Young mothers, Education and Social Exclusion

Thesis

Naomi Rudoe [BA (Hons); MA; MSc]

Young Mothers, Education and Social Exclusion

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Abstract

This thesis examines the education and social inclusion and exclusion of young mothers, focusing on the experiences of sixteen pregnant young women and mothers attending a course of antenatal education during 2007. I use a critical feminist approach to examine the meanings of education in this setting alongside the young women's mothering identities. The thesis interrogates the effects of New Labour's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy in relation to the young women in my study. I analyse how the concept of 'social exclusion' has cast the 'teenage mother' as responsible for reproducing a cycle of disadvantage, obscuring the socially including aspects of young motherhood. I argue that policy constructions of teenage motherhood are contradicted by the lived experience of the young mothers in my study. In defiance of discourses of the teenage mother as unfit mother, the young women construct themselves in many cases as ready for motherhood and as resilient adults who choose to 'take responsibility' for their actions, re-engage with education and want to 'do the best' for their children.

I challenge the idea that 'interventions' such as this antenatal educational setting are part of a policy framework that seeks to teach 'middle-class' parenting methods to working-class young women. Rather, the professionals working in the setting transform policy discourses to support and defend the young women from stigma. I contrast the young women's positive experiences in the setting with their negative school experiences, and show how the process of educational disaffection often happens prior to pregnancy, and how pregnancy precipitates increased motivation. The young women use pregnancy as a way to transition from a 'bad girl' to a 'good mother' identity, and as an opportunity to re-evaluate family relationships and friendships. I conclude by making policy recommendations with regard to the education of pregnant young women and mothers.

Note on previous publication:
A small amount of data from this doctoral study, along with accompanying analysis, has been published in the following book chapter:

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Contents

We know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood.

<div align="right">(Rich, 1976:11)</div>

1. Introduction

This thesis is the result of four years of study of young motherhood (three years of doctoral and one year of Master's degree research) - of living, breathing, reading and writing about something about which I knew relatively little at the start, but in which I had always been intensely interested. I often felt completely overwhelmed by the subject of the thesis, and challenged by working in a tiny study overflowing with books, articles and newspaper cuttings about teenage pregnancy and motherhood. In spite of moments of despair (always to be replaced by the intellectual drive to carry on), and my maternal desire occasionally providing rather too much of a distraction, the four-year process deepened my enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the subject. Towards the end of writing up the thesis, I gave birth to my son, which meant a changed relationship both intellectually and practically with the thesis. In many respects I became more viscerally involved with it.

I did not choose the topic of study (as I applied for an advertised studentship), but I cannot think of any subject to which I would rather have dedicated these four years, and it was a privilege and an enormous learning experience to get to know the women I encountered during my fieldwork. Motherhood is an immensely rich, rewarding and emotional area of study and trying to capture its elusive meanings, even for one particular community of young women, is a difficult endeavour. I take pride in the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, I have been the only person to research the particular fieldwork site involved in the study, and even more so since it was a great challenge to gain access in the first place. I hope that I have managed to convey in the thesis an understanding of the young women's social worlds and their journeys through pregnancy and early motherhood, and that the reader remains as fascinated as I am in their lives.

My study is concerned with young pregnant women and mothers (young women aged between 16 and 20 at interview) who were attending a programme of antenatal education for pregnant teenagers at a vocational training provider in London in 2007. The

study takes a critical feminist approach to examine broad themes of motherhood, education, and social inclusion and exclusion, and the ways in which these three concepts interrelate. Using an ethnographic approach, I examine the setting as educational provision for pregnant young women and as a site for learning about childbirth and parenting and the negotiation around 'good mothering'. I also consider wider questions of social inclusion and exclusion through a particular focus on friendships and family relationships. Through these themes I pay close attention to the young women's changing identities in the process of transition to motherhood. The study is firmly grounded in an analysis of contemporary social policy in relation to young motherhood, and in particular, to New Labour's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and its attempt to cut the rates of teenage conceptions in order to prevent and reduce social exclusion.

The thesis sets out to show the complex interrelationship between discourse and lived experience; the powerful policy and media discourses which construct teenage pregnancy and motherhood in the public eye are contrasted with the young women's lived experience, and the thesis demonstrates the tension at the heart of this relationship. Without wishing to set up a dualism between structure (policy discourse) and agency (lived experience), I am attempting to represent the ways in which dominant discourses are transformed and contested in the process of everyday living. For example, the young women I studied live with the stigmatised identity that is already constructed for them and yet find ways to resist and counteract this. Professionals who work with the young women also demonstrate a complex relationship between holding their own values in tension with official discourses and educational structures that, to a certain extent, constrain the ways in which they are able to support and guide the young women.

The New Labour government launched its Teenage Pregnancy Strategy in 1999. The Strategy ran until 2010, and while it took a multi-faceted approach to the issue, the target of a 50% reduction in teenage conceptions was not met. The fact of finishing this research ten years after the launch of the Strategy, in 2009, gave it something of a symbolic

element. Much changed and much remained relatively stagnant in relation to teenage pregnancy in this decade, and of course 2010 saw the end of New Labour's thirteen-year reign, to be replaced by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government and a severe reduction in public spending. Regardless of the widespread criticisms of the Strategy, it cannot be denied that New Labour channelled considerable resources into tackling the 'problem', and that many young women have benefited from these resources, which simply were not available prior to 1999.

The various feminist critiques of the Strategy, which form part of the context of this study, have gone largely unheard, however. The rationale for engaging in feminist research into teenage pregnancy and motherhood partly involves adding weight to existing feminist voices around the subject. The holistic approach that I have taken has enabled me to examine the meanings of an 'intervention' (or a provision of service) from the perspectives not only of the young women in receipt of it but of the women providing this service. My engagement with policy stems from an interest in doing research that might 'make a difference' and with a fascination with the way in which policy discourses circulate and are taken up and resisted by different communities. I am especially interested in the relationship between processes of educational inclusion and exclusion and the identities of young women who become pregnant as teenagers – in 'the ways in which educational discourses shape the modern individual' (Dillabough, 2001: 15). I am also interested in deconstructing the concept of teenage motherhood as leading to an inevitable 'social exclusion'. The terms 'social exclusion' and 'teenage pregnancy' play significant roles in constructing the 'teenage mother' and have material effects on her experience, even if she herself does not identify as such. In the thesis I attempt to uncover the resistance to this categorisation, and to demonstrate the injury that it does to young mothers.

