction of a teenage pregnancy and parenting problem is not, however, solely a product of media and political representations. It is argued in this thesis that there are a number of key discourses which contribute to this understanding, not least, a discourse of teenage parenthood in itself. It is to the concept of discourse that this section shall now turn.

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<sup>9</sup> A number of the women related instances on buses, in shops and on the street where they experienced stigma in the form of looks, laughing and even confrontation. For example one young woman said; “I got on the bus the other day and there was this woman on there ...talking about she thinks young mums are a disgrace and everything and that she wants to join with the social services to get teenage mums to have their kids taken away from them” (Trish 16: Focus Group One).

### *Discourses of Teenage Parenthood*

Within this thesis, discourse is utilised as a concept which incorporates but is not reduced to, language. That is, representations of teenage pregnancy and motherhood discussed above are part of, but not the basis of, discursive constructions of teenage parenthood. Discourse does more than describe a phenomena, it assigns meaning and shapes the way in which we see the world (Duncan 2007). It is a means by which knowledge is constructed and, as a consequence, shapes policy responses as well as representations and experiences of teenage parenthood. This thesis emphasises the concept of discourse because it is a useful tool in understanding the conceptualisation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood as social problems.

The complexity of discourse production and analysis is acknowledged here. Foucault's analytical approach (in particular as meticulously outlined within 'The Archaeology of Knowledge') provides us with a systematic and rigorous means by which to understanding discourse. In one sense, this work can be considered to be the definitive text from which to define discourse and knowledge production. Foucault argues, for instance, that whilst the physical world exists outside of discourse, it is only discourse which can produce knowledge (Foucault 1972). Nonetheless, similar to the approach taken by Kelly (2000) in her work on teenage motherhood, this thesis is informed by a more pragmatic approach to discourse and discourse theory. This is an approach which is also closer to that employed by Foucault in his work after 1972 (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). Consequently, rather than drawing directly from Foucault, this thesis draws on others who have utilised his work in different ways. See particularly, Carol Bacchi 2010), Wanda Pillow (2004) and Vivian Burr (1995; 1998). The two key approaches to discourse followed in this thesis will now be discussed in more detail.

Firstly, discourse limits what can be said or written about a given subject (Bacchi and Eveline 2010) – in this case teenage pregnancy. As Phoenix (1999: 1) notes, "...the idea that 'teenage motherhood' is a social problem is so deeply ingrained in the public consciousness that evidence to the contrary is hard for many people to believe". Discourse is then helpful in explaining the "myth-reality gap" (Arai 2009: 52) and the disjuncture between research evidence and policy responses to teenage pregnancy (Duncan 2007).

Secondly, discourse is an important consideration in this thesis because it is socially produced knowledge. Multiple discourses are available in a given period and these change over time. Some discourses, however, are more dominant than others. "... [T]hese tend to be discourses that are institutionally sanctioned and which reinforce established economic, legal, familial, religious and educational norms" (Bacchi and Eveline 2010:5). This is particularly evident in Chapter Three where the development of the teenage pregnancy 'problem' was examined. Here it becomes evident that as social norms change, so do dominant discourses and the defining of a social problem. We can then see how the 'problem' has shifted from one of illegitimacy and unmarried motherhood to single parenthood and teenage pregnancy. Furthermore, discourses highlighted within this thesis which aid the construction of teenage pregnancy and parenthood as a social problem support this argument. For instance, discourses of 'good' motherhood (Graham and McDermott 2005), female sexuality (Smart 1992), and a social exclusion discourse (Duncan 2007). These discourses have shifted to reflect and reinforce changing societal norms. Relatedly, so has society's understanding of and policy responses to teenage pregnancy and parenthood. Pillow (2004) argues that the discursive climate influences policy directions. "Policy does not develop in a vacuum but is effected by beliefs, values, and attitudes, situated in discourses" (Pillow 2004:9). Discourse, as a concept, is then also useful in understanding changing structural and ideological influences on people's lives (Williams and Popay 1999). This is evident in this thesis in the ways in which the young mothers' 'decisions' come to be shaped by resulting policy practices (see analysis chapters).

Care must be taken, however, not to overstate a causal relationship between discourse, action and reaction. Policy makers do not simply implement discourse neither are people merely discursive constructions (Hunter 2003). Such an understanding of discourse discounts an individual's ability to exercise agency. This is a particular concern for this thesis where young mothers are often denied agency by being spoken about in terms such as those described in the previous section. Accordingly, the ways in which the women in this research draw on, negotiate and resist dominant discourses of teenage parenthood is a reoccurring theme in the analysis chapters. These interactions with discourse are made possible because of a "lack of discursive unity" (Bacchi and Eveline 2010: 6). Multiple discourses therefore allow a space to emerge which enables young mothers to challenge dominant and stigmatising representations

of their lives. Consequently, and as noted above, this thesis approaches discourse from a pragmatic perspective. That is, acknowledging the influence of dominant discourses without discounting the space available, albeit an unequal one, for challenge and a diversity of opinion. These sections have defined and linked the concepts of representation and discourse to help explain the theoretical framework of social constructionism utilised in this thesis. This chapter will now go on to examine the other theoretical frame utilised to understand the experience of teenage motherhood.

### *Feminist Theory*

As well as being informed by social constructionism, this thesis has also been approached from a feminist perspective. It is argued here that this theoretical underpinning is integral in meeting the aims of this research. It is also linked to the identity of the researcher and a desire to challenge and invoke change. Furthermore, it is argued that the approach taken here reflects a personal and academic belief in the continuing relevance and need for feminist analyses and action. These rationales and potential issues with my feminist approach will now be discussed in more detail.

Feminist theory and analytical approaches are an important means by which to meet the research aims discussed in the thesis introduction for two key reasons. Firstly, feminism is primarily concerned with women and gender and this thesis explicitly focuses on these areas. Secondly, this thesis is also implicitly concerned with power; and particularly gendered power. This is in terms of the dominant and powerful discourses which work to construct teenage pregnancy and parenthood as significant social problems. This has consequences for young parents in terms of policy initiatives and public reactions. The concern with power in this thesis also, however, relates to the ways in which gendered power has some very 'real' consequences for the women in this research. For instance, the analysis chapters reveal some of the women's firsthand experiences of domestic violence.

This thesis is therefore grounded in experience. As noted by Kelly et al (1994), whilst not an end in itself, experience is an important starting point for feminist analyses. In this thesis, this

includes my own experiences, (discussed in more detail later on in this chapter) and those of the women who took part in the research process. This foregrounding of experience enables an understanding of the lives and ‘decisions’ of young mothers to become clear. Moreover, it enables counter discourses and alternative ‘stories’ of teenage motherhood to be heard. Challenging the ‘accepted knowledge’ of teenage motherhood fits into the wider feminist aim of opening up areas of silence and naming structures of oppression. This is also linked to my own position as a feminist and personal commitment to social justice.

It is argued here that making a challenge and attempting to effect change is a key element of feminism and an important part of this project. Similar to the approach taken by Ahmed et al (2000), it is the belief of this researcher that feminism should be transformative. Ignoring or downplaying the continuing impact of gendered structures and discourses risks a popularising of individualist explanations for experiences and disadvantage. Furthermore, this can then creep into political ‘solutions’ for perceived social problems such as teenage pregnancy. Cultural silences around women’s ‘issues’ such as unfulfilment in the home (Friedan 1963) or female sexual desire (Fine 1988) have, in the past, kept problems private. Feminist attempts to speak out and name systems of oppression such as patriarchy have opened out these areas for discussion and challenge. It is believed that a feminist approach to this research can play a similar role here for teenage parenthood. This is achieved by naming the discourses and structures which impact on the lives of young mothers and their families.

The focus on tenets of feminism such as ‘the personal is political’ and the emphasis on structures implies an affiliation to areas of feminism traditionally associated with the ‘second wave’ movement. Nevertheless, it is felt that these strategies have a continuing relevance in contemporary society. Whilst positive changes for women cannot be denied, these are often partial and incomplete (Ahmed et al 2000l; Baker 2008). As many of the women’s accounts in the analysis chapters will demonstrate, these changes have not been experienced equally. There is then, still a role for feminism. Nonetheless, “...there are contemporary rhetorics hailing both a ‘backlash’ culture and a ‘post-feminist’ era...” (Ahmed et al 2000: 7/8). Many young women are reluctant to admit to or adopt a feminist position (Lees 1993). It is often assumed that feminism has little or no relevance in contemporary society. This is fuelled by an

assumed crisis of masculinity (see Faludi 1999) and the co-opting of feminist ideals by popular (Aapola et al 2005) and consumerist culture (Harris 2001). These developments can be observed alongside an emergence of ‘new’ forms of feminism such as ‘power feminism’ (Wolf 1994). This, argues Harris (2001), rejects a collective but supposed victimised version of second wave feminism. Instead, power feminism advocates that women see themselves as “strong, sexual, and powerful and should focus on women’s individual strengths” (Harris 2001: 2). The popularity of these ‘new directions’ can be linked to the infusing of feminist ideals into neo-liberal and individualist discourses (Harris 2004; Rich 2005; Baker 2008; Baker 2010). Consequently, young women often draw on discourses of ‘choice’ and individual explanations for issues such as domestic violence (Rich 2005; Baker 2008).

The feminist approach taken in this thesis comes from a shared concern with the issues raised by these authors. Firstly, this is in terms of an overstatement of the extent to which gender inequality has been eradicated and “...the corresponding inattention to its continuation” (Baker 2008: 55). Secondly, there is unease expressed at the ways in which neo-liberal ideals of ‘choice’ mask gender inequalities (Rich 2005). Further, as Harris (2004: xvii) notes, whilst feminism appears to have furnished women with ‘choice’, “...those without economic or social capital are slipping through our ever-widening holes of what remains of our social safety nets”. It is then also of concern that gains in gender equality have not yet reached *all* women. Thirdly, the current fusing of feminism with neo-liberal and individualist ideals is argued to be disempowering. Rich (2005) found that in her research with young female student teachers;

...the individualistic position which to many of these women felt empowering, also had negative implications for how these women came to understand, challenge and resist various forms of gender inequality (Rich 2005: 506)

It is then a concern that we are once again reaching for individual explanations for collective problems. Moreover, that this this “disavowal rather than identification of enduring (and deepening) structural disadvantage... [leads to a]...chilling lack of empathy towards those not able to muster the personal resources to similarly ‘triumph’” (Baker 2008:60).

The analysis of young mother's experiences discussed in the following chapters demonstrates that women's lives are indeed still shaped by gendered discourses and structures. The feminist approach taken here therefore plays an important role in challenging the idea that we are living in an age characterised by empowered young women. Taking a feminist approach is then more than a personal position. It is a theoretical position which enables the naming of oppressive structures as part of a wider challenge to the problematisation of a particular group of young women and their lives. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that this position may present some implications for the ways in which the women's agency is presented in this thesis.

The feminist approaches drawn on here have been critiqued for their over-emphasis on structures of oppression. Naomi Wolf (2004, for example, argues that this represents a form of 'victim feminism'. She argues that encouraging women to think of themselves as victims is unhelpful and alienating. Moreover, Wolf argues that this approach is now obsolete as most women have equality. What women need now is a; "psychology of female power to match their new opportunities" (Wolf 2004: xvi). As has already been discussed however, gains in gender equality have not been experienced equally. Furthermore, as Harris (2001) points out, this is a rather simplistic and stereotypical critique of feminism. Highlighting structure does not necessarily equate to presenting women as victims. "... [T]he radical act of pronouncing oneself victim to systematic inequality does not necessarily amount to a defeatist confession of utter weakness" (Siegal 1997: 76). Emphasising structure need not them be disempowering to the women in this research. As noted above, naming systems of oppression allows them to be challenged. Whereas emphasising individual choice and power as Wolf advocates is not as empowering as would first appear (see Rich 2005). Baker (2009) found that young mothers often emphasises stories of survival and success. Nonetheless, highlighting resilience and self-reliance and ignoring structure can also have punitive social and psychological consequences (Baker 2010).

Nonetheless, a careful path needs to be trodden in order to highlight the structures which influence the lives of the young women without negating their ability to exercise agency. Consequently, care is taken to demonstrate the ways in which the women in this research resist and challenge problematising discourses; in part through the telling of survival stories (Baker 2009). Furthermore, this work also attends to the ways in which they subvert and resist social

policy responses. The sharing of the women's experiences, whilst not an end in itself, therefore provides a starting point for a useful analysis of path to 'becoming' a teenage mother.

This chapter will now go on to discuss the research methods and process starting with a discussion of 'feminist research'.

### **4.3. Feminist Research**

Feminist epistemological debates and critiques have made a significant impact on social research processes (Stanley and Wise 1993). Whilst there is no one feminist method (Harding 1987; Lee 1993; Stanley and Wise 1993; Letherby 2003), some guiding principles of feminist research have been identified and utilised elsewhere (see for example Roseneil 1993). Recognition of principles such as these has formed the epistemological basis of this research. The research process also draws on feminist critiques of methodology and methods. The approach taken in this research has been inspired by feminist work in three key ways. Firstly, political goals of feminist research which take into account the role of gender and, in particular here, women's experiences. Secondly, the recognition of the 'self' as part of knowledge construction and the challenge feminist research makes to objectivity. And thirdly, care for participants through the recognition of power in research relationships. This section will now discuss these aspects in more detail.

Feminist research is described as having an overtly political aim (Fonow and Cook 1991), one of which is to make a change through the production of 'useful' knowledge (Kelly et al 1994) and challenge silences (Letherby 2003). This research is imbued with a desire to make a positive change for young parents, and young mothers in particular. The stigma attached to being a young parent can be highly damaging. It is linked to a number of assumptions relating particularly to the 'decisions' young mothers make as well as their social position. It is an aim of this research that the 'decisions' young mothers made are cast in a different light. In this way, it is hoped, the research will add to the disruption of the negative constructions of 'teenage parenthood'.

Fonow and Cook (1991) refer to a feminist research aim of 'liberation'. The authors discuss the idea that feminist research emphasises the power of women in their everyday resistance. In order to uncover such resistances, everyday experience is a key focus for research. It is integral in the notion of 'the personal is political' (Roseneil 1993). It is therefore legitimate to look at what could be considered 'mundane' features of everyday life (Fonow and Cook 1991). This research takes into account some of the 'everyday' decisions of young mothers. This focus on experience enables an account of resistance and power to emerge.

The overtly political aspects of research can lead to criticisms regarding the subjectivity of the research (Roseneil 1993). This is because 'objective' research has traditionally been seen as more 'valid' (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Feminist research is useful here in highlighting the spuriousness of this claim. The established tenets of qualitative research in acknowledging the subjective nature of research has already been outlined above. The claim that a researcher can and should be a 'neutral observer' is also challenged by feminists (Acker, Barry et al. 1983). It is pointed out that researchers' assumptions and politics play a part in all research; subjectivity is not limited to qualitative feminist research. Feminist research does, however, make potential biases explicit. The openness of feminist research practices can make the data more honest and allows for scrutiny (Maynard 1994). This may be particularly relevant here given my own experience of having been a teenage mother. As Letherby (2002) argues, acknowledging the personal biography of the researcher is a valuable part of reflexivity. It enables the readers and respondents to make their own interpretation of the motivations and approach of the researcher. This will be returned to further on in this chapter.

The third strand of feminist thought which has been drawn on is the approach to methods. Feminists have critiqued the hierarchy in research relationships (Oakley 1981). Feminist researchers acknowledge the importance of recognising participants as subjects rather than objects. Acker et al (1983) argue that this aids in guarding against the research relationship becoming an exploitative one. Nevertheless, England argues;

...the research relationship is inherently hierarchical; that it is simply part and parcel of the (conflicted) role of the researcher...reflexivity alone cannot dissolve this tension. (England 1994:88)

It may be the case that social research, through analysis and generalisation, will always objectify participants to a certain extent (Acker et al 1983). This does not mean, however, that attempts should not be made to equalise the research relationship. Researchers such as Finch (1993) and Bergen (1993) utilise strategies such as reciprocity and self-disclosure to try and reduce inequalities. Other approaches stress the significance of answering participants' questions and/or openness about personal experience (Oakley 1981; Edwards 1993; Finch 1993; England 1994).

Placing the researcher and her experiences at the heart of the research means participants are no longer placed as an object of scrutiny and can reduce objectification (Acker et al 1983). The limitation of this approach in addressing any power imbalance needs to be acknowledged, however. The researcher ultimately retains control in terms of analysis, decisions on what to include and publication (England 1994). In addition, such an approach can lead to ethical difficulties. A relationship which is more personal than traditional research relationships may increase the vulnerability of participants. Finch (1993) found her participants demanded few assurances about confidentiality and her intentions. She notes that the wealth of data gathered on the basis of shared experiences leave the women open to exploitation. There is a fear that reciprocity can be used as a technique to elicit information rather than as a tool to improve the exploitative nature of research (Wise 1987 cited in Lee 1993). This approach must therefore be used in conjunction with the ethical foundations of the feminist epistemology on which they are based (Lee 1993).

#### **4.4. Methods**

Qualitative research practice and feminist debates have influenced the selection of methods for this research. Participant observation and qualitative interviewing were felt to be ideal methods to foreground the experiences and narratives of young parents. The detail which these methods elicit attends to the desire to place the 'personal as political'. Moreover, feminist critiques of methods can be attended to here. The methods offer an opportunity for rapport, relationship building and reciprocity. It is the case, however, that both methods are important

in their own right as well established methods of data collection. This section will outline the role of these methods in the research process and limitations.

### *Participant Observation*

Denzin defines participant observation as a field strategy which includes "...interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation and introspection" (1989:158). It is recognised however, that these elements can also be applied to ethnography. The use of 'ethnography' as a term is more often used (Bryman 2004; Flick 2009). Although the terms are considered to be synonymous (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983; Delamont 2004) the use of participant observation here is deliberate. Bryman (2004) notes that ethnography has additional meanings. He argues that ethnography refers to both the method and the written product of the research. Participant observation is used as a specific method as part of ethnography but is not ethnography in itself (Delamont 2004). There are, nevertheless, sufficient similarities between the terms in order to draw from existing ethnographic literature and studies.

The observational period of this research strategy has been defined as 'participant observation'. It is, however noted that there are different conceptions of observation techniques and the observer's role (Flick 2009). Attempts have been made to identify a 'scale' of participation to try and define the researcher's role. Gold (1958) identified the categories of the 'complete participant', 'participant as observer', 'observer as participant' and the 'complete observer'. The researcher in this case fits most easily into the definition of the 'participant as observer'. In this setting, participants are aware of the researcher's role but there is opportunity for the development of relationships and for participation. This is similar to Spradley's definition of an 'active participant' (Spradley 1980:60).

A strict definition of involvement in the research field may not be helpful however. Flexibility is an important element of participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983; Bryman 2004). The participation of researchers may vary at different stages of the research. Participation also may not mean participating in the strictest sense (Delamont 2004).

Delamont argues that it can mean ‘helping’ or interacting with participants in the field. It is not always feasible for participant observers to share some or all of the activities of the group under study (Spradley 1980). For example, my participation in the field was more as a group leader/helper than a young parent. Details and reflections of the participatory practices of this stage in the research are discussed later in this chapter.

Participant observation is well established as a method which generates thick description (Denzin 1989). It provides in-depth understanding of a phenomena and facilitates the development of new insights (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note that the value of such work is most obvious in its capacity for the development of theory. This research aims to develop new understandings of teenage pregnancy and challenge misconceptions. Participant observation is then an ideal tool to achieve this goal. It has the capacity to;

...depict the activities and perspectives of actors in ways which challenge the dangerous misleading preconceptions that social scientists often bring to research... (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:23)

Flick (2009) notes that interviewing provides access to participants’ narrative accounts of practices. Participant observation builds on these narratives to allow for firsthand understandings (Silverman 2005). Participant observation is then important as part of a mixed method approach. The practices of participants, although expressed in their narratives, can be further understood through observations (Flick 2009). Observations allow the ‘mundane’ and the ‘everyday’ to become objects of study (Silverman 2005). Young parents’ discussions of parental practices could at first glance be thought of as mundane. It was these discussions, however, which allowed the researcher to see how they lived the narratives they shared with me. Talks about weaning, sleepless nights, relationships and wranglings with council housing departments were all significant. They enabled the ‘lived reality’ of young parents ‘decisions’ and ‘choices’ to become known. Flick notes that participant observation “comes closest to a conception of qualitative research as a process” (2009:231).

Burgess (1982:107) notes that 'conversation is a crucial element of field research'. Burgess notes that such conversations require an element of forethought to avoid descent in gossip and generalisation. The researcher in this case took an approach referred to as 'conversation with a purpose' (Webb and Webb (1932) cited in Burgess 1982:107). Consequently, conversations during periods of observation formed a vital part of data collection. It did however, also serve another purpose. Participant observation offers the possibility for relationships and rapport to be built between the researcher and participants (Bernard 1988; Pearson 1993). Interactions between the researcher and the young parents were key in this respect. In addition, they were used to enhance the more formal interviews which followed participant observation. Informal conversations allowed insights into experiences to develop. These were then used to sensitise the researcher to issues and questions which were relevant to individual participants (Bernard 1988; Kawulich 2005).

Whilst it has been acknowledged here that participant observation has many advantages as a method, it is also important to highlight potential problems with the approach. Some of the classic problems associated with ethnography are not as relevant to this research. For instance, Bryman (2004) notes the stresses associated with 'managing a front' and absence from the researcher's own life. The possibility of 'going native' is also noted by Gold (1958). The length of time spent in the field, however, reduces the likelihood of these issues. The researcher attended three young parents' groups a week. The total length of time in the field was six hours a week. It is, however, important to attend to some of the aspects of 'going native'. The relationship which develops during participant observation may be a difficult one to walk away from for the researcher (Gold 1958; Bryman 2004). The extent to which I identified with participants and became attached to the field is examined in a later section.

Participant observation functioned as a method in its own right to elicit deep understandings needed to meet the aims of this research. It also, however, worked as a forerunner to a number of qualitative interviews. These approaches will now be discussed in more detail.

### *Qualitative Interviewing*

The term qualitative interviewing encapsulates a number of different interview types (Bryman 2004). In the case of this research, three types of interview were conducted. At the outset of the research two focus groups took place. These worked to generate data but additionally functioned as a space to co-construct an interview guide. Further interviews were sought on a one-to-one basis. However, in response to the needs and priorities of the participants, two interviews included their partners. A further two interviews were conducted with more than one parent at a time. The processes of these interviews are discussed in more detail further into this chapter. This section will, however, address the significance and limitations of the interview methods used.

Qualitative interviewing allows the aims of this thesis in placing young parent's thoughts and experiences at the centre of this research to be realised. Young people in general and young parents in particular are relatively powerless. In-depth qualitative interviewing can be a useful tool in challenging power imbalances (Corbin and Morse 2003). "The emphasis must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events" (Bryman 2004:321). It is a method which acknowledges participants as experts in their own lives (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). Qualitative interviewing allows for young parents to reveal issues which are most important to them. Participants' tangents and transgressions from an interview schedule are therefore considered beneficial (Bryman 2004). As Measor (1985) notes, this allows participants to introduce data which is most central to them. This desire to 'get at' the data most relevant to participants led to a consideration of narrative and biographical approaches to interviews.

A number of different interrelated terms and methods are associated with biographical approaches (Denzin 1989; Bryman 2004; Flick 2009). These all have value in their own right. The interviewing technique used here, however, has drawn on these approaches rather than seeking to replicate one in particular. The researcher has taken what Measor (1985:68) has referred to as a 'general tactic' to get an ordered chronological account of biography. It should be noted that use of this method has remained at the level of the interview. The influence of

these methods did not extend to the in-depth psychoanalytic method utilised by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). The use of psychoanalytic theory can result in the use of individualistic psychopathologised explanations (Hepburn 2003). Moreover this approach can exclude the study of experience (Benwell and Elizabeth 2006). This would undermine one of the fundamental principles of this research in recognising young people's ability to 'know' about their own lives.

The interviews focused on the period surrounding participants' decisions relating to their 'becoming' a young parent. Focusing on a 'life story' in this way draws out "...relevant objective details and subjective experiences" (Denzin 1989:185/6). Moreover, this method "allows the interviewees' perspectives and subjective relevances to become apparent" (Rosenthal 2004:62). This allows for understandings of experiences from the perspective of participants to emerge (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). Biographies were elicited with the use of narrative interviewing techniques. The use of narrative is particularly useful here. Elliott (2005) argues that narrative interviewing can help to redress power differentials inherent in research. The participant has more freedom with which to set the agenda. Narrative can also provide evidence about everyday lives and the meanings participants attach to experience (Elliott 2005). This method not only then provides rich and interesting data (Flick 2009) but also fits into the research principles and aims outlined above.

Bryman (2004) discusses the 'life history method' associated with unstructured interviews. This calls upon the participant to produce a narrative of their life. This research focuses on specific points of participants' lives which includes 'decision making' relevant to their becoming a young parent. The life history method was, therefore, considered to have too broad a focus. Nevertheless, it is recognised that life events and experiences outside of the period of interest may be relevant for subsequent 'decisions'. It is the case, however, that such influences can also emerge from narrative interviews which focus on a more specific time frame. Flick (2009) notes that background detail has to be provided by the interviewee in order to give the narrative context. Flick argues that this level of detail may not emerge with a standard interview format.

Despite the potential narrative interviewing and biographical approaches bring, there are some potential problems. Flick (2009) notes that some participants can find the process of recounting a narrative difficult. It has been found in this research, however, that many of the participants responded well to the initial prompt. Those who were not so forthcoming were encouraged by questions informed by the interview guide. As noted, narrative and biographical accounts have been used as an 'influence' rather than adhering to strict guidelines. That some interviews were conducted in a more standardised manner is then less problematic.

Concerns such as memory loss and distortion can be applied to the recalling of a narrative (Bryman 2004). This criticism can also be levied at other qualitative interviewing techniques however. The idea of 'distortion' requires then some attention. Narrative interviews are recognised as being a construction, or reconstruction of events (Mishler 1986; Silverman 2005). Given the stigmatised nature of teenage parenthood, young parents may construct, or reconstruct, a more 'palatable' narrative. It is the case however, that there is value in such 'constructions' (Silverman 2005). Silverman draws on Baruch (1982) to make the point that the interview can enlighten us as to the functions behind participants' constructions. This thesis has made note of the socially constructed nature of teenage pregnancy. It is then of interest to uncover some of the 'realities' of young parents' lives to challenge these constructions. It is also of use, however, to understand the way in which young parents perceive and construct the world which they inhabit. Narrative interviewing is a useful tool here to focus on interpretations and meanings participants' make of their lives (Elliott 2005). Taking this approach produces more 'human' accounts; "...Baruch reveals that human subjects actively participate in the construction of social and psychological realities" (Silverman 2005:107).

Despite the advantages of focusing on narrative in interviews, this process was not followed in the same way for a number of interviews. Four group interviews were conducted and two couple interviews. The format of these interviews did not allow for narratives to be drawn out in the same way as with one-to-one interviews. Nevertheless, group interviews have value as a research method in their own right.

It is acknowledged that there is a difference between focus groups and group interviews. Frey and Fontana's (1991) typology indicates that the focus group is one interview type amongst many group interviews. It is then important to clarify the method used here. The two group interviews conducted at the outset of the research can be described as 'focus groups'. The group was presented with specific themes which were then discussed. The purpose of these interviews was more exploratory (Frey and Fontana 1991). Subsequent interviews which included more than one young mum at a time, however, may be better described as 'group interviews'. Here, the format was more akin to individuals being interviewed simultaneously. Bryman (2004) notes however, that the distinctions are rarely clear cut. It is indeed the case that these general descriptions are helpful. Nevertheless, in practice both types of interview also contained elements of the other.

Despite minor differences between the group interviews, the advantages of this method of interviewing are similar. Group interviewing can (and did) elicit a substantial amount of data (Bryman 2004). Multiple opinions can be brought together with points of agreement and divergence clarified (Denzin 1989). It can also be a method which grants participants more power. In a group setting participants can both question and talk to each other (Morgan 2004). They are then more able to bring out topics more salient to them. It must be noted however, that there is a possibility for group dynamics to have a negative impact on the generated data (Frey and Fontana 1991). Bryman (2004) notes that group interviews may be more likely to produce agreement than individual interviews. Care must then be taken to ensure dominant characters and groups do not silence other members (Flick 2009). It is the case, however, that group dynamics can be observed here (Frey and Fontana 1991; Morgan 2004). It is then possible for the researcher to ascertain whether agreement has emerged from group dynamics.

The two focus group interviews conducted at the outset of interviewing functioned as sites of data collection. They additionally provided some focus and insights for subsequent interviews. Focus groups are recognised as a useful context for the researcher to 'float ideas' (Frey and Fontana 1991). Collaborating in this way can improve the quality of the research (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995). This process provided the young parents with the opportunity to highlight areas which may be missed by the researcher. The young parents were also given the

opportunity to co-construct an interview guide. Asking young people to design questions can mean that more relevant information is gathered (Alderson 2000). Involving young people in the research in such a way can provide some emotional and personal benefit (Sinclair and Franklin 2000). Care must be taken, however, not to overstate such a benefit. Only three parents were involved in this stage of the research.

Two couple interviews or 'joint interviews' were used as a pragmatic reaction to the presence of a partner in the interview setting. It was felt that it was of more use to engage the partner and expand on the data than to attempt to preserve the original plan. It has been noted that young men and particularly young fathers are difficult to engage in research (Thompson and Crase 2004; Cater and Coleman 2006). Moreover, there is relatively little focus on the role of men in teenage pregnancy and parenthood. The fathers' accounts are only a small segment of the whole sample. Nevertheless, it is beneficial to the understanding of men's roles in teenage pregnancy to include them here.

Despite the ad hoc nature of the use of couple interviews, there is sufficient history of the use of this method to demonstrate their advantage here. Joint interviews have often been used as part of a mixed method approach to interviewing since the 1970's (Arksey 1996). They can produce a fuller account as the pair help each other to fill in gaps (Morris 2001). Moreover, interviewing the couple together can offer insights into interactions between the couple (Pahl 1989). It is then also possible to observe power imbalances. Jordan et al (1992:63) found that some of the men could be 'overbearing'. They additionally note that the women tended to be quieter in the joint interview than they had been individually. Gendered power differentials may then be particularly influential in silencing women in this setting. The young women acted as the main informant during the interviews. It must be noted however, that the degree to which the presence of their partner altered their 'narrative' cannot confidently be ascertained. Joint interviews means the participants are representing themselves as a couple rather than as individuals (Morris 2001). They may then attempt (consciously or otherwise) to construct decisions as having been reached through a joint process (Jordan et al 1992). The joint interview can be; "...an occasion for the development of consensus for the presentation of a unified front" (Pahl 1989:80). This is not to say, however, that a co-constructed narrative is

invalidated. Time spent conducting participant observation is useful here in helping the researcher navigate the couple's narrative. Morris (2001) notes that all data is context dependent, she argues that the functions and consequences of a joint account are interesting in their own right.

#### **4.5. Reflexivity and 'Insider' Research**

As noted above, reflexivity is an important tool for feminist research. It is not, however, an exclusive feminist tool (Letherby 2002). For instance, Gilgun (2008) notes the influence of the Chicago School on her approach to reflexivity. Nonetheless, reflexive practices are linked to the feminist recognition that researchers and their experiences are also a key part of the research. As Gilgun (2008: 184) notes;

...researchers are reflexive when they examine and take into account the multiple influences they have on research processes and how research processes affect them and the persons and situations they research (Gilgun 2008:184).

Throughout participant observation extensive notes were made of the data gathered. This included personal reflections on the researcher's position and feelings. Interviews were transcribed including similar notes. This enabled the effect of the researcher on the data and vice versa to become visible and allowed for reflexive practice. This chapter includes these reflections and the 'surprises and undoings' (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Gergan and Gergan 2000) within the commentary on the research practice. This section, then, specifically deals with the ways in which I, as a researcher, and my experiences, as a teenage mother, impacted on the research. Furthermore, it also addresses the ways in which the research impacted on me.

As will be illustrated throughout this chapter, I often shared my experiences with participants. The readiness with which I share these as part of an academic critical reflection has, however, not been easy. Without a pseudonym to hide behind, exposing 'the self' can be a difficult and painful process. Negotiating reflective practices whilst maintaining a sense of privacy is acknowledged to be a difficult process;

When it comes to practice, the process of engaging in reflexivity is perilous, full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails...How much personal detail can be disclosed and what forms can it take? How are researchers to represent a multiplicity of voices while not hiding themselves...Researchers have to negotiate the 'swamp' of interminable self analysis and self disclosure (Finlay 2002:212)

Reflexive practises are particularly important in the case of this study given my experiences of having been a teenage parent. As such, I could be defined as an 'insider researcher'. This is, however, a contentious claim and will now be explored.

Griffiths (1998:361) provides a useful definition of an 'insider'; "... someone whose biography (gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on) gives her a lived familiarity with the group being researched..." My own history of having had a child as a teenager can be argued to locate me as an 'insider'. This was the position I started out with when commencing the research. As time passed however, I began to realise that this status was more relevant to group leaders, academics and to me than the young mums<sup>10</sup>.

Prior to starting field work there was a great deal of discussion about what my 'insider' status might mean for the research. This thinking was reinforced by the leaders of the young mums groups at an early stage of field work. An insider status can be useful in gaining access to the research group (Mercer 2007). This was borne out in the research process. The 'gatekeepers' recognition of me as a 'teenage parent' was key to my being allowed to conduct research at the Minton site. Previously, they had been reluctant to let researchers have access. My personal history, however, reassured them that I would do justice to the stories of the young parents. The leaders also drew on my experiences as a teaching aide. At one research site I spent some time sitting in on a young parents' ante-natal group. The group leader often brought older young mums into the group to talk about their experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and parenting. I was utilised by the leader in much the same way. I was also asked to discuss how I returned to complete my education (field notes 12.09.08). In a later session on childbirth, my personal experiences were called upon by the midwife in charge. I was

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<sup>10</sup> Although the term 'mum' can be seen as somewhat 'un-academic', the term is used throughout this chapter. The women refer to themselves as 'mums' and after asking how they would prefer to be known, they chose this rather than 'mothers'.

asked to reflect upon my experience of pregnancy and birth as a young mother (field notes 19.09.08). These incidents added to my identification as an ‘insider’.

My own strong feelings about my identity meant I had assumed others would also see me as an insider. As expanded on below in my reflections on fieldwork, I still self-identify as a teenage parent. For the early years of my daughter’s life, being a ‘teenage mum’ was a dominant feature of my identity. This was a label I interpreted as negative and stigmatising. Attempting to reject this identity influenced the clothes I wore, the way I parented and my interactions with others. The pervasiveness with which this label permeated my being has not been easily cast aside with age. My continuing identification as a ‘teenage parent’ has been reinforced by the reactions of others. To this day, when people learn the age of my daughter, I am questioned about being a ‘teenage parent’. It is clear that others still see this event as a formative part of my identity.

Nevertheless, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) note that the researcher and the researched may disagree on what is a ‘shared identity’. As noted above, it became clear to me that this was the case here. There were instances in the research where I felt I was connecting with the parents on the basis of my status as a teenage parent. For example during my interview with Nancy (16)<sup>11</sup>;

*Nancy: Can I ask you a personal question?*

*Kyla: Yeah go on*

*Nancy: Since you’ve had your child and split up with him, have you met any serious partners since...See, I feel really lonely that’s the only thing now...I’ve got my friends and everything but I need a cuddle, a bit of attention*

I initially thought that Nancy was drawing on my experience of having been a young parent. After noting this I returned to the interview transcript for more detail;

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<sup>11</sup> Pseudonyms have been used throughout this, and subsequent chapters. Age tags refer to the age at which the women gave birth to their first child.

*Sister<sup>12</sup>: So have you got a daughter now as well?*

*Kyla: Yeah I've got a ten year old, nearly eleven. I had her when I was eighteen.*

*Nancy: At least you were a bit older.*

*Kyla: Yeah, I was the family scandal though!*

*Nancy: At least you were a bit older though.*

*Kyla: Yeah, I had done my GCSE's. I flunked out of college though, it was just before I took my A levels and I failed them.*

*Nancy: At least you done those, I didn't get to do them.*

*Kyla: Yeah, well no because I failed them*

The above excerpt shows Nancy rejecting my experience of being a teenage parent. Nancy had been sixteen when she had her daughter. For her, my having been eighteen was not the same. The extract also demonstrates how I was trying to hold onto my identity as a teenage parent. In retrospect, this illustrates the significance I, rather than Nancy, gave to being an insider. Having made this recognition I returned to the data and could find no overt incidence where I was viewed as an 'insider' by the participants.

Hockey (1993) notes that there may be key aspects of the self which may mean 'insider' researchers may only be researchers in some respects. My relative age, educational and professional status is not shared by the participants. Mohammed found that some aspects of her identity made her more 'outsider' than 'insider' in the eyes of her participants. This was despite her shared identity as a Pakistani woman (Mohammed 2001). Whilst I cannot claim to be an 'insider' there are experiences I have shared with the young mums. For example, my experience as having been a single parent can be seen to have been relevant to Nancy. It is therefore more appropriate to discuss the idea of 'shared biographies'. Discussing 'shared biographies' does not limit experiences to those related to being a teenage mother. Similarly it allows for the very different experiences I have had to many of the research participants.

