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# YOUNG MOTHERHOOD IN A CHANGING MATERNAL WORLD

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*This paper is based on a conference presentation on youth and the meanings and forms of citizenship, hosted by the University of Porto. My contribution draws upon a five year study of motherhood in the UK. «Making of Modern Mothers» explores what it means to become a mother and how this can be understood as a moment of identity change. Focusing on the young mothers, a central argument is that motherhood is a site of new social divisions between women. Within this context young motherhood makes sense when we understand what's happening to motherhood generally. The paper outlines the contours of the project, including the starting points and policy concerns that formed the backdrop to the study. The main body of the paper considers: new motherhood in late modernity; the research design; representations of pregnancy and motherhood; key findings and defining features of young motherhood. The paper concludes with a discussion of two biographical case studies of young mothers who participated in the study.*

**Keywords:** young motherhood, delayed motherhood, social change, identity, motherhood and social divisions

By way of introduction I want to say that what I am about to present is taken from a project funded by the research council in the UK called «Making of Modern Mothers» (Thomson, Kehily, Hadfield, & Sharpe, 2011). We have spent five years looking at what it means to be a mother across the UK and it is from that project that I am going to be drawing the data and the key findings. Our aim was to examine motherhood generally but for the purpose of this presentation I am going to focus on the young mothers in the study. I would like to suggest

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that we need to understand the bigger picture, in order to contextualize the experiences of young mothers. In this paper I outline the aims of the project and policy concerns that formed the backdrop to the study. The rest of the paper is divided into five sections: new motherhood in late modernity; an overview of the research design; representations of pregnancy and motherhood; key findings and defining features of young motherhood. The paper concludes with a discussion of two biographical case studies of young mothers who participated in the study.

### Starting points

At the start of the project we were inspired by a number of things and this quotation sums up many of them:

Many, probably most women feel that their range of choices is greater than that of their mothers with regard to work, marriage and reproduction. One of the most significant differences of income and expectation in late twentieth-century society must be that between the teenage unmarried mother, unable to escape from dependence on state benefits, and the professional woman in her late 30's, married to another professional, having her first child and able to pay for a nanny. (Lewis, 1992: 10)

This observation encouraged us to think about the changing nature of women's experience. Amidst such diversity of experience, we asked, what does it mean to be a new mother today? How is it different from our mothers, how does our life change once we become a mother and how does it stay the same? We were interested in mapping the experience of new motherhood, but also thinking about intergenerational change. If you become a mother today the likelihood is that you're going to have a very different experience from your mother and from your grandmother. So how do these changes come about, and how can we make sense of these changes?

In the feminist era of the 1960s-70s, it was possible to say there was loosely worked feminist consensus that motherhood occupied an ambivalent position as something that possibly impeded your abilities to proceed at work but it also provided a site of solidarity. Women supported each other by sharing childcare and organizing as a collective. Now it seems there is a fragmentation of experience. Motherhood no longer seems to be a point of solidarity between women. There is such great diversity, beginning at the point that women become mothers. To give you an example of this: we interviewed 62 first time mothers in the UK, the youngest of them was 15 and expecting her first child and the oldest of them was 48, also expecting her first child. So both women were sharing the experience of new motherhood but their circumstances were very, very different. How can we understand these differences?

The approach that we took looked at two interacting dimensions of difference: the socio-

cultural and the historical. First of all we looked across the experiences of first time mothers, mapping similarities and differences across practices of solidarity and distinction. We also looked back through the accounts of their mothers and grandmothers in order to ask «how are identities negotiated within the intimacies of family life?». We developed two ways of looking at social change – one looking across the cohort of new mothers and the other looking inter-generationally at the first time mother in relation to her mother and grandmother.

One of the things that we were interested in at the start of the project, was the idea that motherhood was becoming a site of social polarization. For the majority of mothers, there was a tendency to delay the birth of their first child until into their 30s or even into their 40s while a small number of mothers were having children very young, often in their teenage years. Most new mothers were in established careers, they had taken advantage of higher education and they wanted to get to a point in their lives where it was appropriate for them to take a career break. In 2003 the average age of first time mothers in the UK was 29.3, an increase of 2.5 years over a 20 year period and since then we know from surveys such as the Millennium Cohort Study that this trend has continued. We also know that the age at which women become mothers reflects their socio-economic status. So bound up with the age at which you become a new mother is also socio-economic circumstances. And finally we had to recognize that there is a fragmentation of markers of adulthood which means that parenthood no longer occupies the same temporal sequence as for earlier generations. In previous generations it was much more likely that you went through the same experiences at the same time as your peers. In previous generations it was quite common to find women marrying in their early 20s, having children in their mid-20s and going through the similar of markers of adulthood – leaving home, marrying, starting a family at roughly the same time. The idea of Mannheim's (1952) generational cohorts could be applied to the post-war period of the 1950s. However, the idea of «my generation» seems to have broken down.