One feminist voice has described itself as writing 'on behalf of mothers', and in relation to teenage mothers, about the ways in which they are 'held responsible not only for their children's failures but for society's as well' (Hanigsberg and Ruddick, 1999: ix). I do not claim to be writing 'on behalf of mothers', but rather to be using my feminist voice in defiance of the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy and motherhood. I also attempt to highlight some of the wider structural problems that conspire against greater gender equality in terms of parenting, and that continue to overemphasise women's individual responsibility for the outcomes of their parenting. As Nancy Chodorow (1999 [1978]) succinctly summarises:

> Women today are expected to be full-time mothers and to work in the paid labor force, are considered unmotherly if they demand day-care centers, greedy and unreasonable if they expect help from husbands, and lazy if they are single mothers who want to receive adequate welfare payments in order to be able to stay home for their children.
>
> (Chodorow, 1999 [1978]: 213)

Until fundamental social and policy changes are made, for example in the shortening of working hours, women will continue to take the main responsibility for child care, and men will not be able to increase their contribution (Crompton, 2006). New Labour made significant advances in the provision of parental leave in 2003, introducing two weeks of paid paternity leave, and extending maternity leave to twelve months. However, they did not see through plans to provide flexible paid parental leave for twelve months shared between the parents. Gendered ideas of instinctive maternal care continue to permeate societal discourses, and yet the fact that many women struggle to mother without support goes unrecognised. The burden that falls on teenage mothers, some of whom are unemployed single parents, is clear and considerable. Feminist voices in relation to gender equality have made slow progress, and when classed inequalities are taken into account, there are stark differences between middle-class and working-class mothers' experiences and in the choices they are able to make.

It is only necessary to open a popular magazine or tabloid newspaper to find stories of teenage mothers depicted as welfare scroungers or feral children, and it is my hope that this study goes some way towards dispelling notions prevalent in popular culture and media of the teenage mother as deviant individual. As Angela McRobbie points out, this depiction of deviance is the result of 'class antagonism' that finds frequent expression in the media:

> She is a social category, a certain type of girl whose bodily features and disposition betray her lowly status. ... A new virulent form of class antagonism finds expression through the public denigration of the bodily failings of the girl who at a too young age embraces motherhood.
>
> (McRobbie, 2009: 133)

The representation of the 'chav mum/chav scum' (Tyler, 2008) is featured prominently in the popular cultural landscape. One key example is the figure of Vicky Pollard, the white 'chav' teenage mother from the BBC's *Little Britain,* who is a familiarly ridiculed character. Recent sociological work has focused on the relational aspects and processes of class 'othering', whereby deviant cultural characteristics are fixed onto certain (working-class) bodies, enabling others' mobility, and working-class culture is seen as lacking (Skeggs, 2004). This process of othering situates the (white) working-class woman as abject citizen, epitomising the unrespectable face of femininity (Skeggs, 2004; Bullen and Kenway, 2004). Middle-class disgust at a particularly 'feminized underclass (the "fag-smoking teenage mother" narrative)' underlines a discourse of bodily excess and psychological lack (Lawler, 2005: 436). Through the increasing use of terms such as 'pramface' - meaning a teenage mother from a council estate - class distinctions between mothers are now very readily generated (McRobbie, 2004).

Teenage mothers are also constructed as deviant individuals through the idea of their rampant and inappropriate sexuality and sexual activity. Sex, of course, forms a key cultural distinction between childhood and adulthood (Alldred and David, 2007), and the common idea of teenage mothers as children also resonates with the taboo around children's expressions of sexuality. The protectionist and moralising discourses embedded

in much official sex education contrast with the more diverse messages given through the media to young people about sex. One feminist writer comments:

> Despite the incessant flow of sexual images and relationship advice, girls do not get many positive messages about their sexuality. They are barraged with an ever more confusing and contradictory set of guidelines for how they should manage their developing sexuality: don't be a prude but don't be a slut; have (or fake) orgasms to ensure that your boyfriend is not made to feel inadequate, if you want to keep him. Ultimately, though subtly, the media continue to represent the belief that adolescent girls should be sexy for boys and not have their *own* sexual desires.
>
> (Tolman, 2002: 7)

However young people interpret messages about sex from the media, these messages are compounded by the lack of a critical approach to sex and sex education in schools. Instead of taking a progressive approach in examining the history and sociology of sexuality, school sex education emphasises the importance of marriage and stable family relationships and conservatively maintains an official silence about diverse sexualities, resulting in institutional heterosexism (Epstein *et al*, 2003). While I am not directly concerned with sex education in this study, this cultural backdrop is relevant to the ways in which girls negotiate their sexual relationships, which I touch on in the course of the thesis.

My study

The main object of enquiry of my study was the interaction taking place at the antenatal education programme at the vocational training provider (the setting). This was complemented by study of the girls' narratives in relation to their pregnancy and motherhood. My research questions were as follows: first, an enquiry into the girls' educational experiences at school and in the setting, and the contrasts between the two; second, study of the social and pedagogical interaction in the setting, looking particularly at the formation of mothering identities and practices; and third, an investigation into the girls' biographies and the ways in which their stories could be used to think about social inclusion, exclusion and policy.

In this thesis, therefore, I examine the social and biographical contexts in which the girls became pregnant and their changing identities in becoming mothers, and the girls' educational experiences both prior to and after becoming pregnant. I also consider questions of relational inclusion and exclusion, particularly relating to the girls' family and friendship networks. In preparing to undertake my fieldwork, I tried to subsume all of these questions into a consideration of the setting, taking an ethnographic approach, which meant that I was interested in the social interaction taking place in the setting, as well as in how the tutors perceived the education they were providing, and how they thought about teenage pregnancy and motherhood. I wanted then to be able to discuss the meanings of the setting and to be able to feed this all into a discussion of policy on teenage pregnancy and social exclusion. This is obviously an ambitious task, and I also wanted to be able to employ a mixture of methodological approaches and wide-ranging literature and theoretical ideas.

Undertaking my fieldwork enabled me to understand the young women as often agentic, determined and resistant, and to interpret the policy desire to prevent them from having children as in many ways misconceived. The young women themselves had plenty to say with regard to policy on teenage pregnancy, engaging with it in a more profound way than I am able to, sometimes demonstrating maturity and knowledge that is not often credited to them. Of course this confidence sometimes masked deep traumas, insecurities and needs, narratives to which I could not help but be drawn, and which I have attempted to contrast with the largely celebratory feelings that infused the setting. My engagement with these young women leads me to argue strongly that policy continues to fail to understand the meanings of pregnancy and motherhood for some young women. This means that young women are not receiving adequate support and educational provision, and that policy will not sufficiently impact upon the greater issues of poverty and structural disadvantage that are of course intricately linked with teenage motherhood. It is, I believe, a fundamental error to view teenage pregnancy and motherhood as solely and as always a

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mistake and as something that will cause social disadvantage. This obfuscating narrative only serves to mask other, more positive ones, which I will explore in the course of the thesis.

The study's significant contribution to knowledge involves an analysis of how a policy 'intervention' is lived in practice. My empirical work makes this perspective visible; I was able to gain a privileged insight into the intervention and to examine the malleable, shifting discourses co-produced by the young women and the staff in the setting. These discourses were simultaneously shaped by and different from policy discourses. I argue that the education for motherhood provided at the setting was not conceived around a transmission of middle-class parenting practices to 'lacking' working-class young mothers, but rather it blurred the boundaries around the constitution of classed 'good' and 'bad' mothering practices and identities. The study also demonstrates the young women's changing relationships with education from a resistance to school-based learning to a new motivation to learn fuelled by pregnancy and a different educational setting; their complex learner identities were thus re-formed alongside their transition to mothering identities.