It must be acknowledged that 'shared biographies' may be considered problematic. Criticisms levied at 'insider' research may also have implications for this research. That is, the researcher

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<sup>12</sup> Nancy's sister was present for part of the interview

may bring ‘a priori’ knowledge (Hockey 1993; Le Gallais 2003). Le Gallais argues there is a “clear danger...the insider researcher will approach situations with assumptions and preconceptions of the home group” (Le Gallais 2003:3). It should, however, be noted that ‘outsider’ researchers are not immune to ‘preconceptions’. This may be especially the case with such a high profile topic as teenage pregnancy and parenthood. Le Gallais (2003) also argues that an ‘insider’ status can mean that objectivity is lost. It can be argued, however, that being an ‘outsider’ researcher does not necessarily confer objectivity. In addition, as discussed above, it is arguable whether objectivity is possible or even desirable. Reflexivity is then additionally important in monitoring and highlighting the impact of the researcher’s position here.

Particular aspects of a ‘shared biography’ have been helpful to the rapport and relationships I have built up with the young women. My identities as a mother, a woman and as being relatively ‘young’ were meaningful to the participants. My experiences as a mother (separate to being a ‘teenage mother’) were called upon many times. My advice was sought on many occasions, as were my ‘skills’ in holding, feeding and entertaining children. This is expanded upon in the accounts of fieldwork below. My position as a woman was particularly important. In the first instance, I was told I would not have been permitted access to the Newtown and Pensford groups had I been male. My gender also aided identification and rapport in conversations and interviews. Building rapport on this basis has been noted by Finch (1993). Wise (1987 cited in Lee 1993), conversely argues that mutual understanding cannot be assumed solely on the basis of gender. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how my being female could not have been helpful. For instance; it was particularly important in discussions during participant observation on gender roles and housework divisions (field notes 26.02.09). My age was also significant. Whilst conducting fieldwork I was still in my twenties. Although this is a gap of around ten years, it was in a bracket which allowed many shared references. Clothes, pubs, clubs and music all formed a familiar basis for conversation. Rachel sums this up succinctly;

*...you’re quite an easy person to talk to because you’re like young and you seem closer to us rather than if we had to talk to some old bag (Focus Group Two)*

‘Shared biographies’ are important in that they can engender unique understandings to emerge.

...having experienced activities, motivations, feelings and affiliations that are liable, at least, to be comparable with those of many respondents, they have a significant extra pool of material with which to compare and contrast what they see and hear during the research process (Hodkinson 2005:143)

My experiences allowed me to recognise and identify some of the feelings of the participants. There was a familiar sense of 'othering' and defensiveness in many of the mums' descriptions of certain events in their lives. In addition, I could see some of the mothering practices they engaged in to try and dismiss claims of poor parenting. This reaction to a stigmatising label was something I too had acted out in the past. The recognition of myself in their actions also led me to reassure them by acknowledging their parenting skills.

I cannot tell whether I would have understood their behaviour (or reacted in the way I did) without my own experience. I suspect not however. My involvement beyond that of a researcher indicates the identification I felt with many of the young mums. Throughout the research I have found myself increasingly caring about the lives of the mums and their children. My experiences may have been valuable for the research process but they have also been personally challenging. Researching an area so close to my own past has been painful at times. I found that reflecting on participants' decisions caused me to reopen feelings about my own past decisions;

Through encounters and experiences in the field, a researcher may also reflect on their own lives and personal situations which, in turn, may induce feelings about their own sense of self (Hubbard et al 2001:121).

Prior to starting the research, I had been made aware that qualitative research in such a personal area may be challenging. Nevertheless, I underestimated the impact that some of the women's stories would have on me. During fieldwork, two young women had their young children removed by social services. One of these cases resulted in a suicide attempt. The distress this caused to the young women involved is almost unimaginable. As a researcher, being a powerless observer was extremely upsetting. Emotional reactions of the researcher are not, however, uncommon (Hubbard et al 2001; Rager 2005; Gilgun 2008; Sampson et al 2008). In addition, I was unprepared for the extent to which the research would prompt me to re-

evaluate my own past. Nothing in my own experience came close to the horror of having my child taken. Nevertheless, I began to revisit painful memories of becoming pregnant at 18. Reflexive accounts such as those by Rager (2005) and Gilgun (2008) helped to allay feelings of weakness. Literature which opens up the research process provided a less sanitised version which fitted more closely with my own feelings and internal debates.

There were also, however, instances where I shared positive emotional experiences with the parents. During fieldwork one young mum had her child taken off the 'at risk' register and was able to start her life on her own. Two young women were accepted into college; one got engaged and another gave birth to her second child. One instance, however, remains particularly salient to me. Kelly had had her baby taken into care at a very young age. She had little time to adjust to being a mum and possibly as a result, appeared somewhat lost. She was allowed supervised access for a couple of hours a day and some of this took place at Minton. The access supervisor and the workers at Minton were not there to scrutinise Kelly. They would, however, be consulted when the decision had to be made whether to return the baby or not. As a consequence Kelly was parenting under the gaze of professionals with considerable power. Kelly's reaction to this was to show that she was a 'good' parent in the best way she knew how. She had begun to rely on a disciplinarian method of parenting. Observing this behaviour, however, I felt that Kelly was not enjoying this role but felt unable to assume another one. I started a game of 'boo' with Kelly's daughter and encouraged her to 'boo' at her mum. When Kelly started to play, seeing her obvious pleasure was heart-warming to say the least.

The emotional reactions and involvement of the researcher is often discussed as though this is something to be guarded against. For instance, it is assumed that this could lead to the researcher losing their objectivity (Fontana and Frey 1994). The problems with claims to objectivity have already been noted in this chapter. It can further be argued that researcher's emotional reactions to their topic or their participants do not necessarily hinder the research process. Sentiment and emotions are often denigrated by society and seen as inferior to cognition, intellect or rational thought (Hochschild 1975). Similarly, positivistic approaches to research have tended to advocate emotion-free research (Hubbard et al 2001). In contrast;

“...the emotional labour of a researcher is undervalued and at worst, ignored altogether” (Hubbard et al 2001:122). Feminist and interpretivist approaches have sought to unpack these claims and there is a growing acknowledgment of what emotions can ‘bring’ to the research process. A growing number of researchers now recognise the ways in which their emotional responses to participants and data can help them to get to ‘know’ the world which they are studying (Hubbard et al 2001). As seen above, my own emotional reaction to my observations of Kelly (and others) prompted me to ‘get involved’ at times. This may be read, by some, as an indication of a lack of objectivity. I believe, however, that my reaction and involvement helped me to understand Kelly and her experiences of parenting more. Moreover, it has enabled me to share with the reader the Kelly’s emotions and interactions with the expectations of those around her.

#### **4.6. Research Design**

As noted earlier, the research took a mixed method approach. This comprised participant observation at three young parents groups and a variety of different interview strategies. These are discussed in more detail below.

##### *The sample*

The sample was taken from three different young parents’ groups across the South of England. Two were accessed through a personal acquaintance who works as a Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officer. She was able to put me in contact with a Project Leader for Young Parents, Sara, who ran two Local Authority (LA) groups in separate towns. Throughout the thesis, the pseudonyms of ‘Newtown Young Mums’ and ‘Pensford Young Mums’ have been used. After visiting the leader of these groups I was given permission to conduct the research with their groups subject to ethical approval and the agreement of the mums themselves. The third group consisted of a charity run group funded largely by Children in Need. This group consists of two parts; an ante-natal group and a post-natal group. Contact was established here through an internet search for local groups. I was granted permission to research in the group following a meeting with the group’s founder, Muriel. Time was spent

mainly with the post-natal group although some sessions were spent with the ante-natal group. For the purposes of this research, this group has been given the pseudonym, 'Minton Post-Natal Group'. Again, permission was also dependent on the approval of the mums and the University ethics committee.

Whilst securing access to the participant groups, discussions with the two key leaders expressed that they felt there was a need for this research. The Project Leader for Young Parents stated that she had observed the prevalence of outside influences on young parents' decisions. She felt that this impacted on their inability to make 'real' choices'. She noted the importance in gaining an understanding of these influences. This, she said, would assist her to help young mums improve their ability to make autonomous decisions for themselves and their children. This was echoed by the founder of Minton. She felt that a fuller understanding would be useful for her work which involves building self-esteem and increasing the power young mothers have in their own lives.

As can be seen from the above the sampling method used has been 'purposive'. Participants were included deliberately according to key criterion (Ritchie et al 2003). The key criterion in this case was the participant having had their first child under the age of twenty. It should however, be noted that participants were selected from research sites which were accessible to the researcher. This beginning stage of sampling is then also akin to 'convenience' sampling (Marshall and Rossman 2006). There now follows a discussion of the characteristics of the sample.

### *The Participants*

The Local Authority groups (Newtown and Pensford) consisted of approximately 8-12 mums per session. The composition and attendance throughout my time with them. Newtown Young Mums included mums up to the age of twenty-three; however only those who had given birth to their first child aged nineteen or younger were interviewed. It should, however, be noted that the time spent at Newtown highlighted the farcicality of singling out 'teenage' parents discussed in Chapter Two. The parents who had given birth to their children a few years later

came from similar backgrounds, had been down similar paths and faced the same challenges. The inclusion of 'older' young mums in Newtown group is the result of the Project Leader's awareness of this. Her insistence that they be allowed to attend did not go unchallenged by the LA. My concentration on the teenage parents within the group is, however, legitimate. This thesis is a response to policy, media and public conceptualisations of 'teenage' parents as a 'social problem'. The research aims to challenge and understand these conceptualisations rather than to single out teenage parents as problematic.

The attendance and composition at Minton Post-Natal Group fluctuated between 8 and 15 young mums and dads per session. Minton Ante-Natal Group was usually smaller with between 5-10 expectant mothers and their partners in attendance. Although some of the parents were over nineteen, all the mothers had given birth as teenagers. Although fathers were welcomed at the group, the mothers were the most regular attendees. Fathers attended sporadically and only with their partners. The infrequent attendance of fathers can be explained by three key factors. Firstly, several (8 to my knowledge) of the mums were no longer with the father. Secondly, many of the fathers were at work at the time the group ran. Thirdly, the dominance of women and the primary focus on their needs and support seemed to marginalise the men.

In total, 28 young mums from all three groups were consistently included in the participant observation. Out of these, 21 young mums were interviewed. Two partners of the young mums were also interviewed. These were conducted as opportunistic interviews based on their presence during interviews with the mums. In total 24 interviews were conducted and 31 young people were involved in the research as a whole.

### *The Participant Observation*

Participant observation commenced with the Minton group first and continued for a year. Observations with the Newtown and Pensford groups started somewhat later due to the timing of the Local Authority ethical approval process. Seven months of observations took place with these two groups. All three of the groups met weekly for two hours at a time.

All three groups were disbanded after the research was completed. The Minton group was taken over by the local PCT. This meant changes in the staffing and objectives of the group. Whether it still runs under this new capacity is unknown. Coalition government spending cuts and the closure of TPIAG in 2011 led to a review of the spending on teenage pregnancy and parenthood in the local area. Despite petitions and protest from the young parents, both the Pensford and Newtown groups were closed. The staff employed to support the young women (in and out of the group sessions) were moved to new posts not involved with teenage parents. They are not being replaced.

#### *Minton Ante-Natal Group*

The Ante-Natal Group ran on a six week rotation of focused sessions in preparation for birth and parenthood. The young people were able to attend as many repeat sessions as they wished. Fathers were also welcome to attend. Sessions were run on childbirth, pregnancy and basic childcare. In this way it had similarities to NCT ante-natal groups. It also, however, ran sessions more focused to young parents needs such as budgeting and relationships. Sessions were run by a specialist midwife, health visitor and the founder of Minton.

I sat in on one six week rotation of classes before I moved into the Post-Natal Group. The sessions were typically focused on the subject matter of the day and led with a teacher/pupil divide. As a consequence, my research in this group was more observation than participation. Although, I was asked to talk about my experience at times, there was little opportunity for interaction. This did, however, mean that extensive notes could be made during the group sessions. These were then added to after the session with regards to my own feelings and reactions to the session. The organisation of the group meant field notes contained little about the parents themselves. They were focused more on reflections on the process and support available. Many of the girls who attended this group went to the Post-Natal Group after giving birth. It was at this point I was able to interact with them more.

### *Minton Post-Natal Group*

The parents at Minton were either referred there by various teenage pregnancy workers (including midwives and health visitors) or came via word of mouth. There was no requirement to attend but teenage parent workers did assist in the running of the group in this capacity. Parents were therefore able to have their babies weighed, get advice or book meetings with the workers. At the same time the workers were able to further check the well being of the parents and their children. The group was also used for some parents who did not have custody of their children as a point for supervised access. Minton provided bus fares and lunch to encourage attendance.

A typical group meeting would start with lunch. This part of the session was very informal and usually a time for catching up with friends. After lunch was cleared away a soft play area was opened up for the older children and an activity started. The activities ranged; they could be fun or educational and were sometimes things the parents could do with the children. During participant observations the group made piggy banks, baked brownies, planted flower pots, made jewellery and learnt how to belly dance. They also had talks on domestic violence, relationships, weaning and child safety. Occasionally the group went on trips outside the centre. This included; the local swimming pool, aquarium, farm and library.

As noted above Minton was a charity funded group and, as such, financially limited. The group had no crèche facility. In addition, activities often had to be repeated to utilise the materials they had in stock. Group activities also had to take into account a diverse age range of children in a limited space. As a consequence the group was sometimes quite chaotic and parents were often unwilling to take part. The presence of the children also meant that the group functioned more around the women in their role as mothers. This was in contrast to the two LA groups (discussed below) where the groups were more able to attend to the women's specific needs. Unfortunately, at Minton, many of the more focused sessions tended to get lost amongst the chaos.

The informal and often disordered nature of the group meant that it was more appropriate for introductions and explanations of my presence to be organised individually. This method elicited some interesting conversations. The mums often used this opportunity to get their grievances about the stigma they felt or the treatment of social services off their chest. As my time progressed with the group and I became a regular figure, the women began to accept me more. Gaining trust and showing my interest through the children helped to cement my relationship with the parents. The women (and fathers) would talk about their children and their latest achievements with some enthusiasm. I began to be greeted with interest and pleasure by both mothers and children. This was not however, without difficulties.

*When I first arrived in the group I hadn't even put my bag down or taken off my coat and Debbie was shoving her daughter at me so she could go and have a cigarette. This has become a bit of a ritual and although her daughter has now calmed down a bit more and will stop crying after a time with me, if she sees me coming she assumes she is going to be taken from her mum and just cries at me, this is not a nice feeling! (Field Notes 13.03.09)*

I tried to spend some time with each group of friends every week and introduce myself to newcomers. It was often difficult to hold informal short interviews at Minton. Instead casual conversations in small groups of parents about everyday life yielded the best data. These conversations were more exchange than interview, as my experiences as a mother (irrelevant of age) were sought.

I left the group at the point it was taken over by the local Primary Care Trust. At this point new leaders and a new time slot were introduced. It seemed a good time to end the research for myself and the parents.

#### *Newtown and Pensford Young Mums Groups*

The two Local Authority groups were run under the leadership of the same group of teenage pregnancy workers; one 'Project Leader for Young Parents' and two 'Young Parent Workers'. As such there was considerable continuity between groups. Additionally, some of the same mums go to both groups. I have, therefore, included them together in this section. Both of

these groups were 'women only' at the request of the mums. There were many open and frank conversations that the women feel they do not want to share with men. The women were directed to the group via teenage pregnancy workers, word of mouth or found it through local adverts.

The women paid a pound to come to the group but it was heavily subsidised by the LA. This meant the group had a large area, plenty of supplies and a varied timetable of activities. These include cooking lessons, sex and relationship discussions, arts and crafts and games mornings. Most crucially, the group had a crèche. This not only made activities more calm and organised but had an important impact on group dynamics. Without the chaos of children, the women could visibly relax. They were able to talk to each other, offer and take support much more easily. For many, this was the only time they had without their children all week. Nearly all of the mothers I interviewed from these groups talked about how important the group was to them.

The organisation of the groups meant that I was introduced formally in both Newtown and Pensford. I was then given an opportunity to talk about my research and take questions. As with Minton, this brought forward indignant discussion about the stigma attached to being a young parent. Although the groups were run by three council employed Teenage Pregnancy Workers there was less segregation between the parents and the leaders than with Minton. The workers shared and listened as much as the mums. The groups had an air of solidarity and friendship and as a consequence I was accepted easily in both.

*The group this week was a games morning... We played spoons (a card game), fast paced, fun and everyone was laughing, it didn't feel like a mums group, didn't feel like a group of girls who all have worries and struggles. It was just a group of girls getting together and having a laugh... (Field Notes 06.03.09)*

Whilst with Newtown and Pensford I took part in all activities with the mums. In sessions where arts and crafts or cookery took place, this was usually accompanied by laughter and chat. It is these conversations which form the large part of my observational data collection.

### *Reflections on Participant Observation*

One of the main issues that arose out of the participation was confusion over my role in the groups. This, however, manifested itself differently in Minton to the two LA run groups. Largely because I had not been formally introduced as such, when I first started at Minton the mums saw me as more of a worker than a researcher. The women asked me for advice about concerns such as weaning or what products were best for the baby. I felt unqualified to give advice on these matters and had to reiterate my position several times. Although I was able to utilise my own knowledge as a mother, care was taken not to give the 'wrong' advice. I had to be clear that this was experience only and then check with the health workers in attendance. After a time the mums began to ask such questions less often. They knew that I would hold babies while they smoked or ate, or could tell them what activity was going on. But they knew my limitations and role in the group. This became more defined after I had interviewed more of the women as they would from time to time ask me how my research was going.

There was more of a longstanding blurring of roles with regards to the staff members however. Many of them were not initially told who I was and why I was there and so treated me as a worker. This was a role I then began to slip into. The group struggled financially and was run by already over-stretched workers. There was consequently much I could do to help. I sometimes found that I had gathered little data as I had been busy sorting out food or filming parents for a funding bid. I had to work to find a balance in lending a hand without negating the primary reason why I was there. This was less the case in the LA run groups due to adequate numbers of staff and no children. Here the staff members were also more sensitive to my position as a researcher;

*I felt a little bit bad about being in the other room chatting so I went into the kitchen and asked if they needed a hand to dry up. Sara said no, go and do my thing and spend some time getting to know the girls... (Field Notes 21.01.09)*

The blurring of my role in the Minton group also raised some ethical dilemmas. There were occasions when the mums raised things I felt needing reporting to the workers. For instance

when one mother (Sallie) told me about how her child had temporarily been taken from her care;

*She told me that it was because she had been 'apparently' neglecting her daughter. I asked her specifically why but she said that she did not know. She said that she did not know why as she had been told by 'that bitch' (pointing to one leader) that her daughter was overweight. She said that she feels like not feeding her now because she does not understand why. I asked if she wanted me to find out why. She shrugged and said, if you want. I met with the leaders in their after group meeting to pass on Sallie's lack of understanding so that it could be rectified... (Field Notes 27.03.09)*

My personal involvement in the Pensford and Newtown groups became a little more complex. As I have noted, the groups were close, friendly and I was warmly welcomed. The three main leaders were dynamic, fun and maintained a more informal relationship with the mums. Two of these leaders were around my own age and had also had their children as teenagers. These factors meant the group came to mean more to me than simply a research site. I increasingly found myself really enjoying my time with the group and looking forward to the meeting. Not only this, I found that the group often left me feeling more positive about my own identity. Once I recognised this, I tried to think through why it was I felt this way and how it may have affected the data.

When I had my daughter at eighteen, there was no group such as this in my area. I had no contact with parents of a similar age. My friends of the same age were going through the life stages of travelling, clubbing and university. Friends I made through my daughter were many years older than me and, for the most part, married. I was a single parent. One of the key successes of the Newtown and Pensford groups was the non-judgemental and supportive atmosphere. The mums are respected as knowing parents and women. Age is not a factor. For the first time since having my daughter I had found a place where my past was not open for scrutiny. Here, no one asked how my parents reacted to my pregnancy and whether I regretted having my daughter. In the leaders, I met two women who shared similar paths in life. The instant understanding and rapport I had with these women led to an important and supportive friendship.

This validation and unquestioning acceptance is something, in retrospect, I have never felt before. My life path is still out of sync with my contemporaries and my identification as a 'teenage mum' has not diminished over time. Neither have the negative connotations and judgements attached to the term. As a consequence, the group became unexpectedly important to my own sense of self. It was a place where I was allowed to feel proud of my past and identity.

### *The Interviews*

The interview process started with two focus groups with a group of three mums from Minton. The purpose of this was to enable the mums to reflect on my initial ideas. It also provided some focus for the following interviews. The second of these interviews expanded on discussions from the first interviews. This was firstly to clarify meaning and was then used to co-construct an interview guide for subsequent interviews.

The focus groups took place at a local Children's Centre and were digitally recorded. The first of these was an hour long; the second, an hour and a half. The parents were given bus tickets prior to the meeting to cover costs. Toys for the children and refreshments were provided. The format of the focus groups differed from successive interviews. Discussions did not centre on the mums own experiences, although their stories did emerge. I started by discussing my research ideas and asked them to reflect on them. The mums gave their opinions on what they thought were important decisions and points in the lives of young parents. I noted these down on a flipchart for reference points throughout the interview. The mums talked about their own rationales as well reflecting on what they thought might influence other young women's decision making. These focus groups provided me with a biography of decision-making which extended beyond the period I had originally set out to research. The women brought up decisions they felt were important following the birth of their children. These included coping with social service interventions, leaving the child's father and access/contact arrangements. This cemented my original intention to conduct subsequent interviews by drawing on biographical approaches.

The interviews started with ‘can you tell me about how you met [child’s name] father?’ In most interviews the young women then told the ‘story’ of their relationship and pregnancy. I then went back to reference points in the story that they had given me to elicit further details. For example, ‘could you tell me a bit more about...?’ In other interviews ‘stories’ were not so forthcoming and I directed the narrative with more questions. These questions were informed by the biographies given in the focus groups, other interviews and participant observation. Interviews concluded with a question which enabled the interviewee to provide me with anything they felt I had missed. Many of the mums used this opportunity to tell me of the importance the groups played in their lives.

Interviews with the Minton mums took place outside of group meeting time. A café near to the Minton group formed the location for five of the interviews. The remaining Minton interviews took place in the women’s homes. From the Newtown and Pensford groups, only 2 interviews took place at the women’s homes. The remainder were conducted in a separate room during group time. The interview process has had to utilise elements of opportunism and pragmatism. Interviewing in Newtown and Pensford was quite straightforward as I was able to utilise the premises. This also meant that children were not present during the interview. This was not an option at Minton. Here, organising interviews in advance meant I was stood up on a number of occasions. As a consequence I took some parents to the café straight after their group meetings.

Two of the women I arranged to interview at the café from Minton requested for their friends to be part of the interview. This was a consequence of having to interview after the group. The women often went out together after the meeting and were unwilling to miss out on this time together. As a result, these interviews are not as in-depth as the one-to-one interviews. They did, however, still reveal some relevant and interesting data. In addition, two interviews were conducted with the young mother’s partner present.

### *Reflections on Interviewing*

As noted above, trying to organise interviews with young women, many of whom have chaotic lives was challenging. In addition to being parents, many of the women worked and/or had

other commitments. Remembering or keeping their meeting with me was often low down on a long list of priorities;

*Debbie: Monday's she's [daughter] got contact with her dad, Tuesday's I've got 'Living Without Violence' meeting, Wednesday she's got contact and then I've got contact with her dad, Thursday she's got contact, Friday she's got mother and baby...And I've got all these meetings to go to; Core group meetings, child protection case meetings... (Focus Group One)*

The opportunistic form of interviewing I was then obliged to embark on often entailed young children being present in the interview. Children did provide a point of conversation to relax the women at the start of the interview. They were also, however, often noisy and distracting. Conversations were sometimes curtailed for feeding and comfort or were lost to screeching and crying. Transcribing immediately following the interview was necessary in these cases in order to fill in the blanks from memory. This, unfortunately, was not always possible.

Conducting interviews to fit around the young parent's commitments also meant that in two cases an additional family member was present. One mum brought her own mother with her to keep the child entertained whilst she was being interviewed. Another interview was conducted whilst the young woman's sister and granddad were in the same room for part of the time. I was concerned that this would limit the young women's responses. In both cases, however, they found a way around this. In one instance, the young woman sent her mother away with her son before she discussed more private matters in detail. The other interviewee utilised non-verbal methods;

*Nancy: ... obviously I'm on the pill and all this*

*[At this point she shakes her head and mouths 'no' indicating towards her granddad and sister who are in close proximity. Meaning she was not on the pill.]*

Issues raised here, and previous descriptive sections of this chapter highlight the need to take consideration of ethical matters as part of research. A detailed discussion of the ethical considerations taken will now follow.

## 4.7. Ethical Issues

### *Confidentiality and Privacy*

Research participants were made assurances of confidentiality and privacy verbally and in information sheets (see appendices). This included the use of the data and quotations. All participants, their children and group names have been given pseudonyms. Participants were also made aware of the limitations to assurances. Participants were advised that confidentiality would only be broken if there was a concern that they or their children were in danger. This, they were told, would not occur without them first being warned. The matter would then be discussed with their group leader. Participants were then given a consent form to sign (see appendices). All data has been stored on a password protected computer. Hard copies have been locked in a separate location.

Sieber (1993) notes that privacy concerns are different for different groups of people. This was found to be the case. The young parents showed little concern for the assurances I was giving them. This may be linked to the trust and rapport I had built with the young women. However, it may also be related to the fact that they were accustomed to sharing their lives with strangers;

*Chloe: "I don't mind, I talk to anyone anyway, everyone knows everything" (Focus Group One)*

*Debbie: I'm used to it cos I've got so many people prying into my life that I'm just like 'oh whatever' (Focus Group One)*

### *Voluntary Informed Consent*

As noted above, consent was first granted by the leaders of the young parents groups who acted as 'gatekeepers'. Consent of gatekeepers cannot, however, be assumed to stand in for the consent of the participants themselves (Heath et al 2004). Therefore, the final consent lay with the parents themselves. The gatekeepers discussed my research with the parents to gain their consent for me to conduct participant observation. The parents were given an 'opt-out' option.

This enabled me to attend the groups but not include them in the field notes. Only one young woman chose this option. Informed consent for interviews was obtained with an information sheet and signed consent form. These were then discussed verbally with participants. This was in recognition of the possibility of learning difficulties and to ensure that the research parameters and assurances were clear. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions either at the time of consent giving or throughout the duration of field work.

A number of participants (six) were under eighteen during the research. One of these was under the age of sixteen. Traditionally, it has been the case that young people are subordinate to parents/guardians with regards to giving consent (Alderson 2002). Nevertheless, there is debate as to whether this is appropriate. Research exists which indicates many children and young people are able to make the necessary decision (Stanley and Sieber 1992; Bruzese and Fisher 2003; Heath et al 2004). It is also noted that the competency of young people aged under sixteen and eighteen can vary (Franklin 2002). This throws doubt into the applicability of a blanket rule giving primacy to parental consent.

Seeking parental consent in the case of this research was particularly inappropriate. The participants are all parents; a position of considerable responsibility. This includes the responsibility of making decisions on behalf of their own children. To have then requested parental consent suggests incapability and can be construed as undermining. Moreover, allowing those under eighteen to give consent is a position supported by the UK legal framework. For example; the 1985 Gillick Ruling. This determines that where there is 'sufficient understanding', a child can provide consent to medical treatment (Heath et al 2004). This decision has also been applied to other matters of consent, including research participation (Masson 2004). Young people's ability to give consent is increasingly becoming the convention with a growing emphasis on young people being consulted (Grieg and Taylor 1999; France 2004; Hill 2006). Consent was therefore sought directly from the young parents themselves. Nevertheless, as noted by Heath et al (2004), gatekeepers were key advisers in this respect. Where I suspected that there were issues of vulnerability, the gatekeepers were approached for advice.

### *Protection from Harm*

Young parents may be defined as vulnerable by virtue of their age (Stanley and Sieber 1992; Morrow and Richards 1996). To take this perspective, however, is to subscribe to a stigmatising conceptualisation of young parents. Many of the young women involved in the study cannot be defined in this way. The life experiences and social contexts of some of the participants can, however, lead vulnerability. A number of the young women had experienced violent relationships and some had been brought up in care. In addition, some were involved with social services and had their children on the at-risk register. It was therefore paramount to consider the protection of this group from harm prior to the research commencing. Risks were assessed under three main categories; environment, emotional health and well being and risk from adults.

### *Environment*

All participants were free to set the time and date of the interview to suit their own needs and priorities. This meant that a venue was chosen that was familiar and safe for the young parents and their children. Risk reduction was also applied to the researcher. All interviews took place during daylight hours. Where interviews were conducted in the participants home, a third party was informed of the whereabouts of the researcher.

### *Emotional Health and Well-Being*

Ethical risks involved with qualitative methods have the potential to be greater than those in quantitative studies. This is due to the level of intimacy qualitative methods can generate (Mesor and Petrie 2006). Nevertheless, qualitative methods contain their own ethical safeguards by construing participants as subjects, not objects (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). The relationship and rapport established with the young people in this study means concern for their well-being is more than an academic box to be ticked.

Assessing the well-being of the young people involved was aided by the group leaders. These highly experienced young parent workers have close relationships with the parents. The leaders know the young people very well and were skilled in assessing their needs. The researcher entered the research field with the support of these leaders. This meant that the researcher was able to utilise valuable expertise in assessing the impact of involvement. The researcher requested advice prior to interviewing regarding any issues the parent may have. Throughout the research, this was reassessed and advice sought as each interview was arranged. The initial period of participant observation gave the researcher some personal knowledge of the young parents. This meant the researcher was 'alive' to particular needs and able to make ethical decisions.

Care was taken, however, not to take autonomy from the young parents. The young parents were encouraged to decide for themselves. Obtaining fully informed consent was an important means to achieve this. The young parents were told of possible interview questions and warned they could cause emotional distress. It was also made clear that they could stop at anytime and did not have to answer anything they were uncomfortable with.

It has also been necessary to consider the emotional well-being of the researcher. As noted above the topic has been particularly personal. The leaders of the young parents groups have been invaluable in helping the researcher here. After the group sessions, the researcher has been able to spend time with these professionals talking through issues. They have also remained in contact after the period of participant observation ended.

#### *Risk from Adults*

Prior to the research, the researcher obtained CRB checks through the university and the Local Authority. It has also been an ongoing concern that participants are protected from potential harm which could result from publications. There is a risk that published material can increase the stigma and disadvantage of young parents (Alderson 2004). The researcher has firsthand experience of these issues and is therefore highly sensitised to this issue. Every attempt has

therefore been made to accurately and fairly represent the young parents involved. The potential misuse or misrepresentation of data has been considered.

#### **4.8. Processing and Analysing Data**

This section details the process by which the data was managed, analysed and presented. It is acknowledged that qualitative analysis is a complex process without a definitive approach (Bryman 2004; Coffey and Atkinson 1996). There are "...few well-established and widely accepted rules for the analysis of qualitative data" (Bryman 2004: 538). The method of analysis used here draws on a process of 'thematic coding' as described by Bryman (2004). In addition, although narrative analysis has not been used, critiques and theory coming from this field have been attended to. Consequently, there was no one approach or rigid process for analysis.

Attempts to present findings and write methodological reports can mean that the analytical process appears sanitised and straight forward. The reality, however, feels somewhat different. Interpretations and analysis of data made here have not always been part of a linear process. As Wolcott (1994:24) notes; "...truly analytical moments will occur during brief bursts of insight or patterns of recognition". These 'bursts' have occurred at various stages during and following data collection. Nonetheless, the recognisable and assumed start of the analytical process is the coding of data. It is here, therefore, where the description of the analytical process commences.

##### *Coding*

Bryman (2004) notes that coding is a good starting point for analysis. Coding is argued to enable judgements to be made about meanings within the data (Ryan and Bernard 2003). This stage has also been described more as a form of data management (Wolcott 1994). As Flick (2006) notes however, coding can include the aims of categorising and theory development. The process of coding and the drawing out of themes (see below) was a significant part of the management of data for this project. It helped me to organise the data to find relevant quotes

and themes quickly and efficiently. Assigning codes, reading and re-reading the transcripts and participant observation notes this entailed also developed my analytical thinking however. I started by reading closely, highlighting and labelling parts of the data. In order to determine what may be significant I took into account Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) guidance as to what could be coded. For example, I highlighted codes relating to events (such as childbirth), relationships (such as parents or partners) or meanings (such as those attached to motherhood or family).

Following Bryman's (2004) advice, I then reviewed the codes a second time. As I re-examined my coding, I checked to see whether codes were labelled appropriately and that I hadn't used different terms to describe the same instances or phenomena. I also looked for links and relationships between codes and back to existing literature around relevant subjects. From this point I was then able to formulate themes.

### *Themes*

Bryman (2004) states groups of related codes can be built up to make a theme. Ryan and Bernard (2003a) provide some techniques to identify themes. This includes, looking for repetition, similarities and commonalities and relations to existing theoretical literature. With this in mind I began to group codes together into a thematic framework. Here I copied and pasted from the interview transcriptions and participant observation notes into separate documents. Documents were headed by themes and divided by sub-themes. For example the theme of stigma emerged at this point. Under this were sub-themes or codes such as 'dealing with', 'effects of' and 'experiences of'. Identifiers were kept on the data as it was moved from the transcripts and observation notes. This includes participant name, date of observation/interview and line number. This enabled me to go back to the data if necessary and remind myself of the wider context of the code. This became especially important during the writing up stage when I frequently returned to the original transcripts and notes.

Drawing out themes was not as straightforward as is presented in this explanation however. As Ryan and Bernard (2003:275) note, themes can be; "...abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs".

Consequently, most of the themes did not become fully developed until the writing stage. Wolcott (1994) highlights the importance of the early stages of writing as part of the analysis process. He argues that at this point an excess of data is included and decisions must be made about what is to be included. As I wrote, I moved between the thematic framework, transcripts/observation notes and sometimes the original interview recordings. Some themes were then developed further, others I felt were not as significant for this project. Still more themes did not become apparent until this point of writing.

### *Narratives*

As noted above, some of the interviews were informed by a narrative or biographical approach. Similarly, Reissman's work on narrative was informative but not directly followed as part of the analysis. For instance, Reissman (2000) draws on Goffman (1969) to highlight the performative qualities of narratives. This, "...is not to suggest that identities are inauthentic, only that they are situated and accomplished in social interaction." (Reissman 2000:12). My awareness of this led me to understandings of the way in which the women narrated particular elements of their 'stories'. For example, the way in which they presented their feelings about having found out they were pregnant. This enabled a greater understanding for the context (such as the stigma of teenage pregnancy) to be understood rather than doubting their accounts. As Bryman (2004:553) notes;

...at the very least it [narrative analysis] entails a sensitivity to the connections in people's accounts of past, present and future events and states of affairs; people's sense of place with those events and states of affairs; the stories they generate about them

One final strategy was also used to enable the women's narratives to remain intact, that was the structure of the written analysis. Wolcott (1994) argues that qualitative researchers should be story tellers and that one method of storytelling is an attendance to chronology. Consequently, rather than dividing the data thematically, the analysis chapters begin with accounts of the women's lives prior to their pregnancy and finish with them as mothers. This allows me as a researcher to tell their stories and retain the context of the women's 'decisions'. Moreover, this enables the data to stay as close as possible to the narrative shared with me by

the women in this research. Following an examination of the limitations of this research, it is to these chapters that I shall now turn.

#### **4.9. Limitations**

This section details some limitations in the sample and notes their impact on the research findings. Firstly, the young parents included in the sample are all white British. Whilst this was not a deliberate strategy, it is a potential outcome of the sampling method used. Participants were primarily selected on the basis of the age at which they had their first child. Nevertheless, this was, in part, constrained by the membership of the young parents' groups. In two of the groups (Newtown and Pensford), the membership was almost entirely white. One young mum was of East Asian origin. She is not, however, included in the interview data as she gave birth to her first child at the age of twenty.

In the Minton group, for the most part, membership also consisted of white British young parents. As noted above however, the attendance at this group often fluctuated. There were, at various times, three ethnic minority young parents present. This ethnic make-up of the groups is reflective of the picture in the South East. The 2001 census data shows the wider population to be 95.1% (ONS 2001). Efforts were made to include these young parents in the interview stage of the research. They were however, unwilling or unable to take part. Their reluctance to take part may be linked to their relatively sporadic attendance at the group. This did prevent me from developing a rapport and relationship with them similar to that of the rest of the group. It is worth noting at this point that there were also some white young parents whose irregular attendance prevented an effective relationship developing.

The fact that the all-white sample can be seen to be fairly representative of the locality may be useful in making generalisations. Nevertheless, this does not take into account the relative prevalence of teenage motherhood amongst some ethnic minorities. Young parenthood is more common amongst Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women (Berthoud 2001). Research with BME young parents indicates there are a number complexities worth exploring associated with this group (Higginbottom et al 2006; French 2007). Nevertheless, the lack of ethnic

diversity of this sample means that this research does not widen knowledge about diverse needs and issues for ethnic minority young parents.