### **New mother hood and policy concerns**

We were interested in thinking about what it means to be a new mother today and about motherhood in relation to social debates and policy perspectives. What are the issues of concern? Are there any hot spots for state intervention? One of the issues associated with teenage motherhood is the idea of intergenerational transmission; the notion that teenage mothers who have children early will have daughters who also become teenage mothers, thereby reproducing a cycle of broken education, poor economic prospects and social exclusion that carries on through generations. So the key policy concerning teenage mothers lies in interventions

aimed at breaking this cycle. Older mothers are also seen as part of a policy agenda in that delayed parenthood carries the risk of infertility that requires medical intervention. At this end of the spectrum there can be a double load of caring responsibilities. Women who leave the birth of their first child until their late 30s early 40s, may have a young family at the same time as having to care for elderly parents. There is also an issue of childcare and the delegation of parenting responsibilities for women who stay at work and pursue careers. A further policy concern, and this has been part of the New Labour agenda, is the idea that teenage mothers establish themselves as adults in different ways, they have what could be called an «alternative career», which in policy terms is seen as creating a culture of dependency. Teenage pregnancy can be a means of securing adult status or belonging in the local community, but from the policy perspective it creates a cycle of dependency and disadvantage. So those three issues sum up the kind of policy concerns that were at large when we started the project more than five years ago.

### **New mother hood in late moder nity**

Now it is possible to say on a broader scale that motherhood is becoming the site of a new social division between women. This was how we began to understand what we were doing and what was motivating the project. Many of the themes running through the project draw upon late modern social theory. We acknowledge a divergence in the conditions of Western women's lives. For women who were doing well, who were managing a career and motherhood at the same time, there's a delegation and a commodification of care practices. To take advantage of being able to pursue your career and be a mother you had to be in quite a privileged financial position to absorb the financial burden of childcare. In contemporary times there seems to be an increasingly localized understanding of what it is to be a «good mother». On our travels across the UK, interviewing women in different sites, there was no consensus over what it meant to be a «good mother». Some women would claim that going to work and getting care in place was the best thing they could do for their family and their child, other women insisted on staying at home as the best thing for their child. Any consensus of what a good mother does was breaking down and it is increasingly being defined at the level of the private. The question this left us with is «what part does motherhood play in the struggle to secure a stable identity in uncertain times?».

Now we could say in recent years, certainly since we've been doing the project that there has been a re-enchantment of motherhood in «new times». If we look at the individualization thesis in the work of Beck (1992), Giddens (1991, 1992), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995),

it is possible to say that a feature of late modernity that appears to be highly prized is the idea of having a child. The couple that matters these days, the new political unit, is the «motherand-child» (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, *ibidem*) written as one word. Embedded in this sentiment is the resurfacing of an idea that can be traced back to the Romantic period – that the child is a treasured emotional investment. This idea of the child as a treasured emotional investment can be seen to suit the contingent nature of the «pure relationship» (Giddens, 1992) in which the child becomes the emotional anchor for the couple. The couple may be together for contingent reason but the child becomes the thing that anchors them, the thing that turns choice into permanency and commitment.

As Beck elaborates: «The child is the last remaining irrevocable, unexchangeable, primary relationship. Parents come and go. The child stays. Everything that is not realizable in the relationship is directed towards the child» (1992: 118).

From this perspective the value of the child lies in their emotional connection to parents. Previous generations of children had to work to contribute to the family income. In contemporary times, the child has this privileged status as a treasured emotional investment. This resonates strongly with Romantic themes dating back to Rousseau, encapsulated by the idea that children come from God; children are regarded as close to nature and naturally innocent, they're untainted and they only become tainted through contact with the outside world. Consequently, it is the job of the parent to protect children and preserve their childhood state. Late modernity seems to have appropriated Romantic ideals and given them currency in «new times».