The thesis traces several interlinking stories, the main ones being those of the young women, with a close analytical attention to their words and experiences. However, I have set these stories in the context of the story of the setting (the fieldwork site), alongside policy analysis. The following chapter frames my study, offering an analytic lens through a review of the relevant literature. Chapter 3 details my methodology and examines difficult moments of difference in the process of fieldwork. Chapter 4 introduces the reader to the setting and examines the tutors' perspectives on teenage pregnancy and motherhood. Chapter 5 focuses on girls' educational identities, relating their experiences to educational policy for teenage mothers and to education more widely. Chapter 6 examines the learning about childbirth and mothering that is enacted through various 'interventions' or teaching practices that the girls encounter at the setting. Chapter 7

examines the concepts of readiness for motherhood and maternal love, focusing particularly on two girls' experiences of maternal trauma. Chapter 8 looks at the girls' voices in relation to teenage pregnancy and motherhood, and considers questions of social inclusion and exclusion through a discussion of their social networks. The final chapter reflects on the study and develops my conclusions in relation to policy on teenage pregnancy and motherhood.

2.   Literature review

Introduction: teenage motherhood as 'problem'

Since New Labour's launch of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy in 1999, there has been a proliferation of government reports and academic research on teenage pregnancy and motherhood, adding to the already considerable body of work on the subject. There are many studies concerned with the numerous areas of youth research relating to teenage pregnancy and motherhood: education, health, social and economic disadvantage, the care system, and the overarching theme of 'social exclusion' (see for example, Kidger, 2004; Dawson, 2006; Shaw and Woolhead, 2006; Lall, 2007; Barn and Mantovani, 2007; Chase *et al*, 2009). This chapter covers a chronological overview of feminist research into teenage motherhood beginning in the 1980s, moving on to New Labour policy from 1999 to 2010. I then address the concomitant policy themes of social exclusion and education, ending with an examination of wider literature relating to motherhood and identity.

The framing of teenage pregnancy as a contemporary social problem is difficult to escape in approaching the issue from a feminist sociological perspective. Debates around teenage motherhood invoke key feminist dilemmas, such as the conflicts between the public and private spheres, between professional work and unpaid care work, and between women's reproductive rights and their rights to economic independence. Lynne Segal writes that:

> every aspect of the *predicament* of unplanned teenage pregnancy needs to be understood culturally and politically...we need to discern such things as the role of religion, sex education, access to contraception, girls' levels of self-assertiveness, relevant peer subcultures (of girls, and of boys), the life choices open to young women, and so on...in Britain, as in the USA, social inequality and inadequate sex education are a significant part of the *problem.*
>
> (Segal, 1999: 70-4, my emphases)

Segal qualifies her description of teenage pregnancy as a problem by stating that when it is *unplanned* it is a problem. Teenage pregnancy *is* mostly - but not always - unplanned, and

policy steers away from a discussion of planned teenage pregnancy. It is easier for policy-makers to frame the issue as one of ignorance (which can be ameliorated by sex education), rather than to focus on the structural factors shaping teenagers' decision-making. It is important to note here the rate of unplanned pregnancy in relation to women in general. Research has found that up to a third of conceptions proceeding to birth in the UK may be unplanned (Lakha and Glasier, 2006). Furthermore, an unplanned pregnancy does not necessarily mean that it is unwanted. The word 'unplanned' in relation to teenage pregnancy conjures up the idea of an ignorant mistake that must be avoided in the future, and yet, as I attempt to show in the course of the thesis, this description of the phenomenon is profoundly inadequate.

Segal rightly states that both social inequality and inadequate sex education are contributing factors to teenage pregnancy. Sex education, although not as comprehensive in the UK as in other parts of Western Europe, is only a small part of the story, however, and there is little evidence that sex education causes change in sexual behaviour (Arai, 2009a). The fact that teenage pregnancy rates are higher in the more unequal societies of the UK and US than comparative European states, and that teenage motherhood is an indicator of social disadvantage, should point to the basis of the 'problem' in class inequalities, or more specifically, in poverty. Teenage motherhood needs to be seen and understood in the context of the polarising trends of the age of first-time motherhood, and of young people's transitions to adulthood. The majority of young women experience an extended transition to adulthood, with more young people entering higher education and being economically dependent on their parents for longer (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007), and are delaying motherhood until they establish themselves in a relationship and in the labour market. A minority of young people experience an accelerated transition to adulthood; this 'fast lane' to adulthood is a route epitomised by the teenage mother (Bynner *et al*, 2002). Young women who delay motherhood are considered to be taking the 'correct' path, while

becoming a mother in the teenage years is seen as an indicator of a subordinated working-class identity.

Use of the category 'teenage mother' tends to emphasise women's responsibility for transfer of social disadvantage to their children (Moore, 1996), as the teenage mother is seen as irresponsible and ill-equipped to provide for her children. The teenage mother becomes the deviant actor and the agent in the cause of poverty. This neoliberal emphasis on individual failure 'prevents a thorough analysis of the causes and consequences of poverty. Teenage pregnancy does not cause poverty, however strongly it may be correlated with it under certain circumstances' (Moore, 1996: 63). Instead of speaking about poverty, or the 'underclass', New Labour shifted this terrain to one of 'social exclusion', and it saw teenage pregnancy as both a cause and a consequence of social exclusion. The concept of social exclusion operates as a powerful discursive mechanism to define a certain state, but at the same time opens up a discourse of 'inclusion', which then becomes the solution to the 'problem'. Closely related to this were New Labour's ideas about the 'low aspirations' of some working-class young people, which link into the tendency to locate individual blame in relation to social disadvantage (Francis and Hey, 2009).

Segal notes that 'the most culturally ubiquitous narrative available for explaining all manner of social problems…today focuses upon the fate of the helpless and vulnerable child within the bad or abusive family' (1999: 119). In the case of teenage pregnancy, the discourse of 'children having children' (Lesko, 2001: 137) compounds this narrative, so that stories of twelve-year-olds having babies are strewn across tabloid media in a frenzy of disgust. The image of the child bearing a child is also used to evoke a tragic figure for which the public must conjure sympathy. Dillabough and van der Meulen (2007) suggest that there is a need to consider the role of representations of disadvantaged young women, remarking that 'representations of female youth poverty are often grounded in a spatial

notion of the tragic female character' (37), and argue that a discourse model of analysis is not sufficient to grasp the historical gendered representations particularly to be found in journalistic accounts. Of course, an analysis of imagery of teenage mothers could have formed a chapter of this thesis in itself. Of the many examples of pictorial representations of teenage mothers, there is one that stands out for its use of tragic imagery. In 2007 the children's charity Barnardo's launched its *Believe in Children* advertising campaign, which featured one advertisement in which a teenage mother is pictured looking distraught and bereft, childlike, yet aged beyond her years (see Appendix 1). The advertisement asks, 'Would you abandon the child threatening to abandon her own child?' This is a stark reminder of the way in which teenage mothers are essentialised as children; when they are not demonised (and given agency in this way), they are constructed as in need of help and charity, victims of poverty and completely lacking in agency.