The age range of the sample may also be considered to be a limitation of this research. As demonstrated in the glossary of participants (pg236), the majority of the women had given birth over the age of sixteen. Five women had been sixteen at the time of birth. Three had been under sixteen with the youngest at fourteen. The age range of teenage mothers captured by this sample reflects the picture of teenage motherhood more generally. Berthoud and Robson (2001) reported that statistics across Europe indicate that the numbers of births to teenagers decreased with age to near zero at age fifteen. In the UK, the conception rate for the thirteen to fifteen age group is significantly lower (7.5 per thousand women) than for older teenagers (57.3) (ONS 2011).

Nevertheless, there is a point to be made with regards the possible effect on the findings of this research. The evidence discussed in chapter two indicates that younger teenage mothers face a distinct set of challenges with regards health (Chen et al 2007; Gupta et al 2008) and education (Berthoud and Robson 2001). Furthermore, the children of 'very young' teenage mothers are also at greater risk of accidents and hospital admissions (Hudson and Ineichen 1991). The circumstances in which younger teenage mothers experience parenting are also different. For example, parents aged under sixteen are legally required to return to education and those under eighteen are also prevented from holding a tenancy. Such differences are likely to have a specific impact on the experience of motherhood. Younger teenage mothers then appear to be a particularly vulnerable group of mothers facing a very particular set of challenges. The relative absence of these younger mothers (whilst representative of national figures) may then affect some of the findings of this research in terms of experiences and outcomes.

Similarly, the sample does not, by its very nature include some 'hard to reach' young parents. Hard to reach young people can be defined as;

...young people who are not engaged with, or are disengaged from the usual range of education or other services for children and young people, activities or constructive leisure pursuits (Hendry 2007:7)

The use of the term 'hard-to-reach' can be questioned however. The term implies homogeneity amongst those who are not engaged with local services (Brackertz 2007). It is the case that there is a wide range of reasons for this including those who may do not feel a need for the involvement of local services. It is argued here that the use of the term 'hard to reach' may needlessly problematise those who are not attending the groups. A better term may then be 'hidden populations' (Atkinson and Flint 2001).

Whilst conducting participant observation at Minton a number of young people were referred there by social services or teenage parent workers. Some of these parents received considerable support and persuasion before they would attend. Many did not stay. The specific needs of this group were obvious. They were often the youngest of the young parents. Furthermore, a number of these were involved with social services and/or lived in residential homes for young parents. It is then reasonable to assume that there are a number of similarly placed young parents who did not attend the groups at all. It may then be that young parents included in this research are not those who face the deepest of social problems. For example, 'hard to reach' populations include victims of domestic violence, those with drug and alcohol problems and the homeless (Brackertz 2007). In addition, Brackertz notes ethnic minority groups may be included in this category. The low numbers of ethnic minority teenagers has already been noted above. The possibility that young parents from these groups are not included in the research must be borne in mind when making claims on the basis of this sample.

Nevertheless there may be other explanations for non-attendance. Some of the young mums at Newtown and Pensford discussed with me their reluctance to attend the group at first. They had felt that they did not fit into the stereotype of the 'teenage mother'. They therefore felt that the group wasn't for them as they did not feel the need for support. It has been noted elsewhere that misperceptions about service provision can prevent some young women from accessing services (Barlow et al 2004). With a population as maligned and stigmatised as teenage mothers it is not difficult to see why some mothers may have misgivings about the nature of the groups. It was also the case that a number of mums didn't attend regularly (or left)

due to work and educational commitments. It may then also be reasonable to suppose there are also 'hidden populations' which fit into this category.

It is also worth noting the relatively small number of fathers included in the sample. It has already been discussed that these were included as a result of a pragmatic approach to the interview setting rather than as part of the original aim. As such, having only two fathers in the sample is not, in itself a limitation. Their inclusion can only add to the knowledge gained in this thesis. This is especially important given the problems of involving young fathers in research. Nevertheless, care must be taken; making inferences beyond the sample is problematic (Bryman 2004). The ability to generalise should not always, however, be used as the key criterion for including data. There is also value in the understanding which can emerge from a detailed study of a small sample (Shaw 1999). In addition Glaser and Strauss note;

Since accurate evidence is not so crucial for developing theory, the kind of evidence, as well as the number of cases, is also not so crucial. A single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property...the pressure is not on the sociologist to "know the whole field" or to have all the facts "from a careful random sample" (Glaser and Strauss 1967:30 emphasis in original)

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodology and methods utilised in conducting this research. It has demonstrated how methodological considerations and the researcher's personal history have impacted the research decisions made. In addition, it has provided as reflexive account of the pragmatics and practical side of the research. This thesis will now turn to the data generated by this research process.

## Chapter Five: Contraception and Reproductive ‘Decision-Making’

This chapter examines the contraception ‘decisions’ and behaviours which resulted in pregnancy. Although the term contraception is used here, most of the discussion in this chapter focuses on condoms. This reflects the narratives of the young women interviewed. Although I asked about contraception, the women responded as though ‘contraception’ and ‘condoms’ were synonymous terms. Furthermore, condoms were the most commonly used contraceptive method. This in itself is an important point. Whilst government did highlight SRE as an important means to reduce teenage pregnancy, it appears that their focus on condom use has been particularly influential. This was especially evident when one of the participants quoted directly from a government advertising campaign; “want respect – use a condom” (Debbie: focus group one).

That the discourse surrounding condom use appears to be dominant is significant given that research indicates that successful condom use is problematic (for example see Holland et al 1990). As is demonstrated here, gendered power is a key factor in understanding the misuse and non-use of condoms. This argument is particularly prominent in the first part of this chapter where attitudes to condom use are the main focus. This includes the ability to demand condom use, dislike of condoms and a discussion of who is deemed to be responsible for contraception more generally. This provides an understanding of the difficulties involved in contraception use for young women.

The chapter then moves on to look more specifically at the use of contraception. The majority of the women in this sample had been using contraception prior to the point at which they became pregnant. This is supported by observations in the Pensford group. A discussion on post-pregnancy contraception revealed the women to be highly knowledgeable about contraception methods (field notes 06.02.09). What may then be more concerning is the way in which contraception is used. Consequently, this section of the chapter examines the women’s use and non-use of contraception.

The chapter concludes by examining ‘orientations to pregnancy’. This takes into account those women who described their pregnancies as being, on some level, planned or desired. For some of the women, childhood experiences can be seen here as an important influence on these feelings. This section particularly relates to explanations put forward for teenage pregnancy centring on ‘low expectations’ (see Chapter Three). Rather than ‘low expectations’ however, it is argued here that these women are demonstrating ‘different expectations’. Nevertheless, these are often framed by the discourses of love and gendered expectations which can be problematic.

### **5.1. Attitudes to Contraception**

#### *Talking about Condoms*

During group sessions, the women were open and forthcoming about the topic of contraception. They appeared to be less than open with their partners however. Only Bea (14) reported talking to her partner about contraception before they had sex for the first time. Furthermore, only two young women reported bringing up the subject of condoms whilst in a sexual situation;

*Debbie (19): I was like, use a condom*

*Amanda (16): I said to him obviously you’re going to have to put a condom on*

It is interesting to note that these were the only women who also spoke about sexual desire as a motivation for sex. Similarly, Holland et al (1990) found that young women who were more able to negotiate condom use tended also to be more able to talk about sex in terms of pleasure. A positive approach to sex and sexual pleasure may then enable more ‘positive’ contraceptive use. “Pleasure”, a booklet produced for workers involved in sexual health with young people argues that positive messages about sex (such as female sexual enjoyment) can make safer sex messages more salient;

If we deny talking about pleasure then we severely restrict the potential health promotion messages with Sex and Relationships Education (SRE). If we talk about pleasure and what young people can gain from being safer and more competent in their sexual encounters the safer sex message is more likely to be heard and practiced (The Centre for HIV and Sexual Health 2009:4)

Hostility from some sections of the media and politicians mean it is notably difficult to include discussions of pleasure in UK SRE<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, there have been some interesting attempts to utilise pleasure as a way of increasing condom use. The DoH published findings from a poll which indicated that men prefer women to initiate discussions of safe sex. It is also claimed that women are increasingly carrying condoms and that “condom confidence boosts women's sex appeal”. For this reason, a recent condom campaign is aimed more explicitly at women;

Women needn't be shy about bringing up the subject of condoms. There's no reason they should ruin the mood. These one-liners will make it clear you're up for some fun, but only if he wears a condom

- \* "Let's slip you into something more comfortable"
  - \* "I'm into rubber - are you?"
  - \* "If you make it clean, I'll make it dirty"
  - \* "Let's get you ready for the ride of your life"
  - \* "If you do this now, imagine what I'll do later.-..."
- (Department of Health 2009)

It can be argued that this strategy may be an improvement on previous depictions of female sexuality. It offers young women a ‘sexual script’ (Gagnon and Simon 2005) which has been previously missing. The approach is still problematic for young women however. The DoH promotion can be read as placing male needs and pleasure as paramount in the sexual situation. “If you make it safe then I will please you” – *her* pleasure is still silent.

Utilising these examples entails drawing on a confident sexual self which young women may have. For example, one young woman, Jane (17), noted that in previous relationships she had

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<sup>13</sup> As an article in The Daily Mail demonstrates; “...education teaching manuals set out the full range of positions, partnering and perversions. Much of it looks like propaganda for sexual license...” (Phillips 2009). This is despite evidence that sexual knowledge can aid communication (The Centre for HIV and Sexual Health 2009), that communication about contraception before sex has a positive impact on the use of contraception (Stone and Ingham 2002) and that sex education does not increase sexual activity (Baldo et al 1993; Grunseit and Aggleton 1998; Weaver et al 2005; Kirby et al 2007).

found it hard to demand condom use because; “I was always too embarrassed to ask, so I just let him get on with it”. Jane’s description of a sexual encounter sounds as though she is describing something that happened to her rather than something she played an active part in. It is then especially difficult to envisage Jane saying “let’s get you ready for the ride of your life” as suggested by the DoH.

Research by Holland et al (1990) indicate that Jane’s embarrassment is not an isolated experience. They found, “embarrassment at every stage of condom use” (Holland et al 1990:26). The women in this research reported that partners rarely brought up the subject of contraception either. It is possible, that this too may be due to embarrassment. The experiences shared by many of the women here, however, indicate other explanations are also worth considering. That is, male reluctance to use condoms and expectations of female responsibility for contraception. The following sections will attend to these ideas in more detail.

### *Dislike of Condoms*

Some young women reported that they felt many men do not like to use condoms;

*Trish (19): ...most of them [men] don’t even like sex with a condom*

*Jane (17): They [men] don’t care do they? They don’t think about it [condoms] so they just do it*

*Debbie (19): ... all the boys I ever slept with said ‘no I ain’t got none’ because they don’t want to wear one*

*Kasey (18): Most guys don’t like it [sex with a condom]*

Existing research may help to understand these accounts. It is suggested that traditional masculine ideologies are linked to the non-use of condoms (Pleck et al 1993; Noar and Morokoff 2002; Shearer et al 2005). A young man’s reputation is argued to be enhanced by engaging in risky sexual behaviours (Gelder 2002). This has been linked to the male sex drive discourse. This implies that male sexuality is too powerful to stop to put on a condom (Flood 2003). Conversely, Flood (2003) adds, young men also draw on an idea that their sexual desire

is fragile and can be broken by stopping to put on a condom (Flood 2003). Indeed, Measor (2006) notes that young men often have difficulties physically using the condom. This contravenes the male sex drive discourse which dictates men should be ready and able to perform sexually. Acknowledging that emotions or the body is at fault is therefore complicated. Measor notes that the condom is blamed rather than the male body for this failure.

There is also substantial evidence indicating that male reluctance may be explained by an intense dislike of condoms (Measor et al 2000; Flood 2003; Holland et al 2004; Brown and Guthrie 2010). Flood (2003) notes that men often report that condoms ‘diminish penile sensation’. The condom is therefore seen as a barrier to male sexual pleasure. This is recognised by Trish; “... they’re [men] like ‘err its uncomfortable’ or ‘it doesn’t fit properly’ or ‘feels much better without it’”.

The recognition of male reluctance around condom use by policy makers has led to a focus on young women for sexual health initiatives (Gavey et al 2001). There is evidence to suggest, however, that many women also dislike condoms (Wight 1992; Measor 2006). Three young women in this research shared a dislike of condoms;

*Rachel (17): ... it does feel better when you don't use a condom but only if you know them*

*Debbie (19): I don't like it [in a mock disgusted voice and mimes throwing a condom away with a big arm movement]*

*Nancy (16): I don't like it. I don't like it. It's that rubbery feel, if it was like a really really really thin. (...) and it's like you couldn't feel the rubber and it felt more like skin then I'd feel alright*

Measor (2006:400) found that young women do not like using condoms, “...for their own reasons of passion and pleasure”. Certainly, Nancy and Rachel’s rationale does appear to be linked to ideas of pleasure. Furthermore, they appear to be noting the importance of intimacy. As has been found elsewhere, intimacy and skin to skin contact has been found to be linked to non-use of condoms (Hatherall et al 2005; Measor 2006). Rachel, however, requires a level of

intimacy first. This can be seen to be linked to other evidence which demonstrates that condom use declines as the relationship develops (Hatherall et al 2005).

It can be disputed that women experience the same kinds of pleasure reduction from condom use. Research illustrates that many women find non-penetrative acts as more pleasurable (Thomson and Holland 1998). This indicates that condoms may not present the same barrier for them. Nevertheless, women often discuss condoms using much the same language of distaste. Flood (2003) argues that this illustrates the privilege given to the penis specifically and male pleasure generally. Holland et al (2004) 'male-in-the-head' concept could be used to support this summation. The male-in-the-head works more than simply a 'male gaze', it functions as a power which controls and judges femininity to fit into a masculine heterosexuality. Holland et al (2004) capture how young women play a part in reproducing masculine heterosexuality. When young women apply male interpretations of the condom, they may therefore be reproducing male dominance within sexual relationships.

It was observed during a discussion on contraception in the Minton group how young women may come to 'internalise' the preferences of their partner;

*Sean said that he and Amber had been using condoms but didn't like them, 'did we Amber?' Amber said no, they take away all the pleasure (Field Notes 24.10.08)*

It should be noted here that Sean and Amber's relationship was an abusive one. Sean himself told how he often verbally abused Amber until she cried and then laughed at her (field notes 24.10.08). This example demonstrates the place in which very 'real' and discursive constraints exist around challenging male dislike of condoms.

For women to express their feelings about condoms may then be more challenging than echoing the sentiments of their male partner. Holland et al (2004) acknowledge that young men do not necessarily exercise this power intentionally. Nevertheless, "men are routinely accessing male power over women, whether or not they know this, or want, or intend to exercise such power..." (Holland et al 2004:10). Gelder (2002) argues that the primacy of the male sex drive discourse can mean that young men's desires are dominant. Furthermore, there is evidence that some men do use persuasion and pressure in order to get their partners to have

sex without contraception (Holland et al 2004; Hoggart 2006). In this situation male desires are prioritised.

### *Discussions of Responsibility*

An acceptance of male reluctance to wear condoms may explain the focus on young women in condom promotion campaigns such as the aforementioned DoH campaign. Nonetheless, both the campaign and male attitudes to contraception may also be underpinned by assumptions of female responsibility for contraception. The government sponsored safe sex campaign for Christmas 2008 opened with a distraught young woman receiving a positive pregnancy test (Sweney 2008). The message is clear, the impact of unwanted pregnancy rests on young women and so they should be ensuring condom use. Similar to sexual behaviour then, young women are often presumed to be the 'guardians' of their reproductive capabilities (Aapola et al 2005). Kasey and Kate both shared how they felt the responsibility for contraception was placed upon young women;

*Kasey (18): ...most guys think it's a girl's responsibility now (...) like 'get on the pill' sort of thing ...if they know you are on the pill or something then they are a bit leeway and they don't care... they ask you to use something. So (...) I don't know, guys just (...) do what they want and just go don't they?*

*Kate (18): ...it emerged that he [son's father] thought I was on the pill...if he knew I wasn't on the pill then he would have used a condom but I'd never said to him that I wasn't on the pill but he just assumed it, so it was stupid on both sides (...) I think he just assumed every girl's on the pill*

Non-barrier contraceptive methods such as the pill can allow women to take control of their own fertility. They circumvent the need for women to 'demand' safe sex. Nevertheless these methods do not protect against sexually transmitted diseases. Moreover, such methods allow young men to abdicate responsibility, further compounding the focus placed on women in teenage pregnancy prevention.

Despite the discussion in the previous section, it is important to note that not all young men are adverse to condom use. Seal and Ehrhardt (1999:102) in their investigation into female

condoms found that some men felt condoms should be a “male domain”. Kasey acknowledged that ‘most’ young men did use condoms. Two other women reported that their partners had brought up the subject of condom use;

*Amanda (16): ...every now and then he would sort of say, ‘oh shall I use a condom’*

*Fiona (18): ...he suddenly went, ‘wait, do you have a condom?’*

Furthermore, it appears that some young men saw condom use as their responsibility. Although Holly and Jenny’s partners did not openly discuss contraception with their partners, both had bought and used condoms;

*Matthew (18): I just thought ‘that’s what you do’*

*Jenny (17): I was already on it [the pill] from ages ago, as a natural guy, he’d already got some [condoms] for a just in case situation*

Jenny’s use of the term ‘natural guy’ seems to suggest that she is drawing on a conceptualisation of masculinity which aids condom use. It may be the case that condom use can be repackaged to represent a particular form of masculinity. In Jane’s case, a form of the ‘new age man’. Flood (2003) notes that concerns for the welfare of partner or family can provide a motivation for condom usage. Condom use can then signal a responsible protective masculinity. Rachel seems to agree with this; “boys are supposed to have condoms aren’t they?” Measor (2006) draws on Munro (1996), in noting that condom use can also signal a confident masculinity. Rather than signalling a responsible masculinity, however, condoms may also be an extension of a powerful masculinity. Rachel (17) draws attention to the power young men can wield. This can be used to both demand and refuse condom use;

*I think girls rely on the boys though because boys can pressure a lot...some men are really keen to use one [condom] and if they’re like ‘have you got one’ and if you haven’t they’re like ‘oh we’ll do it anyway’. But if a girl says have you got one and he says no then they wouldn’t [Rachel’s emphasis]*

It is clearly advantageous to empower women to be able to improve their efficacy in demanding condom use. Further, this strategy acknowledges the fact that some young women

also exhibit negativity towards condom use. Coleman (2001:213) in his typology of condom use specified a group he termed “influenced users”. Here it can be seen that a shared perspective on condoms is important to encourage use, whether the ‘influenced user’ is male or female. If young women are relying on men for safe sex then contraception use may depend on the will and desires of young men.

However, a sole focus on women as ‘gatekeepers’ overlooks the power young men have in sexual situations. It further fosters an acceptance of a situation where young men pressure for sex and young women resist. Focusing on both young men and young women can help to reduce the blame which currently resides with women for unsafe sex practices. This chapter will now move on to examine how contraception use develops with the relationship.

## **5.2 Contraceptive Use**

### *Non-Use of Contraception*

Most of the women in this research reported using contraception when they had fallen pregnant. Two young women stopped using contraception prior to becoming pregnant. Jane had come off of the pill;

*Kyla: So did he know that you had stopped taking the pill?*

*Jane (17): No. He didn't ask. He didn't ask, and I didn't think. I don't know, it's all confusing really*

Jane's confusion can be seen to stem from the fact that she knew she could get pregnant and cannot understand her own inertia to stop it. She said; “it was my own stupid fault really”. Her embarrassment about sex and contraception may, however, be a key explanation here. Jane had been on holiday with a friend and her family. She had been embarrassed at the thought of them finding out that she was having sex and so had not taken the pill on holiday with her. Upon her return from holiday, however, she did not start taking it again or tell her partner.

Again here we see Jane's embarrassment about sex and contraception as an impediment to her ability to act on her own needs and intentions.

Kate and her partner, David, stopped using condoms. It was noted above how Kate's partner assumed she was on the pill. When condom use 'fizzled out', neither Kate nor David sought to clarify the situation. Both of the women's partners assumed they were still practising safe sex. This can be considered reasonable given that they were not told otherwise. These two young women's accounts do then demonstrate that young women also have a measure of power in sexual relationships. Nonetheless, Jane's behaviour seems to be a result of embarrassment, inertia and disempowerment rather than intention. We will return to look at these narratives later on in this chapter.

The development of a relationship does not then necessarily entail an increased ability to discuss contraception freely. Furthermore, discussion does not always mean that action will follow. As noted by Holland et al (2004) contraceptive intentions are not always a good indicator of behaviour. This is exemplified by the discussions here;

*Charlie (24): We should have used (...) yeah*

*Lisa (17): We kept saying*

*Charlie: Yeah we kept saying, yeah*

*Lisa: Like once a week we'll go down and get some*

*Charlie: After this period sort of thing we'll go and (...)*

*Lisa: [interrupting] and we never done it*

*Hazel (15): ... just before I actually got pregnant we did start saying, 'oh actually I don't want kids now, I want to finish school first', like you know, try and do something else first*

Although Hazel noted that 'we' started talking about contraception, it was she who gave a reason to use contraception. She recalled that her partner, Mitchell (23), "wasn't too bothered about it". Both these accounts support the assertions made in the above section about the role of young men in the non-use of contraception<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> It is worth considering the idea that this may indicate an un-articulated desire or ambivalence towards pregnancy on the part of young men. This will be returned to in the following section.

The embarrassment and silence around sexual pleasure and contraception indicates that focusing on young women as initiators of safe sex is problematic. The evidence provided here indicates that when young women do not feel they can demand condom use, safe sex depends on young men being able to discuss the subject. The evident reluctance of many young men to talk about and/or use contraception indicates that this is unlikely to result in safer sex practices.

It is laudable that recent safer sex campaigns focus on the importance of communication. Nevertheless, further attention needs to be paid to some of the wider impediments to communication and condom usage. It has been argued that traditional masculinities may be significant in preventing young men from initiating discussions with partners (Stone and Ingham 2002). It is further argued here that these understandings of masculinity impact on young men's willingness to use condoms. Dealing with this would, however, entail a larger and more complex challenge to gendered sexual power and pleasure. In addition, government involvement in sex education is often fraught by intense criticism. This often takes the form of accusations of the 'nanny state' interfering in an area believed to be a parent's right and responsibility. It is perhaps not surprising that the policy focuses on parent and child communication.

Whilst there are clear impediments to these young women's sustained use of contraception, a number of young women were using contraception. The following section will now attend to what 'went wrong' here.

#### *Contraceptive Failure and Misuse*

Given that most of the women in this sample reported using contraception at the point they became pregnant, contraceptive failure or misuse would account for most of the pregnancies within this sample. Certainly, a number of the young women cite failures in pill usage as being the cause of their pregnancies. Nicola (19) and Kasey (18) reported having been ill causing the pill not to work. Saskia said that she had been told by the doctor that her hormones may have been too strong for the pill she was on. Some, however, did not know what had happened;

*Claire (16): I haven't a clue, I don't know, maybe because I missed a couple...I don't know to be honest*

*Harriet (18): I might have [been ill] (...) I don't know, I can't remember this but I might have missed one or something like that or...*

*Sallie (18): I was taking mine but it just didn't work properly*

*Bea (14): Needless to say, the pill was unsuccessful*

It is not the intention to try and ascertain the 'truth' behind these statements. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to attend to the possibility that some women may prefer not to reveal misuse or even non-use of contraception. For example, Debbie (19) shared how she had been on the pill and using condoms at the point at which she became pregnant with her daughter. Despite the apparent unlikelihood of a pregnancy occurring, she maintains she was unaware how she became pregnant<sup>15</sup>;

*I'd had two miscarriages before that – no fault of my own, I was using contraception and everything, I was still using contraception with her...I was like 'oh what, how does that work?'*

Goffman's work may be useful here in understanding how and why young mothers may seek to emphasise that their pregnancies were accidental. In 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' Goffman (1969) sought to understand the way which individuals present themselves. Using a dramaturgical metaphor, he argued individuals attempt to maintain an 'impression' of themselves which can be considered 'palatable' to their 'audience'. "...Individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are being judged" (Goffman 1969:243). It is argued here that the young women's statements above are evidence of a particular impression management. Further, that this is necessitated by the stigma attached to being a teenage mother.

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<sup>15</sup> It is also worth bearing in mind Debbie's orientation towards pregnancy here. See later section for further discussion.

Goffman (1968) draws attention to three key types of stigma. The second is perhaps most relevant here; “blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty” (Goffman 1968:14). The way in which teenage pregnancy has become problematised fits into this definition of stigma. For example Chapters Two and Three drew attention to concerns related to the ‘nature’ of female sexuality. It was argued here that discursive constructions of inappropriate female sexuality are implicit in the problematisation of teenage pregnancy. The significance of youth and marital status was also noted. Teenage pregnancy can be seen as a visible signifier of these “unnatural passions” and a source of stigma. Welfare dependency and tales of immorality perpetuated by tabloid and neo-liberal discourses can be seen as “weak will” or “dishonesty”. It is these which can be seen to provide some of the most stigmatising representations of young mothers. Significantly, the women in this study were keenly aware of these interpretations of teenage pregnancy and parenthood. As Kathy (16) noted, “I hate the stereotype people have of young mums who only have children for the money and a free house”. Research conducted elsewhere has also shown young women to be aware of the stigma of being a teenage mother (Yardley 2008). It is perhaps not surprising then that these young mothers may seek to present themselves in a more ‘acceptable’ light;

...the very obligation and profitability of appearing always in a steady and moral light, of being a socialised character, forces one to be the sort of person who is practiced in the ways of the stage... (Goffman 1969:244)

Goffman (1967:5) also examined the idea of ‘face’. That is, “an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes”. Goffman argued that when information emerges which is inconsistent with a desired sense of self, an individual may engage in ‘face-work’. Stigmatising discourses attached to teenage parenting indicate why the women may want to avoid further ‘blame’. This is exemplified by Debbie (19) when she highlights that her previous pregnancies and miscarriages were not her “fault”. That the women’s pregnancies may have resulted from carelessness or intention<sup>16</sup> can be seen as being inconsistent with this faultless self. Instead then, the women engage in ‘face-work’ to explain their relative responsibility for the occurrence of pregnancy.

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<sup>16</sup> Face-work and the presentation of self with regards pregnancy intention is returned to in the following section.

Society may distinguish three levels of responsibility an individual may be assumed to have for actions which have caused them to lose 'face' (Goffman 1967). The women's highlighting their use of contraception (however sporadic or unsuccessful) can be seen as a "defensive orientation". As part of this they also articulate that they are unaware of what 'went wrong'. They are then drawing on an idea of responsibility similar to the first 'level' described by Goffman. That is, the act (conception) was "unintended and unwitting". The pregnancy is therefore cast as accidental. Furthermore, this conveys a particular message to the 'audience' in that; "those who perceive the act can feel that [she] would have attempted to avoid it had [she] foreseen its offensive consequences" (1967:14).

Fiona (18) and Jenny (17) both acknowledged that they kept forgetting to take the pill. It is worth noting here that Jenny had been on the pill as a treatment for polycystic ovaries rather than as a method of contraception. Jenny related that she had been told that she could not have children due to her condition. She said it was this knowledge that had meant she was not "extra careful". Research with teenagers who have polycystic ovaries suggests that this is not an isolated reaction. Dowdy (2010) argues that the effects this condition potentially has on fertility is not fully discussed with young women. As a result, young women may become "lax with their contraceptive efforts, believing themselves to be unable to conceive" (Dowdy 2010:5).

Three other young women in this study also questioned their fertility. Trish (19) had had a miscarriage from a previous relationship. She noted that after this she was not sure she could get pregnant again. Holly (18) cited her irregular periods as a sign her body wasn't "sorted enough" for pregnancy. Lisa (17), however, had been told by doctors that she had problems with her fertility;

*I was told when I was younger that I couldn't have children, and because I had cancer of the kidney. And er, it wasn't a definite so really I should have, I should have you know, took precautions. But (...) erm I'd been with a partner before for two years and never used contraception and nothing happened so I assumed that, you know, that that was right what they said*

As Lisa notes, however, this was not a certainty. Nevertheless, she had constructed an illusion of safety. Similarly Fiona states; "...after a while you start to feel invincible". These findings mirror that of Skinner et al (2009). They noted that a number of young women had "...dismissed their risk of becoming pregnant" (pg52). They noted that this dismissal was fuelled by a feeling of invincibility when pregnancy did not occur.

The issues discussed here around consistent and correct use of contraception, particularly the contraceptive pill are not, however, particular to teenagers. Research examining unintended pregnancies found 62% had been using contraception at the point at which they became pregnant (Bury and Ngo 2009). The majority of whom did not know why their chosen method had failed. This does raise the question as to why teenage girls should be singled out for their contraceptive 'failures'<sup>17</sup>.

Bury and Ngo's (2009) research was conducted with young women presenting themselves for abortion. This, and the high level of contraceptive use reported in this study, may lead to an assumption that unintended pregnancies are also unwanted. Former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, articulated this presumption on radio 4's 'Today' programme. He stated that teenage pregnancies were "unwanted in almost every case" (Brown 2009). This assumption regarding the wantedness of teenage pregnancy is reflected in policy 'solutions'. For example; addressing 'ignorance' about and access to contraception and abortion. There are, however, contradictory discourses about the 'wantedness' of teenage pregnancy. 'Low expectation' explanations for teenage pregnancy suggest that some pregnancies may, on some level, be intentional. Certain media and public assumptions about teenage pregnancy also draw on an idea that teenage pregnancies are 'intended'. This can be seen in assertions that young women use pregnancy as a means to access social housing and welfare benefits (Selman 2003).

Determining pregnancy intention is, however, problematic. Different accounts of pregnancy 'intention' exist because there is no one explanation. As Swann et al (2003:4) note; "some teenage pregnancies may be wanted and planned, others may be unplanned but wanted, and

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<sup>17</sup> 25% of the 1,964 women interviewed were aged under twenty.

yet others may be unwanted and unplanned”. The following section will now pick up on these ideas and explore the idea of ‘wantedness’ and ‘intention’ with regards the pregnancies in this sample.

### **5.3 Orientation towards Pregnancy and Parenthood**

#### *Defining a ‘Planned’ Pregnancy*

Despite the assertion made by Gordon Brown above, evidence suggests that many teenage pregnancies are not ‘unwanted’. A number of researchers have examined ‘planned’ teenage pregnancies (see for example Montgomery 2001; Montgomery 2002; Montgomery 2004; Quinlivan 2004; Cater and Coleman 2006). Teenager’s pre-pregnancy ‘intentions’ about childbearing have been explored (see Stevens-Simon et al 2001).

Despite the sometimes unproblematic way in which these terms are used and applied, determining pregnancy intention is not straightforward. Teenage pregnancies may not always fit neatly into categories of ‘planned’ and ‘unplanned’. It has been recognised that these terms may be too definitive and so the notion of ‘ambivalence’ has been acknowledged (Cowley and Farley 2001; Cater and Coleman 2006). Furthermore, ‘unplanned’ pregnancies do not necessarily equate to the pregnancy being ‘unwanted’ (Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley 1993). In this research, only three young women utilised the term ‘planned’. One of these (Rachel) was in response to the researcher’s question “did anyone here plan?” It has been argued elsewhere that young people may not use these terms spontaneously (Barrett and Wellings 2002). Finlay (2006) felt that the teenagers within his research would not have used the term ‘planned’ had it not been used by the researcher first. Nevertheless, two women in this research (Kasey (18) and Amanda (16)) did use the term spontaneously.

The difficulty in defining pregnancy intentions is not limited to teenage pregnancies (Barrett and Wellings 2002). The authors found there was no agreed definition of the terms and argue, “...since women interpret and understand these terms in a variety of ways, using these terms alone to discover the circumstances of women’s pregnancies would be inadvisable” (pg550).

The authors also found that the meanings women attached to the terms could change during the course of their conversations. This may demonstrate a problem with the language used. It also, however, shows some instability and confusion in the women's feelings about their pregnancy intentions. These ambiguities will now be examined in more detail.

### *Confusions and Ambiguities*

During the focus groups, Rachel (17) clearly defined her pregnancy as 'planned'. Nonetheless, further examination indicates some uncertainty. The language she uses when describing her experience reveals that she felt, "scared", "worried" and "wasn't sure";

*...when we started trying I started getting quite scared and wasn't sure whether I wanted to do...I don't think I was really that sure in the beginning when we were still trying and I was getting like really worried and I was like 'wow this is real we could actually have a baby' so I just stopped it and I was like ... [interrupted by daughter screeching, Rachel stops to shush her and the other girls move the conversation on]*

Here we can see far more indecision and uncertainty than a definition of a 'planned' pregnancy implies. This illustrates the problematic nature of defining pregnancy intention noted by Barrett and Wellings (2002). Nevertheless, Rachel continues to define her pregnancy as 'planned'. This may, in part, reflect the relative simplicity of describing her pregnancy in this way. Rachel's emphasis on her anxiety can be seen as a demonstration of her knowledge of the enormity and seriousness of the decision. Rachel is ensuring that I am aware of the consideration and control she had over the situation. When doubt crept in, she stopped trying and re-thought the situation before trying again. Given the presentation of young mothers as irresponsible, it is imperative to Rachel that she presents her decision as being one based on forethought and awareness. It is perhaps easier for Rachel to be reflexive in this way because it all 'worked out'. At the point of interview, Rachel was married to her daughter's father and expecting their second baby. If it had not worked out, expressing that she had had doubts and gone ahead anyway risks being read entirely differently.

As has already been noted, Debbie (19) said that she had been using contraception when she became pregnant. This would suggest that her pregnancy was ‘unplanned’ and is supported by her assertions;

*I didn't really want to have a baby young...we were planning to have a child like a year after our marriage...I didn't plan it or anything but when I found out I was I was like I definitely want this baby*

By the second focus group however, Debbie and her husband had separated. She had discovered that John had been having an affair and had got his girlfriend pregnant. Here Debbie was more reflexive and critical about her desires for a baby. At this point she says;

*I did want a baby but erm (...) I think it was a lot more for me*

*I think it was more my decision to have her than his... I was desperate for a baby*

The confusion in her reflections appears similar to Kasey's interpretation of her pregnancy intentions. Kasey announced in her focus group that she had planned her pregnancy despite having previously said that she had been on the pill at the time she became pregnant. Kasey and her partner were in the process of separating due in part to her partner's disinterest in his son. Kasey said;

*He [son] was planned, like I was planning having him and that but after (...) it got on well where I was pregnant and feelings changed like how much work it would be and that it was planned but (...) now that I (...) because it was planned and that...*

The confusions and contradictions in these women's accounts may be linked to the apparent changes in their partner's desires. A rejection by a partner may cause a reevaluation of feelings which were very real at the time but difficult to imagine or admit to in light of new circumstances.

Rather than trying to define their pregnancy intentions, these women (and some men) are described here as having an ‘orientation’ towards pregnancy. What follows is an examination of narratives which indicate this orientation. This is presented thematically rather than by

levels of 'planning' or 'wantedness'. Further, it allows understandings to emerge as to why pregnancy may on some level be 'intended'. Focusing on understandings rather than defining intentions is considered to be more of a useful approach here. As has been discussed some teenagers orientation towards pregnancy has been variously explained by 'low expectations' or for financial gain. This section therefore provides some understanding and challenges to these explanations.

### *A Symbol of Love*

The focus here moves from a potential pregnancy to a baby. It is argued here that a baby can be read as a symbol of love for the young women. Two 'types' of love can be seen here, firstly; the unconditional love associated with a parent/child relationship. Cater and Coleman (2006) note that this may be especially significant for young people who have experienced chaotic or difficult childhoods. This was evident in some of the women's narratives here;

*Amanda (16): I suppose it's hard because I never used to get that much attention at home and I just wanted something that would love me as much as I loved them and it was sort of I don't know. I just sort of wanted this little baby if you know what I mean*

*Debbie (19): I did want a baby ... because I haven't had the family that I wanted, you know like the perfect family, like best friends, daughter and blah blah blah...I wanted the perfect family*

The sense that these women felt there was a 'deficit' of love in their own childhoods may mean that the love of a child represents a substitute or alternative source. Nonetheless, Debbie dismisses the idea that a need for 'love' alone is a sufficient reason to have a baby when talking about an acquaintance;

*Because he grew up in foster care and had lots of problems with his parents and stuff and he thinks that if he has a baby of his own then it's somebody to love and will be there for him all the time and I just don't think that's a valid reason to have a baby*

Debbie may have needed or wanted a source and focus of love in a baby. This is placed into the wider (and possibly also more 'acceptable') desire for a family however. Her childhood

experiences provide the context for this desire (or need) for what she describes as ‘the perfect family’. Debbie’s step-father had been in prison for raping his daughter. After he was released from prison, her mother resumed her relationship with him;

*...we were taken into care and she [mum] had a choice of like us or him [step-father] and she chose him...she had to do so many things that she had to do to try to keep us and one was that he had to stay away and she was still seeing him. So I told social services that he was still there and now my mum blames me for everything*

Debbie and her siblings were consequently taken into care. Her relationship with her mother was then particularly fraught and perhaps why she highlights the importance of her relationship with her own daughter. Kate’s (18) articulation of her ambivalence about becoming pregnant is also linked to family experiences;

*Kyla: So you knew you weren’t on the pill, so why do you think you...*

*Kate: [interrupting] I don’t know. I think one (...) I think (...) that in the back of mind I don’t think I would have cared if I got pregnant or not. I don’t think I would [quietly] because I was in such (...) because my mum and dad split up in the April and we only got together a few weeks after mum and dad split up so I think it was just like they weren’t together so if I got pregnant it was something for me to hold on to. Something that would never go*

Knight et al (2006:395) suggest the emotional consequences of family breakdown may lead to sex being “...a way of controlling and hanging on to a relationship”. It may be the case that having a baby has a similar purpose; but rather than hanging on solely to a relationship it is also about hanging on to family. Claire (16) utilises a similar explanation for her “wanting” a baby;

*Claire: Well I’ve always wanted a baby...*

*Kyla: Why do you think you wanted a baby so much?*

*Claire: Something that (...) I don’t know (...) something that was mine like. He’s mine he’s no one else’s and no one can take that away from me. I think that’s about it really, I just (...) I don’t know [laughs]*

For Kate and Claire, the love of a baby appears to symbolise something stable and unwavering. A love that would “never go” (Kate) and “no one can take away” (Claire). Both had experienced a loss when their parents separated. After Claire’s mother had left the family home, she and Claire; “never spent much time together”. Similarly, when Kate’s dad moved out she stopped talking to him.