We know from previous research that the idea of becoming a parent is still very important to definitions of adulthood. A study by Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe, and Thomson (2007) called «Inventing Adulthoods» mapped how young people were making the transition into adulthood from adolescence and most of the young people in that study said that what it meant to be an adult was to settle down and have a child. So this idea of forming a family is still a key part of young people's aspirations for themselves and a key marker of adult status. Finally there is a notion that surfaces in popular culture and in girl friendship groups; that idea of «baby hunger». Baby hunger incites the biological urge to reproduce. «Got to have a baby, got to have it now» is an urge that also entails maneuvering into the right position, in work and personal relationships where having a child would be possible. All of these things are working together in the late modern period: the idea that children are treasured, the idea that to become an adult means to have a family and to have children and the idea that you find the appropriate point in your biography to make that happen. So Romantic themes and late modern contingencies seem to be working together in the efforts of individuals to contour a «reflexive biography of self» (Giddens, 1991).

## **Research design**

To comment briefly on the design of the study. Our focus was on first time motherhood and we were looking at motherhood as an identity at the point at which women have their first child.

Our research questions can be summarized as: What does motherhood mean to first time mothers? What are the intergenerational narratives concerning motherhood? How does being a mother change women's identities? How have women of different generations imagined and practiced motherhood? What part do men play in influencing women's expectations and experiences of motherhood?

We combined a three generational design with longitudinal and cultural analysis. Our initial mapping of expectations of motherhood involved 62 interviews with women who were expecting their first child and often we interviewed them in late pregnancy, usually 7-8 months. With 12 of the women we conducted in-depth intergenerational case studies, interviewing the women again a year after they had given birth and then interviewing their mothers and their grandmothers in a cycle until the child was five years old. Simultaneously we completed a content analysis of the most popular advice texts and manuals for new mother such as «What to expect when you're expecting» and «The baby whisperer» (Hogg & Blau, 2001). So we looked at the advice texts that women were telling us that they were reading. Alongside the advice texts we looked at pregnancy magazines. There are a number of titles on the market with a very wide readership that were commonly used across our sample as a resource, including for our young mothers who despite the fact that they didn't buy them, many pregnancy magazines were used in pedagogic circumstances with them, in mother and baby classes for example. We did a content analysis of advice texts and pregnancy magazines for roughly an 18 month period while the fieldwork was taking place.

## **Representations of pregnancy and motherhood**

While we were talking to women and building up our intergenerational chains of women, we were interested in how motherhood was represented at the cultural level. When motherhood comes into view through popular culture, what does it look like and how is it represented? A marked change in the representational field is the shift to a new visibility of pregnancy and motherhood. At one time, not so very long ago, pregnancy was called a term of confinement and people actually used that word; late pregnancy and birth itself was called confinement. Now it seems that pregnancy and birth is much more public. Pregnancy magazines

offer a glimpse into changing representations and shifting discourses. Pregnancy is publicly celebrated and much spoken about to the point where a notion of «pregnant beauty» (Tyler, 2001) sits alongside other public appraisals of women's appearance. Encoded within «pregnant beauty» is the idea that how you wear your bump matters. Your bump should be neat and you should put on a certain amount of weight but not too much. So pregnancy magazines represent motherhood in very particular ways. They also celebrate pregnancy and motherhood in strap lines such as «bumptastic», «It's the time of your life» and «It's your greatest achievement to date!». So pregnancy becomes an embodied achievement that you show off, that you publicly celebrate and draw attention to yourself through «the bump».

FIGURE 1

Representations of pregnancy as an embodied achievement



In pregnancy magazines there is a general assumption that new mothers are between the age of 25 and 35. Early motherhood gets left out, pregnant teenagers don't find themselves represented in the pages of this magazine and neither do the experiences of older first time mothers. There's a general assumption within the pages of the magazine that new mothers are in stable heterosexual relationships. There is also an assumption that they have choice in their lives; that they're financially in a good situation; they have material resources and cultural resources. Pregnancy for these women, the way it's represented, is seen as a feat of synchronization in the construction of an individual choice biography. Women in this age group get themselves into a position where it is appropriate for them to have a baby because they're in

the right circumstances, they've found the right man, they've got the right job, and they've got adequate resources. Pregnancy becomes a synchronized event for successful women, keen to claim motherhood as the apex of achievement for orderly femininity. Pregnancy is also portrayed as a beautiful big adventure. Through the magazines women are presented with a menu of choice and this idea of choice structures the whole way in which the magazine operates. Taking this front page from this magazine, one of the features is «make mine an epidural». Women are surrounded by choice; you choose the point when you become pregnant, you choose what kind of birth you have; choice structures the whole maternal experience. But we know from talking to our teenage mothers that choice doesn't structure their experiences.