The large body of recent feminist work in relation to teenage pregnancy, which critically interrogates its problematisation, (including Bullen *et al*, 2000; Kidger, 2004; Hirst *et al*, 2006; Alldred and David, 2007; Duncan, 2007; Arai, 2009a, 2009b) has not significantly impacted upon government policy. The fact of the lack of impact of this feminist 'intervention' is an interesting conundrum. While policy is of course the outcome of the consultation of many different interest groups and is capable of shifting over time even in the course of one political party's government, New Labour's policy on teenage pregnancy remained intractably committed to a negative paradigm, wedded to the notion of teenage pregnancy equalling social exclusion. In the case of the feminist attempt to shift the discourse around 'low aspirations' causing working-class underachievement, Francis and Hey (2009) clearly demonstrate the difficulties of making critical feminist voices heard and of having an impact upon government educational policy. There are limitations to what can be said by - and heard from - feminists in this context, as they show in their account of their attempts during a Cabinet Office seminar to question the logic of the deficit argument around working-class underachievement (Francis and Hey felt that their

only 'effect' was to 'moderate, rather than revolutionise' the discussion) (231). There are obviously strong economic and pragmatic considerations driving the policy focused on the reduction of teenage pregnancy. There is also a tendency to examine and explain social problems in quantitative rather than qualitative terms. My commitment to feminist research is indicative of the continued need to promote engagement with qualitative enquiry, to challenge the mindset of the rational economic actor, and to foreground work that listens to women's voices.

Theoretical framework

My research takes a holistic approach to studying 'teenage pregnancy' and the broad themes of motherhood, education and 'social exclusion'. Taking this holistic approach meant being 'interested in every aspect of...young people's lives and how these fit together and interact' (Henderson *et al*, 2007: 13), rather than honing in on one aspect and thus excluding the potential for greater depth in my research. I therefore sought an understanding of how the sixteen pregnant/young mother participants in my study relate to their sociological contexts, while at the same time focusing on the three main themes. I attempt to situate 'the teenage mother' as a subject whose identity can and should be examined not in relation to prevailing stereotypes, but in relation to wider feminist sociological and psychological theories about motherhood. My extensive and critical engagement with policy is also crucial to my approach, as it enables an understanding of how policy discourses operate in relation to policy subjects, and it reflects my feminist desire for social change and justice.

My use of the concept of discourse is fundamental to this study. I am using 'discourse' in the broad sense of the term as a way of understanding meaning-making in social life through the use of language or text (Wetherell, 2001). The ideas that language is both constitutive (it creates meanings) and is situated in interaction (Taylor, 2001) have

informed my data analysis. More specifically, I have approached language analysis with an understanding that discourses – within which stigmatised terms such as the 'teenage mother' and 'social exclusion' are constructed – are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). The governmental discourse of 'social exclusion' allows the formation of a subject who is understood as excluded in some way from society, and this becomes a powerful way of defining a group of people and a cause of policies and strategies to be applied to this group. My critical approach can be located in the tradition of 'policy-as-discourse theorists', whose purpose is to highlight meaning making in policy debates and to show how 'issues are represented in ways that subvert progressive intent' (Bacchi, 2000: 47). Bacchi is critical of the effects of this approach in that, she argues, it has focused upon the way powerful groups 'use' 'discourse', thus rendering the groups affected by these discourses disempowered; in this way 'possibilities for challenge and change go undertheorized' (54). My study, however, places a twin emphasis on the ways in which discourses have constructed the 'teenage mother' and in which these constructions are in fact challenged and transformed.

Discourses construct the way phenomena are understood, then, with particular discourses being drawn on by different people or groups of people, requiring critical analysis. If one considers for a moment the multiple and overlapping discourses that are used to construct the issue of teenage pregnancy and motherhood, its complicated representations and contestations become clear. The neoliberal discourse cites teenage pregnancy as a social and economic problem due to the cost to the state and the need for female participation in the labour market (and New Labour's response to this involved early intervention to prevent social exclusion). The medical discourse cites the problem as one involving the cost to the health service in terms of, for example, high-risk pregnancies and low birth-weight babies, while sexual health services discourse refer to condom usage and 'risk-taking behaviour' (McDaid *et al*, 2010). The educational discourse focuses on the disaffection from school as both cause and effect of teenage pregnancy. The feminist

sociological discourse is often focused on the classed logic of teenage pregnancy and young women's bodily integrity and agency and a concern with gendered experience. The psychosocial (academic) discourse is interested in the cyclical nature of teenage motherhood in working-class families and in young women's fear of differentiation and separation from this familiarity (Walkerdine *et al*, 2001), while the psychotherapeutic discourse invokes the idea of teenage motherhood being caused by a desire to replace love that was never received. The popular representation of teenage mothers as children themselves adds a further layer of complexity. I examine all of these discourses in the thesis, as they were all invoked at different points during my research and they interweave continuously, providing a fascinating web of different access points to and explanations of the issue.

The key tension emanating from my study involves the interactions and contradictions between discourse and lived experience or, as Bacchi (2000) would describe it, between 'discourse' and those constituted or affected by 'discourse'. These tensions are played out in terms of the policies in relation to teenage pregnancy which shape dominant understandings of the issue, the ways in which the professionals in my study understood and embraced or rejected these policy discourses, and the ways in which the young women experienced them – most often struggling to resist and counter negative stereotypes. At the same time as policy on teenage pregnancy has involved the investment of money into services for teenage mothers, it has also defined and stigmatised them, and this is another tension. These young women's changing identities as they transition to motherhood need to be understood in the context of this stigma, as well as placed in a wider biographical context. The ethnographic nature of my study enables me to illustrate the tensions and links between discourse and lived experience and to create new perspectives in understanding teenage motherhood.

There is a task to be undertaken, then, of studying young mothers' experiences qualitatively, and trying to make sense of these experiences in relation to the common

assumptions that obscure and negate young women's voices. I hope to add weight to my analysis of young women's voices by way of a critique of the policy link between teenage pregnancy/motherhood and social exclusion, a link which has created a dominant understanding of teenage pregnancy as a mistake, and which masks the far more complicated reality. While I go on to examine the literature on 'teenage motherhood', much of it excellent feminist work, I want to keep hold of the notion that, like other categories of Other mothers (single, lesbian, disabled, older), 'teenage mother' is a deterministic term that encourages categorical assumptions. I am not dismissing the body of research related to teenage pregnancy and motherhood, much of which is used in ways which benefit young mothers - my research is after all part of it – but am cognisant that qualitative empirical study needs to be broad and robust enough in order to be able to challenge the commonplace policy and media rhetoric surrounding the subject. As Les Back states, the task of sociology 'is to cast doubt on the public understandings that prevail...and invite other voices to be heard and reckoned with' (2007: 151).