The orientation towards motherhood expressed by these women appears to be a way of making up for deficits in love and stable families. As Scott (1983:891) notes “...Sex, pregnancy and childbirth may be strongly linked to need satisfactions involving love, sharing and continued close companionship...teenagers no less than adults have psychosocial needs...”.

The second way in which a baby can be seen as a symbol of love is as a product of intense feelings for a partner. This can be seen with Rachel (17) when she says;

*...we were like so in love and we wanted to like have a baby out of that like to show our love kind of thing*

In this way a baby can be seen as the culmination of the romantic narrative; the ‘happy ever after’. This romantic narrative also appears to have an appeal for Debbie (19); “...I always said I want to get married...I always thought my life would be like a fairytale; find my prince and get married”. Warr (2001:245) notes; “romantic love links individuals to the social expectations within marriage and the family”. Debbie’s romantic notion is then significant as part of her wider ideals and desires for a ‘perfect family’.

It can be seen here that the motivation for pregnancy may only alter from that of many ‘adult’ women in its timing. Having a baby can be seen as part of the ‘natural’ progression of a relationship. As Montgomery (2002:287) describes it “the natural next life step”. The idea that this would, at some point, be a ‘life step’ in their relationships was noted in the couple interviews;

*Holly (18): we both wanted to have children together you know we've always said one day when we are 'grown up' we'll get married and have children [Holly's scare quotes]*

*Charlie (24): Err we'd discussed it didn't we, we said we wanted kids and that..?*

*Lisa (17): MMM [affirmative]*

*Charlie: But we wasn't (...) looking to have one (...) right this second sort of thing you know? [Laughs]*

These pregnancies may then be best described as 'mistimed'. These young couples assumed that parenthood would be part of the 'natural' progression of their relationships. This idea of 'nature' can also be seen to be linked to the women's conceptions of their roles as women. We will return to this idea later on in this section. What is significant here, however, is that these young men also appear have some orientation towards parenthood. This chapter will now move to discuss teenage fathers a little further.

#### *Young Men and Orientation to Parenthood*

Two fathers (Charlie (24) and Matthew (18)) discussed how they had considered and desired fatherhood at some point in the future. Three young women, however, report how their partners articulated a more immediate desire for fatherhood. Rachel described trying for a baby as initially being her partner's "idea". This may help to explain some of her hesitancy expressed above. Debbie's desire for a family (see above) appears to have been shared by her partner, John (age unknown). As noted above, Debbie and John discussed having a baby after they were married. She said; "He'd said to me actually before I found I was pregnant, oh I want to have kids soon". Similarly, Claire also related that her partner, Mark, had said; "I want to have your babies".

Without direct contact with these fathers, an accurate understanding of their motivations cannot be presented. Instead any analysis must rest on speculation and existing research. This is problematic however. Firstly, this requires speaking for rather than to young fathers and secondly, there is a lack of knowledge regarding young men's motivations and attitudes towards fatherhood (Gelder 2002; Buston 2010). As has been found here, this is possibly due to the difficulty of involving young fathers in research (Thompson and Crase 2004; Cater and

Coleman 2006; Whitehead 2008; Buston 2010). Caution should then be exercised in making links from current research and applying it to the young men discussed here, not least because research in this area is often dated and originating from the US. As Gelder (2002) points out, this research is not necessarily transferable. Nevertheless, attending to existing research can be considered important to provide some understanding. This is especially the case in light of research which indicates that the boyfriend and relationship can be significant in reproductive decisions (Cowley and Farley 2001; Lee et al 2004). Hoggart (2006:15) notes, "In most cases the greatest single influence on the young mothers' decision to continue with their pregnancies was their relationship with the father of their babies". The influence young men may have on this particular decision is returned to in the following chapter. Research which attempts to offer an explanation for young men's orientation towards fatherhood is considered here.

US based research has highlighted that young fathers often come from a similar background to young mothers. Socio-economic disadvantage and low educational achievement often predate fatherhood (Marsiglio 1993; Bunting and McAuley 2004; Thompson and Crase 2004). It is claimed that young men from these backgrounds view fatherhood as a source of self-esteem (Marsiglio 1993)<sup>18</sup>. This finding appears to mirror literature on young mothers which indicates that many young women feel motherhood gives them status (Arai 2003a; Graham and McDermott 2005). Australian research has noted that young men appear to hold 'idealised' views of young fatherhood (Quinlivan 2004; Condon et al 2006).

UK research on planned teenage pregnancies has highlighted more explicitly some of the reasons young men give for desiring fatherhood. Buston (2010) found a minority of her sample of incarcerated young men desired fatherhood. Nonetheless, those who did cited a love for children and two felt it would help them settle down and stop them from reoffending. Again here similarities can be observed between young men and young women's motivation towards parenthood. Cater and Coleman (2006) noted that young women planning pregnancies sometimes saw pregnancy and parenthood as a way of gaining a purpose in life. Both young

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<sup>18</sup> Marsiglio (1993) does not see this as a result of limited life options or an equal but different value system. Instead the focus is on a discussion of the motivations of a 'reproductive underclass'. Linking young fathers to the 'underclass' in this way may reflect the time and place the research originates from.

women and men articulated that having a love of children provided a motivation for parenthood (Cater and Coleman 2006). These authors also drew attention to the influence of disadvantaged backgrounds and poor experiences in their family of origin. The desire to create a family of their own following an unhappy childhood has been noted elsewhere (Tyrer et al 2005; Chase and Knight 2006). Furthermore, Chase and Knight (2006) also link growing up in care to young men's orientation to fatherhood. Where both young mothers and young fathers gravitate towards parenthood from poor experiences in their family of origin there are clear implications for parenting.

More research is clearly required in order to understand young fathers' motivations and their part in the 'decisions' young women make. This is particularly important given the lack of involvement, of some fathers despite an apparent desire for fatherhood. As Claire notes;

*...that's one thing that I didn't understand ever. Like, 'you said you wanted my child and then now I've had it you don't want to know'*

The idea that some men had a 'change of heart' is returned to in the following chapter. This chapter will now return to focus on the young women and address the idea of 'natural' maternal desires.

#### *A 'Natural' Desire*

Some of the young women seem to express that an orientation towards parenthood was 'natural' for them. This was expressed through the use of the idea of 'maternal' or 'broody' feelings;

*Debbie (19): I'm very maternal anyway I looked after my sister's kids, my friends' kids, I've always looked after kids so I'm very maternal anyway*

*Rachel (17): I was always like maternal and loved babies and would always look after babies from a really young age*

*Amanda (16): I've always had like a maternal instinct from a young age. I always used to love my babies and my prams and my dollies and everything erm and then just as I got older and older I just you know I just used to really want*

*Claire (16): I've always wanted a baby. It's just one of those things you know I love babies and I just see them and I'd get broody and things. You know, I want my own one*

Cater and Coleman (2006) noted that some young women cited a love of babies as part of their reasons for 'planning' a pregnancy. The authors draw attention to the experience these young women already had in caring for babies and small children. As can be seen above, Debbie and Rachel had had some experience with children. Four young women (Sally, Jenny, Naomi and Trish) were pursuing careers working with children. Cater and Coleman (2006) argue that early experiences with children led to a realisation that this was something the women enjoyed and wanted to do. This then manifests into a desire for children and/or a desire to pursue a career working with children. Experience with children cannot be assumed to transmute into a desire for children however. Saskia (16) relates;

*I remember looking after my erm sister when she was younger and I looked after for an hour and I went (...) absolutely mad. I erm I left her in her cot crying and I went into my bedroom and I sat on the floor crying for an hour until my mum come home! And I said I'm not having kids, I'm never having kids [Saskia' emphasis]*

Gillespie (2000) demonstrates how powerful ideologies and discourses of motherhood have led to assumptions about the 'nature' of motherhood;

Experts and opinion formers constitute powerful elites who have been able to privilege their accounts of the natural inevitability of a desire for motherhood in women; of motherhood as women's principle social role; and crucially, the centrality of motherhood to understandings of feminine identity (Gillespie 2000:225)

Marshall (1991) argues that there is an assumption that motherhood is a natural destiny. Maher and Saugeres (2007) also posit that motherhood is constructed as natural and highly desirable for women<sup>19</sup>. They note the way in which the mothers in their research draw on this

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<sup>19</sup> Constructions and discourses of motherhood are picked up in more detail in chapter seven.

construction. Their decision to have children was reported as being about the women's "natural progression" (pg14). While the women in this research talked about having a child as part of the progression of a loving relationship, it may also then be part of their progression into womanhood. Certainly, the idea that mothering is assumed to be part of woman's identity (Garey 1999) and their primary role (Letherby 2002a) has been noted elsewhere. Young mothers may be then modelling a traditionally accepted route to womanhood, albeit earlier than is considered 'acceptable' (Kaplan 1996 in Stewart 2003). Stewart (2003) adds that women with more traditional ideas about gender are more likely to become mothers at an early age. This literature may help to explain why some of these young women express feelings about a maternal 'nature'. It is argued in this thesis, however, that these young women have not pursued motherhood to achieve womanhood and fulfil a maternal role. Instead, they look towards motherhood because they are women and they see this as a 'natural' part of this identity.

The idea of a maternal nature seems to suggest an innate desire and ability to nurture; something beyond the control of individual women. This is perhaps most obvious with Amanda. Here she describes her pregnancy desire as though it is something which happened to her that she had little or no control over;

*I had always wanted a baby anyway, it was weird but he never knew anything about it and I sort of like planned it on him really...I don't think he knew that I sort of like really wanted a baby I suppose. It was rather weird. And then it all come out because I like, I actually like I don't know, it's weird I don't know how to explain it. I basically made myself pregnant, I tried keeping the cum up me and everything [laughs]*

Such is the intensity of her feelings she had to go with it even though her partner 'didn't know'. Furthermore, Amanda's maternal feelings continue despite having two children under two and finding it hard work;

*I'm adamant that I (...) I do want another baby but not yet. I do get broody over like pregnant women and little babies, it's ridiculous. But (...) then my two are enough at the moment. I find it hard enough work with the pair of them, it's hard work*

A maternal desire can be seen in a similar context to the idea of the ticking biological clock in older women. That is, desire to have children is so natural to women that it ‘takes over’.

Amanda can be seen to be alluding to this above with her repetition of “weird”, implying that even she did not know or understand her own feelings. This understanding may be appealing to young women given that explanations such as reduced opportunities and gendered socialisation (see below) are not likely to be available to them. In addition, the way in which these desires are presented as ‘natural’ can work to protect these women from criticism of their motives. In other words, if something is natural and beyond the control of the individual it cannot be construed as wrong.

The way in which these women’s ‘choices’ are informed and then judged can be seen in the light of two contradictory discourses. Firstly, the idea of motherhood as an exalted and natural occupation and secondly, the idea that teenage motherhood is a result of ‘low expectations’. Gillespie (2000) draws attention to powerful discourses (political, scientific and medical) which depict motherhood as a natural social role for women. Stewart (2003) further argues that gender socialisation continues to emphasise women’s role in the home and influences ‘choices’ in this direction. Mothering and family can then be seen to stem from natural desires and normal development of women.

There are, however, limits to what can be seen as ‘natural’ motherhood. Letherby (2009) notes that ‘correct’ social, sexual and economic circumstances have to exist before motherhood is considered ‘normal’ and ‘natural’. Contemporary ideologies depict the ideal age and circumstances in which to mother (Phoenix and Woollett 1991). These authors argue that social constructions of motherhood fit into current political ideologies of the family and good mothering. Consequently, as we have seen, teenage pregnancy is, in part, attributed to ‘low expectations’. That is, motherhood is desired not as of and for itself but due to a dearth of opportunity and aspiration. This theory is reinforced by a more devaluing of the mothering role (Wilson and Huntington 2005)<sup>20</sup>. A lack of opportunity and education is argued to make pregnancy and parenthood seem a more attractive option (Adler and Tschann 1993; Bullen et

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that society’s views of mothers and mothering is often complex and contradictory. As Phoenix (1991: 4/5) notes; motherhood is “...popularly romanticised as valued (although in practice it is often devalued)”.

al 2000). That young mothers should have 'other' and perhaps also 'better' aspirations can be seen in the focus on their return to education and employment<sup>21</sup>. It is perhaps then not surprising that some of the women express confusion at the stigma of being a young wife and mother;

*Debbie (19): But even being married, you still get a lot of stigma being married at such a young age... It's part of the whole stigma, it's if you're married young and you have children*

*Rachel (17): It's really strange because like when my Nan got married she got married really young and that was normal but now you're supposed to be like older and when you get married now it's like oh my god!...I don't know why that's happened though because it used to be fine it used to be what was supposed to happen and now it's like...? [shrugs]*

Here it has been shown how gender roles and expectations play a part in some young women's orientation to parenthood. This is not to say that structural disadvantage is not relevant or that better opportunities could not provide women with other ways of 'being'. Nevertheless, it indicates that gender may intersect with structural disadvantage. This discussion also suggests that teenage pregnancy could be thought of as an alternative but positive life course. That is, young parenthood may, for some young women, be a rational and positive response to social circumstances. Ruddick (1993) argues that presenting teenage pregnancy as a negative life choice for some working class women can be seen as an unwelcome imposition of middle class norms. This may be particularly salient given the evidence outlined in Chapter Two which suggests a pregnancy may make little difference to some women's socio-economic position;

...There is no point blaming teens for making choices that, although they may seem like bad ones from a middle-class point of view, have little consequence for the young people involved (Luker 1996:112)

I would agree that blame and judgement are wholly inappropriate reactions. Nevertheless, gendered expectations and economic disadvantage impede the consideration of other life

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<sup>21</sup> Encouraging and enabling young mothers into education and employment can be considered beneficial in addressing poverty associated with teenage parenthood. Nevertheless, Chapter Seven demonstrates that this focus is often pursued at the expense of the mothering role.

'paths'. It can then be questioned whether the notion of 'choice' is applicable here at all. Furthermore, I suggest that these impediments remain for women long beyond their teenage years.

#### **5.4 Concluding Thoughts**

This chapter has examined teenage mothers' reflections on their contraceptive 'decisions' and behaviours prior to becoming pregnant. It was found here that condoms were the most prevalent method of contraception. This in itself provides an important understanding of the impact of policies such as SRE and safe sex campaigns. Whilst condoms can provide a high level of protection against STI's and pregnancy, successful usage is problematic. This thesis has drawn on health literature to understand the challenges these women faced in practising safe sex. As with previous research, this study uncovered silence, embarrassment and resistance surrounding condom use. These experiences are framed by gendered expectations around sex and sexual desire. The accounts of these women directly link the issues related to condom use to the incidence of teenage pregnancy. It confirms that it is not a lack of knowledge per se which impedes safe sex and results in pregnancy. Rather, continuing gendered inequalities and sexual double standards silence and inhibit young women's ability to demand safe sex. Condoms may not then be the most effective way to reduce unwanted teenage pregnancies. Methods such as the coil or depot injection circumvent rather than address the problem at the heart of practising safe sex however. Furthermore, such methods do not protect against STI's. Condoms cannot continue to be presented as an unproblematic solution to teenage pregnancy. In order to start to 'un-problematise' condom use, some of the challenges of condom use need to be unpacked within SRE. The difficulties in making real changes to SRE strategies have been noted in this chapter. Without a wider sea change around gender and sexuality it is recognised that significant change is unlikely to be forthcoming.

Without an effective critique of the circumstances surrounding condom use, misuse or non-use of contraception can lead to blame being apportioned to young women for a pregnancy. The women were aware of the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy and negative assumptions about the motivations of young mothers. This thesis aimed to understand the way

representations of teenage parenthood affect the experiences of young mothers. It is argued here that the potential for blame and stigma explains why some women sought to emphasise that their pregnancy was an accident. Goffman's work was utilised to explain the way in which individuals seek to avoid stigma through impression maintenance. The effect of this, however, is that gendered power and passivity remains hidden as an explanation for the occurrence of teenage pregnancy. This thesis is then an important reminder of the impact of gender on the path to becoming a teenage mother.

The latter part of this chapter examined the ways in which some women expressed an intention towards pregnancy and parenthood. Here, 'planned' pregnancy was problematised as a term. Instead having an 'orientation towards pregnancy' was utilised as a better explanation. Current research with teenage parents highlights the impact of socio-economic circumstances on young women's parenting 'intentions'. Here, policy makers utilise a 'low expectations' explanation (SEU 1999) whilst academic work highlights the paucity of opportunity for young women (Arai 2003). This chapter adds an emphasis on the way in which needs around love and family (for young men and women) underlie orientations towards pregnancy. The importance of considering the family of origin, particularly where childhoods are characterised by trauma, has been noted elsewhere (see Cater and Coleman 2003). This research showed how a baby could compensate for deficits of love in the family of origin. By building on Cater and Coleman's work however, it is argued here that love on its own is not enough. These women express desires for the love of a child in the context of a family. Despite some of these women's experiences in their family of origin, the traditional family unit continues to appeal as a source of love and stability. Ironically, these are exactly the ideals presented as devoid in 'Broken Britain'; a phenomenon in which teenage parenthood has been implicated. This chapter also discussed those women who utilised 'natural' and maternal desires as explanations for their orientation to parenthood. As with above, this may 'function' to deflect blame for pregnancy and parenthood. A discourse of nature allows the women to draw attention to forces which are presented as more powerful than themselves. It may be the case however, that maternal desires also demonstrates the influence of acceptable and gendered paths to adulthood. Motherhood, for these women, is part of their 'natural' destiny.

This thesis takes care not to negate the worth of motherhood or family as an ideal or the positive experiences shared here. Instead it seeks to add further understanding of the context of the 'decisions' made by these young mothers. The arguments made here should not be seen as a replacement or counter argument to the importance of structural disadvantage. Instead, a more rounded explanation of the intersections of class and gender is sought. This sets the 'decisions' made by young women as they become young mothers in the context of powerful ideals and discourses. The thesis will now move on to examine the women's 'decision' to continue with the pregnancy.

## Chapter Six: Continuing with a Pregnancy

This chapter focuses on the women's 'decision' to continue with the pregnancy once they knew that they had conceived. The chapter starts with the young women's initial reactions to their pregnancies. The women's presentation of themselves as being shocked at the discovery of pregnancy is explored. The way in which the women considered the options they felt they had for the resolution of the pregnancy is then examined. Here, moral and personal objections to termination are discussed. Notions of 'responsibility' and what it means to be a 'good' mother also start to emerge. These concepts continue to be an important influence on the women's 'decisions' and 'choices' in the following chapter.

The chapter then moves on to examine some of the influences on the women's 'decisions' to continue with a pregnancy. Here, some of the women draw on notions of 'the family'. For those women who had experienced extreme childhood adversity, creating a 'better' family than the one they had experienced was seen as particularly important. The wishes and presence of the baby's father are also considered. For some women, the father's wishes and reactions framed their own feelings and decision making. For others, the presence and support of the father meant they felt more able to make a 'decision' to mother. This section also starts to acknowledge the impact of the father on the women's mothering experiences<sup>22</sup>. It is noted how some of the women's partners in this study became violent or disinterested in the pregnancy. It is also acknowledged here that for some of the women interviewed, the father's views and feelings were not important. These women were prepared to 'go it alone' and possible reasons for this are discussed here.

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<sup>22</sup> This is a theme which continues in the following chapter

## 6.1. Discovery and Reaction to Pregnancy

A number of interviewees described their initial reaction to finding out they were pregnant as 'shock';

*Debbie (19): I just sat there in shock...I was completely shocked*

*Claire (16): I was a bit stunned really*

*Jenny (17): I was quite shocked (...) it was kind of a shock because I was told (...) I couldn't have children*

*Lisa (17): It was a shock, I was scared*

To be 'shocked' at the discovery of a pregnancy can be seen as a demonstration that you were not aware that this could be an outcome. Whilst assumptions about fertility and the use of contraception may justify feelings of shock, the women's narratives reveal that this was not always the case. Contraception was not always used consistently and infertility was not certain;

*Kyla: How did you feel?*

*Trish (19): Err, shocked and (...) well not shocked but shocked. Shocked in the way that it's a reality and I knew that it might happen because we hadn't been using anything*

It is then important to consider why these women articulate that they were 'shocked' when they found out they were pregnant. This may be explained by aforementioned feelings of 'invincibility'. As Trish notes; "I didn't think it would happen to me". Nonetheless, ideas discussed in the previous chapter drawing on Goffman may also be of use. Here it was argued that the young women sought to guard themselves against stigma through their presentation of contraception failures. Here too it can be seen how stigma plays a part in the women's presentation of their reaction to a pregnancy.

Reporting your feelings at the discovery of a teenage pregnancy is challenging, especially to a relative ‘outsider’. Sharing feelings of pleasure brings into question pregnancy intention. To be pleased about a pregnancy indicates that you may have, at some level, wanted or intended to become pregnant. It has already been acknowledged that pregnancy intention is a problematic concept (Barrett and Wellings 2002). Pregnancy intention for teenagers has an added complication however;

...planned teenage pregnancies are attributed, amongst other things, to naivety about the demands of parenthood, or dysfunctional families and communities where traditional gender roles, a ‘benefits culture’ or low expectations thrive (Macavarish and Bellings 2010:51)

Even where pregnancy may not be read as ‘planned’, the construction of teenage pregnancy as problematic has implications for the women expressing pleasure at a pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy is not something you are ‘supposed’ to be happy about. As Harriet puts it; “it’s supposed to be all happy but it’s a scary time and telling your mum and dad because you’re at such a young age”. To avoid having actions interpreted as being informed by these rationales highlighted by Macavarish and Bellings the pregnancy needs to be presented as unintentional, even when this appears unlikely<sup>23</sup>.

As Goffman (1969:246) notes, “deeply felt shame” may lead an individual to minimise the chances of exposure. In this case, the young women attempt to minimise the chances of being exposed as being a particular type of teenage mother. That is, one that desired and intended to become pregnant. Instead, the women look towards what can be considered a more ‘fitting’ response given the circumstances. It is argued here that the use of ‘shock’ may be part of this presentation. This can be used to preface feelings of pleasure in order to safeguard the self against stigma and judgement. Once the news has been digested and the shock subsided, feelings of joy can be expressed;

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<sup>23</sup> See for example Debbie’s discussion of her having become pregnant whilst on the pill and using condoms in the previous chapter.

*Naomi: I was shocked at first and the once I got my head around it and I realised my mum was alright about it we were all actually quite excited*

Presenting feelings of distress at the discovery of a pregnancy can be equally fraught however. This may read as evidence that the pregnancy is unwanted. Furthermore, articulating that you may not have wanted your child does not fit into the ‘good mother discourse’ (discussed in the following chapter) teenage mothers often feel they need to present (Graham and McDermott 2005). To imply that the child may have been unwanted contravenes ideas of ‘natural’ motherhood. The desire for and love of a child (even when unborn) is constructed as part of the nature of womanhood and motherhood.

Retrospective reporting of pregnancy wantedness may also be problematic. Once the baby has arrived, it may be difficult to acknowledge that there was a moment, no matter how brief, that pregnancy may have been unwanted. Lisa (17) and Charlie’s (24) account is interesting here;

*Lisa: I cried my heart out [self conscious laugh]*

*Kyla: Did you?*

*Lisa: Charlie said ‘is it that bad’ [self conscious laugh] but yeah I was (...) it was just...*

*Charlie: [interrupting] It was shock*

*Lisa: Yeah it was shock, I was scared*

As discussed in the methodology chapter, couples interviewed together may attempt to present a ‘united front’ (Pahl 1989; Jordan et al 1992). Furthermore, Goffman (1967) draws attention to the idea that people may co-operate in their face-work. Relatedly, work coming from the field of psychology has noted that; “...social actors may, on occasion, take joint responsibility for policing conversations, for correcting, managing and for suppressing the articulation of particular forms of presentation” (Condor et al 2006: 445). Rather than Lisa and Charlie working together however, Charlie appears to be trying to re-orientate Lisa’s reaction into one of ‘shock’ rather than sadness. Shock appears to be the more ‘acceptable’ reaction for Charlie.

Lisa's response may have been especially hard for Charlie to bear considering Charlie's feelings about fatherhood and abortion (see below).

A form of 'management' is also evident with the group interaction between Harriet (18), Kasey (18) and Jane (17). When Harriet answered first, she appears to set the precedent as to what the 'correct' response should be and so 'manages' the way the other women then present their reactions;

*Kyla: How did you feel?*

*Harriet: Shocked*

*Kasey: Shocked then happy*

*Jane: Shocked then happy because it's quite scary*

Claire (16) related some negative emotions when she discovered she was pregnant;

*I didn't have any emotion, I just froze. Took me about five minutes and then I just burst into tears, crying after that. I was still at school obviously so like I was like going out of lessons bursting into tears...I went crying to my dad straight away and I was just crying in his arms and he didn't know what the hell was wrong with me*

Nevertheless, later she said that "in my head I knew what I was doing" and related how she had always wanted a baby (see previous chapter). Her reaction here is rather at odds with her articulation of a desire for a baby; this not to dispute Claire's account, however. Claire may have desired motherhood, but the circumstances of her pregnancy (sixteen and single) may not have been what she had in mind. Relating her desire to be a mother may then be part of a strategy to present herself as fulfilling a dream rather than living a nightmare. Further, this may act as a form of reassurance to the self that is something she has always wanted.

These young women can be seen to be negotiating a path between two competing discourses surrounding teenage motherhood. They cannot be seen to desire motherhood, whilst at the same time have to present themselves as 'good' mothers who love and want their children. This need to present a coherent self can also be seen when it comes to deciding to continue

with the pregnancy and will be returned to later. The chapter will now move on to examine the women's considerations and influences about the resolution of the pregnancy.

## 6.2. Considering the 'Options'

Most of the women only discussed two possible options for the conclusion of the pregnancy; parenthood or termination. Only Kate (18) mentioned the possibility of adoption as a resolution to the pregnancy;

*I got pregnant in August and found out in December...we went for an abortion and that's when we realised I was twenty four weeks and so they said to us either you keep it or you put it up for adoption and adoption wasn't really an option...I thought well, I'm not going to give it up for adoption; can't do that. Erm, so I just thought at the end of the day I'm going to keep it*

It is interesting to note that Kate seems to be prepared to terminate the pregnancy but not to adopt<sup>24</sup>. Given her expression of an orientation to pregnancy discussed in the previous chapter, it may be the case that having an abortion was not her first choice. It is also worth considering whether Kate's orientation to parenthood has any impact on the late confirmation of her pregnancy. Hudson and Ineichen (1991) note that poor attendance at ante-natal clinics is linked to the fact that teenagers are often late in confirming the pregnancy. These authors argue that there are a range of reasons for this including; fear, embarrassment and being afraid to confront the reality of pregnancy.

The late confirmation of pregnancy may have made Kate's 'decision' not to abort easier to make. Nevertheless, David's reaction to the pregnancy may have led her to consider this outcome;

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<sup>24</sup> It is regrettable that I did not pursue Kate's feelings about adoption further. In retrospect this would have been an insightful line of enquiry and would have enhanced understandings of her perspectives.

*We nearly finished, we nearly like (...) because he didn't (...) he wasn't ready... he said, 'I don't want to keep it' which is understandable because he wanted to go to uni*

As previously discussed, Kate said she wanted something to 'hold on to' after her parents' separation. Losing her partner did not then fit into these needs. Faced with this prospect, aborting the pregnancy may have seemed preferable. Nevertheless, when this was no longer an option, the decision to give up a baby carried for nine months and given birth to was perhaps more challenging. Furthermore, she became certain that David wouldn't leave her;

*...I just thought at the end of the day I'm going to keep it, if he wants to stay around he can stay around...I knew that he was angry, but I knew that he wouldn't go because he's not that type of person (...) he's not (...) I dunno, different*

Kate describes adoption as 'not being an option', whereas presumably termination would have been an option had the pregnancy been discovered earlier. David's preference for the pregnancy to be terminated when Kate had a 'choice' was considered by Kate as "understandable". The statement above, however, indicates that once she no longer had a 'choice', David withdrawing support would not be understandable. Furthermore, it would not fit into her conception of him as a 'good man'.

Three further young women also related how they were too far into their pregnancies to be able to terminate;

*Naomi (18): I didn't know I was pregnant until I was thirty two weeks*

*Harriet (18): I didn't find out until I was six or seven months pregnant...But my dad was like (...) trying to make me he like booked me a place in a clinic to try and get it aborted and I was like 'dad it's like past the stage for like stuff like this'*

*Sallie (18): I was properly in tears...because I was in college I didn't like want it but when I went down to go and see the doctor I was too far gone to have like an abortion...I fell pregnant in the November and I didn't find out properly until January. And I was like two months gone*

Naomi and Harriet said that had they been able to abort they would have chosen not to. Sallie, however, expresses that she would have preferred to terminate had she not have been 'too far

gone'. A termination would have been possible at two months but would have been more likely to have been a vacuum aspiration abortion. Although then not technically 'too far gone' for an abortion, Sallie may have felt unable to go through this more intrusive treatment. It may be the case however, that Sallie was referring to a moral objection to an abortion at this stage. 'Deciding' to abort in the later stages of a pregnancy may have felt less 'palatable' than an early termination of a barely developed foetus.

Given that many of the young women felt unable to terminate (see following section), it is surprising that adoption was not mentioned as an option. This may draw further attention to the need to differentiate between unintended and unwanted teenage pregnancies. It has been noted within this thesis that adoption was a more likely outcome for teenage pregnancy in previous decades. This was considered by society to be preferable to having a child being raised by an unmarried mother. Luker (1996:164) notes that adoption is no longer considered "simple and morally correct" for teenage mothers however. Abortion is more often presented in SRE as a resolution to an unwanted pregnancy and adoption has declined in frequency. Nevertheless, adoption continues to be raised as a potential resolution for 'problem' families. Notably, Jack Straw was quoted as advocating adoption as a "positive, responsible choice" for unmarried mothers (Riddell 1999) and teenage parents (Arai 2009). Levitas (1999:14) sees this pronouncement as being related to his views on the "inadequacy of teenage mothers". As Straw included the need to reduce teenage pregnancy whilst discussing "Progress in tackling bad parents" (2009) it would appear Levitas' supposition is justified.

It is then interesting that the only time which adoption was noted by young parents other than by Kate was in reference to an understanding of 'bad mothers'. In the first focus group a conversation started about a mother who attended the Minton group. Rachel (17) and Debbie (19) were both particularly critical of the young woman's disciplinary practices. A comparison was then made between the young woman and the mother of 'Baby P'<sup>25</sup>;

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<sup>25</sup> 'Baby P' is a reference to a case of child abuse in 2007 resulting in the death of 17month old Peter Connolly. His mother was convicted for causing or allowing her son's death. The boy's step father and a lodger were also convicted in relation to the Peter's injuries and death.

*Debbie: ....I can't understand people that are like that [a mother in the group]. Like with that baby P as well, I feel for that little boy he must have gone through so much pain. It makes my stomach crawl like thinking how can a mother do that to a child?*

*Rachel: Yeah and how can you let someone else do it it's just....*

*Debbie: I'd be like (...) I do everything for her to protect her there is no way I would let anybody harm her*

*Rachel: I don't understand how people are like that either, how could you do that?*

*Debbie: And why have children? Why carry the pregnancy?*

*Rachel: Or give them away for a better life. Put them up for adoption*

It is interesting that a young mother struggling to discipline her child is put in the same bracket as a notorious case of child abuse. It is interesting how Debbie in particular differentiates herself from the 'failures' of Baby P's mother to protect her son. The implication is clear; adoption is for 'bad' mothers and 'bad' women and Debbie is not one of these. As Graham and McDermott (2005) observe, othering 'bad' mothers is a discursive strategy used by young mothers in order to distance themselves from representations of the problem teenage mother. Debbie, however, has an added investment in distancing herself from this judgement. Debbie was under social services eye because of her experiences in her family of origin. Consequently, when Debbie became pregnant, their involvement increased and her daughter was put on the 'at-risk' register at birth. Similarly, Hazel (15) found that assumptions about her ability to mother were made before she had given birth. Here, the assumptions about Hazel's capability are related to her age;

*Hazel: ...social services got involved and (...) started telling me if I didn't get rid of it I would have it taken off of me when it was born... We're going to take your baby off of you as soon as it is born because we don't think you're capable to look after a child. Bearing in mind this was the first time they met me, because it was the doctor who phoned them. And he said I'm sorry but I don't think you are mature enough to look after a child.*

Adoption and social care can then be seen here as to signify punishment for 'bad' mothering and an assumption of poor parenting. This is in direct opposition the women's representations

of themselves as 'good' and 'responsible' mothers. Luker (1996) also notes a commitment to 'family values' linked to the rejection of adoption as a solution for teenage women.

She says;

...These [unmarried and poor] young mothers express a commitment to moral values over material advancement, a passionate attachment to children, and a willingness to sustain a family (albeit a non-traditional one) whatever the social and financial cost (pg164)

Given the consideration of family and maternal feelings in the previous chapter, it is perhaps little wonder that adoption is not more widely considered or used. The chapter will now go on to examine considerations of abortion and draw further on these ideas of responsibility and good mothering.

#### *Feelings about Termination*

The women's feelings about terminating a pregnancy can be seen to fit around two key ideas; personal objection and moral opposition. A number of women expressed that not having an abortion was a personal decision;

*Fiona (18): I don't think I could have sat through an abortion to be honest, I don't think that abortion is bad because sometimes I think yeah ok, it's for the best if you really don't want a baby...but I don't think I could have sat through one you know...*

*Bea (14): I couldn't bring myself to have a termination*

*Claire (16): I never doubted ever having an abortion, never [emphatically] I don't know why, it just never even crossed my mind.*

*Lisa (17): I just thought I couldn't go through an abortion, you know mentally I think it would really screw me up.*

Hazel (15) and Holly (18) also expressed a personal reason for rejecting abortion. They did, however, preface this by stating they do not 'agree' with abortions. Nonetheless, both professed not to judge those who may choose to abort and added some caveats as to which situations abortions are deemed acceptable;

*Hazel: I don't agree with abortions (...) personally*

*Kyla: Is there any particular reason for that?*

*Hazel: Not really, I just (...) I couldn't imagine doing it...*

*Kyla: Would there be any circumstances where you would think that abortion would be something you could do?*

*Hazel: For other people, yeah. Like if someone was raped or whatever and they got pregnant, and they obviously weren't ready I think that'd be ok. But it's everyone to their own isn't it?*

*Holly: I didn't want to have to go through having an abortion because I've never really agreed with it. Obviously like in certain situations (...) I wouldn't ever judge anyone that had had an abortion or anything because it's their decision but I wouldn't feel comfortable having one*

The use of a wider moral opposition to abortion to bolster personal objections is a clear theme emerging from this data.

Research conducted elsewhere has noted the influence of community and familial anti-abortion sentiments. These have been suggested as influential on the decision to continue with a teenage pregnancy (SEU 1999; Greene 2006; Arai 2009). Lee et al (2004:16) note; "...the case for the 'right-to-choose' abortion exists in a relatively weak form as part of the cultural context in which young women's opinions about the abortion issue are generated".

Nevertheless, Arai (2003a:208) suggests that within her sample of teenage mums; "...for some, the espousal of anti-abortion beliefs seemed to mask a genuine desire for motherhood..."

Cater and Coleman (2006:20) also suggest that; "vehement anti-abortion views could be that they serve as a justification for continuing with a pregnancy, because such strong views are unlikely to be challenged".

As has been discussed above, young women struggle to present their feelings about pregnancy in an 'acceptable' light. It can be further argued that young parents are not considered to have an automatic right to childbearing once pregnancy has occurred. It may then be, as Arai (2003a) suggests, that young women may be wary about appearing to desire motherhood.