When we think about the way that motherhood is represented for teenage mothers, we're into a completely different level of representation and a completely different set of meanings. Young motherhood generally is represented negatively. When young motherhood comes into the media spotlight it is, of course, class-coded and representations lend themselves to comedic excess. Being a young mother becomes a subject of comedy. The award winning comedy series in the UK, «Little Britain» features Vicky Pollard as an aggressive caricature of working class femininity: Vicky is a teenage mother who is laughably excessive. She goes drinking, she goes shoplifting, fighting is also part of her repertoire. The shorthand term for young mothers like Vicky is «Pram face». Although this is a caricature, positioning young working class women as excessive is an intrinsic part of comedy that finds points of resonance in the culture. Vicky is represented as a troubled young woman in the maelstrom of life that can be parodied for comic intent. Representations of young motherhood draw upon popular pathologies of young mothers, as irresponsible, as bad mothers and particularly as economically unproductive. They're living on benefit; they're not contributing to the economy. Within this representation of young motherhood, far from it being celebrated and being «it's the time of your life!» it carries largely negative associations. Young mothers are seen to embody a style of feminine excess denote an overly abundant and unruly sexuality. The sexuality of working class young women is viewed as excessive and as morally reprehensible. These features feed into comedy; that young mothers are so extreme, they're so beyond the pale that they become these comedy characters that we can laugh at. And alongside the laughing there is also an element of disgust.

## **Key findings**

All women in the study were invested in motherhood as a moment of profound identity change; whatever age they were and whatever circumstances, and whether their pregnancy was planned or unplanned; they embraced motherhood as a moment when things were going



to change for them. Their life was going to change radically, things were never going to be the same again. Women in the study anticipated this change and in most cases looked forward to it. So it was an acknowledgment that motherhood brought another dimension into their lives and something that produced a significant and profound identity change. Thinking about new motherhood in terms of generation, we can understand birth as an intergenerational act; it reconfigures relationships within the family. So the daughter becomes a mother, the mother becomes a grandmother, the grandmother becomes the great grandmother. Relationships within the family are reconfigured in particular ways and this also affects men in the family and it also affects sibling relationships, something we did not quite anticipate. A woman having a baby often reactivates or can reactivate sibling rivalry; we found a number of women in our study who had a baby and then their sister also had a baby.

Our main finding however relates to age. We found that age was the master category through which normative notions of motherhood are constituted. Age seemed to give shape to the maternal experience. When we were viewing the experiences of first time mothers, their age group seemed to contour the kind of experiences and the ways in which they were interpreting them. Popular culture and representations inform the data in various ways. If we talk to new mothers and look at the representational field, we can see that motherhood exists as a rite of passage to the parenting magazines, referred to as «mum's club». Representations of young mothers by contrast draw upon popular pathologies. The young pregnant body seems to elicit moral disapproval. So far from being visible out there and celebrated, it's visible and out there but subject to moral disapproval and becomes a source of comedy.

### **Defining features of young motherhood**

Focusing particularly on the sample of young mothers in our study I aim to draw together the themes that are essential to their accounts. Pregnancy for young mothers constructs them as both childlike and mature. A common discourse is that young mothers are children themselves. Taking a 15 year old in our study, her mother and her grandmother both referred to her as «a child who was expecting a child». At the same time they're also seen as responsible for their situation, «well, they've got to step up to the plate, becoming a parent involves responsibility». Becoming a young mother creates an accelerated track to maturity. Both of these discourses are working at once; being childlike and being mature.

The accounts of young mothers are replete with assertions of denial and agency. There is a contradiction in young women's accounts of motherhood, and one of the things that we realized was that if you become pregnant when you're 25 to 35 no one says «why have you done

that?». Everyone says «how wonderful!», and it is a cause for celebration. Our teenage mothers had to account for their pregnancies from a defensive position. They had to account to their families, to the social workers, to medical personnel, to midwives and in these accounts there was both a denial of agency and an assertion of agency. Both of these things were going on and often young women had well established narratives for accounting for their pregnancies, depending on the audience.

Young women often found themselves at the centre of family dramas. Their pregnancy was something that sparked off quite a lot of disruption within the family and sometimes it caused splits and fights within the family. Young women drew upon soap operas and celebrity culture to understand their situation rather than pregnancy magazines and advice texts. Birth for our young mothers in our study tended to be a family affair, involving their mothers being present, the grandmothers, their friends and sometimes partners. So the labor suite was pretty crowded when young women gave birth; it wasn't an intimate event between couples, there was involvement across the extended family.