Teenage pregnancy in the 1980s and 1990s: Before the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy

This section provides some historical context leading up to New Labour's policy on teenage pregnancy, discussing the key early feminist texts on the subject. The social problem of teenage motherhood is very deeply engrained in public consciousness, with the categorisation of 'teenage pregnancy' coming into use in the 1960s (Phoenix, 1991). In the 1960s the teenage unmarried mother was depicted as a moral problem, while in the 1970s the psychological problematisation of the teenage mother became more prominent with concern around her adolescent immaturity (Koffman, 2009). Following this period, with increasing de-traditionalisation, the stigma of being unmarried faded, as neoliberal ideas encouraged castigation of the 'welfare scrounger'. Teenage pregnancy is not a new phenomenon, as critics of New Labour's policy construction of the issue have emphasised.

The teenage birth rate in England has actually been in decline for the past three decades (Daguerre, 2006; Duncan, 2007; Arai, 2009a). The construction of the problem makes most sense in relation to the UK's higher teenage pregnancy rate than other Western European countries (Arai, 2009a). Teenage motherhood also needs to be seen in the context of the marked shift towards later childbearing in the UK over the past thirty years. Of live births in England in 2006, 28% were to women aged 30-34, and 26% were to women aged 25-29; only 7% were to under-20s (ONS, 2008). The average age for women giving birth in England and Wales in 2007 was 29.3 years, compared with 26.6 years in 1971 (ONS, 2009). These gradually shifting patterns mean that childbearing norms are shifted, making teenage fertility an increasingly minoritised – and pathologised – issue.

Ann Phoenix's (1991) study of young mothers in London, while conducted almost two decades ago, remains a key text in this field, and I use it as an entry point into the literature. Phoenix undertook a longitudinal study of women of different ethnic backgrounds in London having their first child at age 16-19. She argued that the young women in her study were not too young for motherhood and that their major problem was poverty rather than inadequate mothering. While documenting the concerns about the outcomes of teenage motherhood – the higher association of health risks, the increased likelihood of the children of teenagers becoming teenage mothers themselves, and the damage to education and employment options, Phoenix pointed out that many of the negative consequences were a result of the young women's poor socio-economic circumstances. She argued against common misconceptions that young women who became pregnant did so out of ignorance or in order to be given a council flat. She did observe, however, that there was difficulty with contraceptive use in that young women found it difficult to demand that their partners use condoms. Very few of the young women in her study were in favour of abortion. Phoenix reported that most of the mothers were caring for their children full-time because they believed it was right to do so, because paid employment was seen as less attractive than motherhood, and because of inadequate

pay and the cost of childcare. She also stressed the heterogeneity and differences of outcome in relation to her sample.

Much of the political rhetoric around teenage pregnancy in the Conservative years of the 1980s and 1990s revolved around the notion of the teenage mother becoming pregnant in order to secure a council flat, with right-wing politicians perceiving strong welfare incentives for girls to become pregnant. Politicians also highlighted the role of single and teenage mothers in contributing to the erosion of family values and thus societal stability (Arai, 2009a). Phoenix (1996) points out that the young mothers she interviewed did not reject the construction of the teenage mother as problematic; rather, they did not include themselves in the deviant category. Some of her participants 'readily reproduced existing stereotypes of lone mothers (but not themselves) becoming pregnant for instrumental reasons' (180). In their more recent study conducted in Teeside, MacDonald and Marsh's (2005) teenage mother respondents similarly thought that there were social security incentives that worked to create more teenage pregnancies, but they were reluctant to apply this to themselves. MacDonald and Marsh describe this as 'the rhetorical efforts of the poor and powerless to preserve personal and family respectability by castigating others in apparently similar situations' (133). One of their interviewees did say that she got pregnant to secure a council house and benefits. While the Conservatives did introduce an ineffective strategy from 1992 to 1997 to reduce pregnancies to girls under sixteen (Arai, 2009a), overall the governments of the 1980s and 1990s made few attempts to address teenage pregnancy; their approach may be described as a combination of aggressive rhetoric without any significant policy initiatives (Daguerre, 2006).

Angela McRobbie's (1991) study is another important precedent in the field. McRobbie conducted a small-scale study of young mothers in South Birmingham in the early 1980s. She framed the context of the study in the large-scale youth unemployment during the Thatcher years, raising the question of whether or not teenage pregnancy was a direct response to unemployment:

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> The local work which was available for girls was boring and badly paid. Being pregnant was a great deal more interesting than standing in a fruit shop all day long. It gave them a place in whatever small community of women there was in the area. It gave them something to talk about with the older mothers and was recognised as a sign of maturity – indeed, it was the only sign of maturity to which they could legitimately aspire. Being pregnant was an 'honest' expression of being sexually active. Remaining childless could easily be taken as a sign of immaturity.

(McRobbie, 1991: 224)

McRobbie emphasises that the problem of the girls' financial dependency on the state is an acute one. Women's work does not pay enough to cover childcare, state benefits are insufficient, she argues, and she suggests that it is important to look at the feminisation of poverty and at ways of 'escaping this poverty trap' (231). The girls' 'greatest long-term need…was for a training leading to the kind of job which could be combined with bringing up their children and which would pay them enough to lift them out of poverty and dependency' (239). As McRobbie (2000) points out in later work, feminists have been divided on the issue of whether or not lone parents should be expected to work. One of New Labour's last welfare reforms attempted to urge lone parents into work by shifting those on income support onto jobseeker's allowance and encouraging them into the job market (by threatening benefit cuts) by the time their children reach the age of seven. As feminists continue to point out, however, the reality of the issue is that women with caring responsibilities in low-paid work will not achieve economic self-sufficiency (Crompton, 2006). An examination of McRobbie's and Phoenix's studies illustrates the enduring nature of these issues, and also enables a highlighting of the changes that have taken place in this social and policy context over the past thirty years, most notably in the increasing interest in fatherhood and fathers' responsibilities for children, and in the proliferation of 'expert' childcare advice in the public domain.