Ruddick (1993) draws attention to the lack of positive discourses available to young pregnant women;

Negative and positive experiences are both integral to procreative choice. Yet in discussions and readings about adolescent procreativity, I find amid a discourse of fear and admonition scant evidence of enabling concepts. Indeed positive conceptions of mothering, birthgiving...are themselves interpreted negatively-as dangerously likely to lead to...disastrous mothering (Ruddick 1993:134)

There is then little space for teenage women to claim legitimacy in their 'decision' to continue with a pregnancy. "A key issue in determining the mother's ability to be viewed as legitimate is her ability to elicit societal sanction and support" (Bock 2000:65). Bock argues that the most important factor in claiming legitimacy is the presence of the father. Where the father was not present such as with her sample of 'single mothers by choice'<sup>26</sup>, Bock found that the women were able to call on other factors in order to claim legitimacy for their decision to mother. This included 'age, responsibility, emotional maturity, and fiscal capability'. Bock argues that teenage mothers, "...frequently have no man to serve in the instrumental function of bread-winning..." (Bock 2000:66). Therefore, she says, teenage mothers lack legitimacy in the eyes of society. At the point of deciding to continue with the pregnancy, all of the young women bar Claire were in a relationship with the biological father. Nevertheless, it appears that they still struggled to articulate a sense of legitimacy or 'right' to continue the pregnancy.

Lack of legitimacy may be used to explain Saskia's account of her change of heart about termination;

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<sup>26</sup> All of the women in this study were over the age of 25

*Saskia (16): I did book an abortion [says quietly] and I did go (...) I was going to go through with it. [I] had the tablet in my hand, the tablet that softens the embryo up and breaks it down. I had the tablet and I was about to take it and Thomas kicked. And I couldn't take it.*

Rather than claiming that she changed her mind and decided to continue with the pregnancy, Saskia places the decision as being out of her hands. Firstly in terms of the timing of the abortion and secondly in what she relates as the dramatic intervention of her son.

Irrespective of marital status, discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy demonstrate a lack of societal sanction and support for the 'decision' to mother in these circumstances. It can then be argued that all young mothers carry some burden of illegitimacy. The pro-choice agenda could provide a framework for young women to argue a sense of right in their decision to mother. Whilst 'pro-choice' allows for a space to 'choose' abortion, there is little concomitant space for teenage mothers to 'choose' motherhood. It may then be easier to claim a right to reject abortion on moral grounds than to claim a right to mother. For example Trish (19) noted; "I wanted keep him [baby]..." but then quickly adds "... because I didn't really believe in abortion". Wanting to keep the baby was not, in itself, reason enough to continue the pregnancy. Accordingly, some young women used language which wouldn't be out of place in a 'pro-life' leaflet;

*Debbie (19): There are so many people out there who can't have children but there's so many people out there who are killing their child and their babies and stuff and I think that I couldn't do it [abortion] seeing people who can't actually give birth. Sort of you know desperate [Debbie's emphasis] for children and there's people that are like 'oh I'm pregnant', I think it's horrible I really do*

*Nancy (16): I feel that if you don't use the condom and you don't use the pill then I think that you should have the baby. I know there's enough children in this world that are still out there and need adopting but it is better to put another one out there than to kill a life*

*Jane (17): I can't kill a baby. It's just not fair*

*Kasey (18): The doctor gave me loads of leaflets and told me to think about it. I went in on the Wednesday and she gave me til the Friday to decide and I was like I'm going ahead with it, you can't do that really can you?*

*Kyla: Do you think there was any particular reason why you felt you couldn't?*

*Kasey: It's not their fault is it? It doesn't matter if you're a teenage mum...*

*Harriet (18): ...I don't think I agree with the whole aborting thing, I don't think I could do it...it wasn't a mistake, it probably was but it's your own mistake so you have to live with the mistakes you made I guess*

*Kathy (16): I couldn't have done that [abortion]. I don't even squash spiders and I hate them*

Here the unborn foetus is cast as an 'innocent victim'. Furthermore, language used here such as 'kill' and 'rid' denotes a decision to abort as irresponsible, callous and actively cruel. Here, motherhood seems almost a penance for irresponsible sexual and contraceptive behaviour. As can be seen in the previous chapter, Jane described her pregnancy as her "own stupid fault". This is similar to Kasey's statement above that it's not the baby's fault and Harriet's use of the term 'own mistake'. The implication is clear, the fault is believed to lie with the mother and therefore the only responsible action is mothering.

The idea that having the baby is a responsible resolution to the pregnancy has been found elsewhere (Tabberer et al 2000; Lee et al 2004; Greene 2006). Greene (2006) found that a sense of responsibility for the unborn foetus and for contraceptive behaviour fed into a decision to reject a termination.

As already discussed, teenage pregnancy discourses draw partially on gendered constructions of sexuality. Young men are traditionally seen as naturally sexually desiring and therefore not responsible for their 'urges'. Young women are then placed as 'gatekeepers' and deemed responsible for sexual and contraceptive behaviour. This responsibility is compounded by the likelihood that young women are 'left holding the baby'. Koffman (2009) notes that historically a teenager's decision to continue with her pregnancy was viewed positively. She says; "The self-sacrifice of motherhood was seen as the antithesis of the selfish pursuit of sexual pleasure that led to the pregnancy" (Guardian online 2009). Furthermore, Williams and Shames (2003) note a link between pro-life perspectives and ideas of maternal selflessness. The influence of these discourses can be seen in these young women's narratives. The women place themselves as responsible for their sexual behaviour, risks and even 'mistakes'.

Nevertheless, the problematisation of teenage pregnancy means that this is no longer viewed as a positive resolution.

Greene (2006:36) argues that the women's constructions of their responsibility demonstrate young mothers have; "asserted their personal agency" and resisted dominant discourses about young motherhood. It can be seen here that the young women did indeed assert their personal agency. In contrast to the passivity evident regarding contraception use, the women appear to exert a stronger sense of self and ability to act on their desires. This could be irrespective of the father's views;

*Claire: I just said, I'm having a baby that was it, final*

*Trish: I decided to keep him (...) whether he [partner] was going to be part of his life or not*

Or of the family of origin's views;

*Jenny: It's not their [her family's] decision, it's my decision and it's going to be me that has a baby to look after, it's not their decision it's my decision*

Contrary to Greene (2006), however, it is argued here that these women's use of notions of responsibility does not signify an assertion of personal agency. Rather than resistance, this indicates an acceptance of dominant and negative constructions of teenage pregnancy. The women here do not talk about continuing with the pregnancy because they want to have the baby. Instead, claiming this right and desire to mother the women present themselves as moral and responsible young women. Framing their 'decisions' with these concepts looks more like a defence against assumptions often levied at young mothers than a complete rejection.

This suggests that the women's presentation of themselves as 'good' and 'responsible' mothers is part of an acceptance of dominant teenage mother discourses<sup>27</sup>. Constructions of good mothering practices which exhort women to be self-sacrificing caregivers are aimed at

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<sup>27</sup> This argument is reinforced in the following chapter where the women's attempts to deflect and deal with negative constructions are demonstrated in more detail.

all types of mothers (Williams and Shames 2003; Douglas and Michaels 2005). But those mothering from stigmatised positions of class (Gillies 2007), ethnicity (Douglas and Michaels 2005) and indeed youth are likely to feel a double or even triple bind. There is then an important investment in presenting the self as a good and responsible woman and mother. The power of these ideas may make having an abortion more challenging to consider. Williams and Shames (2003:822) argue that “pro-choice rhetoric, which focuses heavily on individual autonomy and sexual liberation for women, feeds the charge that women who get abortions are ‘selfish’”. ‘Choosing’ termination is then cast in direct opposition to the self that young pregnant women need to present.

Whilst the women’s feelings about abortion were paramount, other factors were also considered in the decision to continue the pregnancy. The following sections will now examine two of the key influences at this stage; ‘family’ and ‘the partner’.

### **6.3 Continuing with the Pregnancy**

#### *The Perfect Family*

The previous chapter highlighted how some of the young women in this research articulated an orientation towards pregnancy. A desire for love and a family of one’s own was an important consideration for some. In the data presented here, three young women can be seen to be drawing on this idea in the ‘decision’ to continue their pregnancies. It is also demonstrated that this need goes beyond a desire for a family and incorporates a dream of ‘the perfect family’. It has been asserted that young women often see a baby as a source of love which may have been lacking in their own childhoods (Montgomery 2002; Cater and Coleman 2006; Chase et al 2006). It is argued here that this can be linked to the difficult childhood experiences related by these women. We start by examining Debbie’s (19) narrative.

Rather than (or possibly as well as) a need for love Debbie’s decision to continue her pregnancy may be influenced by a need for acceptance from her family of origin. Becoming a mother can be seen as a way for her to prove herself to her family;

*When I told my mum I was pregnant she was like, 'oh you'll never amount to nothing la la la'. But all my family were going, 'oh you'll never get a partner and you'll never have a baby' and stuff because 'you're worthless' and 'na na na'. But when I found John and I fell pregnant with her I kind of was like well I've got everything that I wanted now so fuck you in the face sort of thing*

Debbie's marriage to her childhood sweetheart and having his child proves her 'worth'. As has already been noted, she draws on an idealised view of the family expressed through her repetition of wanting the 'perfect' family;

*...when I fell pregnant with her I was like yeah I've got my husband to be, I've got my baby on the way and it was like the perfect family like so different from my family life*

John's history, however, does not match this ideal. John had two children from two previous relationships neither of which he saw any more. Nevertheless, Debbie appears to overlook this in her need to create her family. In doing so she recasts her and John's family as being different from his previous experiences;

*...he's got this little one now so (...) and before he had two boys so now he's got a girl. And she's such a daddy's girl, it's always dad dad dad*

It can also be seen that marriage, to Debbie, was a way of cementing her family; "I got married when I was five months pregnant because I wanted her to have the same name as us". Marriage and a shared name can be seen as signifying her family as a 'proper' family. In addition, this further differentiates her family from John's previous ones; particularly as they do not share his surname. Lisa also articulates a desire to create a better family than one she experienced in her family of origin;

*Lisa (17): I was very like kind of poor and you know not much happening, mum's an alcoholic. Yeah, mum drinks a lot; dad's always drunk and so (...) I just want everything apart from that to happen so...*

*Kyla: Do you think that had an influence on you deciding to (...) [continue the pregnancy]*

*Lisa: [interrupting] Yeah. Because I thought I'll bring someone into the world and bring them up properly kind of thing*

Cater and Coleman (2006) discuss the influence of family experiences on planned teenage pregnancies. They found that some young women wanted to have a baby to prove that they could be a good parent, or a better parent than their own had been. They further argue that for these young women, pregnancy is a way to 'correct' their experiences in their own relationships with their children. This can also be seen in Nancy's (16) account;

*... it wasn't just that it was from when I was in care I just wanted a baby to prove that you don't parent your child like that. You do it this way and (...) yeah from the way I was treated at home<sup>28</sup>*

The above extracts demonstrate how these needs and wants are also influential on the decision to continue with an unplanned pregnancy. In addition, as with Debbie, Lisa aspires to an idealised view of 'the family'. She and Charlie (24) shared how they saw their future together;

*Charlie: That's the plan...get married when he's two or three when he's a toddler and then he'll be a page boy*

*Lisa: My dream is a nice two bedroomed house or three bedroomed house you know with a garden... and that'll be me for the rest of me life [laughs] be nice to have just a little bit of money behind us so we are comfortable and that'd be it. You know, annual family holiday, I'd love that*

Nancy too can be seen has having dreamt of a more 'typical' family life than she had experienced as a child growing up in the care system. Sadly, for Nancy she already felt these dreams were shattered;

*As a child thinking 'yeah, I wanna be like everyone else' and settle down and have a family. It's not until you have a child and you're going through what I'm going through you realise how many actual other families are like that. See as you grow up, well as I grew up as a child all I ever saw was mummy, daddy, family everywhere I went. All my*

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<sup>28</sup> Nancy did not want to talk about why she was placed into care but did mention experiences of domestic violence in her family of origin. She also related being beaten by foster carers in more than one placement.

*friends were all like and now obviously I've gone through all that, now they're not like it. They're all broken<sup>29</sup> and stuff.*

These accounts demonstrate that, to these young women coming from severe family difficulties, forming a family of their own is a serious matter. This is key to understanding the 'choices' and 'decisions' made by these particular young women. Marriage and the family are seen as important for their own stability, security and happiness. Furthermore, these are viewed as an important framework for children. These three young women have come from chaotic family lives and so are perhaps more aware than most of the value of stability and have high expectations of family life. This is a far cry from the presentation of young mothers as feckless and irresponsible. Although a number of teenage mothers do end up as single parents at some point (see Chapter Two), it is clear from these (and indeed most) of the accounts in this study that this is far from the desired or anticipated position.

As can be seen in the following chapter, when Debbie and Nancy became single mothers their desire to provide stability and safety for their children remained a constant. It can however, be considered that the women's idealisation of the family can be disempowering and even dangerous. John's history and social services assessment of him as a risk to his own child belies the notion of the perfect family. Similarly, Nancy's partner's drug use and violent behaviour (discussed in the following chapter) does not read as a 'happy ever after'. Nevertheless, the women's needs and desires (with regards love and the family) can be seen as blinding them to the less than ideal nature of these relationships. Lisa's situation indicates, however, that the desire to create a 'better' family for the self and the unborn child does not necessarily lead to problematic or damaging relationships. It is important, however, to note the potentially damaging power of discourses of love and 'the family' for women who have experienced severe childhood adversity. Moreover, this is also salient for women, of any age, who become involved with exploitative and dangerous sexual partners. This section will now move on to look in more detail at the place of the father in the decision to continue the pregnancy.

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<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note the term 'broken' used below given the rhetoric of 'Broken Britain' which was prevalent at the time of interview

### *What the Father Wants?*

In almost all the cases in this study, the first person to be told of the pregnancy was the father of the child. The previous chapter demonstrated the women's partners had already been influential on 'decisions' relating to sexual relationships and contraception. The fathers can also be seen to have an impact on the 'decision' to continue with the pregnancy. This section therefore details the father's reaction to the pregnancy. The way in which the women present the views and presence of the father in their decision to reject termination and continue the pregnancy are then discussed. At this point it is worth remembering that only two fathers were interviewed directly. This section therefore relies on the young women's reports of their reactions and wishes. Consequently, it is an account of the meanings they give to their partners reactions.

The prevalent reaction of the fathers, as reported by the women in this study, was one of shock. This was followed by an expression of their desire or preference for the outcome of the pregnancy. It was reported that happiness or a wish for the pregnancy to continue was the most common response from partners. For example as the accounts from these three young women show;

*Kasey (18): ...he had this big happy smile on his face and that and he loved it, he came to all the scans he could*

*Hazel (15): ...I was like 'I'm pregnant' and he text me back going 'oh for real' and then he went out and was like telling all his friends, he was really excited*

*Nicola (19): ... he was like 'oh baby' you know 'that's us now, a family, we're done' [pleased voice]*

Nicola's account in particular indicates that the father's preference to continue the pregnancy may be important. She expressed profound unhappiness about her partner's (Grant) desire for her to continue the pregnancy;

*I didn't want to tell him I was just (...) going to go off and do one and then just disappear because I felt I couldn't stay around him if I was going to have to (...) get*

*rid of a baby. He must have noticed that something was wrong because he started questioning and then you sort of go 'oh, I'd better tell you then' [resigned]*

Once he became aware of the pregnancy, Nicola's own wishes became silenced and she was unable to voice her preference for an abortion;

*I sort of went 'ah. (...) so you want to keep (...)'. Erm, and his family were very much, 'oh yeah another grandchild' you know (...) and it sort of felt like 'oh ok, there's my decision made' ...I think I was so much in love at the time and he was happy I thought 'oh ok'*

The age difference between Nicola (19) and Grant (32) may explain the disparity in their feelings about the pregnancy. The age difference may have also been significant to Nicola's apparent lack of power to pursue her own desires here. Kathy's account demonstrates a similar lack of power in her relationship with James (age unknown). Kathy (16) was clear that she grew to want the baby and it was she who decided to continue with the pregnancy.

Nevertheless, she was also certain that had her wishes not have accorded with James' then she may not have been able to make that decision;

*Kyla: Do you think if he wanted to you to have an abortion you would have had one?*

*Kathy: I'd like to say I wouldn't of, but he was so good at manipulating me that I think if he had wanted that he would have got that...It was intense and sometimes violent relationship. James was very manipulative*

*Kyla: How about if you'd have wanted an abortion, would you have been able to say to him that you were having one?*

*Kathy: No way. Never.*

Whilst the number of men in this study is limited, these two accounts indicate that notions of the family may be also be appealing to some men<sup>30</sup>. Grant told his family about the pregnancy almost immediately after he found out. This may indicate the placing of the pregnancy in a wider family context. Charlie explicitly drew on an image of being part of the family as an explanation for his pleasure at the pregnancy;

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<sup>30</sup> As with the women in this study, the men's family of origin may be important here. However, as is already noted speculating from the limited data available here is problematic.

*I wanted kids anyway so I wasn't bothered...I was happy as well because like all my sisters have been having kids and that so I was like I'm actually going to be part of the family like because I was going to have a kid as well...so I'm glad it's happened sort of thing*

Both Lisa and Nicola draw on desires of an ideal family. This can be seen above when Lisa described her dreams for the future. Nicola noted; "because I grew up in a step family I wanted my children to have their biological parents together; happy". Young men who appear to hold similar ideals may be unwittingly tapping into young women's dreams of the 'family' Other young men, whilst making their preference for the pregnancy to continue clear, offered support for 'any' decision;

*Bea (14): ...he said he'd rather not terminate it but as I was younger than him he would support whichever decision that I made*

*Fiona (18): ...we both talked about it because he wanted to make sure he'd (...) you know (...) he (...) he didn't agree with abortions either so err he wanted to make sure that I was sure...he was making sure you know what I was in for...that I knew it would be hard and stuff and*

*Lisa (17): He just said you know (...) he was really good about it, he just come and said 'look I'm there whatever you're going to do'*

*Kyla: [to Charlie] Did you ever think that perhaps you might have preferred to have had an abortion?*

*Charlie (24): No I'm instantly against it...I don't even think twice about it. No [emphatically]*

The women imply that they were free to make any decision they felt was right. Nevertheless, the expression of their partner's feelings may have, in reality, made this more challenging. Existing literature emphasises that young men's opinions may be significant the decision to terminate a teenage pregnancy (see Tabberer et al 2000; Evans 2001; Hoggart 2006, Lee et al 2004). It may also then be the case that a partner can have a significant impact on the decision to continue with a pregnancy. The age of the father is also an important consideration and may have implications for power differentials in a relationship (Brown et al 2006). Bea's partner, Roger, is reported to have left the decision to Bea because of her age (she was fourteen at this point). At nineteen, Roger can be considered still to be a young father. Nevertheless, the age

gap is still significant, especially given that Bea was underage. Charlie and Grant were also older (twenty-four and thirty-two respectively). Their ages may have also been important in framing their feelings about impending fatherhood. Furthermore, they may have been influential on the women's 'decisions'. Perceptions of the father as being more experienced and knowledgeable may have reassured the women that they were making the 'right' decision or silenced their own preferences.

These accounts highlight the importance of taking young men into account when considering teenage pregnancy. It was demonstrated in the previous chapter that young women's needs and desires are silenced in sexual situations preceding pregnancy. It can be seen here that this silence continues. Kathy and Nicola's narratives demonstrate the power that male partners can have in taking women's decision making powers away from them. Other women may not have been subject to the same kind of control. Nevertheless, young men's abortion views may also be influential. Whether wittingly or not, young men have the potential to exert considerable influence on young women's 'choices'. Dominant discourses which hold women to account for teenage parenthood, however, conceal circumstances such as these. Evidence suggests many teenage mothers end up parenting alone, at least for a part of their lives (see Chapter Two). Further then, some young women are also left to take sole responsibility for a situation they had thought they were entering into as a couple. This is especially important considering some of the women's relationships started to break down before the child was born.

#### *A change of heart*

*Kyla: So he was quite pleased when he found out then?*

*Jane (17): At first, yes (...) but then when I actually started getting the bump...he just lost interest in both of us and was just going out with his mates and didn't care and wouldn't come to the scan and stuff because he just didn't care any more*

*Kasey (18): ...it was fine and then I dunno when I was nearly (...) about to drop sort of thing he was going out every night and coming home like six in the morning and that and I didn't know what was happening with us*

Jane offers an explanation for this apparent change of heart;

*...you're boring basically when you're pregnant aren't you? You can't go out, you can't do fun things so he just lost interest...I think when they find that their girlfriend is pregnant they want it and then once it comes and they realise it's a lot much hard work they just dog off with their friends and don't (...) just leave it all to the mum because they know they can*

As has been noted above, these women's acceptance of mothering responsibilities appears to start fairly soon after conception. These young men, however, do not appear to be able to make the same changes at the same pace. Trish and Nancy found that their partners did not make the changes in behaviour they expected;

*Trish (19): But then after like I found out I was pregnant we started arguing loads and (...) then I just told him to fuck off basically and then he started living in squats and taking smack... his initial reaction, his like life, was to live in squats and get wasted as mine was to stop all that and just become pregnant. So I had to stop all that and he didn't, I don't think he could understand how I could stop it all so quick*

*Nancy (16): ...I was getting all serious and like we've got to stop taking drugs and we've got to stop doing this and got to stop doing (...) and because he was only seventeen at the time he wanted to still be out there and doing it. And I was sort of the one sort of being a parent to him I suppose, would you say? [Directed at her sister who nodded]. Yeah like you can't do this and you can't (...) and locking him in. I shouldn't have locked him in but it was the only way I could get him to listen*

These accounts of young men's behavior prior to childbirth indicate that they were not able or willing to make sacrifices equal to that of the women at this stage. Baker (2009) draws attention to the sacrifices performed by young women as they become mothers. She details the loss of independence, a 'constriction' of possibilities and a marked reduction of contact with friends. Such experiences are exemplified by the women's accounts of their domestic lives;

*Nicola (19): I used to do all his clothes, his laundry, his ironing, his cooking, his cleaning... he would just come home and sit down, everything was done for him...I was doing catering so I was on my feet the whole time. So I went from cooking other people's meals to cooking his meals*

*Fiona (18): I try and get dinner on for him like when he comes in and especially lately cos he's very much a 'I like my house spotless' person*

*Nancy (16): I'm like I've been doing the cleaning all day, I've been looking after your daughter all day, I've been doing you dinner, I've just run your bath, I've dah dah dah*

Holly also referred to sacrifices she made in her social life because of her mothering responsibilities and concerns about leaving her son for the evening. Mothering discourses legitimate these sacrifices;

Some of the strongest features of mothering described by the young women were its weight of responsibility, the demand for an intensive nurturing, and the need for self-sacrifice. Each young mother described the suppression of self-interest in order to accomplish the responsibilities of mothering (Baker 2009:282)

Ross et al (2009) note that within their sample, most young men were able to give up problematic friendships and activities in preparation for fatherhood. Nonetheless, similar to these findings, some found it more difficult and this became a source of conflict and separation from partners. Nancy draws on the idea that age and maturity might explain her partner's behaviour in the face of fatherhood. Care must be taken, however, when speculating on the basis of second hand reportage of the father's attitude to parenting. It has already been noted within this thesis that young men are often absent from discussions of teenage pregnancy and parenthood. Tuffin et al (2010:486) warn that "this research vacuum has, all too frequently, been filled with myths and negative characterisations". It is then important to consider the potential inaccuracies in speaking for fathers. As with young mothers, there is no one story of teenage fatherhood, or fathers involved with teenage pregnancies. Furthermore, in contrast to the accounts above, young men are often happy to take on paternal responsibilities and roles (Bunting and McAuley 2004; McDonnell et al 2009; Ross et al 2009; Tuffin et al 2010). This was also found to be the case with many of the fathers in this research (see following chapter).

As noted above, motherhood ideologies and discourses demand a level of sacrifice. Some of these young fathers do not however appear to accept a similar level of sacrifice. Dallas et al (2000) noted that some mothers' were angered by what they saw as a disparity in levels of sacrifice. This is borne out through the women's accounts of domesticity and their partner's behaviour both here and in the following chapter. Many of the young men were providing

financially and so perhaps saw their role as being fulfilled<sup>31</sup>. This may be especially the case given that the child is not born yet and other more ‘hands on’ roles cannot be performed. Furthermore, perhaps as the ones carrying the baby the women feel more aware of its presence and so more able to change their behaviours.

McDonnell et al (2009) note that young fathers often felt unprepared and uninvolved in ante-natal services. The authors argue that more support services need to build on young fathers’ expressions of interest in impending fatherhood. This would then help to strengthen their relationships with their children. This idea was also advocated by Nancy who shared some of her struggles to get her daughter’s father to be more involved with his daughter;

*I do feel that if there was more groups for dads (...) like to do with pregnancy as well...I definitely do think there needs to be some more stuff for fathers though definitely, to promote things more because dad’s, they say they know everything but they don’t. But they’re too scared to ask for help cos it’s obviously male pride and in front of their friends and stuff like that*

Parent rather than mother focused support for teenage pregnancies may also help to engender some understanding between the couples. Role expectations could become part of the focus for discussion at ante-natal groups to challenge gendered understandings and reduce the potential of conflict. Engaging fathers at this stage as research demonstrates that men’s feelings about pregnancy and their prenatal behaviours has implications for their later involvement with their children (Bronte-Tinkew et al 2007). It is the case, however, that some of these young dads required support beyond that of their role as fathers. The issues related below for both Barry and Sean indicate that there may be further issues impeding some young men’s involvement as effective partners and fathers. Once Trish and Barry’s relationship broke down as a result of these conflicts he began threatening her and the unborn child;

*He has anger management problems and drug problems and alcohol problems and everything else under the sun [sighs] and like part schizophrenia so he just like switches all the time*

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<sup>31</sup> The roles and expectations of contemporary fatherhood are examined in the following chapter, including the relevance of considering the ‘breadwinner’ role.

A similar story was related by one of the young fathers attending the ante-natal group at Minton. As noted earlier, Sean reported verbally abusing his pregnant girlfriend, Amber;

*He said he wanted to stop it as he knew it was wrong. He had earlier said that he had been the “type of man” to go to raves, spend all the money on drugs and not care. He said finding out Amber was pregnant had changed him...he asked if he would be able to access help in prison as he was waiting to go to court for a breach of his previous order. He was looking at doing four months (Field Notes 24.10.08)*

Sean’s expression of a need to change and find support was picked up by the group leader at Minton. She was able to find support relevant support and refer him<sup>32</sup>. Three other young women (Saskia, Naomi and Nancy) reported incidents of domestic violence during their pregnancies. Existing research into domestic violence reveals that this is a shared experience (Tilley 2004). A Home Office report on domestic violence revealed that violence often escalates during pregnancy. Furthermore, 30% of domestic violence starts during pregnancy (Home Office 2006). Domestic violence in the women’s relationships will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

### *The Importance of Dad*

The presence of a father who is willing to support the young woman and the child can have an indirect influence on the decision to continue the pregnancy. This has already been hinted at above when Kate (18) decided not to adopt. Her assumption that her partner would not leave her was noted here. Lisa (17) notes that if she had not had Charlie’s (24) support she may have come to a different decision;

*I think if I didn’t have a supportive father or I didn’t know who the dad was I think I would not have gone through with it...when he kind of was so supportive like that I kind of thought, well yeah maybe it’s meant to be...*

Lisa places her decision into the hands of fate here. Given Charlie’s articulation of his feelings about termination, perhaps drawing on discourses of fate has a more romantic ring to it than

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<sup>32</sup> Sean and Amber split up shortly before the birth of their baby and whether Sean went on to access support and continue with the changes he had started to make is unknown however.

indecision or disempowerment. Furthermore, Lisa's feelings about family may be significant in her need for a partner's support in continuing the pregnancy. Her dreams of a house and a family may not have seemed a possibility with her as a single parent.

Holly (18) also noted the importance of partner support. Further, both she and Matthew (18) drew on the importance of stability in the relationship when making their decision to continue the pregnancy;

*Holly: ...to be honest I think if Matt had said no [to continue the pregnancy] then I think I would have ended up (...) not having him...if I had doubted whether we would be together or not then I think maybe I would have had to take into consideration other options*

*Matthew: I don't know, maybe if I had any doubts about our relationship (...) I would've thought maybe not [continue with the pregnancy]*

A similar discussion took place in the second focus group with Rachel (17) and Debbie (19);

*Debbie: I think it's also like where you are in a relationship and stuff because like you've got to think when I fell pregnant is this relationship gonna go anywhere or am I going to raise her on my own or...what if we split up or and it all goes through your mind and effects your decisions as well*

*Rachel: How stable is your relationship yeah*

*Debbie: I'm not saying I would have had an abortion if like I wasn't with her father or anything but I think it does affect your relationship and like where you are going to be in like nine months time and how you're going to cope...I think you have to think about your relationship beforehand because there's no point going on with it if you're in nine months when you give birth it all crumbles*

The accounts from these young women demonstrate that a partner is considered an important factor to continuing with the pregnancy. It is worth noting, however, that for Debbie this was not the deciding factor. Nevertheless, as with Lisa, her emphasis on 'the family' includes the presence of the father as an ideal. The father can be an important source of support in terms of finances and shared parenting. If the relationship breaks down the women are then left with a situation they might not have chosen otherwise. Furthermore, this leaves them in a more vulnerable position as young single mothers. Conversely, three young women express that

their partner's preferences and desires were not paramount, it is to these accounts that this chapter will now turn.

### *Going it Alone*

Amanda (16) described her 'decision' to continue the pregnancy as being linked to her longstanding desire to have a baby;

*Amanda: He wanted me to have an abortion, erm I was sort of like because at the time I was living with my mum and he was living with his mum and we just had no stableness there at all really apart from each other. There was no home involved for us to move into or anything...he turned round and said to me like 'I really think we should have an abortion, I really don't think I'm ready for it' and all this lot. And I turned round and said to him 'I'm having this baby whether you like it or not', basically I was going to go through whether he left me or not I didn't care, I was adamant, I'd wanted this baby (...) so erm basically that was that*

Her use of the phrase; "that was that" appears to dismiss Simon's preferences as unimportant. It has already been noted above how Kate decided not to have her baby adopted saying; "if he wants to stay around he can stay around". This can be read as a 'decision' to parent as a single mother if absolutely necessary. Kate, however, assumed that David would not leave her. It may then be the case that Amanda took a similar gamble; and indeed Simon did not leave her.

Trish (19) and Claire (16) became aware very early on that they would be single parents if they continued with the pregnancy. Trish and Barry split up early on in the pregnancy. Nevertheless, Trish had already expressed her determination to keep the baby; "whether he was going to be part of his life or not". Claire and Mark had split up before she found out she was pregnant. When she told him of the pregnancy, however, it became clear that she could not expect any support even as an absent parent;

*Claire: He was just like (...) like you know (...) no you're not (...) or (...) you know (...) it's not mine. And then he went to prison literally days after<sup>33</sup> ...he was like 'just got of prison' and I was like 'ok' and he was like 'did you keep the baby' and I was like 'yeah' and he was like 'why? Get an abortion.' And I was like 'I'm due in two weeks'*

It may be significant that Amanda, Trish and Claire all shared some orientation towards pregnancy (see previous chapter). This may have overridden some of the more practical implications of parenting alone. It is debatable, however, that this is an indication that single parenthood is seen as desirable or a 'choice'. These women may have 'chosen' to continue with the pregnancy, but single parenthood is the default situation in which the choice has to be made. The decision to continue the pregnancy alone needs to be seen in the context of the concepts discussed above. Ideas of responsibility, abortion views and a desire to mother (even if not at this point) can also be seen to frame the decision. Whilst the absence of a supportive father may not be ideal, it may a question of; "what else can you do?" The women's presentation of themselves as making a decision to 'go it alone' may be part of this suppression of hurt. The presence and support of the fathers may have been something they wanted but could not have. The fact that these women continue to facilitate the involvement of the fathers also indicates that they considered the father role as important.

#### **6.4. Concluding Thoughts**

This chapter has examined the women's reflections on their 'decision' to continue with their pregnancies. The way in which the women presented their reaction to the discovery of a pregnancy was firstly addressed. The power and influence of negative discourses of teenage pregnancy on the presentation of a reaction to pregnancy was noted. From this is argued here that some young women may make a positive choice to mother, but feel unable to articulate this. Instead the 'decision' is framed around discourses which depict teenage motherhood as 'poor' option which has to be justified. This not only maintains the view of teenage motherhood as inherently problematic but is likely to do little for the women's sense of self. That the women have to attempt to make the 'right decision' for themselves whilst having to

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<sup>33</sup> She later told me that he also accused her of sleeping around; Mark continues to deny paternity... He went to prison for ABH after a bouncer tried to throw him off the pier. The bouncer had called him and his friends a bunch of monkeys (Mark is black) and a fight ensued (Interview notes 12.03.09)

appear to make the 'right' decision for society is a running theme throughout this thesis. As such this thesis adds to the existing literature and provides understanding of a further 'layer' in the constraints on young mother's lives and 'decisions'.

The 'choices' the women felt they had available to them in the resolution of the pregnancies were then examined. It was noted how adoption was not seen as a relevant 'option'. This effectively left the women with a 'choice' between abortion and motherhood. It was demonstrated here however that 'choosing' a termination is fraught with difficulty. Personal fears and moral objections to abortion framed and constrained the women's 'decision-making' here. As was found in other research, the young women drew on notions of 'responsibility' for their situation and unborn child. It was argued here however that, contrary to arguments made elsewhere (see Greene 2006) that this demonstrates the pervasiveness of rather than a resistance to teenage motherhood discourses.

Whether as resistance or reinforcement of dominant teenage mother discourses the women's take on responsible mothering can be seen as problematic. The predominance of such discourses impedes the choices available to young women. This further reinforces arguments that there is a need to acknowledge the gendered power constraints on the negotiation of safe sex for young women. Without this, young women are likely to continue to take sole responsibility for circumstances in which their 'control' has been debateable. Even when pregnancy may be read as a 'mistake', the fact that young women feel they need to pay for this with motherhood is problematic. Whilst a number of these women went on to lead happy and fulfilled lives as mothers, some did not. The following chapter demonstrates how a number of the women went through considerable adversity. This seems a high price to pay for an unplanned pregnancy, especially if it results from circumstances in which agency is debatable.

Discourses of 'the family' were also shown as influential on the 'decision' to continue the pregnancy. The desire to mother and create a family of one's own should not be denigrated. To reiterate, a number of young women were indeed happy in their newly formed families. Nevertheless, we can see how vulnerable young women may seek to improve their circumstances by 'choosing' a path which effectively compounds their pre-existing

disadvantage. This is particularly notable with those women whose partner's had a 'change of heart'. Resulting single parenthood was not the 'lifestyle' envisaged by these young women. Nonetheless, it is this rather than their age per se which can be seen to be linked to some of the adversity, challenge and difficulty some of the women face. The following and final chapter will now move on to examine the women's lives as mothers.

### Chapter Seven: Personal 'Decisions' and 'Responsible' Mothering

This chapter concentrates on the lives of the young women once they had become teenage mothers. Two key areas of decision making are identified by the women in this study; firstly in terms of entering EET and secondly with regards to their relationships with male partners. Focussing on these areas also fits into the aim of this thesis to understand how teenage mothers interact and negotiate policy demands and representations of teenage motherhood. Firstly, the chapter examines the ways in which the women interacted with a key policy priority; increasing the numbers of young mothers in EET. Chapter Two noted that the TPS chiefly defined 'support' for teenage parents as improving their engagement with education and employment. This chapter secondly looks at one of the negative connotations of teenage parenthood; becoming or considering single parenthood. Chapter Two traced the development of the teenage pregnancy problem in government and media discourses. In doing so it was demonstrated how concerns related to the family and single parenthood are implicit in the problematisation of teenage parenthood.

The women's 'decisions' in these areas are influenced by discourses which frame what is considered the 'right' or 'responsible' course of action. This includes 'good' mothering discourses and discourses around teenage parenthood which denote 'responsible' behaviours for young mothers. 'Good' mothering discourses have already been touched upon in the previous section and chapters. These discourses will now be discussed in much more detail here. Literature is drawn on to outline the key constructions of 'good' motherhood. It is shown that these constructions of 'good' mothering may be read in a similar way by different women but can result in different 'decisions'. The way in which the women present their 'decisions' by drawing on discourses of 'good' mothering is also significant here. The chapter highlights

the way in which policy attempts to address some of the negative outcomes associated with teenage parenthood. Nevertheless, it is demonstrated here how this can clash with women's attempts to be 'good' mothers and complicate already difficult 'decisions'.

The chapter also draws on literature around contemporary constructions of fatherhood. A number of young women expressed some unhappiness or dissatisfaction in their personal relationships. This was predominantly framed around the way in which their partners enacted the fathering role. This section argues that socio-cultural expectations about families and fathering are important here. When partners were seen to 'fail' to live up to the women's expectations of 'good' fathering, conflict was evident in many of the relationships. It is also argued here that emphasising the father's role in the relationships demise was important for the women. Breaking up the idealised nuclear family means the women may be subject to accusations of 'bad' mothering. Furthermore, there is the potential that they will then be doubly stigmatised as a *single* teenage mother. The way in which the women highlight what they see as their partners' 'failures' as a father may then serve to protect the women from these accusations. The chapter closes by discussing the presentation of the self in more detail.