Among many of our young mothers there was an active sense of keeping all arrangements close within the extended family. Intergenerational proximity may be borne of necessity. For financial reasons young women tended to stay within the parental home and not move very far away from their family. In most cases, their mothers were crucially involved in all aspects of pregnancy, birth and childcare. One of the ways of understanding this staying close to home is in relation to downward social mobility. These young women were not in an advantaged position, they couldn't go out and buy a new home and live independently. Within this context there was a need for the extended family to pool resources to make the arrival of a new generation possible. For most of our young mothers, pregnancy was not experienced in terms of choice. It was seen as something that happened to them and now needed to be accommodated.

The final thing we noticed was that men seemed to be central to young women's definition of mothering even when they're apparently marginal or absent. Young men may be physically absent as fathers but they're imaginatively central to women. This challenges one of the widely circulating ideas that young mothers don't need men anymore, that they can go it alone, men are redundant to the maternal experience, they don't matter anymore and that young women can get benefits, and get a council flat and set up on their own, in ways that render single motherhood as a completely viable thing. We found with all the young women in our sample, whether the father was involved or not, men were central to the whole project; that they were orientating the whole experience around the expectation or not that fathers maybe involved.

To illustrate the some of the themes discussed above and communicate the experience of young motherhood, I draw upon two case studies. In both cases, pregnancy is unplanned. The

interview process documents their personal circumstances, the way they adapted to becoming pregnant and prepared for motherhood.

### Case study 1: Sophie Bishop

Sophie is 17 and seven months pregnant when we meet her. She is living alone in a residential care facility for young mothers run by the local authority and a housing association.

Many of the themes discussed above were salient to Sophie's case. When she told her family about her pregnancy, her parents were so upset that they threw her out of home. At about the same time her boyfriend said he didn't want to have anything to do with her anymore. She described this point in her life as really «rubbish» but it did have a positive outcome. She found the residential care facility she is living in now and as part of her tenancy agreement she was asked to attend a course for young mothers to be run by a local church based charity. Through this course she met other young women in the same situation as herself and even though it is assumed that young mothers have abandoned the whole project of learning, we found with Sophie and with many of our young mothers is that they haven't abandoned learning, they have abandoned a particular style of learning. They've abandoned formal education but actually they're very keen to learn in other circumstances. The «Foundation for Parents Course» was a very successful learning experience for Sophie where she gained confidence, was able to reflect upon the disruption in her family life and preparing for motherhood.

As part of what can be seen as a reflective resolution and a settlement with her situation, she articulates a reversal of her life plans. She said:

I know the usual thing is to finish your education, then settle down, then get married, then have children. I'm going to do it all the other way round. I'm going to have a child first, then I'm going to work really hard and then I'm going to settle down.

She developed a rationale for the pregnancy that made sense in her particular circumstances and responded to her local circumstances.

She told us she didn't understand the difference between having a baby now or having a baby when you're older. There's still the knowledge, all the things you need to know when you have a baby for the first time. So it doesn't matter how old you are, it's still the same set of issues: sleepless nights, breastfeeding, changing the baby, and just because you're 17 or you're 30 it's not going to be any different. Older people may judge you because you're young and having a baby but actually it's the same issues.

And she finishes by saying: «I love being pregnant, I absolutely love it, and I would go through it again and again!». As part of her rationale for young motherhood she comes up with a reversal of life plans and characterizes pregnancy as a universal experience. In this sense she speaks back to dominant discourses that position her in negative ways by constructing herself as a good mother, as someone who's competent, responsible and keen to parent. For Sophie motherhood is a route into adulthood and she has no regrets; she's ready to give up her old lifestyle of going to the pub and being part of the club scene because she's ready for this moment in her life. She's got a changed set of priorities, new friends, and in her own way she's woven a recuperative narrative for herself that anticipates a changing identity. This is just one example of the way in which young motherhood at the policy level seems completely disruptive and difficult but at the personal level can be resolved biographically in local contexts.

### **Case study 2: Kim Thompson**

Kim Thompson provides a contrasting case study to Sophie. I wanted to look at both of them because there's an assumption in policy terms that early motherhood has similar affects on young women; they're all going to have broken education or trajectories and that will lead to a future life of poverty. I wanted to demonstrate some of the differences that in young women's accounts.