New Labour introduced the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS) in 1999, following the newly formed Social Exclusion Unit (SEU)'s report on teenage pregnancy (1999), with aims to halve the number of teenage conceptions in England by 2010 compared to the baseline year of 1998, and to increase the participation of teenage parents in education. Teenage pregnancy was described in New Labour policy as both a cause and a consequence of social exclusion, and was seen in policy terms as a 'serious social problem' (DfES, 2006: 7) with the necessity to invest in its prevention to save on the broader cost to the state, such as the financial burden on the National Health Service. Policy documents on teenage pregnancy repeatedly cite research showing that teenage mothers and their children are at risk of poor outcomes, including a higher infant mortality rate, mothers being more than twice as likely to smoke and half as likely to breastfeed as older mothers, being at increased risk of isolation and postnatal depression, and of living in poverty and poor housing by the time they reach their thirties (DfES, 2007). While New Labour policy documents are careful to avoid the stigmatising terms of the previous decades through the use of the concept of social exclusion, there is no doubt as to their casting of the teenage mother as a problem and of teenage pregnancy as a mistake. Beverley Hughes, at the time the Minister for Children, Young People and Families, commenting on a study funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Cater and Coleman, 2006) into planned teenage pregnancy, stated: 'This is an unfortunate study which, on the basis of a very small and carefully selected sample, suggests that teenage pregnancy can be a positive option for some young people. We reject that view completely. There is overwhelming evidence that, overall, teenage parenthood leads to poorer outcomes both for teenage mothers and their children' (BBC News, 2006). While New Labour policy also importantly included the *support* of teenage mothers, this aspect was neglected in favour of a focus on a reduction in conception rates (Arai, 2009a).

The Teenage Pregnancy Unit was set up in 1999 in the Department of Health and in 2003 moved to the Department for Education and Skills. The Unit's move reflected the increasing policy emphasis on the education of young parents, and more broadly reflected the shift to integrated children's policy and the casting of education and schools within this. The target to reduce teenage conceptions remained a joint Public Service Agreement (PSA) shared by the departments of Education and Health. In 2008 the government reported that it had decided to 'rationalise the number of PSAs, and to make them more cross-cutting' (DCSF, 2008). This meant that reducing the under-18 conception rate was no longer a PSA in its own right, but part of the new 'Youth' PSA (*Increasing the number of young people on the path to success*). The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (which replaced the DfES in 2007 when Gordon Brown came to power) became the lead department for the Youth PSA, although other departments, including Health, shared responsibility for progress on the PSA in general and the under-18 conception rate indicator in particular. In 1999 the TPS outlined four components: a national media awareness campaign, joined-up action to ensure national and local coordination, improved sex and relationships education (SRE) and access to contraception and sexual health services, and support for teenage parents to reduce their risk of long-term social exclusion by increasing the proportion in education, employment or training (EET). One popular scheme initiated under the TPS was *Care To Learn*, which pays for the childcare costs of parents under 20 who are in education. This emphasis on increasing the post-sixteen participation rate in education was mirrored by other New Labour incentives such as the Education Maintenance Allowance[1], introduced in 2004 to encourage poorer students to remain in education, and its decision to raise the school leaving age to eighteen in 2013.

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[1] The Coalition government announced its axing of EMA in 2010, to be replaced by a discretionary learning support fund administered by individual institutions.

Teenage conception rates have shown a small overall decrease since 1998. Government statisticians measure teenage conception rates in England for under-18s (girls aged 15-17) and under-16s (girls aged 13-15). Data released in 2009 showed that the under-18 rates declined slowly but steadily from 46.6 per thousand females in 1998 to 40.4 per thousand in 2006, but rose to 41.7 per thousand in 2007 (ONS and TPU, 2009). The under-16 rates declined from 8.8 per thousand in 1998 to 7.7 per thousand in 2006, but rose to 8.3 per thousand in 2007. Thus the government was able to demonstrate a reduction of 13.3% for under-18s in 2006 compared to the baseline rate, but a reduction of only 10.7% in 2007. Similarly, there was a reduction of 13% for under-16s in 2006, but of only 6.4% in 2007. These data also show that from 1998 to 2007 the percentage of under-18 conceptions leading to legal abortion rose from 42.4% to 50.6% and the percentage of under-16 conceptions leading to legal abortion rose from 52.9% to 61.9%. New Labour's response to this small decrease in conceptions and small rise in abortions was to emphasise the decrease in conception rates, and to point out that there is significant variation in rates at a local level. It stressed that in some areas (where its strategies had been properly implemented) rates had fallen by almost 40%, whereas in other areas rates were increasing, and that if all areas were doing as well as the top 25% the national reduction would be almost double (DCSF, 2008). The political opposition responded to these figures by calling the TPS a 'disaster', with the *Daily Mail* noting that critics refer to it as the 'teenage abortion strategy' (Doughty, 2009).

In 2005 an evaluation of the TPS examined whether the downward trend in rates was linked to strategy-related activity. While it found that conception and birth rates decreased in areas receiving more resources, it also concluded that the explanation for differences between areas was multi-factorial. Contextual factors such as educational attainment, employment rates and deprivation levels 'have a strong effect on changes in conception rates compared with Strategy-related intervention' and the report recommended

addressing these issues as well as targeting disadvantaged areas (TPSE Research Team, 2005: 75). In 2000 the Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group was set up to advise the government on the TPS and monitor its implementation. In its reports it has consistently urged the government to make Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education a statutory part of the curriculum (which in 2008 New Labour finally announced it would do, with implementation in September 2011), as well as to improve young people's contraceptive services, and to improve support for teenage parents by providing them with a dedicated personal advisor. In particular, the advisory group has noted concern about continuing reports of closures of what it terms 'positive parenting courses' for teenage parents such as the one upon which my research is based. It is indicative of the current vulnerability of public services and welfare support that the Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group was one of the many public bodies to be axed (or in this case not renewed) by the Coalition government.

While New Labour policy emphasised the deprived backgrounds of teenage mothers, it did touch briefly on their ethnic characteristics, stating that while most mothers under 19 are White British, there are substantial regional variations, with the young women most 'at risk' of teenage motherhood being of 'mixed "White and Black Caribbean", "Other Black", "Black Caribbean" and "White British" ethnicity' (DCSF and DoH, 2008: 8). While survey research suggests an over-representation of some minority ethnic groups among teenage parents, there is in fact (in contrast to the situation in the US) little evidence of 'racialisation' of teenage parenthood in the UK (Owen *et al*, 2008). Platt (2007) found that while rates of poverty in the UK were highest for Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Black Africans, compared to the first two groups, Black Caribbeans and Black Africans appeared to be deprived in relation to informal social contact as well as to have a higher prevalence of lone-parent families. However, Karlsen and Nazroo (2000) have stressed that ethnic identity and culture are not static and that health behaviours are influenced by factors of class and gender: ethnicity 'as structure (both in terms of racialization and class

experience), rather than ethnicity as identity, is strongly associated with health for ethnic minority people living in Britain' (55). While there is a lack of research on ethnicity and teenage pregnancy in the UK, recent research in the area suggests that black and minority ethnic young parents shared some commonality of experience with white young parents, in terms of aspects of sexual decision making, decisions around contraception, timing of sexual intercourse and choice of partner (Higginbottom *et al*, 2008).