### **7.1. Motherhood versus Education, Employment and Training**

Chapter Three outlined the main aims of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. It was noted how the support arm of the strategy focused on the NEET status of young mothers. Various schemes and support mechanisms were put in place by the Labour government to aid the return to education or employment. Time spent conducting participant observation meant I was able to see the women engaging with these policy aims. Groups such as the ones in this research enable workers to address and support the specific needs of young parents and so aid their transition to EET. For some young women this included providing information to help a return to education. Janet (a Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officer), however, defined this as 'improvement' rather than 'support';

*She said that the groups...were centred on "improvement" and so ran courses on nutrition, education, parenting etc. "If they just want a support group they have to set that up themselves" (Field Notes 13.06.08)*

The pressure for young mothers to enter EET as soon as possible is not then just about reducing dependency but also about improving them as mothers, or even people. For parenting to be seen as an alternative and ‘positive choice’, however, appears to be age (and also class) dependent. The disparity between expectations of older and young mothers was not lost on one of the group leaders;

*Caitlin said a twenty five year old would never be expected to find work or return to education immediately after the birth so why should a young mum. She also pointed out that there were several in relationships who were being supported by the father and were still classed as NEET rather than a housewife or stay-at-home mum and so were subject to policy directives and interventions (Field Notes 23.06.08)*

Age appears then to be important on how mothers’ decisions around employment are read by professionals. As Yardley (2009) points out, however, focusing on EET as support is not always out of step with the aspirations of young mothers. Conversely, the age of the child appears to be more important to young mothers’ consideration of education and employment. The majority of the young women involved in the interview stage were parenting at home full time<sup>34</sup> at the outset of the research. Most of the women had children aged under three, the majority were still under one. Those who did have older children were also more likely to have had a second child. It is perhaps the age of the second or last child which is then important. This may provide an explanation for the number of women not in EET. As Alexander et al (2010) note, timing is a crucial consideration for young women. They found that all of the young women in their study felt that it was important that the child was ready for their mothers to go to work or return to education. This is also significant here. The two women (Kathy and Bea) who were in employment at the point of interview had children who were old enough to be attending school full-time.

By the time fieldwork was completed, several women were no longer ‘stay-at-home-mums’. Saskia (16) and Hazel (15) had secured places at college (Jane (17) was waiting to hear if she had a place). Kate (18) and Jenny (17) had started college and Holly (18) had a part-time job

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<sup>34</sup> The economic positions of the women who only took part in the participant observation stage of research cannot be accurately ascertained. Nonetheless, I was aware that at least two were working full-time as this prevented them finding the time to be interviewed.

pending her start at college. All of the children would be over a year old by the time the women would be starting college. Claire (16) had completed her GCSE's whilst pregnant and started college when her son was a few weeks old. Nevertheless, she found it was "too much" and left. As the children age, mothers may feel less needed in the home and more able to cope. Other women expressed they had made similar considerations about their future plans;

*Fiona (18): I've been considering when Christopher's older taking a beautician course*

*Harriet (18): I probably will do [go back to college] once he's started school or something or when he's started nursery*

*Trish (19): I want to go to college and just get a job really like when he starts full-time school, like do college all that time because that gives me a couple of years studying*

Whilst timing may be considered important, Alexander et al (2010) note that what is considered as enough time varies between women. Examining the discourses the women draw on in order to make the decision to enter EET, however, provides a deeper understanding. The quotes above indicate the women are influenced by ideas which emphasise a mother's place as being with her young children. This analysis is supported by further quotes below. There are then two competing discourses influencing the women's decisions around EET. Policy understandings of what constitutes 'responsible' behaviour can be seen as being at odds with 'good' mothering discourses. It is to these second discursive influences which this chapter will now turn.

### *'Good' Mothering Discourses*

Motherhood itself has been argued to be a constructed experience (Oakley 1976) consequently there are implications for the way in which 'good' mothering is understood. This is in terms of 'types' of mothers as well as mothering practices. This section outlines dominant discourses which help to construct the 'good' mother. The understandings these discourses produce help to shape negative perceptions of young mothers. This is because the; "...construction of the 'good' mother...can be seen to reflect one sort of motherhood – that is, middle class motherhood among educated women" (Breheny and Stephens 2007:119). It is not then always

possible (or desirable) for young women to meet some of the demands of 'good' mothering. It is important to note, however, that there are contextual understandings of 'good' motherhood available for women excluded by prevailing discourses.

Mothers in 'different' circumstances have different understandings of what motherhood means (Elvin-Novak 2001). For instance, it is acknowledged that dominant understanding of 'good' mothering comes from a white perspective (Hill-Collins 1994; Nakano Glenn 1994; Elvin-Novak 2001). Nevertheless, work by Hill-Collins (2000) draws attention to positive and protective meanings of motherhood for African American women. She disputes feminist analyses of the family as exploitative for women. Instead, Hill-Collins draws attention to mothering roles which act as resistance to oppression. Gillies (2007) provides us with some understanding of the way in which working class women make sense of mothering. She notes that working class mothering practices are held to be the antithesis of 'good' parenting. There is, however, evidence that working class mothers attempt to subvert and reject this understanding. Gillies uses her research to draw attention to 'different' mothering values and practices. For instance, she notes that working class mothers often have 'different' values in relation to their children's development. Whilst the women in her study demonstrated pride and pleasure watching their children grow, they were not fixated by their intellectual capacity (pg154). Instead they prioritised caring, protecting and loving over educating and cultivating. Nevertheless, as normative orientations of working class mothering diverges from middle class expectations, practices are often misunderstood (Gillies 2007). This may be exacerbated by the increasing worth placed on child-centred modes of parenting (Perrier 2009; Macavarish 2009). This includes an emphasis on 'enrichment' through extra-curricular activities (Vincent and Ball 2007). Given that teenage mothers tend to come from working class backgrounds and have their parenting assessed by middle class professionals, these ideas are relevant here. Financial pressures may add to the exclusion of young and working class women from 'enrichment' activities. This may then necessitate placing more value on practical forms of mothering. As Baker (2009) notes, statements of commitment and displays of affection are important when women have little or no resources in order to live up to the ideals of mothering.

Ethnicity and class then affect the “patterns of engagement with dominant discourses” (Miller 2007:340). Some of the women’s experiences related in this study from their family of origin may well be significant to the women’s understandings of ‘good’ motherhood. Nancy and Debbie spent significant periods in the care system. Other young women had turbulent or non-existent relationships without their mothers (Holly, Saskia, Jenny, Claire and Kathy). Oakley (1976) argues mothering instincts are little more than a social construct. Instead, what women know about mothering is culturally learnt or taken from their own mothers. Given that these women had little or no mothering experience from which they could draw, cultural representations of mothering become more significant. It is argued here that being a teenage mother is also influential on young women’s engagement with ‘good’ mothering discourses. As was discussed in Chapter Two, concerns are expressed about teenage mothers’ ability to cope and parent well. There is a potential that such concerns can lead to social services interventions. Indeed, interventions were observed during the research. Young mothers then have an added investment in demonstrating their ability to be a ‘good’ and ‘moral’ mother. Furthermore, the groups attended by the women often provided advice, support and guidance with regards to mothering practices and skills. As will be demonstrated here, on occasion, these drew on dominant discourses of ‘good’ mothering.

It is argued here that teaching parenting which draws on, supports and shores up dominant discourses of ‘good’ mothering has unintended effects<sup>35</sup>. This is in terms of the way in which young women react to conceptualisations of themselves as ‘bad’ mothers;

In seeking to construct an identity as responsible, caring mothers and resist the negative discursive representation of teen motherhood, the young women continued to position themselves within the regulatory framework of ‘normal’ mothering. They made very deep investments in mothering discourses, subverting, negotiating and refusing discourses of teenage motherhood to construct their ‘good’ maternal selves (Graham and McDermott 2005:71)

Similarly, Phoenix (1991a) and Alexander (2010) found that being a ‘good’ mother was an important part of young mothers’ identities. May (2008:473) also notes that, where there are

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<sup>35</sup> This is an argument which underlies the chapter as a whole and can be levied at a number of policies designed to help and support young parents and their children.

strong expectations of ‘good’ mothering; “...mothers tend to try to present themselves as fulfilling the necessary requirements”. This is evident throughout this chapter as the women articulate their decisions as being framed by the needs of their children. This can be seen as an act of resistance to the labelling of them as ‘bad’ mothers by teenage mother discourses. Similarly, Holt (2009) found that mothers subject to Parenting Orders<sup>36</sup> adopted specific strategies to the label of ‘bad’ mother implied by the order. She noted that one way the women went about this was to re-position themselves as a responsible parent. This entailed drawing on normative parenting practices.

There may be a dominant discourse to which the women are exposed, but how this becomes interpreted into mothering practices can differ. For example, ‘good’ mothering may entail ‘being there’ and so being a stay-at-home mum. In other instances financial provision and being a role model may be read as elements of ‘good’ mothering. This is more likely to result in the mother entering EET. How ‘good’ mothering is understood by the young women is then an important factor underlying their ‘decisions’ and ‘choices’ as mothers. Ultimately, however, it is how ‘good’ mothering is interpreted based on medical, professional and cultural ideals which is important. Dominant discourses of mothering do not take into account structural difference in the experiences of mothers (Phoenix and Woollett 1991). These are further erased and ignored by media and political constructions of good mothering (Vincent and Ball 2010). As was discussed in Chapter Four with regards to Kelly, demonstrating ‘good’ mothering to professionals can mean the difference between retaining custody of your child or not.

Dominant discourses of ‘good’ mothering are then an important area of examination. Despite recognition of differences noted above, three discernable features of a discourse of motherhood can be observed. Firstly, that motherhood and mothering is natural to women. Secondly, that motherhood is all encompassing; and thirdly and relatedly that motherhood requires an element of sacrifice. This chapter will attend to each of these in turn.

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<sup>36</sup> Parenting Orders were introduced as part of the Crime & Disorder Act (1998). These are given to the parent of a child receiving one of a range of ‘orders’ including an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO). Conditions include parental attendance at parenting support and guidance sessions. Failure can result in conviction or fine.

### *The 'Natural' Mother*

It was discussed in Chapter Five that a desire for motherhood is constructed as a natural part in being a woman (Gillespie 2000; Maher and Saugeres 2007). Mothering is also believed to come naturally to women (Miller 2007). Harrison (2003:115) argues that the “biological fact of reproduction” means that women are assumed to have the necessary qualities to perform mothering roles. Women are then expected to possess a natural ability to nurture, love and care. That women are thought to be naturally able to perform these roles is also based on assumptions about femininity. Moore and Rosenthal (1993) note that warmth, expressiveness and dependence are assumed to be feminine characteristics. Motherhood is considered to be an important expression of femininity. This is reinforced through popular and negative assumptions made about women who do not become mothers (Gillespie 2000; Bradley 2007; Maher and Saugeres 2007). Nonetheless, there are some tensions in this discourse of natural motherhood. Assumptions of motherhood as being natural for women stand at odds with childcare and parenting manuals offering expert advice on childrearing (Marshall 1991). Although mothering is considered to be natural for women, they still require expert guidance (Letherby 2009). For instance, breastfeeding is understood to be natural and yet requires that professionals teach women how to do it (Wall 2001).

The idea that elements of mothering can be considered ‘natural’ to women has already been noted with regards to some women’s orientation to pregnancy. It also permeated some of the young women’s thinking at the Minton antenatal group. Sessions were given on parenting skills which covered breastfeeding, bathing and changing nappies. These sessions supported an idea that parenting may not be instinctive and some aspects needed to be taught. Nonetheless, the way in which some women responded indicated that this was not the way in which they saw mothering. During one session the women were shown a video on breastfeeding. This demonstrated some of the ‘optimum positions’ for successful

breastfeeding. After the video, Muriel offered the women the chance to hold the training doll to practise some of the positions. When no one responded, one of the women suggested that this was unnecessary. She said that holding the baby would come naturally once it was born (field notes 14.11.08). Similarly, when Muriel asked a mother who had attended the group prior to her daughter's birth to give her thoughts on labour she drew on the idea of nature;

*She said that you need to be calm, not fight the pain but go with it; your body knows what it is doing. She then mentioned that women have been giving birth for years and nowadays people take too much notice of articles and research (Field Notes 14.11.08)*

The idea that birthing is natural and that biology supersedes professional opinion is clear. Upon giving birth, the women presumed they would instinctively know how to perform parenting tasks. Muriel sought to provide women with parenting skills as recommended by the TPS. Nevertheless, discourses which posit mothering to be 'natural' appear to undermine some of this work.

#### *Motherhood as 'All-Encompassing' and Requiring Sacrifice*

Harrison (2003:113) identifies contemporary motherhood as including three key roles;

...the mother as the person responsible for the daily maintenance and the management of the household within the nuclear family, the mother as the key provider of emotional nurturance, and the mother as vital in monitoring and fostering appropriate emotional physical and intellectual development in her child

In other words, the mother's role and responsibility is primary in all things childrearing. Marshall (1991) observes that 'good' parenting is deemed to be best placed within the nuclear family and the father's role is considered important<sup>37</sup>. Nevertheless, fathers are not crucial to the day-to-day care of children. Consequently, there is a normative assumption that pre-school children require their mother at home full-time (Phoenix 1991a). Although working mothers have become more prevalent, this is still not accepted as an unproblematic norm. Phoenix and Woollett (1991) argue that constructions of 'good' mothering can be made explicit by looking

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<sup>37</sup> Contemporary understandings of fatherhood will be examined later on in this chapter.

at public concerns regarding mothering. Continuing media and academic interest in ‘working mums’ (and the relative silence around ‘working dads’) is then significant. Normative assumptions that pre-school children should have one parent, preferably the mother, at home persist (Lupton 2000).

This idea was reinforced in one session at the Newtown Young Mums Group. The women were given a talk over three weeks from a child psychologist. I was present to witness one of these sessions where Bowlby’s attachment theory was taught;

*She [the psychologist] then went on to talk about Bowlby, although she did preface this with a brief discussion about the political context of his work, from a teaching perspective I don’t think she actually explained what the implications of this were. Additionally she also discussed attachment to ‘mothers’ the entire time...I then sat and listened while she talked about Bowlby’s son who theorised that two parents are better than one (Field Notes 10.06.09)<sup>38</sup>*

As I was only present for a part of this session I was unable to see how the women interacted with the theory. Nonetheless, it is significant that this was taught to the women in a fairly uncritical fashion. It adds an authoritative voice to some of the less overt discourses available to the women. This permeation of a ‘good’ mother discourse has particular resonance considering the emphasis on EET for teenage mothers. It represents a conflict between discourses of ‘good’ mothering and ‘responsible’ teenage mothering. The implications of this are explored in more detail in the following section.

The worst excesses of the ‘all-encompassing’ aspect of ‘good’ mothering discourses is exemplified by what Sharon Hays (1996) calls ‘intensive mothering’ or Douglas and Michaels (2004) refer to as ‘new momism’. Hays suggests that intensive mothering means that women are considered to be the central caregiver. The child is conceptualised as having a particular value which deserves special treatment and that their needs are best met by the mother. In order to provide the required attention and care, women’s needs are eclipsed by those of her

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<sup>38</sup> I was concerned about the way in which the session was presented and so I did interject and ask the psychologist whether a child could equally become attached to a father or a grandparent. She replied that it could. I would have liked to have engaged later on in the session but one of the babies started crying and I was asked by the mum to take the baby for a walk.

child. Arendell (2000) notes that intensive mothering is intertwined with idealistic notions of the family which assume middle class, heterosexual and white privilege. Its influence has also been noted within the UK and Australia (Maher and Saugeres 2007). For instance, Faircloth (2009:15) argues that long-term breastfeeding “represents one particular permeation of ‘intensive mothering’”. Even when not considering ‘long-term’ feeding, Wall (2001) argues that breastfeeding represents part of cultural standards of ‘exclusive mothering’. Hays argues this view of appropriate childrearing has a bearing for all mothers;

These ideas are certainly not followed in practice by all mothers, but they are, implicitly or explicitly, understood as the *proper* approach to the raising of a child by the majority of mothers (Hays 1996:9 emphasis in original)

Although the extreme end of intensive mothering may not have resonance for all mothers, key ideas filter down into ‘good’ mothering practices. In particular, the notion that a ‘sacrifice’ is required in order to meet children’s needs;

...mothers must be prepared to submerge their own needs and interests in those of their children, a degree of self-effacement which in relationships other than the mother-child one, would be judged pathological (Phoenix and Woollett 1991:36)

Ribbens McCarthy et al (2000:789) note that there exists a moral imperative that; “...adults must take responsibility for children in their care and therefore must seek to put the needs of children first”. The recognition of this imperative, they argue, was integral in shaping their research respondents’ decisions. Similarly, Williams (2004:72) argues that there is a; “general rule of thumb that where children are involved their needs should be prioritised”. Perrier (2009) and Macavarish (2009) argue that this approach to parenting is integral to the criteria of ‘good’ mothering. Breheny and Stephens (2007) found that healthcare professionals equated attending to children’s needs first with ‘good’ parenting skills. Whilst considering the needs of children may not sound problematic, the implications of a discourse which places women’s needs and desires as second can be. As Douglas and Michaels (2004) point out women are expected to make sacrifices willingly and happily. An expression of unhappiness or tension could lead to suppositions about a woman’s abilities to parent or love for their child. This is despite recognition that mothering can be tough and often takes the form of “monotonous and

exhausting daily regimen of childcare” (Harrison 2003:118). Furthermore, a mother to be able to meet the needs of her children (especially with the required smile), mothers also need to have their needs met (Rich 1977).

The discussion below demonstrates how some women sacrificed their own desires (continuing at college) and needs (social interactions) in order to care for their children. Motherly sacrifices need not necessarily be seen as disempowering however. Holly (18) reported that she enjoyed the feeling of putting her son first;

*I like having to think about and look after somebody else and think, ‘oh what’s best for them’. I like that...It’s not easy. Not at all. But I do like caring for him*

Furthermore, as can be seen from the discussion below a ‘child first’ reading of motherhood opened up opportunities for the women as they sought to improve the lives of their children. The following section will now turn back to the data to examine interactions between ‘good’ mother discourses and a ‘good’ teenage mother discourse in more detail.

### *Conflicting Demands of Mothering*

The policy priority of encouraging and supporting young parents to enter EET was observed on a number of occasions at group meetings. It is important to note, however, that none of the group leaders or workers placed any pressure on the women to return to EET. Both Caitlin and Sara expressed that they were keen to provide a service that the mums needed rather than one dictated by distant policy makers;

*Caitlin felt that a lot of young people find their own paths back into education later on anyway given the right support and there is too much pushing when all they want is to be a parent. She runs a separate group which she says is a bit of a compromise and stops them being hassled as it takes them off the NEET register for a time (Field Notes 23.06.08)*

Nevertheless, I did witness some of this ‘pushing’ during fieldwork;

*Two women came in and were asking to speak to the mums about a course they were offering. It was for lone parents but they made the mistake in assuming that they were all single... They then almost twisted the arm of one girl who had difficulty saying that she did not want to go. They were saying they would pay for bus fare and childcare. I had a look at the course and it was basically a self esteem building course. The girl was already attending college but they wouldn't listen to her (Field Notes: 12.12.08)*

The re-integration officer related to me how she was in contact with a fifteen year old who was pregnant with her second child. She said;

*...we think she went and got pregnant on purpose because we threatened her with prosecution if she didn't go back to school [she then laughed] (Field Notes 13.06.08)*

The amusement of this woman was in stark contrast to the fear expressed by one young mum, Sophie. Sophie was fourteen when she had her daughter and so subject to legal requirements about her return to school. She was due to return to school after the limit of eighteen weeks of authorised absence ended. When the time came for her to go back Sophie became very resistant;

*Had a brief chat with Sophie, she was feeling pretty mad as she had to go back to school after Christmas. She did not want to and said that she is going to refuse, she said ‘the police can get me and take me and I'll just leave again’ (Field Notes 28.11.08)*

As her return became imminent, Sophie became argumentative and defensive with members of staff, including myself. After she returned I asked her how it was going;

*She said that she has skived off most of the week. She said they had put her in all bottom sets and treated her like a ‘dummy’ when she isn't. She said that she wasn't going to waste her time going back to do things that she already knows when she could be with her daughter (Field Notes 17.09.09)*

As has been suggested elsewhere, educational failure, disengagement or dislike of school often predates teenage pregnancy (Phoenix 1991; Arai 2003a; Pillow 2004; Cater and Coleman

2006; Hosie 2007). The DCSF (2010:9) referred to low educational attainment and poor school attendance as “underlying risk factors” for teenage pregnancy. Despite this recognition, Hosie’s (2007) research shows that these pre-existing issues often go unaddressed. These factors seemed to be applicable to Sophie. Sophie had had a chaotic home life and spent some time in the care system. Such experiences would have done little to help her to settle at school. Indeed, she told me that she had hated school and had had no friends in her own year. Nonetheless, there had been no attempt to get to the bottom of these issues before encouraging her return to education.

Sophie’s desire to stay at home with her daughter was shared by a number of the other young mums in the study;

*Rachel (17): The whole point of having children is to see them grow up and see them do different things*

*Trish (19): That’s why I don’t want to go back to work yet. I don’t see the point in having kids if you just go back to work straight away...you want to get to know your child and see everything that they do because it changes everyday*

*Nicola (19): I didn’t want to miss those important (...) first crawl, first walk*

These women are expressing a desire to ‘be there’ at least for the early years of their children’s lives. As noted, above, this fits into normative assumptions for mothers of small children and is consistent with the wishes of many older mothers (Lupton 2000). The women’s articulations above of a ‘want’ rather than ‘need’ can also be read as an expression of maternal love. In accordance with intensive mothering practices, being with a child is exactly what a good mother should *want* to do.

That young mothers may wish to stay at home for a time after childbirth is recognised within policy (TPIAG 2001) and by young parent workers (DCSF 2007; Dawson 2006). Nevertheless, the emphasis remains on securing their return to education. Encouraging Sophie to complete her education is a laudable aim with long term benefits for herself and her daughter. As Caitlin noted above, however, education may not be a priority for young women when they have small babies. This was also noted by Yates and Payne (2006) and has been acknowledged

within policy. The DCSF (2007:20) reported that some young parent workers felt there was an “unwelcome pressure to return too early”. In addition, it was recognised that a return to education which entailed sacrificing mothering responsibilities may, in fact, be counterproductive. Nonetheless, the report sidelined these arguments, highlighting that; “many are happy to return to EET earlier, but still felt that there were obstacles that prevented them from doing so” (DCSF 2007:20).

Sophie, however, saw education as being an obstacle to her mothering responsibilities. Dawson (2006:72) notes “...when working with young mothers both their academic position and their place as young mothers with young children need to be taken into account”. There is potential for flexibility in the provision of education for school aged mothers. Specialist units, home tuition or education within local colleges are available in many LEA’s (Directgov 2010, Dawson 2006). Such alternatives may have alleviated some of Sophie’s fear of school as she would not be returning to the site of her previous unhappiness. Furthermore, they may have better enabled Sophie to combine education with her mothering responsibilities. It is then unfortunate that these options did not appear to be available to Sophie. Especially given that young mothers attending specialist units have been found to have attendance nearing 100% (Dawson 2006) and made ‘dramatic improvements’ (Hosie 2007). These findings are supported by Bea’s account;

*...instead of continuing at a mainstream school I attended a young mothers unit where I achieved all my GCSE’s grade A-D. If I’d carried on at school that would never had happened*

Although Sophie’s previous experience of school should not be discounted, her feelings should also be seen in the context of her personal situation. Sophie’s relationship with her partner broke down a few months after she had her daughter and she returned to live with her mother. Her daughter was subsequently taken into the care of her ex-partner’s mother<sup>39</sup>. It was during the ensuing period of assessment and supervised visits with her daughter that Sophie was expected to return to school. Sophie’s desire to be with her daughter was then particularly

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<sup>39</sup> The exact details of the removal of Sophie’s daughter were kept confidential from me. Although I spoke to Sophie personally a number of times this was not something she wanted to disclose.

been given that her time with her was already limited by access arrangements. It is then little wonder that education was not a priority for Sophie at this time, she had more pressing concerns.

When mothers are held mostly, if not wholly, responsible for their children, the way is opened for ‘mother-blaming’ if things ‘go wrong’ (Harrison 2003). This is likely to be exacerbated when structural limitations on women’s ability to meet the standards of contemporary constructions of motherhood are not recognised (Vincent and Ball 2010). Phoenix and Woollett (1991) note that, instead, mothers become pathologised and labelled as ‘bad’ mothers. The potential consequences of ‘bad’ mothering are then monitored;

Currently surveillance is used to ensure that children are brought up in ways acceptable to professionals (such as social workers and educational psychologists) and to attempt to prevent children from growing up to be criminals or dependant on welfare agencies. The major impact of child welfare polices is on poor mothers who are often made more powerless through such interventions (Phoenix and Woollett 1991:19)

Mothers under surveillance face the possibility of what they refer to as the “ultimate sanction of the state” (Phoenix and Woollett 1991:19). That is, the permanent removal of a child from the mother’s care. By placing her daughter in care, Sophie is being labelled as a ‘bad’ mother. In order to regain custody of her daughter it is then imperative that Sophie presents herself as a ‘good’ and ‘responsible’ mother. The inconsistencies between policy and personal conceptualisations of what ‘good’ mothering entails for teenage mothers are then particularly problematic.

Sophie’s enforced return to education undermines her attempts to portray this. Firstly by taking her away from where she needs to be to ‘prove’ herself as a ‘good’ mother; with her daughter. And secondly by denying her the ability to make her own decision about her academic future. A number of the young mothers were able to decide when they returned to education. This enabled them to incorporate their educational futures into their ‘good’ mothering practices (see below). The involvement of outside agencies in her education denies Sophie this opportunity. Consequently she was made to feel like a recalcitrant child rather than a knowing and mature mother.

Although the details of Sophie's daughter's removal were kept confidential, some workers expressed concern about the grounds for removal. This was part of a more general concern about the removal of children from young mothers. Muriel (Minton worker) often acted as an advocate for young mums who had to attend court hearings over the custody of their children. She expressed to me that she felt that older mothers would not have had their children removed for some of the reasons young mothers did. This was echoed by Violet (Newtown worker) who felt that a higher standard of parenting was expected of young mothers. She noted that when this was not met, young mothers also faced steeper penalties in the interventions and surveillance that followed. Eunice (Minton worker) disputed this however, she felt teenage parents were not subject to more scrutiny by virtue of their age. She said;

*I think care leavers and looked after children who are teenagers and pregnant are very much under social services' eye. But taking into account their own experiences of poor parenting there has to be careful monitoring and safeguarding in place (Field Notes 10.07.09)*

Unless mothers over nineteen who have been care leavers or had poor parenting experiences are under similar scrutiny it is, however, difficult to conclude that age is not a factor. Furthermore, as Walters and Woodward (2007) point out, affluent parents who can equally be charged with claims of 'poor parenting' are less likely to be scrutinised and face state intervention. It appears then, that the ideals of 'good' mothering are also pervasive for many of those monitoring teenage parents. Teenage parents are then under immense pressure to live up to contemporary expectations of mothering. Assumptions of poor parenting and a negating of structural differences in women's abilities to meet mothering standards may lead to a misinterpretation of young mothers parenting styles and decisions. Given these circumstances there is added pressure on young mothers to parent in a way which is socially acceptable.

There may be some very real concerns about the parenting abilities of some young mothers, particularly when they themselves have come from chaotic families of origin. Indeed, a mother attending the Minton group disciplined her son in a way which caused some concern for the leaders, mothers and indeed me. A young boy had pushed in whilst waiting for his turn on the slide. His mother pulled the boy away, threw him on a chair and wrote 'naughty' on his

forehead. The young woman was not a regular attendee and had a number of other issues which the group leaders and social services were working with her to overcome. That this incident was viewed in a critical fashion by the rest of the mothers in that group indicates that parenting styles cannot be generalised. Furthermore, in my personal capacity as a parent I would suggest (and have witnessed) that a period of time spent with any group of parents is likely to reveal some questionable parenting styles. Examples of 'poor' parenting are not limited to young or poor mothers. Nonetheless, such a generalisation means that young and poor parents are more likely to pay a high price in losing custody of their children.

Older teenage mothers in the groups studied were not subject to legal requirements to return to education and did not experience the same coercion as Sophie. Nevertheless, the young parents groups were keen to encourage and enable this path for all the women. For instance, during one session at the Minton ante-natal group, the women were told how they could receive help with childcare in order to go to college. Kelly (17) looked disgusted and said there was "no way" her baby was going into childcare. She said that she "wanted to look after it"<sup>40</sup> herself" (field notes 12.09.08). This expression of reluctance to use childcare amongst teenage parents is not isolated. The DSCF (2007:20) reported that young mothers have "...higher than average levels of anxiety about using formal childcare". Similar to the women's voices here, Vincent (2010) found ideas of intensive mothering to have an impact in childcare decisions. That is, the idea that the mother should have primary responsibility for the care and nurture of her children. It is worth noting, however, that teenage pregnancy discourses amplify these gendered ideas of responsibility and care. The previous chapter demonstrated how the women considered having the baby as a 'responsible' resolution to an unplanned pregnancy. On becoming a mother, it appears this sense of personal 'responsibility' for their circumstances remains and mothering continues to be prioritised. As Harriet (18) noted, "you have to live with the mistakes you made". This is exemplified by Fiona (18) when she discussed her college's reaction to her pregnancy. Childcare is presented here as an abdication of responsibility, not just for her son, but also for having got pregnant;

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<sup>40</sup> The use of the term 'it' by Kelly here and Fiona (later on) is explained by the fact that these conversations were held prior to the birth of their children when the gender was unknown.

*They said 'well if you don't want to bring it into college you can always put it in a day care centre or something'. And I was like 'well no, it's my baby and my responsibility and I don't want to do that you know'. I was the one who got pregnant so I have to be the one who's got to look after it*

Teenage mothers are criticised for not being child-centred enough in their mothering styles (Phoenix 1991a). As is noted above, this is an important factor in being defined as a 'good' mother. Fiona can be seen here articulating this in her representation of what is responsible behaviour for her as a mother. She is then able to make a claim of 'good' motherhood by staying at home to look after her son (Phoenix 1991). The following section will now move on to examine the concepts of 'responsibility' and 'sacrifice' enacted in 'good' mothering.

#### *Mothering as 'Responsibility' and 'Sacrifice'*

Some of the women's narratives indicate that taking 'responsibility' meant that they sacrificed desires or needs of their own. For instance, Harriet's mothering responsibilities required her to stay at home but conflicted with her personal preferences. She described herself as being "gutted" when her pregnancy meant she 'had' to give up her college course. Sacrifice can also be seen in the narratives of Nancy (16) and Claire (16). Nancy expressed to me that she wanted to go to college but that it was "not a good time". Nancy felt she would not be able to maintain her daughter's place at her current nursery if she was at college and unable to drop her off and pick her up. Nancy was keen for her daughter to go to a private school and was using the nursery (which was attached to the school) to increase her chances of getting a scholarship. Putting her own education first could have jeopardised this opportunity, and was therefore not part of Nancy's 'good' mothering practices. Claire had continued in education throughout her pregnancy and entered further education when her son was newborn. She left, however, saying she couldn't concentrate because of her son. Both women's desire to return to education was put on hold despite their expressions of frustration as 'stay-at-home mums';

*Nancy: ... I do feel really low because some days I don't have absolutely anything to do. The house is all clean, everything's done, no meetings, no shopping nothing, and I just sit here all day I'm so bored. So so bored*

*Claire: I wake up in the morning and I don't have anything to do...I want to, because it's starting to get boring really*

Breheny and Stephens (2007) examined healthcare professionals' application of 'good' mother discourses to teenage parents. Young women's expressions of boredom were read as inadequate mothering. Boredom and frustration is not limited to the experience of being a young mother. Tizard (1991:192) argues that the "tyranny of constant childcare" can lead to resentment and a lack of fulfilment. The monotony of housework can also be a source of dissatisfaction (Oakley 1974). As Innes and Scott (2003) point out, women still do the overwhelming majority of unpaid caring and domestic work. Indeed, a number of young women noted how their lives were characterised by domestic chores which caused tension in some relationships (see above).

Furthermore, as Debbie's (19) account indicates, demonstrating 'good' mothering requires being 'good' at housework. After she was moved from her foster placement, Debbie was visited by a social worker to make sure she was coping;

*...they've got to see the place to make sure I'm managing it, make sure it's clean and tidy...You know all the books say don't worry about cleaning up and stuff at night if you're tired just go to sleep while she's sleeping and do it in the morning but if I did that and they turned up they'd be like 'that's not clean and tidy'*

Whether this was a requirement of social services or not is unknown. Nevertheless, it is interesting that Debbie saw domesticity as a sign of her 'coping'. Given the pressures of being a 'good' mother and fulfilling domestic obligations, it is little wonder that some women may find fulltime parenting boring, frustrating and also lonely at times (Oakley 1974). Young mothers are less likely to have adequate social networks of support (Kidger 2004) and so this may be intensified. This is evident in Nancy's account; "I feel really lonely that's the only thing now...I feel very lonely at the moment". Taking this into account, enabling young women to enter EET may be beneficial beyond the aims of financial improvement. Nonetheless, in order for this to succeed, an understanding of parental responsibilities and discourses of 'good' mothering must also be at the forefront.

### *The Problems of 'Choosing' EET*

The women's narratives exemplify the complexities around the 'decision' to exchange fulltime motherhood for EET. As Duncan et al (2004:255) note there are; "...social, moral and emotional components..." involved in childcare and parenting decisions. These are often overlooked however. Instead, policy makers prioritise economic concerns and assume parents make decisions based on cost-benefit calculations (Duncan et al 2004). Catherine Hakim's 'Preference Theory' (2000; 2003) has also been used to explain decisions around employment and childcare. She argues; "...Lifestyle preferences are more important than educational qualifications in shaping women's choices between paid work and a life centred on family and children..." (Hakim 2003:16).

'Preference Theory' has been robustly criticised elsewhere however (see McRae 2003; Leahy and Doughney 2006). Furthermore, data generated by this research indicates that 'contraceptive and equal opportunities revolutions' (Hakim 2003) have not reached a number of young women. Nevertheless, Hakim's work serves as a reminder of the continuing attraction of the notion of 'choice' and particularly 'individual' choice espoused by neo-liberalism. New Labour's focus on individual responsibility for social inclusion through paid work shores up the idea that 'choices' are free and unencumbered. Kidger (2004) argues that New Labour policy did not place enough emphasis on the structural and contextual barriers to employment. As noted in Chapter Two, they did introduce a number of strategies which arguably address some of the issues faced by young parents. Nonetheless, the attitude of the re-integration officer seen above may indicate this level of understanding is not widespread.

The effect of conceptualisations of 'good' mothering and gendered understandings of care are also overlooked in policy. Duncan and Edwards (1997) draw attention to some of the limits to 'individual choice' with the theory of 'gendered moral rationalities'. That is, although people may make rational decisions, what is considered to be rational is not defined in terms of individual utility. Instead, "...what is rational, and what constitutes a cost or a benefit, are defined in collective moral and social terms..." (Duncan and Edwards 1997:56). These, note the authors, are highly gendered. This thesis builds on Duncan and Edwards (1997) work with

lone mothers. Here, collective understandings of 'good' mothering and notions of moral responsibility frame what is considered 'rational' and 'right'. Williams (2004) notes that a diversity of family types often provokes concern that this is a result and cause of a reduction in commitment. Instead, she argues;

...changes have not undermined people's sense of commitment to one another. When faced with dilemmas, people generally negotiate 'the proper thing to do' in and through such commitments, especially with reference to the well-being of their children (Williams 2004:41)

I expand on Williams' recognition of family practices (co-habitation, lone-parenthood, step-families, and same-sex relationships) to include teenage parenting. Similar to the parents in Williams' research (2004:41), the young women here are making "...morally informed responses...rather than simple expressions of individual choice". In the case of the young women above, what is right is a rejection of EET (at least for now) in order to care for their children. As Duncan (2003:256) notes, "...people do not view care simply as a constraint on paid work. Rather they feel morally obligated to care and often want to do so".

Work by Duncan and Edwards (1997 and 1999) and Williams (2004) draws much needed attention to the importance of caring. Their theories work to revalue mothering (and indeed parenting) and challenge the concept of individual choice in a family setting. Nonetheless, the accounts of the women above also highlight some of the problematic elements of obligations of care. This is particularly the case when care is linked to notions of 'good' mothering. Moral obligations constrained the women's ability to enter EET and so, for some, also their ability to escape from poverty and isolation. The pressures of motherly responsibilities and a desire to be financially independent can cause young mothers to feel torn (Alexander et al 2010). There is also a need to recognise that, in caring, people may not always act in the same way (Williams 2004). What care, and therefore 'good' mothering, is can be read differently in different contexts. The following section will now go on to explore the idea that entering EET can be seen as part of 'good' mothering.

### *Education as part of 'Good' Mothering*

As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, a number of young women entered employment or education before the research period ended. It has been noted elsewhere that teenage pregnancy often provides an impetus or motivation for educational success not previously held (Cater and Coleman 2006; Hosie 2007; Duncan 2007; Smith-Battle 2007). This was also found to be the case here, for example Kate (18) noted that having her son made her realise what she wanted to study at college. Kasey (18) also expressed a new found motivation in her son;

*I hated school and that but now that I've got my little boy I want to go back to college, I want to do stuff [Kasey's emphasis]*

Alexander et al (2010) found that young parents are often highly motivated with regards their educational future. Whilst this also appears to have been the case here it is worth examining why. Education appears to be valued, not for its own sake, but for the doors it opens with regards to employment. This is evidenced by the courses which the women embarked on. Rather than retaking GCSE's or starting A level courses, the women's choices are focused on a particular employment path. For instance, Kate (18) was studying accountancy. Jane (17) had applied to study 'hair and beauty' and Jenny (17) had already started on the course. Hazel (15) was about to start 'animal care' course and planned become a veterinary surgeon. Alldred and David (2010) claimed that young mothers rejected education 'for-its-own-sake'. Instead, there was a recognition that education would help them to find employment and improve their chances of providing for their children. This fits into New Labour's rhetoric of education and employment as tools to reduce poverty and exclusion. It also, however, allows young women to bring their own preferences into line with 'good' mother discourses.