Kim is 16 when we meet her. She's living with her mother, her stepfather and two siblings. She was born and brought up in Zimbabwe, her father died when she was seven, her mother remarried and because of turbulent times in Zimbabwe the family migrate to the UK when Kim is about 10 years old. Like Sophie, Kim is attending a parenting course for young mothers at the Christian Foundation. Kim's family have a troubled reintegration into life in the UK. Kim is bullied at school and becomes disaffected. She leaves two schools and is registered on a home-school programme at the time she becomes pregnant. Much youth studies research refers to the concept of «bedroom culture» as the place where young women get together and express themselves (McRobbie & Garber, 1975; Lincoln, 2004). In this body of work the bedroom becomes a place for the rehearsal and expression of femininity. In Kim's case the bedroom became her classroom as well as the place where she got together with her friends and had fun. It was also the space of her sexual initiation, because the father of her baby is a young man who is the nephew of her stepfather. He comes from Zimbabwe to stay in the UK, he wants to get work, the family say, «we can put you up for a limited amount of time», and during that time him and Kim have a relationship.

Prior to becoming pregnant Kim has a sense of herself as non maternal; she'd never wanted to have children; she has plans to have a career. She's constructed in the family, by family narratives, as clever and ambitious and everyone was surprised by her pregnancy.

There is a taboo surrounding the circumstances of her pregnancy and the relationship with the father. Kim constantly refuses to talk about it. Well she did talk about it actually over the five year period, but at the start she consistently refused to talk about it to her family or to anyone else. Kim's mother is angry but continues to play a key role in Kim's life; mediating and controlling all her activities and sometimes speaking for her. We've got very different circumstances here. Sophie is aiming for independence and working on a narrative that makes sense in her world. In Kim's case we've got an extended family who pull together to support her, but this doesn't give her much space to negotiate anything for herself.

I would like to suggest the importance of not just looking at the young mother and her transition to motherhood, but to look at the family and particularly to look at the extended family and the dynamics within that family. Kim's family is experiencing downward social mobility. They're having a very troubled reintegration into the English working class and they're suffering severe economic disadvantage. In Zimbabwe they were economically advantaged, they had servants, money and an enviable ex-patriot lifestyle. The crash from being affluent and having status in a community to being disadvantaged financially and having no status has a spiraling effect on family fortunes. As the family is on a downward trajectory, Kim becomes caught up in the family drama in an exaggerated way, straining family finances and creating further disruption. These two very different experiences extend beyond responses to the pregnancy and the capacity to forge a maternal identity. Early motherhood makes visible the circumstances of the family and particularly intergenerational narratives of social mobility.

### **Concluding comments**

To draw this together I conclude with some general comments emerging from young mothers in the study. We can say that young mothers in our sample were aged between 15 to 19; we can see them as an identifiable cohort that are defined in relation to other mothers, other mothers who are delaying the birth of their first child and to other young women of the same age who do not become pregnant. Young mothers are defined as a group among themselves but significantly they're defined against women who delay pregnancy. We can say that social class is embedded within the age category and age seems to mobilize economies of affect. Working class young women are seen as morally reprehensible; the embodied state of preg-

nancy is seen as something that arouses disapproval and a certain amount of disgust that goes with the position of being a young teenage mother (Tyler, 2008).

Young motherhood is commonly believed to be a consequence of inadequate sex education. Popular discourse suggests that young women don't know what they're doing due to the shortcomings of sex education. We found this to be a modern myth. that none of the young women were ignorant around sex education. Young motherhood for them was not about sex or morality and it was certainly not about ignorance or the shortcoming of sex education. There were other forces that work in becoming pregnant, whether it was accidental or not and there were other forces at work in deciding to go ahead with the pregnancy and make the decision to become a young mother.

Young motherhood can seem as part of a biographical project of self that makes sense at the level of the local. We have to look at these young women in their local situation too make sense of motherhood as an emergent adult identity. It is a way of becoming adult in particular local circumstances. And in certain communities it may be a way of gaining recognition and status within the community itself. And finally, young motherhood has to be seen as part of an intergenerational story within processes of social mobility that the family may be undergoing at the time. For some young women pregnancy offers opportunities for forms of recuperation as in Sophie's account. In other cases young motherhood may be a disruption to be accommodated within the extended family. Extrapolating from the study as a whole, motherhood exists as a magical solution, offering a moment of profound identity change at significant biographical junctures that set into motion an embodied and emotional response to the contradictions of femininity.

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