New Labour's last policy document on teenage pregnancy (wishfully subtitled *Beyond 2010*) (DCSF, 2010) positively evaluates its achievements and points out that the policy landscape changed considerably over its time in government. It states that the TPS pre-dated the Every Child Matters agenda and yet anticipated its objectives of positive outcomes for all young people, and that the TPS was at the vanguard of joint working between government departments. It highlights the increase in the number of on-site sexual health services in schools and colleges and an improvement in the provision of SRE. It also announces a number of new measures in its strategy, including an expansion of the number of areas offering the Family Nurse Partnership (complementing the work of health visitors for disadvantaged families). The Coalition government has promised to double the number of families offered support from the Family Nurse Partnership by 2015. In terms of its commitment specifically to teenage pregnancy, the new government has announced an Early Intervention Grant, which replaces former funding streams, including that of teenage pregnancy, allowing local authorities to direct funds as they deem appropriate. This strategy is representative of its approach to end 'top-down' government and to empower local government and communities to make decisions about 'what works' – albeit on reduced public funds.

The term 'social exclusion' originated in European Union policy and became increasingly used in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s (Levitas, 2004). The SEU was set up in the Cabinet Office in 1997 and was replaced by the smaller Social Exclusion Task Force in 2006. The SEU 'had a wider focus, whereas the current Task Force seeks to tackle the problems experienced by those facing the most entrenched and complex exclusion' (Cabinet Office, 2009). The definition of social exclusion is given as follows, quoted from work by Levitas *et al* (2006):

> Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.
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> (Cabinet Office, 2009)

Teenage pregnancy and 'social exclusion' were inextricably linked in New Labour policy, a link that many critics have questioned (Bullen *et al*, 2000; Duncan, 2007). Teenage pregnancy, along with rough sleeping, truancy, drug use, smoking and suicide, was identified as one of the SEU's priorities (Levitas, 2006). My critique of the concept of social exclusion takes its lead from the work of Ruth Levitas (2005), who argues that social exclusion is a contested concept and that the flexibility of the term worked to the government's advantage precisely because it is not a synonym for poverty, allowing societal inequality to be obscured and placing poverty somehow outside of society. The term also invokes various problematic arguments of paid work as in itself a solution to social exclusion, and - in targeting groups whose behaviour is considered problematic - of the existence of a moral underclass (reminiscent of Conservative rhetoric around the subject). Levitas uses three models to demonstrate how the meaning of social exclusion shifted in the language of policy-making: the redistributionist discourse (RED), drawing attention to the intertwining of social exclusion with poverty; the moral underclass

discourse (MUD), which relies on cultural rather than material explanations of poverty; and the social integrationist discourse (SID), which views inclusion in terms of participation in the labour market. Levitas observes that over the course of its time in office, New Labour shifted from RED to a combination of SID and MUD. The emphasis was on equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome. For New Labour, she argues, job security became less significant, or something one achieves individually, since by building up skills, people will make themselves more employable. The concept of social exclusion can be seen as enabling a shift of responsibility for inequality from the state to the individual 'via the diagnosis of pathological culture' (Skeggs, 2004: 79). New Labour presented social exclusion as 'an outcome rather than a process – it is a condition people are in, not something that is done to them...there is no specification of economic processes or agents that are responsible for producing unemployment' (Fairclough, 2000: 54).

At the heart of Levitas' critique is the argument that New Labour placed too much emphasis on employment as the only route out of poverty. This emphasis largely ignores the question of in-work poverty (as was argued by McRobbie in 1991), and parenting is not referred to as work; rather, it is a responsibility. Levitas argues that the TPS is less punitive than New Labour's responses to other problem areas identified by the SEU, such as truancy. She identifies a redistributive response in the Strategy, in its identification of poverty as a causal factor in Britain's high rate of teenage conceptions, and an integrationist response, in its concern about the lack of education of teenage mothers, but also an underclass discourse, which seeks to change behaviour. The underlying current of this underclass discourse is that teenagers should not become parents and those that do are indicative of a deviant culture. Levitas sees policy directed towards teenage or lone parents as multi-faceted, in that projects such as Sure Start[2], which provide integrated

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[2] Under the Coalition government, funding to local authorities for Sure Start Children's Centres will no longer be ring-fenced, meaning a potential reduction in the number of Children's Centres across the country.

services for children under five including early education and childcare, can be seen as providing a valuable service, and at the same time as an intervention in behaviour. Levitas argues that the Strategy 'compels' young mothers to place their children in childcare and return to school, and that the 'suggested exclusion of young women from their social role, obligation and status as mothers, and exclusion of children from their family of origin, is social exclusion of a profound kind' (197). As the key indicator of success becomes the proportion of teenage mothers in education, employment or training, the question of poverty is left behind. While on a purely theoretical level I would question the extent of this 'compulsion', how it works in practice is something I will discuss in the following chapters.

MacDonald and Marsh (2005) concur with Levitas that underclass theory has been subsumed into social exclusion. In their study they demonstrate the effect of de-industrialisation from the mid-1970s and the collapse of the youth labour market in causing widespread unemployment in Teeside. They discuss how many of the girls in their study did not plan things in general, and talked of pregnancy in fatalistic terms. The young mothers' social networks were critical, giving them a positive sense of self-identity, and their peer groups reinforced the legitimacy of motherhood, while at the same time preventing them from escape. None of their respondents recognised the term 'social exclusion' and only a few felt that it described their lives once it was explained to them. Bullen *et al* (2000) argue that New Labour did not recognise the multi-dimensional nature of social exclusion, so that for some, not being in paid work and being dependent on the state are not the worst possible scenarios. The policy emphasis remained largely on the economic dimensions of exclusion, which is why I have chosen to focus on the relational aspects of inclusion and exclusion. It is these relational aspects, I would argue, that deserve much closer attention, and which are indicative of the huge importance of emotional and social support in the transition to motherhood.

I now move to look at inclusion and exclusion from an educational perspective, education and schooling being a main focus of my study. Many young women who become pregnant have been excluded from school or are self-excluded, and do not want to return to mainstream school (Hosie and Selman, 2006). It has even been argued that dislike of school 'predisposes' girls to the risk of teenage pregnancy (Bonell *et al*, 2005). Studies of teenage mothers and education, however, have indicated that pregnancy in the teenage years can lead to increased motivation and a re-engagement with education (Dawson, 2006; Hosie, 2007). Clearly it is difficult to gauge the extent to which this is due to increased opportunities, exemplified by the project I studied. While a recent policy document acknowledges that 'some young mothers need or want time to adapt to motherhood, to build a strong relationship with their babies and to resolve crisis issues (for example in relation to their housing situation), before re-engaging with learning or employment' (DfES, 2007: 9), New Labour policy in general maintained the importance of education and employment for young mothers in terms of their future economic well-being and their self-esteem and identity.