There exists a "strong moral imperative" to put the needs of children first (May 2008:473). This can be seen in Claire's statement; "...everything I do now is for him...he has to come first now. I've got to do it for him". Education must therefore be seen to have some worth for the child or family. As Hays (1996) notes, employment for mothers can be justified by meeting children's material needs. Education can be justified in the same way when it leads to employment. In this way it becomes part of 'good' mothering rather than something which

detracts from mothering responsibilities. These values also chime with official teenage parenting discourses which emphasise employment as a solution to welfare dependency. As Jane notes; “I’ve got more to drive for because I’m doing it for him as well as me because I don’t want to be living on benefits for the rest of my life”. When education is seen in this light, a deeper understanding can be made of Sophie’s rejection of education. School, as opposed to college education, is less employment focused; it is more about education in its own right. Accordingly, Sophie sees no ‘worth’ in this level of education with which to incorporate into her idea of ‘good’ mothering.

Kasey (18) and Nancy (16), however, both articulate a value in education separate to its link to employment. For instance, Nancy was interviewed with her younger sister where she tried to impress upon her the importance of education;

*Like her [indicating her sister] she bunks school half the time when I’m trying to explain to her there’s people, children in Africa, that’d love to have her education and she’s just throwing it away, all them thousands of pounds that the school education pay for her to have one (...) and they don’t*

Nevertheless, the values these women placed on education were still for the good of their children, rather than for themselves. As noted above, Nancy was deferring her entrance to college in order to maximise her daughter’s chances of attending a ‘good’ school. Kasey recognised that her getting an education would provide her son with a role model. She said; “I want him to have an education so if I show him that I’m doing something then when he’s older he’ll be like ‘oh my mum done this’”. Kasey also saw her returning to college as a way to provide a different type of care for her son, providing him with opportunities;

*Every course that I can do so that he can go into crèche I took that opportunity just so that he can go and meet friends. It doesn’t matter if he don’t know anyone, put him in the front line. At least he’s not clingy and he just has his own little independent life as well as I do what I want to do.*

Similarly, Claire (16) felt that her staying at home was not in her son’s best interests; “it’s not fair on Matty either because it means he’s not getting out and doing anything”. The above narratives show that whilst education may be beneficial for the women’s own well being and

desires, this has to accord with 'good' mother discourses. Consequently, the decision is made and expressed in relation to children's needs and well being. Even where the women acknowledge their own desires with regards education, their responsibilities as mothers are emphasised. For instance, Kasey noted; "I'm still doing what I want but I have got a responsibility and I'm still doing that at the same time".

There were, however, two exceptions where women were able to discuss their desires for an education without reference to their children's needs;

*Kate (18): Well, what our plan is, is for him [partner] to do his three years at uni. Me do two years at college and then go on to uni for another three years to be fully qualified*

*Holly (18): I know that I want to go back now. Erm and do like an evening class. I kind of wish I was doing it this term but I'm going to have to wait until next September now but erm and I think that I'm going to do beauty and that's something I want to do [Holly's emphasis]*

These women's understanding of the benefits of education for their families may be implicit in their future plans. Nevertheless, it is interesting that, unlike the other women here, they did not make them explicit. There appears to be two key reasons for this. Firstly, these young women (and their partners) grew up in families which placed a high value on educational success. For instance, this was evidenced by the reactions of Kate's partner's family to her pregnancy. Here the initial concern was about the effects parenthood would have on David's place at university and career plans. Kate's orientation towards pregnancy can be seen as contradictory to these values. Nevertheless, her future plans indicate otherwise. Her description of having her next child "properly" implies a retrospective assessment that she had not done things the 'right way round';

*...this is our plan, get a house we just want a house before we have any more children we want a house (...) I couldn't imagine having any more children now. Just the fact, money and space and stuff and to have a child that's planned, to do it all properly, like have a nice nursery and stuff [laughs] and not just do it off benefits and stuff*

Secondly, as ‘partnered’ mothers, these women may have been under less pressure to demonstrate ‘good’ mothering. Both women lived with their long term partners and Holly was engaged to Matthew (now married). Furthermore, both male partners financially support them and the children. As noted above, specific circumstances help to frame motherhood as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ (Letherby 2009). One of these circumstances remains the heterosexual nuclear family (Phoenix and Woollett 1991; Smart 1996; Harrison 2003; May 2008). This conceptualisation of the nuclear family is also supported in policy pronouncements and in certain sections of the media. Here the ideal mother is not just partnered, but also married<sup>41</sup>. Holly and Kate are both then able to draw on this construction of their mothering being almost inherently ‘better’. Consequently, this ‘legitimacy’ (Bock 2000) meant there was less need for them to draw on ‘good’ mothering discourses; at least overtly.

The presumption of the superiority of the nuclear family and the importance placed on the father is then significant. The following section of this chapter will now move on to examine this in more detail.

## **7.2. Relationship Decisions**

As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the women’s relationships with the fathers of their children represent a significant site for decision-making. Four discourses emerge here as important influences on the women’s relationship decisions. That is, a desire for ‘family’; love and romantic feelings for the father; the need for a ‘good’ father and the need to be (and to be seen as) a ‘good’ mother. It should be acknowledged that the data revealed these concepts were also important to other relationship ‘decisions’. This included; access arrangements with ex-partners and re-partnering. In order to adequately address the complexity of relationships ‘decisions’, this section will, however, only focus on one area. That is, the women’s ‘decisions’ to remain in or leave the relationship with their children’s’ father.

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<sup>41</sup> See for example Amanda Platell’s article “The town that marriage forgot: My journey to single mother central” (Platell 2010) and Iain Duncan Smith’s proposals for tax breaks for married couples (Mulholland 2011)

This part of the chapter starts by examining what is meant by 'good' fathering before examining the impact contemporary ideas of fatherhood had on the women's relationships. There is not the room here to attend in detail to the growing interest in this area. Nonetheless, a brief outline of some of the key ideas underpinning contemporary fatherhood is sufficient for the purposes of this chapter. This is followed by the accounts of Naomi, Nicola and Saskia. These women's experiences of domestic violence make the consideration of influences on their 'decisions' to stay or leave particularly salient. The chapter then moves on to look at the relationship 'decisions' made by some of the women who did not report incidences of domestic violence. Firstly, the 'decision' to leave a relationship is examined through Kasey and Debbie's accounts. Both of these women's relationship breakups occurred during the research. This enabled a unique insight into the process of splitting up. Secondly, the chapter looks at the 'decision' to remain together by concentrating on the accounts of Harriet and Amanda. These were not the only women who were in a relationship with the fathers of their children. Nonetheless, these were the only women who presented their relationship as being, at some level, in crisis. These women appeared to be in the process of reviewing their 'decision' to remain in the relationship. The chapter concludes by returning to the theme of presentation. It is recognised that the representation of teenage motherhood as problematic impacts on the 'stories' of the women. Consequently, the way in which these women present their accounts as ones of survival is discussed.

### *'Good' Fathering*

Much attention has been given to the idea that fathering and fatherhood has undergone some significant changes (See for example, Pleck 1987; LaRossa 1988; Ranson 2001; Brannen and Nilson 2006; Wall and Arnold 2007; Williams 2008; Dermott 2009). Before attending to contemporary understandings 'good' fathering, it is worth noting that there is caution expressed as to the extent of change. For instance, it is argued that traditional ideas of the family which depict the father as the sole earner has always been more ideal than practice (Brannen and Nilson 2006). Furthermore, the male breadwinner model of the family is still entrenched in the public subconscious (Charles 2002; Bradley 2007). Consequently, it is

argued that it is images of fatherhood rather than the behaviour of fathers which have changed (LaRossa 1988; Segal 2007; Wall and Arnold 2007; Gillies 2009; Dermott 2009).

Whilst men's involvement with their children has increased (Brannen and Nilson 2006; Featherstone 2009), what they are 'doing' may not have changed as much as is assumed. Segal (2007:30) draws attention to research which indicates the 'routine' care is still left to mothers with fathers taking on the more 'pleasurable aspects' of childcare. Furthermore, research has highlighted the reluctance of many men to alter working hours on becoming fathers (Ranson 2001; Dermott 2006; Gillies 2009). As with the 'decisions' made by the women above regarding paid employment, it is important to draw attention to the problems in conceiving this as 'choice'. Policy failings, workplace culture and gendered pay gaps all constrain fathering choices (Wall and Arnold 2007). Williams (2008:491) argues; "...there is an evident element of personal choice, but these really are 'choices' driven by household necessity".

There is then a persistence of; "...many traditional cultural understandings of motherhood and fatherhood" (Wall and Arnold 2007:509). Warin et al (1999) found "deeply entrenched" gendered divisions within families. 'Involved' fathering is at odds with ideas of hegemonic masculinity (Brannen and Nilson 2003; Wall and Arnold 2007). Further, as evidenced by the above sections, gendered ideas about parenting are still influential. Where motherhood is still defined in terms of care and primary responsibility for the child, it is likely that fatherhood will be understood in opposing terms. Indeed, the salience of the role of provider for young men (Oakley 1996; O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000; Delamont 2001; Charles 2002) and teenage fathers (Bunting and McAuley 2004) has been noted. Nevertheless young fathers may find achieving the provider role challenging, particularly given the decline in manual and unskilled work available for working class young men (Brannen and Nilson 2006). Elster and Panzarine (1983) note that the difficulty young father's face in meeting the goal of provider often leads to stress.

Despite debates as to the extent and type of changes in fathering and fatherhood, it remains important to elaborate on what is meant by 'contemporary' and 'good' fathering. Pleck (1987) notes that new images of fatherhood are remarkably pervasive. As such, expectations of

fatherhood are raised (Wall and Arnold 2007). Young mothers can then become disillusioned with their partners when this ideal cannot be lived up to (Whitehead 2008). It is argued that being a 'good' father no longer rests solely on the role of breadwinner (Dermott 2003). Fatherhood is thought to have moved beyond the distant authority figure and breadwinner roles (Gillies 2009). As noted above, however, material change is not necessarily in step with a change in imagery. Financial provision is often still described by fathers as being part of their role (Warin et al 1999; Ranson 2001; Brannen and Nilson 2006; Williams 2008 and Gillies 2009). Nonetheless, 'breadwinning' is argued to be just one expression of fathering commitment (Dermott 2003). Financial support has become the "minimum requirement" (Summers et al 2006:152) or the "fundamental basis" (Warin et al 1999:3) of good fathering.

As May (2003:37) notes fathering has "...become more than just breadwinning". Instead, 'good' fathering is judged by involvement with children as well as more 'traditional' tasks such as providing (Williams 2008). It is difficult to define what the 'new' father is, however, and so perhaps easier to establish what it is not (Dermott 2006). It is also easier to glean what the women understand as 'good' fathering by examining their discussions and complaints of what their partners or ex-partners did not do. This is exemplified by my interview with Nicola (19). I asked her about the relationship with her new partner. Although she started to tell me about what her new partner does, she uses her ex-husband's 'failings' to highlight the strengths of her new partner;

*He [new partner] does most of the childcare in the morning and in the evening. So he does the childcare when he's at home and I do the childcare in between. So it means I can go and have a bath. Because before if I wanted a bath I had to take my son with me because he [ex-husband] couldn't handle him...I said that's because you don't spend no time with him and he doesn't know who you are. You work 80 hours a week, how do you expect your son to know who you are you know?*

This excerpt demonstrates how Nicola saw the fathering role as having moved beyond breadwinning. Whilst Nicola's ex and current partner were employed, a level of involvement outside of the working day is also required. Furthermore, there is also a level of critique levied at Nicola's husband here for working *too* much. Discrediting an ex-partner whilst shoring up

the reputation of the new partner is perhaps to be expected. Nonetheless, that fatherhood now demands a deeper level of involvement is borne out in the literature.

Warin et al (1999) note that their respondents frequently referred to 'being there' and being an involved father. It was unclear, however, as to what exactly was meant by this. Dermott (2003) notes that the term 'involved fathering' is unhelpful as involvement can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Nevertheless, some authors have attempted to achieve some clarity as to what involvement may include. May (2003:37) for instance draws on the mother's accounts in her research to define 'good' fathering as including; "psychological support to his children, partakes in caring work and provides a positive male role model...". Summers et al (2006) examined 'low-income' fathers and noted that 'good' fathering included, providing support, being a mentor and teacher, care-giving and nurturing. Brannen and Nilson (2006) identified three broad types of fathering roles. Although they included 'work-focused' fathers who reported having little involvement with their children, two further types were characterised by 'involvement'. 'Family men' emphasised 'being there' and 'hands-on fathers' were all heavily involved in childcare, some on a full-time basis.

As can be seen then, 'involvement' is varied and multi-faceted. Furthermore, class and understandings of gender roles can influence the way in which being an involved father is enacted. Gillies (2009) notes that the level and type of involvement of fathers is dependent on the family's access to resources. As touched upon at the beginning of this section, gendered pay differences may affect the level at which women are able to swap places with men in the home. In addition to this, low pay and long working hours may also prevent fathers from taking on more 'involved' roles. Warin et al (1999) reported that most families in their study retained a 'traditional' approach to parenting roles. As Wall and Arnold (2007) found in their analysis of a Canadian newspaper supplements, 'Family Matters', a father's involvement in the day to day care for children is presented as 'admirable' but not 'essential'. Furthermore, unlike women, fathers are not required to make sacrifices in their career in order to be considered a 'good' parent. Whilst involved fathering is considered as positive, this role is still seen as complementary to the 'vital' caring work done by mothers.

Given the range of roles and duties which 'good' fathering now encompasses, it is perhaps best not to try and define an exact role here. What can be gleaned, however, is that 'good' fathering entails more than simply being a financial provider. The level of involvement and the types of roles in which fathers are expected to be involved in vary. Nevertheless, it is clear that to be considered a 'good' father, doing nothing is not enough. As has already been discussed, providing a child with a 'good' father may well be part of 'good' mothering. These understandings of fathering are useful to bear in mind as this chapter turns to examine the women's accounts of their relationships and relationship breakdowns.

### *Leaving a Violent Relationship*

This section concentrates on the accounts of three young women (Naomi 18, Nicola 19 and Saskia 16) who had experienced domestic violence. These were not the only women who had separated from the fathers of their children. Neither were they the only women who had experienced domestic violence. These women are discussed because they gave the decision to leave their partners particular prominence in their accounts.

There are many considerations and challenges women face in deciding to leave a violent relationship; many are interrelated and all difficult to weigh up (Lloyd and Emery 2000). Not least because of the way in which many women minimise and deny the violence they have experienced (Wilcox 2000). Or the way in which cultural constructions can lead women to look to change their own behaviour as a solution to the violence (Dobash and Dobash 1992). Fear of the perpetrator is a significant issue (Kim and Gray 2004) as is having an idealised view of relationships (Crawford et al 2009). Consequently, leaving a violent relationship can be described as a process rather than event (Lempert 2006 cited in Crawford et al 2009). These and other more practical barriers to leaving the relationship can be seen in the women's accounts below and should not be understated.

There is already a body of research examining many of the issues women face in leaving violent relationships. 'Adding in' the experiences of young mothers builds on this knowledge. As noted by Brown et al (2006) there is still relatively little known about experiences of

domestic violence amongst parenting teenagers. It should be remembered, however, that this research is not about the women's experiences of domestic violence. Rather the focus remains on 'decisions' and 'choices' in relation to teenage motherhood. Highlighting experiences of male violence draws attention to the challenging contexts in which some women make relationship decisions. As such, individualist understandings of love and relationships are questioned. Notions of 'good' mothering, the family and 'good' fathering can add to barriers in leaving a violent relationship. Alternatively, they can provide an impetus to exit the relationship. Also examined here are the ways in which the women present their decision in the light of dominant discourses. The section starts by examining Naomi's narrative.

Naomi (18) described her ex-partner Phillip, as a 'good' father. He fulfilled his role as a provider by working long hours on a night shift. He would then come home and look after his daughter during the day when he would take her to the park or to see family. Phillip fits into a model of fathering which included more than being simply an involved breadwinner. In Brannen and Nilson's typology (2006) he could be defined as a 'hands-on father'. Phillip also had two children from two previous relationships. He had his first son when he was fifteen. The child was adopted but Phillip and the adoptive parents were in regular contact. Phillip saw his second child every other weekend. Naomi said; "I must admit he was good with them". Phillip was, however, far from the ideal partner as he was often violent to Naomi. Naomi articulates the conflict and struggle she had in leaving the relationship;

*...you can't get away, I tried getting away loads and you can't because it just gets more violent. So as much as you want to get away you can't. You do anything you can but you can't get away... when he's done something like (...) been violent towards you only think about the good times, you think 'oh that was really sweet, that was really nice' and erm you sort of think 'oh well' (...) sounds really weird, it is really weird, because you can't (...) I don't know, I can't explain why..*

Naomi can be seen reflecting on how she attempted to justify her partner's violence and why she stayed as long as she did. Naomi draws attention to the 'good times' and that Phillip was not 'all bad'. As Lloyd and Emery (2000) point out, violence may be difficult to recognise and name as such when it is part of an otherwise acceptable relationship. I did not ask Naomi to give an explanation as to why she had stayed in the relationship. It is then interesting as to

why she felt she needed to give one. Cultural norms often hold women responsible for the emotional well being of the family and relationship (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Wilcox 2000). This may lead to women feeling responsible for the breakdown of the relationship, or taking a measure of responsibility for the violence. This can be seen here where Naomi presents herself as goading Phillip;

*...he did it to get at me because everything he was saying to me I was saying, 'yeah whatever, whatever, whatever'. And he didn't like that so he tried a different tactic to try and get to me, so I think that's why*

Naomi successfully and finally forced Phillip to leave after a particularly violent attack one Christmas Eve which her daughter witnessed. That night she phoned a friend to come and remove Phillip from the house and he did not return.

Similar to Naomi, Nicola (19) expressed the difficulty involved in leaving her violent partner, Grant. The 'pull' for Nicola, however, was not exacerbated by her ex-husband's 'good' fathering or the otherwise satisfactory relationship. Instead, Nicola draws on the importance of family;

*...a couple of times I left but I don't know something just pulled me straight back. I don't know, I suppose because I wanted that family unit. You know because I grew up in a step family I wanted my children to have their biological parents together*

It is interesting that although having the biological father present was important for Nicola, she did not attempt to present him as a 'good' father;

*...he used to say, 'I'll get someone to babysit because I want some time with you', he couldn't have time as a family; it was either him (...) or my son...for the first six months he refused to do anything with him. He refused to change a nappy, wouldn't bath him...There was no (...) fun in his milestones [Nicola's emphasis]*

Grant did, however, fulfil the role as a 'good' breadwinner father. This was emphasised by social services when they became involved. Nicola reported the way in which her social worker reinforced her role as the carer; "It was, 'well he's out working two jobs so you know, you should be able to cope'". It is interesting that whilst Nicola wanted more from Grant,

authority figures reinforced a more gendered approach to parenting. This increased the pressure experienced by Nicola;

*I was struggling emotionally with being a parent because (...) I suppose there was so many expectations of you're a mum, you should be able to cope with everything. But (...) it (...) everything was just squashing me down into the ground... [Nicola's emphasis]*

Wilcox (2000) notes that concern for children's well-being often acts as a catalyst for women to leave an abusive relationship. She found that abuse in front of or to the children was often a turning point, as seen above with Naomi. Similarly, Nicola notes that a concern for her son's well being was integral to her final decision to leave;

*[the] violence spiralled...he just flipped totally and everything I did was wrong erm to the point where I thought I can't keep my son here, I can't, it's not safe*

It is worth noting here that Nicola had experienced domestic violence as a child. Wilcox (2000) also notes that part of the anxiety about children's well-being is the fear that they may repeat this cycle. This was a relevant concern for Nicola; "I can't let *another* generation go through it" [Nicola's emphasis]. It can then be seen how anxiety for her son may start to conflict with her desires to keep the biological family together. There may, however, have been another factor which may have helped Nicola to resolve this conflict and leave the relationship.

Nicola recounted the support of a close friend, Paul; "He was always at the end of the phone when I needed him and he was my rock, he was my support through all the hassle I went through". Nicola and Paul began seeing each other whilst she was still with Grant. Her relationship with Paul can be seen to provide both emotional and practical support necessary for her to leave the relationship. Setting up home after leaving a violent relationship can be extremely challenging (Wilcox 2000). This may have been particularly problematic for Nicola given that she had moved towns away from her family in order to be with Grant. Meeting Paul offered a practical solution by providing her with 'somewhere to go'<sup>42</sup>. Moreover, being with

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<sup>42</sup> Following Grant's final act of violence, Nicola did in fact flee to her partner's house.

Paul meant that Nicola was no longer depriving herself or her son of a family. Whilst this was not the biological family she preferred, in the circumstances Paul was the best alternative<sup>43</sup>. Saskia (16) is an interesting exception to the two women discussed above. She was the only young woman to allude to a loss of love as part of her rationale. Her ex-partner, Donovan, became violent when she was pregnant with their son. Saskia describes this as the point at which she “lost interest” in him. It is noteworthy that this is the only time love is utilised in reference to leaving a relationship. Furthermore, it is almost hidden behind inferences. This is particularly interesting given contemporary sociological theories of love and relationships. These ideas, as well as Saskia’s narrative will now be discussed.

### *Love, Relationships and Individual ‘Choice’*

Theories of love, such as those advanced by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), argue love has become more important. Or, “...the centre around which detraditionalised life revolves” (1995: 3). The authors also draw attention to the fragility of love. Partly due to the increased value placed on love, it has become “weighed down by hopes” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 2). This is also, however, because love is at odds with contemporary ideals of individualisation. Love and relationships in contemporary society are argued to be more ‘contingent’. This “...jars with the ‘forever’, ‘one-and-only’, qualities of the romantic love complex” (Giddens 1992: 61) and is more likely to lead to separation and divorce. When love fails, however, there remains a continuing appeal in marriage and relationships (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995).

This theoretical turn in the study of relationships increasingly draws on the individualisation thesis. Smart and Shipman (2004) argue that this has also introduced the concept of ‘individual choice’ in debates around relationships. Consequently, there is a general concern that responsibility and commitment in relationships and families has decreased (Williams 2004). At first glance, that a number of these women have left unsatisfactory relationship would appear to support this thesis. A closer examination of the women’s narratives however, indicates that an individualised account of relationship decisions is misplaced.

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<sup>43</sup> Although the women’s subsequent relationships are not examined here, Nicola did go on to have a child with Paul. This can be seen as her cementing her new family and her partner as a legitimate biological father.

Firstly, these theories rest on an assumption that gendered ties and constraints have considerably lessened. This research demonstrates that, for these women at least, gendered roles are still significant. This is demonstrated by the way in which gender laden understandings of ‘good’ mothering and fathering are adopted. Furthermore, clear (and sometimes violent) experiences of gendered power are also evident. Secondly, both Naomi and Nicola went on to form new relationships and have children with their new partners. This would seem to support the idea that love and family has a continuing significance, even after negative experiences. Discourses of love and romance are also highly gendered. It is clear then, that structures of gender do then continue to bind women to relationships and families.

Thirdly (and relatedly), individuals are argued to be freed from traditional obligations and duties in relationships (Giddens 1992). Consequently, there is assumed to be more freedom to end relationships which do not meet individual needs. The women’s narratives in this and following sections do not chime with this understanding of relationships however. For instance, although Saskia notes that she ‘lost interest’ in Donovan, she did not cite this as her reason for leaving the relationship. Instead, similar to the women above (and other research, see Crawford et al 2009), Saskia places her son at the forefront of her ‘decision’ to leave;

*I just thought, the moment he [son] was born, I just thought, he was the most important thing so I just left... he [partner] wouldn't (...) buck from his responsibility*

Saskia also highlights what she sees as fatherly responsibilities;

*I said to him he has to get a job and he has to start paying his way. He didn't bother. He was in bed all day (...) not trying to help out with [son], didn't get up in the night (...) And that's when [son] was two weeks and I said you've had, basically had a week to start looking for a job and I said to him, he has had the second chance to start looking for a job but he didn't bother looking for a job... that's when he beat me up.*

As was discussed above, fatherhood still incorporates a level of providing as the basis for ‘good’ fathering. There has been a move, however, towards an expectation that fathers should also have a level of involvement with children beyond this. These roles are apparent in

Saskia's account. Her repeated reference to Donovan as needing to find work indicates that his role as provider is paramount. Whilst she saw childcare as her main responsibility, Donovan was also expected to 'help out'. Saskia highlights Donovan's 'failures' in his responsibilities as part of her reason to leave;

*...he wasn't willing to take his part so...I left him... That's what I came to realise that he wasn't...going to do it so I left him*

It is interesting to note that as well as her lack of feelings, Donovan's violence was also underplayed as part of her rationale. An individualist theory of relationships would suggest that these would be sufficient and understandable rationales. Instead, however, Saskia discusses what she sees as Donovan's failures as a father and her desire to protect her son. The following section sheds some light onto why this may be as the ways in which Naomi, Nicola and Saskia present their narratives are discussed. There are two key points considered here. Firstly, the psychological effects of domestic violence and, secondly, the continuing significance of the 'good' mother identity.

#### *Portrayals of the Self in Violent Relationships*

Despite the seriousness of the violence reported to me, many of the women appeared to downplay the severity. For instance, Nicola causally referred to one incident saying; "he got violent when I was six months pregnant (...) erm held a knife up to my throat". Naomi related that Phillip had tried to 'kick the baby out of her'; "how's she still alive I don't know". Nevertheless, this incident was minimised later on in the interview;

*I think it was to get at me. He didn't do it hard, he threatened to do it hard but when he did it wasn't hard, it wasn't hard, it wasn't really hard enough to do any damage*

As seen here, women often minimise the violence they experience, (Wilcox 2000). Furthermore, they may also report feelings of numbness and desensitisation (Tilley and Brackley 2004). Crawford et al (2009) suggest that minimising experiences may be a form of survival or resilience. It is not hard to imagine that the sustained violence experienced by both

of these women may have lead to similar feelings. Indeed, evidence has drawn attention to the damage domestic violence can do to the psychological well being of women (Tilley and Brackley 2004, Kim and Gray 2008; Crawford et al 2009)<sup>44</sup>. Consequently, women may be; “unable to recognise the impact on themselves” (Crawford et al 2009:71). Psychological effects, such as low self-esteem, experienced as a result of domestic violence is argued to be significant to why women may remain in violent relationships (Tilley and Brackley 2004; Kim and Gray 2008). This is because;

...their own identity as a woman [become] less significant to them, due to the level of physical and emotional abuse and the resulting psychological effects, they [are] unable to recognise the impact on themselves (Crawford et al 2009:7)

This may help to explain why the young women discussed here do not discuss leaving the relationship for their own needs and benefit. The recognition of violent relationships is then important in making a challenge to the idea that young women are ‘free’ to chose to leave. Furthermore, that leaving represents an individualised ‘choice’. Instead, an ‘external influence’ (Crawford et al 2009) was needed to aid the women leave the relationship. In Nicola’s case, the support of her new partner was significant. Moreover, all three of these women articulated that their children had been important in informing their ‘decision’ to leave. This was also found in research by Tilley and Brackley (2004) and Crawford et al (2009).

The way in which the women discuss protecting their children rather than themselves draws attention to the significance of ‘good’ mothering discourses. May (2008) argues that women seek to preserve an identity as a ‘good’ mother and a claim a ‘moral self’ when leaving relationships with their children’s father. In her research she posits that violence was considered a legitimate reason for a mother to “deprive her children of a two-parent family” (May 2008:477). This enables the need for a ‘good’ father, or an ‘in-tact’ nuclear family to be overridden. In this way ‘good’ mothering and ‘good’ fathering discourses may aid women in leaving a violent relationship.

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<sup>44</sup> Whilst the occurrence of female on male domestic violence, albeit to a lesser extent (Dobash 1992) is acknowledged elsewhere, the research and discussion here is based solely from the perspective of male violence towards women.

They may also however, work to keep women in violent relationships. This is evident in the value Nicola placed on the biological father and nuclear family. Naomi's presentation of Phillip as a 'good' father is also important here. As Mullender et al (2002) point out, women in violent relationships can be subject to accusations of having 'failed' to protect their children. Staying in a violent relationship can be seen as contrary to the image of a 'good' mother. Naomi's description of Phillip as an otherwise 'good' father may then act as a defence. As does her insistence at their daughter did not witness any violence;

*...he never actually hurt [daughter] it was me...he was good with her yeah. He was too sappy with her actually...she didn't really see anything until the last time he did it*

In order to retain this identity the women appear to draw on narratives of 'good' mothering. In the above quote Naomi demonstrates that staying had not been detrimental to her daughter's wellbeing. It may also be the case that Naomi was reassuring herself. As Wilcox found in her work, some of the women; "drew on a model of children as being 'safe' from abuse and violence, so long as they did not witness violence or 'only' overheard violence" (2006:81). As Wilcox points out however, this idea must be challenged given evidence of the detrimental effects on children living in families where violence is a feature.

When fathers are seen as an integral part of the family, Naomi may have felt a further obligation to stay. Once Phillip exposed his daughter to his violent behaviour, it became more difficult to cast him in the role of 'good' father. Naomi's wish to leave the relationship no longer clashed with her need to provide her daughter with a 'good' father. Saskia's highlighting of Donovan's 'failures' as a father performs a similar function. It demonstrates she is not depriving her son of a 'good' father.

The narratives these women tell are both for mine and their own benefit. They work to reinforce their identity of a 'good' mother. As has already been discussed, mothering in a stigmatised or marginalised position means there is more investment in this identity. Claims to 'good' motherhood are also evident in the narratives of women who did not describe their relationships as abusive. It is to these that this chapter will now turn.

### *'Deciding' to Leave*

This section focuses on the accounts of Kasey (18) and Debbie (19). Both women were in a relationship at the outset of the research but were observed going through the decision to leave their partners. Kasey was interviewed once and confided how she and her partner, Nathan, were “in the process of splitting”. Unfortunately, I was not able to re-interview her after this point. Debbie was interviewed as part of two focus groups. In the initial interview she was still with her partner, John. During the period of field work Debbie discovered he had had an affair and had got his girlfriend pregnant. By the second focus group she had ended the relationship and was starting divorce proceedings.

Both young women utilise understandings of ‘good’ fathering in order to support their decisions to leave their relationships. Furthermore, the way in which love is presented here as a factor in the ‘decision’ is also interesting. For Kasey, this appears to be sidelined as a rationale. As noted in Chapter Five. Debbie had invested in a romantic discourse alongside her desire for a family. Here we see how Debbie reconciles her attachment to this dream in the face of her partner’s infidelity.

When Kasey confided in me that she was going to finish with her partner, the couple were already living separately. Kasey cited her unhappiness with Nathan’s fathering as her main reason;

*...he just ignores him [son] and plays on his Xbox or goes out or something. Great [sarcastic]. Or if he’s like in danger or if he falls or something, he’s like ‘oh watch him’ [in a grouchy voice] or if he does fall over ‘why weren’t you watching him?’...his dad’s only just started feeding him, at 14months, and he don’t change his bum at all so I can’t even leave him with him because it’s a constant worry and if I do leave him with him is he going to be alright, is he going to change his bum, is he going to (...)?*

Nathan’s fathering does not live up to contemporary expectations of fathering outlined above. Furthermore, Kasey also shared how Nathan did not fulfil the ‘provider’ role; “...he just wants to spend his money on other stuff”. Kasey does not mention her feelings for Nathan, or indeed any loss of feelings. His presence in the relationship is only described in terms of his fathering role. The nearest Kasey comes to any reference to feelings is her fear of loneliness;

*...the only thing when he is there that I like is at night sitting down with him and having someone to talk to other than the baby. That's the only thing that I like about having him there*

Kasey's account does not betray any love or regret about her relationship with Nathan. Acknowledging this may be problematic, however, in that she can be accused of putting her own needs in front of her son. Furthermore, having fallen out of love so quickly with a man she 'planned' to get pregnant is unlikely to sound like an appealing narrative. It may then be easier for Kasey to emphasise Nathan's fathering as part of her justification for ending the relationship. Similarly, Kasey notes that she felt their relationship may have been better had he been a better father; "...if he was more supportive and done more things with him I think we would be better together". This may also then indicate that her feelings were bound up with his ability to be a good father. When Nathan failed to be the father she envisioned for her son, she was not going to stay just because he was the biological father; "there's no point staying together just because we've got a kid together". She also hints at an idea that her son would be better with another man, someone more willing to be a father; "I'm not being funny but I'm sure there's loads of nice guys out there who'd love to have kids and they can't..." Kasey is then drawing on more contemporary ideas of fatherhood which demands more than simply biology. Re-partnering and step-families are often used as evidence that 'the family' is in decline (Newman and Grauerholz 2002). Kasey's account indicates that fathering and family are still important concepts and may inform a desire to re-partner. Biology may guarantee a father but not a 'good' father and, for Kasey, it is a 'good' father that matters. Such an understanding supports the assertion that an ethic of care; "transcend[s] blood and marriage ties" (Williams 2004:17).

Debbie's account of her relationship breakdown centres less around John's fathering and more on his role as a partner. Soon after Debbie became pregnant, social services became involved in her relationship. This was, in part, due to Debbie's own family experiences. It also appears, however, that Debbie's husband, John, was also significant to the level of involvement of outside agencies. At the point at which Debbie took part in the research, she and her daughter were living with a foster family. John was living separately and had supervised access with his

daughter twice a week. Debbie explained her continued stay at the foster placement as being because she "...chose to be with her [daughter's] father". She gave no further information; nevertheless, her attendance at a domestic violence support group may provide an explanation. Despite John's role in her placement, Debbie positioned social services as being responsible for her frustration and unhappiness; "I've got post-natal depression because of what social services have been putting me through". John was conversely presented as caring and loving;

*...when I was pregnant [he was] just doing everything, carrying everything, he wouldn't let me get in the bath on my own or anything...he was just always there making sure I was ok he kept putting his head there and talking to her. He was really involved in everything, he came to all my appointments, came to hospital with me, stayed at home with me, do all the shopping, do all the cooking and I just used to lie back.*

Presenting John in this way fits into Debbie's attachment to a romantic discourse and John as her 'prince' (see Chapter Five). Depicting social services as having kept John and Debbie apart also reinforces a romantic narrative. They can then be cast as the 'enemy' in a 'love conquers all' scenario;

*...in the context of romanticism, partners are encouraged to attribute negative interaction to external forces... "you and me against the world" may have particular meaning for the couple as a metaphor for what is right within the relationship and what is wrong with everything else (Lloyd and Emery 2000:27)*

Debbie's presentation of social services helps to retain her investment in a romantic narrative at this point. Even following the discovery of John's affair and the ensuing pregnancy, Debbie continues to draw on love and romance discourses;

*I think he was genuinely in love with me because he had fancied me for like twelve years...I don't know what's going through his brain now [laughs]...but at the time I think he truly genuinely loved me and wanted to spend the rest of his life with me (...) but things fell away and social services got involved...but I genuinely did love him*

Debbie is asserting here that whatever subsequently happened, their love was 'genuine' and it was outside forces which were to blame. Debbie continues to hold social services responsible at some level for the demise of her relationship. In addition, she refers to uncontrollable male

sexual urges precipitated by her and John's separation; "Because I wasn't in the flat with him to attend to his every desire. Because he wasn't getting it from me three times a day (...) he had to get it from someone else". This then depicts his new relationship as a mere imitation. These factors in the demise of her relationship allow Debbie to retain a hold on her romantic narrative. In the second interview, Debbie begins to reflect on her relationship and John's declarations of love;

*I felt I got married too [faltering] too young...too soon I think (...) too young and too soon, I think I was too young to get married...And he's like still saying to me, 'I still love you and I want to try again'. And 'blah blah blah' and I'm like 'how can you love me when you cheated on me?' If it was a one night stand fair enough, I may be able to forgive you for that but for seven months and you've continuously lied to my face when I've asked you is there anything going on with you two and he's been going 'no no no'... it turns my stomach*

The pain in which Debbie recounts her feelings here demonstrates how John has shattered her romantic ideals and love for John. Debbie's understanding of male sexuality as uncontrollable meant that she saw their separation as having caused him some sexual frustration. This was scorned but ultimately understood and could possibly have been forgiven. In Debbie's analysis, John's affair and the subsequent pregnancy with another woman was more than a satisfying of sexual urges however. It calls into question his love for Debbie and undermines their marriage and, for Debbie, this is unforgivable.

This section indicates that when partners are seen not to live up to expectations, either as a partner or as a father, leaving the relationship becomes a consideration. That becoming a single parent is desired or preferred, however, is clearly not the case. Both women articulate that staying with a loving partner and good father would have been their preferred decision. Instead, the women are forced to choose between two undesirable situations taking into account what they think might be 'best'. It has been noted in the previous section that what the women may want for themselves and what they feel may be best for their children may be a source of conflict for the women. This conflict can be seen more clearly with women who, despite expressing unhappiness in their relationships, remained with their partners. We will now move on to examine these women's discussions of their relationships and partners.

### *Staying Together*

This section concentrates on the narratives of Harriet (18) and Amanda (16). Both women were critical of their partner's fathering and expressed some unhappiness in their relationships. Nevertheless, both were still with their partners at the point of being interviewed. The section starts by looking at Harriet's narrative. Harriet shared some frustration with what she saw as her partner's shortcomings as a father;

*...sometimes I wish he wasn't there like half the time because he doesn't actually do anything, he just sits there. So it's alright having someone around but it gets a bit annoying because he'd rather just sit there, and when I go to the toilet or go and have a bath or something and I'm like watch [son] and he's like 'uh', 'take these headphones off' and stuff and he's like 'oh...yeah' [says in a dopey voice] so it's a bit hard like sometimes...It's good having him there and he is a good dad but sometimes I just wish he wasn't there sometimes because he doesn't actually physically do anything*

Harriet's description of Ed as a 'good dad' appears, at first, inconsistent with her descriptions of his fathering. Harriet draws on some key understandings of the fathering role which provide some explanation however; "...he's alright, he goes to work, he buys him all the stuff that he needs so I feel quite lucky to still have Ed around". As noted earlier, 'breadwinning' remains highly valued (Warin et al 1999) and Harriet appreciates Ed's participation in this role. Harriet also describes herself as being 'lucky' to 'still' have Ed around. Here Ed is contrasted with other fathers who are no longer around or may not contribute financially. For instance the partners of the two friends she was interviewed with (Jane and Kasey). Such fathers, especially when contrasted with Ed could be labelled as 'bad' fathers. Ed's presence in the family and his role as a financial provider is then important to her view of him as a 'good' father.

Harriet's frustrations with Ed's fathering reflect the couple's differing expectations of the fathering role. This also supports assertions that breadwinning is no longer considered to be the only role of a father. It is important to remember at this point that Ed was not interviewed. As with young mothers, researchers should not attempt to speak 'for' young fathers. It is

recognised therefore, that Ed's views of fathering are taken from Harriet's narrative and must be treated with care;

*... he's like 'it's your turn because I changed it last time' and it's like it shouldn't be a competition about who changes more nappies because I'm with him every day when he goes to work and I don't think he understands that I do most of it. He just says 'I've been at work all day'*

Ed appears to be articulating a gendered division in his and Harriet's roles; his being to go to work, whilst she takes on the caring role. Research shows these understandings of gender roles are not out of step with those of other young men (O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000). Indeed Nancy reported similar conflicts with her partner; "I used to say to him, 'change her nappy' and he'd be like, 'oh I've been at work all day' [mimics a pathetic voice]". These young men continue to call on more traditional forms of fathering. Nevertheless, the resistance offered by the women confirms the view that "breadwinning is no longer seen to legitimise a form of fathering whereby men are exempt from active involvement with children" (Brannen and Nilson 2006:348).

Harriet does not mention any feelings of love for her partner. Most references to Ed are made in monotone and with a resigned sigh. That she was interviewed with her friends may explain this. Moaning about a partner's inadequacies may be part of bonding and solidarity amongst groups of women rather than an expression of unhappiness. Indeed, Harriet expresses no intention to leave the relationship. Nonetheless, practical considerations and challenges cannot be overlooked. Harriet's recognition of Ed's provider role indicates her reliance on him for her financial security and well-being. Furthermore, Harriet lived with Ed's parents and so her having a home depended on her staying with Ed.

These factors may then conflict with any loss of feeling she may have had for Ed. Harriet's description of Ed as a 'good' father may then have another purpose. Casting Ed as a good father helps to explain why she was staying in a relationship she was unhappy with. This understanding allows Harriet to be the 'good' mother looking after her son and providing him

with a 'good' father. Moreover, this allows Harriet's 'decision' to stay in the relationship to be one of 'choice' rather than inaction or impotency.

Amanda also discusses her partner's fathering as a source of frustration;

*...I'm the only one now who's doing anything, Simon just sits at home, he plays the Playstation all day...I need more help from him at the moment. I can't bear him sitting around while I'm doing everything, it really drives me mad. He's just sitting there and I'm running around after two kids all day long*

Brannen and Nilson (2006) note that declines in manual labour and unskilled work have eroded the possibility for many working class men to take on the provider roles. Indeed this appears to be the case for Simon. Unemployment may give men the opportunity to draw on different ways of fathering and look beyond that of the provider role (Warin et al 2009). Nonetheless, Segal (2007) points out that evidence suggests unemployed men often do less work within the household than employed men. Segal draws attention to the pervasiveness of traditional gendered divisions as an explanation and adds;

*...male unemployment also produces low self-esteem, isolation and multiple hardships. Indeed many studies suggest that it serves more to polarise than to merge the experiences of men and women (Segal 2007:34)*

Amanda does not share whether Simon expressed any views about not being able to provide. Nonetheless, through fieldwork it became clear that Simon was drinking heavily during the day and was suffering from depression. This put Amanda under immense pressure; "I get really stressed out easy at the moment...it all gets on top of us".

Nevertheless, she continued to describe Simon, somewhat paradoxically, as a 'good' father; "Oh he's a brilliant dad. He is really good but he does usually just sit on his arse and do nothing to be quite honest". Similar to the women discussed above, this description may function as an explanation for the women, to themselves, as to why they remain. Amanda adds an extra dimension here, her continuing feelings of love for Simon;

*I hope it will last out because I love him to pieces but (...) I don't know at the moment. I don't know how it's going to go. I hope we do stay together but we are growing apart if you know what I mean. I don't love him as much as what I used to. But there is obviously love there because he is my kid's dad and in that perspective I do love him but (...) I need more help from him at the moment*

Amanda notes her feelings for Simon had changed. Nevertheless, she still calls on an ideal of love as a reason to stay together, albeit in a different form. There is now a sense that she feels that she *should* love him because he is the father of her children. There is a sense that Amanda's happiness is being sacrificed because of her commitment to her children and 'the' family;

*I've just basically given up to be quite honest. I'll just do what I've got to do to bring up my kids and that's it. Make sure that they're fine and that's all I really worry about to be honest*

The wider context of keeping the family together and sure the children are alright may be an important underlying factor for both of these women in their continuing in their relationships. It was discussed in Chapter Five how Amanda related her desire for a child to the deficit of love she felt in her family of origin. Harriet shared how her parents were "having problems" when before she became pregnant and were in the process of going through a divorce. The effects of both these experiences may have contributed to these women's continued efforts to 'make it work' despite their own frustrations. Nonetheless, the idea that they should sacrifice their feelings for the sake of the family is problematic. Harriet and Amanda appear unhappy, resentful and even angry towards their partners. This analysis of Amanda's feelings in particular is supported by participant observation. Amanda was observed complaining about her partner's refusal to do housework or take responsibility for the children (field notes 26.01.09). Furthermore, she also referred to a concern about his visits to the pub during the day (field notes 13.02.09).

Despite these expressions of unhappiness, the above quote shows Amanda drawing on reserves of tolerance and strength in order to do the best for her children. It is important to consider the significance of this. Consequently, the following section will now examine the significance in the telling of survival stories.

### *Feelings of Malaise and Survival Stories*

Amanda's narrative of her unhappiness and struggles in coping reflects research discussed in Chapter Two which looks at the effect of teenage mothering on wellbeing (Hawkes et al 2004; Berrington et al 2005). Nonetheless, Amanda's unhappiness appears to be related to the lack of support she feels Simon provides rather than teenage motherhood itself. Reports of domestic violence (Nicola), concerns about debt (Claire) and relationship issues (Harriet and Kasey) are also significant in understanding struggles. Whilst teenage motherhood in itself may not cause malaise, young parenthood may lead women to be more vulnerable to circumstances which can cause severe issues. Particularly when policy responses to teenage pregnancy (such as housing policy) can exacerbate the problems young mothers face (Alexander et al 2010). For instance, Amanda discussed her living circumstances as impacting on her own wellbeing and that of her relationship;

*They [her, her partner and their two children] are all in the same bedroom and have no room to put anything, it is covered in mould everywhere and there are puddles of condensation on the window sills. Half her garden has just been given away to her upstairs neighbours and they can sit outside her French windows looking into her flat and so there is no privacy (Field Notes 06.02.09)*

Despite Amanda's narrative of unhappiness, she exhibited signs of strength, resilience and determination in coping; "at the end of the day I just look at it now as if to say bugger everybody else, I'll just get on with it". This was also observed in the narratives of other young women in the research;

*Naomi (18): ... it's proved to me how strong I actually am; a hell of a lot stronger than I thought I was*

*Nicola (19): ... [I thought] I'm going to prove you all wrong. And I think that's what makes young mums strong; it's the fact that they've got to prove they can do it.*

Baker (2009) draws attention to the significance of these survival stories. She argues that young mothers tend to minimise challenges and draw attention to stories of success. This, she maintains; "allows them to disavow an association with irresponsible and dependent

mothering. Instead, identification is made with a redemptive maternity that is worthy and sacrificial” (Baker 2009:285).

Throughout this chapter there is evidence of considerable challenges faced by a number of the young women. This includes; conflicts between educational needs and mothering responsibilities, abusive partners, lack of support in relationships, poor housing and loneliness. It is little wonder then that a number of the women in the Newtown group reported taking antidepressants. Although the women noted some of the challenges they faced, accounts of determination and survival are particularly prominent. For example, the way in which the women refer to their children as having given them the impetus to succeed educationally. It has already been discussed how some women downplayed their experiences of domestic violence. This too is an important strategy for survival (Crawford et al 2009). The peppering of accounts with expressions of determination and tales of success may work in much the same way. In other words, they can “be read as evidence of resilience and agency” (Baker 2009:285). It is important to consider that the telling of survival stories may be for their own benefit. That is, they help them to see themselves as strong as resilient and so enable the women create a more positive sense of self. Where young women have limited resources, the ability to be self-reflexive and construct more positive life narratives may increase in importance (Graham and McDermott 2005). Indeed, encouraging the telling of survival following a traumatic event is argued to be an important therapeutic tool (Echterling and Stewart 2008). These authors argue that this helps create meaning to the event and provides consolation and solace. It is not hard to see how the women’s narratives of success in the face of adversity work in a similar way.

Whilst teenage pregnancy and parenthood may not be traumatic, it is cast as disastrous by dominant discourses. There is also then a benefit for the women in telling others that they have survived and grown from the experience. This is significant given the context in which they were sharing their narratives. Firstly, they were telling me as a researcher. In this guise I am in a position to share their stories more widely. There may then be a wish to utilise me to challenge popular misconceptions of teenage motherhood. Secondly, they are telling me in my position as having been a teenage mother who is now interviewing them as a graduate and

PhD student. Although I faced, and continue to face, a number of challenges in my own life, the women were not aware of these. As such, I was meeting them with the appearance of having ‘succeeded’ as a young mother. Given this, it can be seen why the women would feel the need to explain that they too were ‘succeeding’. Baker (2009) argues that highlighting these elements of their lives enables young mothers to make a claim to ‘good’ motherhood. I would add that, more specifically, it allows them to make a claim for ‘good’ *teenage* motherhood.

### **7.3. Concluding Remarks**

The first half of this chapter looked at the ways in which the women interacted with the policy aim to increase the numbers of teenage mothers engaging with EET. It was demonstrated here that there was a conflict between the priorities of policy makers and the priorities of the young mothers in this study. A second and related conflict is evident between ‘good’ mothering discourses and what is expected of a ‘good’ teenage mother. ‘Good’ mothering discourses have been shown to position the mother as primary caregiver. Although working mothers are more commonplace, there is still debate regarding the effects of this, especially when children are small (see for example BBC 2001 and Brooks-Gunn et al 2010). Many of the women in this research articulated that they felt they should be mothering full-time, and that this was what they wanted to be doing. For the young women, this was what was required to be a ‘good’ mother. To be seen as a ‘good’ *teenage* mother, however, young parents are expected to combine mothering responsibilities with EET. A number of the young women expressed resistance to policy objectives. The powerlessness of one young woman (Sophie) to circumvent the conflict caused considerable distress. A number of the women were able to resist or negotiate policy priorities however. This was easier where women were given the space to mother. For example, when teenage parent workers recognised the women as mothers and did not place pressure on the women. In addition, when women were over sixteen they were not subject to legal requirements to return to education. A number of these women were able to ‘decide’ when they entered EET. The ‘decision’ was informed by what they thought was ‘best’ for their children. The age of the child emerged as a significant factor as this allowed the women to combine mothering and studying more easily and the women felt they

were less needed at home. 'Good' mothering discourses were then also influential on these young women. Furthermore, it was argued here that their awareness of the requirements of 'good' mothering had implications for the way in which the women sought to present their 'decision'. Consequently, the women's own desires around education were sidelined. Instead, education and employment were presented as benefitting the children rather than themselves. This chapter drew further on the idea of the presentation of self in relation to problematising discourses of teenage parenthood in the discussion of survival stories. It was noted here that presenting the positive implications of teenage pregnancy (such as with educational ambition) allows the women to disrupt stigmatising discourses.

The second part of this chapter explored the narratives of those women who discussed their 'decisions' around remaining in or leaving their relationships with the father of their child/children. It was demonstrated here how contemporary constructions of fatherhood have led to raised expectations of the fathering role. It is also often posited that children may be harmed because of the absence of a male role model in the home (Morgan 1999; Dennis and Erdos 2000). It can then be argued that the father/child relationship is now considered more important than in previous eras. Furthermore, 'good' mothering discourses and ideals around the nuclear family also emphasise the importance of the presence, if not the role, of the father.

These discourses were evident in the women's narratives. It was demonstrated here how the women's expectations fitted into an understanding of fatherhood which went beyond a 'breadwinning' role. Whilst providing for the family was considered to be important, the fathers were expected to be more involved in the care and well being of their children. When these expectations were not met, the women expressed frustration which, for some, led to the relationship ending. For others however, the women's frustrations and unhappiness did not lead to them leaving the relationship. It was argued that the desire to preserve the family was an important factor in understanding why these women remained in their relationships. The influence of negative experiences in the family of origin was noted to add to the women's desires around forming a family of their own. Similarly, this can be seen to impact on these women's 'decisions' to stay in a relationship which they reveal to cause them unhappiness. This is especially important to consider in the context of those women who experienced

domestic violence in their personal relationships. Conversely, however, 'good' mothering discourses were noted here as providing the women with the strength and legitimacy to leave the relationship.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter a number of young women expressed that they were happy in their relationships and in love with their partners. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note how love for the partner appears to be marginal in these women's accounts. Falling out of love may have been part of these women's 'decisions' to leave the relationship, nonetheless, it was sidelined or silenced as a reason. It is argued here that presentations of teenage motherhood, and in particular, single teenage motherhood, underlie this presentation of the women's decisions. Problematising discourses outlined in Chapter Two demonstrate how young single mothers and the break between marriage and children are important in constructing the teenage mother as a social problem. There is then, an added pressure for these women to maintain a relationship with their partners, or to justify ending it. This allows the women to continue to call on the identity of 'good' mother.

There is a debate to be had about challenging 'good' mothering discourses. There are complexities in the 'effects' of the discourse however. For instance, it is evident from this chapter that, for some, striving to be a 'good' mother can be empowering. This could be by providing the impetus to leave a violent relationship or embark on a college course. Nonetheless, women of all ages are constrained and judged by contemporary constructions of motherhood. Policy makers and those who seek to understand teenage mothers' 'decisions', need to start to acknowledge the influence of these discourses and other experiences. This is especially where women express strong family orientations linked to deficits in their own experiences of family. For these young women, the need to be, and be seen as, a 'good' mother was intensified.

## Chapter Eight: Closing Thoughts and Reflections

This thesis has investigated the factors which have influenced ‘decisions’ made by young women as they became teenage mothers. The development of official government policies and approaches to teenage pregnancy and parenthood and their impact has been explored. The ways in which a group of teenage mothers’ interacted with these policies, and related political processes and institutions has been key in understanding their experiences. This research focussed on the negotiations with, and resistances to representations of teenage parenthood made by a group of young parents. As such, this thesis has provided a distinctive examination of the lived experiences of teenage mothers. Consequently, the thesis offers a contribution to the debate surrounding teenage pregnancy and parenthood. It provides insights into the ways in which policy and representations of teenage motherhood impact on the experiences of young mothers. It reveals the complexity of their interactions with these influences. As a result, this research makes a challenge to underlying assumptions regarding the ‘decisions’ young women make and the implications this has for their lives as young mothers. This final chapter brings these threads together to draw out some key conclusions. The chapter starts by revisiting the thesis aims set out in chapter one and demonstrating how they have been met and goes on to discuss emerging conclusions.

### **8.1. Thesis Aims**

- Firstly, this thesis aimed to identify the development of social policies designed to prevent teenage pregnancy and support teenage mothers. It further sought to document the responses and reactions to these policies in a group of teenage mothers.

Chapter Three traced the historical development of the teenage pregnancy ‘problem’ starting from the post-war period. It outlined how successive governments sought to address the ‘problem’ as they defined it. This thesis discussed social constructionist arguments which highlight underlying anxieties linked to the problematisation of teenage pregnancy. Chapter Three built on these points to demonstrate how official government approaches and policies draw on these underlying concerns and problematising discourses. In particular, issues

concerning state expenditure, dependency, the underclass, the family and changing expectations of youth transitions (especially for women) were noted as influential. It has been argued that policy interventions and representations of teenage mothers are misleadingly framed due to these anxieties. The analysis chapters examined the ways in which the women interacted with resulting policy interventions and discourses. Chapter Five examined the dynamics of contraception use amongst the young women and their partners as well as orientations towards parenthood. This provided some understanding of the lived experiences of policies which focus on improving the promotion and provision of contraception in order to prevent teenage pregnancy. Chapter Six added to this by looking at the women's 'decision' to continue with a pregnancy. It was discussed here how problematising discourses surrounding teenage motherhood impacted upon the way in which they presented this 'decision'. Chapter Seven examined the women's 'decisions' around education and employment. This was in reference to the support aims of the TPS which focussed on EET. These chapters allow an understanding to emerge of the ways in which the needs and desires of teenage mothers conflict and correspond with policy aims. Furthermore, they enable us to develop an understanding of the ways in which the women seek to negotiate with policy, taking their own priorities into account.

- Secondly, the thesis aimed to explore the perspectives and 'lived' experiences of young people who have become teenage mothers.

This was achieved through empirical research with a group of young mothers. The qualitative methods of participant observation and interviews allowed a detailed exploration and an in-depth perspective to be gained. The advantages, pitfalls and reflections on the research process were discussed in chapter four. Chapters Five, Six and Seven identified, described and analysed the women's experiences generated by these methods and processes. The findings highlighted the impact of normative expectations around gender, family and mothering on the women's experiences. It also enabled understandings to emerge of the ways in which representations of teenage motherhood shaped the lived experience of motherhood. These ideas will be returned to later in this chapter.

- To explore and articulate the ‘decision-making’, resistances and survival of a group of young mothers

The women in this research identified a number of key ‘decisions’ they had made as they became young mothers. ‘Decisions’ around contraception, ‘planning’ a pregnancy and continuing with an ‘unplanned’ pregnancy were subsequently explored. ‘Decisions’ around EET and the women’s personal relationships after they had given birth were also examined. This focus allowed the influences and rationales underlying the women’s ‘decisions’ to be exposed. The complexities surrounding sex, contraception, pregnancy and mothering became apparent through this approach. The women in this research emphasised their desires around the family drawing on gendered role expectations and ‘good’ mothering discourses. This provides further understanding of why young women interact with policy interventions in the ways described in this thesis. Furthermore, the thesis is then able to challenge some of the assumptions about young mother’s ‘decisions’ which contribute to negative representations of teenage motherhood. This thesis has also discussed the women’s presentation of self and their ‘decisions’. It has been argued here that representations of teenage pregnancy influence the ways in which women seek to frame their ‘choices’ and lives.

- To take into account existing research which highlights the social positions of teenage parents and add an examination of the impact of gender on the path to and experience of teenage motherhood

Throughout this thesis, gender has been used as a lens through which to shed light on the women’s ‘decisions’ and experiences. This approach intersects with academic work which has highlighted the class position of teenage parents to provide a unique insight. Gendered expectations of the women as sexual actors and mothers are implicit in the shaping of the problematisation of teenage pregnancy. For instance, responsibility for contraception use and consequently pregnancy continues to rest upon the shoulders of young women. The women’s ‘decisions’ and lived experiences are also then shaped by understandings of gender and particularly traditional expectations of women within the family. Gender laden discourses surrounding ‘good’ motherhood were demonstrated as having the potential to both constrain

and empower young women. The following section provides more detail about the ways in which gendered expectations, roles and discourses underpin the women's experiences. The context of the women's lives, experiences and 'decisions' were explored in the analysis chapters. These presented a chronological picture of the women's paths to 'becoming' a teenage mother. The following sections pick out two key threads running through the women's paths to motherhood.

## **8.2. Mothering and 'The' Family**

This thesis has demonstrated how family and mothering ideals were influential at every stage of 'becoming' a teenage mother. It has been particularly notable that the women in this research tended to draw on very traditional and gendered ideals of family life. Feelings about family have been shown to be influential on 'decisions' around planning a pregnancy and continuing with an unplanned pregnancy. Here, a number of the women drew on ideas of natural motherhood and maternal desires to explain their 'decisions'. Desires for motherhood or a family also need to be set in the context of the family of origin. For some of the women, negative experiences led to them seeking to form a new family. This appeared to be a way to make up for 'deficits' of love in their past and recreate 'the perfect family'.

This finding provides an important understanding of the influences on young women's 'decisions' around pregnancy and mothering. It demonstrates that ignorance or low expectations are limited and inadequate explanations for teenage pregnancy. Moreover, it helps to make clear the ways in which young women's needs sometimes conflict with policy aims around teenage pregnancy and parenthood. When young women express an orientation towards parenthood based on maternal desires or deficits of love, an emphasis on contraception is unlikely to be successful in reducing pregnancy. Furthermore, from the perspective of the women in this research, 'low expectations' does not seem like an appropriate explanation for teenage pregnancy. Many expressed that they had high expectations of motherhood and family life. In some cases mothering did not match up to the expectations expressed here and may have exacerbated the issues the women faced. Nevertheless, the women did express aspiration for their futures albeit often ones which did

not accord with policy aims. Rather than passing judgement, this research has then helped to make the women's 'choices' and 'decisions' more intelligible.

Chapter Seven demonstrated further how family priorities and mothering obligations can conflict with policy priorities. This was particularly evident where policy makers and young parent support workers sought to encourage young women to engage with EET. Whilst the underlying intention is creditable, it was demonstrated here how such policy aims can actually make teenage motherhood more challenging. Traditional and gendered readings of familial roles present women with a further challenge. The desire to 'be there' and the strength of feeling expressed about motherly responsibilities often meant that EET was not considered compatible with parenting (at least not yet). Family ideals also acted as an impediment to some women leaving relationships with which they were unhappy. Seen in this context, young women's desires for a better future through motherhood and 'the' family may be self defeating. Nonetheless, it was also evident that motherhood could act as an inspiration or motivation for these young women. This was expressed by women who invoked 'good' mothering discourses to aid them to leave violent relationships. Or by young women who sought to enter education in order to provide a better future for their children. It was noted in chapter two that mothering as a teenager can have a compounding effect on previous disadvantage. Whilst this may be the case for some young women, motherhood also appears to bring some advantages. A sense of agency, determination and motivation may well help to mitigate some of these experiences of disadvantage.

### **8.3. Representations of Teenage Pregnancy and Teenage Mothers**

Problematizing discourses have been shown in this thesis to be implicit in representations of teenage motherhood. It has been demonstrated how these impact on policy interventions and experiences of young motherhood. This is not a linear relationship however. Representations of teenage pregnancy feed into and are reinforced by policy and the reactions of young mothers. These then come together to perpetuate an understanding of teenage parenting as an inherent social problem regardless of evidence to the contrary. These points will now be explored in more detail.

Evidence of poor outcomes of teenage pregnancy and parenthood has undoubtedly influenced governmental concern and ultimately informs policy interventions. Nonetheless, the complexities outlined in this thesis are overlooked in presentations of the teenage pregnancy 'problem'. Chapter two of this thesis drew attention to work which questioned the extent of negative associations and highlighted the complexities of establishing causation. A number of problematising discourses attached to young parenthood have also been discussed in this thesis. This has included ideologies of motherhood, 'the' family, childhood and female sexuality. Economic concerns regarding state expenditure, welfare dependency and social exclusion have also been highlighted. Chapter three demonstrated how these concerns are implicit in the problematisation and representation of unmarried, lone motherhood and, latterly, teenage pregnancy. This thesis has also enabled the ways in which these underlying concerns have permeated interventions to become clear.

Firstly, this is evident in the ways in which the government have sought to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy by tackling 'ignorance'. It has been shown here how SRE has been constrained by family ideologies and understandings of appropriate teenage and female sexual behaviour. Consequently, SRE practitioners have been inhibited in utilising approaches which address sexual pleasure and openness. Emphasis therefore remains on contraception provision and use, and, in particular condoms. Nevertheless, gendered understandings of sexuality continue to position young women as responsible for the prevention of pregnancy. Furthermore, as demonstrated by this and previous research, young women find negotiating condom use challenging. In part, precisely because of gendered understandings of sexual behaviour and responsibility.

Secondly, problematising discourses are also apparent in interventions designed to support mothering teenagers. For instance, the support arm of the TPS has focused on supporting teenage mothers back into education and employment. This is an important means by which to address the poverty experienced by young parents and their children. New Labour explicitly noted their concerns about the social exclusion of teenage mothers. Nevertheless, chapter three demonstrated how welfare expenditure and dependency are implicit in the development of the

teenage pregnancy 'problem' and policy. These issues are particularly evident in the implementation of the policy. Younger and single mothers are labelled as NEET. Consequently, young mothers are encouraged and sometimes coerced to returning to education. As teenage mothers, they are subject to different expectations to older and married mothers. The stay-at-home dependent married mother remains an ideal. Teenage mothers, partnered or otherwise, are expected and exalted for returning to education and employment however. Lone parents are under even greater pressure to re-enter the workplace through changes to income support entitlement<sup>45</sup>. Unacceptable welfare dependency is then compared to acceptable family dependency.

The influence of problematising discourses rather than a reliance on research evidence and nuance is problematic. Both of these policy approaches potentially represent young women as being culpable for their pregnancy and wholly responsible for their situation. Where a teenage pregnancy occurs, there is little understanding of the impediments to successful contraception use highlighted in this research. When young women resist or reject entering EET, they may be positioned as 'dependant', 'excluded' or 'scroungers'. There is little space for recognition that mothering as a teenager may be positive or desired by young women. This is despite evidence here that this may well be the case.

Furthermore, as touched upon above, young women's expressions of need do not always correspond with policy aims. Neither do their circumstances always match up to discursive constructions of family ideals. Consequently, 'decisions' around education, employment and relationships can be read as confirmation of negative representations of teenage parenthood. It has been argued in this thesis that the women's awareness of this influences the ways in which they seek to present themselves and their 'decisions'. The rationales and influences discussed here in relation to mothering and 'the' family provide an alternative understanding of teenage mothers. More importantly, they indicate that the concerns and priorities of teenage parents do not appear to differ from those of older mothers. The key difference appears to be in the ways in which their lives and 'decisions' are represented and responded to.

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<sup>45</sup> In 2008, single parents whose youngest child had reached the age of twelve were no longer entitled to income support were required to seek employment. In 2010 this was extended to parents whose youngest child had reached seven. It is currently proposed that this will be extended to parents of children aged five and six in 2012.

#### **8.4. Being a Teenage Mother**

This study has provided an interesting insight into the effects and influence of representations of teenage pregnancy. Previous research has discussed the stigmatisation of teenage motherhood. This thesis builds on this to highlight the ways in which representations of teenage pregnancy filter into policy and young women's experiences of policy. The examination of policy priorities alongside young mothers expressed needs and desires has enabled a distinctive understanding of the lived experience of young motherhood to emerge. The thesis has added to recent debates to present some of the nuances behind evidence and representations of the outcomes of teenage motherhood. It has demonstrated that rather than age alone, a range of other factors combine to impact on the well-being and lived experiences of teenage mothers. In particular representations of teenage motherhood and dominant familial and mothering discourses have been noted. Both of these are framed by continuing traditional understandings of gendered behaviours and roles. Whilst these wider issues relating to sexual behaviour and motherhood remain unaddressed, representations and lives of young parents are unlikely to change.

Policy provision and intervention does, and has, changed however. As the TPS reached the end of its ten year target, the incoming coalition government made the decision not to continue with the strategy. The data gathered here represents a snapshot of a specific period of time and so provides an important record of this policy era. In addition, budget reductions and ensuing service cuts across the public sector has made a mark on the provision for young parents. TPIAG (2010) reported some concern regarding the potential impact of the scrapping of EMA and the closure of a number of projects for teenage parents. Despite lobbying MPs, petitions and appeals both Pensford and Newtown young parents' groups were closed after field work was completed. Staff whose roles had been dedicated to the care and support of young parents were deployed to more generic posts. The wisdom of some of Labour's underlying policy aims and means of implementation has been debated here. Nonetheless, the commitment to supporting young parents and their children alongside dedicated funding has provided much needed opportunity and assistance. The precise outcomes and impact of these groups has not been measured here. The testimonials of members and ex-members of Newtown and Pensford

indicate that the groups and workers were valued highly by teenage mothers however. We do not yet fully know which direction the coalition government will take with regards teenage pregnancy policy. Nonetheless, set in the context of public sector spending cuts being a teenage mother may well be even more challenging than for the young women in this research.

Glossary of Participants: Interviewees (Mothers)

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age at Child's birth</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Age of Youngest Child</b>	<b>Occupational Status</b>	<b>Main Income Source</b>	<b>Relationship with 1<sup>st</sup> Child's Father</b>
Amanda	16	2	1-2years	Full-time Mother	Benefits	Living Together
Bea	14	4	4years+	Part-time Employment	Joint Income	Married
Claire	16	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Benefits	Separated
Debbie	19	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Benefits	Separated
Fiona	18	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Partner's Income	Living Together
Harriet	18	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Partner's Income	Living Together
Hazel	15	2	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Benefits	Living Together
Holly	18	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Partner's Income	Engaged
Jane	17	1	1-2years	Full-time Mother	Benefits	Separated
Jenny	17	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Partner's Income	Living Together
Kasey	18	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Unknown	Process of Separation
Kate	18	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Partner's Income	Living Together
Lisa	18	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Partner's Income	Living Together
Kathy	16	1	4years +	Full-time Employment	Joint Income	Separated and Re-partnered
Nancy	16	1	3-4yrs	Full-time Mother	Benefits	Separated
Nicola	19	2	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Partner's Income	Divorced and Re-partnered
Naomi	18	2	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Partner's Income	Separated and Re-partnered
Rachel	18	2	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Partner's Income	Married
Sallie	18	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Benefits	Separated
Saskia	16	1	1-2years	Full-time Mother	Benefits	Separated and Re-partnered
Trish	19	1	Under 1year	Full-time Mother	Benefits	Separated

Glossary of Participants Included with the Thesis: Participant Observation (Mothers)

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age at Child's birth</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Age of Youngest Child</b>
Kelly	17	1	Unborn
Amber	17	1	Unborn
Sophie	14	1	Under 1 year

Glossary of Participants: Fathers

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age at Child's birth</b>	<b>Partner's Name</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Occupational Status</b>	<b>Interviewed Yes/No</b>	<b>Participant Observation Yes/No</b>
Matthew	18	Holly	1	Employed	Yes	No
Charlie	24	Lisa	1	Employed	Yes	Yes
Sean	Aprox 18	Amber	1 (unborn)	Unknown	No	Yes

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Appendix One: Live and still births to unmarried mothers by age from 1940-1960

Year	15-19yrs	20-25yrs	25-29yrs	30-34yrs
1941-1945	272	96	55	44
1946-1950	197	65	45	41
1951-1955	171	50	33	39
1956-1960	172	53	32	37

Annual averages are given for five-year period  
Outside marriage, live and still births: proportions per 1,000 total births.  
(ONS 2008)

Appendix Two: Registered births to mothers aged 15-19 in the periods 1981-2000

Year	Age range15-19yrs
1981-1985	55,583
1986-1990	56,942
1991-1995	45,862
1996-2000	46,712

Annual averages are given for five-year period  
1981 maternities are based on a 10 per cent sample (ONS 2006)

## Appendix Three: Information Sheet for Participant Observation



### **The project**

This project is about understanding some of the decisions and choices made by you linked to you becoming a parent. I am interested in the experiences you have had in making some of these decisions.

I will be spending some time in (*Group Name*) observing and talking to members of the group. I will then be asking some members of the group if they would like to be interviewed. The research findings will go into a research report as part of studies for a degree at the University of Brighton. Some of what you say to me may also appear in parts of the report. The findings may also be used at a later date in academic publications about my research. These would be for professional journals and not for general public reading. A group of young parents in another town will also be given the opportunity to comment on some of the findings as part of the research.

### **Your rights**

You have the right to change your mind about being included in the research at any time. You have the right to be treated with care and understanding. You will not be judged on anything you say to me. I will make every effort to make sure you are happy and comfortable throughout the research.

You have the right to remain anonymous. This means that no one should be able to identify you. All identifying features (such as the names of your children, places and yourself) will be changed.

You have the right to be treated confidentially. This means that I will not tell anyone else what you have told me. However, if I think that you (or anyone else) are in danger I will have to pass on that information.

## **My Responsibilities**

I have a responsibility to report any criminal behaviour. I also have a responsibility to pass on information if I think that you or anyone else is in danger of harm. If I have to report anything I will discuss it with you first. We can then discuss it with (*group leader*) together or separately.

## **Feedback**

If you have any questions for me about any aspect of the research or my own experiences please feel free to ask at any point. If you want to contact me outside of the interview you can ring or email me at the university;

Tel: 01273 644544  
Email: [kes13@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:kes13@brighton.ac.uk)

You will be given a chance to report about how you felt about being researched and how it could be changed or improved. Please feel free to be as honest as possible. If you are not happy about any aspect of the research process you can talk to someone completely independent at the University of Brighton. They can be contacted on;

Sallie White (Research Administrator)  
Tel: 01273 643480  
Email: [S.S.White@Brighton.ac.uk](mailto:S.S.White@Brighton.ac.uk)

## Appendix Four: Information Sheet for Interviewees



### **The project**

This project is about understanding some of the decisions and choices made by you linked to you becoming a parent. I am interested in the experiences you have had in making some of these decisions.

I will be asking you to talk me through some of the key points leading up to you becoming a parent and the decisions you may or may not have made. This may be things like meeting your partner, deciding to have sex for the first time, using or not using contraception, trying for a baby or carrying on with an unexpected pregnancy. There may also be different things which you think are more relevant.

I will be asking you how for your feelings about some of these points and why you think you made the choices you did.

The research findings will go into a research report as part of studies for the University of Brighton. Some of what you say to me may also appear in parts of the report. The findings may also be used at a later date in other academic publications.

### **Your rights**

Some of the subjects we will be talking may be quite difficult and so you need to remember that you can refuse to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with. You can also stop the interview at any time and it is up to you whether to let me use what has already been said. I will not be angry or upset with you if you make either of these decisions, these are your rights and I will understand if you want to stop.

You have the right to be treated with care and understanding. You will not be judged on anything you say to me. I will make every effort to make sure you are happy and comfortable throughout the research.

You have the right to remain anonymous. This means that no one should be able to identify you. All identifying features (such as the names of your children, places and yourself) will be changed.

You have the right to be treated confidentiality. This means that I will not tell anyone else what you have told me. However, if I think that you (or anyone else) are in danger I will have to pass on that information.

### **My Responsibilities**

I have a responsibility to report any criminal behaviour. I also have a responsibility to pass on information if I think that you or anyone else is in danger of harm. If I have to report anything I will discuss it with you first. We can then discuss it with (*group leader*) together or separately.

### **Feedback**

If you have any questions for me about any aspect of the research or my own experiences please feel free to ask at any point. If you want to contact me outside of the interview you can ring or email me at the university;

Tel: 01273 644544  
Email: [kes13@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:kes13@brighton.ac.uk)

You will be given a chance to report about how you felt about being researched and how it could be changed or improved. Please feel free to be as honest as possible. If you are not happy about any aspect of the research process you can talk to someone completely independent at the University of Brighton. They can be contacted on;

Sallie White (Research Administrator)  
Tel: 01273 643480  
Email: [S.S.White@Brighton.ac.uk](mailto:S.S.White@Brighton.ac.uk)

Appendix Five: Consent Form for Participant Observation



- I agree to take part in this research which is about understanding some of the decisions and choices linked to me becoming a parent.
- The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose of the study and the possible risks involved.
- I have had the procedure explained to me and I have also read the information sheet. I understand the procedures fully.
- I am aware that Kyla will be observing the young parents group.
- I understand that any confidential information will be seen only by the researcher and will not be revealed to anyone else.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the investigation at any time.

Name (please print) .....

Signed.....

Date.....

Appendix Five: Consent Form for Interviewees

 University of Brighton



- I agree to take part in this research by being interviewed by Kyla.
- The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose of the study and the possible risks involved.
- I have had the procedure explained to me and I have also read the information sheet. I understand the procedures fully.
- I understand that any confidential information will be seen only by the researcher and will not be revealed to anyone else.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the investigation at any time.

Name (please print).....  
Signed.....  
Date.....