Currently Local Education Authorities have a duty to provide suitable education for all girls who become pregnant while of compulsory school age. This education might be in school, in an FE college, in a specialist unit, or at home. New Labour was particularly concerned about post-16 participation in education, employment and training, noting that 'Participation rates for teenage mothers remain stubbornly low. This is in part due to their low level of prior qualifications, but is also a result of the lack of availability of foundation level courses and the difficulty of finding courses that are flexible enough to accommodate their needs as new mothers' (DCSF, 2007: 53). This same report also notes the difficulty for those young women who have missed out on their GCSEs being able to access GCSE courses in post-16 institutions. Models considered to be good practice do exist: the

Meriton in Bristol and Moat House in Stockport are pupil referral units that cater specifically for pregnant and parenting young women, and both were given Outstanding[3] reports from Ofsted at their last inspections. These facilities are not replicated throughout the country, however. While Dawson (2006) notes that there exist a number of excellent specialist centres with full educational provision alongside support for parenthood, research into educational provision for pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers has emphasised its frequent inadequacy, with too many girls who become pregnant while at school being forced to leave because of the school's inflexibility, or ending up in pupil referral units that are unable to cater for their needs (Vincent and Thomson, 2010; Osler and Vincent, 2003; Lall, 2007). Osler and Vincent state that pregnancy often marks the end of girls' formal education and that even highly motivated young mothers are likely to find barriers to continuing their education, particularly with the limited childcare facilities in colleges.

The issue of whether separate educational provision for pregnant teenagers constitutes inclusion or exclusion is particularly interesting. I have found it instructive to turn to American studies of education for pregnant teenagers, particularly since there is rich literature available, and because there are many respects in which UK social welfare policy is increasingly borrowing from American approaches. Wendy Luttrell (2003) conducted an ethnographic study of mainly black pregnant teenagers in a separate educational programme in North Carolina from 1992 until its closure in 1997. The programme, which was originally federally funded and in its own location, had moved to an annex of the city's 'most troubled high school' (11), and having been taken over by the school district, was limited and inadequate in its provision. Luttrell describes how the girls' separation from school limited their sense of possibility, and how during their educational experiences they:

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[3] This is the highest possible rating, and both units achieved Outstanding in almost every aspect of provision. While I believe Ofsted ratings should be considered critically, I think it is important to highlight this.

wrestled (consciously and unconsciously) with conflicting emotions regarding their transition from girlhood to motherhood. Their answers to the question "How does it feel to be a problem?" were persistently fraught with references to self-worth, value, respectability, and a desire to control their surroundings.

(Luttrell, 2003: 171)

Their teachers viewed the girls' pregnancies as something to be corrected and disciplined. However, Luttrell also observes that the teachers 'find themselves imprisoned in an educational system that does not meet their own or their students' needs' (171). The classes offered 'met basic graduation requirements but limited the girls' future curricular choices' (11). The emphasis on accountability, she argues, means that this objective, evidence-based way of measuring learning is seen as the best or only way, and that as a result, educators may overlook 'emotional participation and artful engagement with their lowest-performing students' (172). It is the eventual closure of the programme, however, that Luttrell describes as the most troubling aspect, reflecting larger trends towards the erosion of comprehensive public educational services. This programme, then, represented an exclusion for the girls, being under-funded, under-resourced, and then finally closed.

Wanda Pillow (2004) frames her discussion of the education of teenage mothers in the US as a racialised story; by the 1980s the 'epidemic' of teenage pregnancy and the problem of the welfare mother was located specifically in black families. Pillow states that teenage mothers are most often educated in separate classrooms or schools in order to keep them out of sight and prevent 'contamination', although white pregnant teenagers most often remain in school or have home tuition. She notes the lack of debate as to what schools should do to support teenage mothers' right of equal educational access. Pregnant students tend to be removed from school settings for their own safety, with no discussion of how the school might change to accommodate them. Pillow writes that the 'kind of education such teen mothers receive in segregated, alternative school settings is questionable, with many programs placing more emphasis on moral and vocational training than on education' (103), and she suggests that schools should adapt to provide services to allow pregnant teenagers to remain in school, and should capitalise on the refocusing and

commitment that pregnancy and motherhood can encourage. At the end of her study, Pillow wonders what it would mean to look at separate programmes as potentially feminist spaces that are 'critically empowering' for the pregnant or parenting teenager. Ultimately, she does not come down on one side of the inclusive/separate debate. I consider these issues further in Chapter 9. The debate over mainstream educational inclusion versus separate provision is obviously a fraught and difficult one, bringing to mind the comparison of the education of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in the UK[4].

While Luttrell's and Pillow's studies emanate from the American context, which differs greatly from the UK context in terms of the provision of public services and in the influence of the American religious right in arenas such as sex education, they are effective reminders of the UK's problems with educational division. Over the past two decades there has occurred 'the exclusion of the troublesome lower classes in units, support centres, EBD schooling, and FE colleges' (Tomlinson, 2005: 172), a separating out of working-class students into vocational education. Later New Labour educational policy initiatives of an increasing diversity of types of schools and the re-establishment of vocational pathways in the form of Diplomas for 14-19-year-olds continued to reflect this division (Ball, 2008). The relationships between social class and educational opportunity and achievement remain very deeply entrenched. The debates over educational inequality continue, with the Coalition government's promise to address this with its promotion of Academies and Free Schools, more power and freedom for individual schools, and the return to a more traditional and 'rigorous' curriculum.

In response to the current strictures of the curriculum and standardised testing, as well as the gendered and heteronormative assumptions in educational settings, Alldred and David (2007) suggest that education should prioritise emotional well-being, calling for

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[4] The issue of mainstream versus specialist provision for SEN pupils has been under debate ever since the landmark report by Mary Warnock in 1978, which advocated the inclusion of SEN pupils into the mainstream, a recommendation that she later questioned.

schooling that values relationships, rather than emphasising economic and employment agendas. Critics of the spread of what I will term emotional pedagogies in education (such as Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) have directly challenged this emphasis on emotional well-being, Burman (2009) arguing against its focus on individual behaviour and meritocratic principles, and Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) rejecting the emergence of a therapy culture which they claim values the emotional over the intellectual. Ecclestone and Hayes argue that the promotion of emotional well-being in schools 'encourages assumptions that topics and processes can only be engaging if they relate directly to the self and its feelings about life and the world' (385). This debate about relationship and personal relevance in educational settings is directly related to the processes of mainstream exclusion and specialist inclusion that my participants often experienced, and I will return to this in later chapters. The challenges of educational inclusion and exclusion are acute. Provision for the needs of pregnant and parenting teenagers forms a very small part of the wider spectrum of inclusive education, and it remains under-funded and unrealised.

Young motherhood and identity

In this final section I bring in my focus on motherhood in order to be able to later tie this in with my previous focus on education and policy. The transition to first-time motherhood can be experienced as a 'profound psychological upheaval' (Hollway *et al*, 2008: 21). Becoming a mother incites powerful questions of a mothering versus (or in addition to) a working identity and of what it means to be a 'good' mother, and here I engage with issues of teenage motherhood and mothering identities. Chapter 7 takes up the theme of the girls' maternal identities, examining some of the wider literature on motherhood in the context of analysis of my empirical data. At present, I am concerned with teenage mothering identities and the inevitable engagement with issues of social class, since this is the overwhelming determinant in whether or not a teenage pregnancy is

continued (Crompton, 2006). Social deprivation has been found to explain about three quarters of the area variation in teenage conceptions and abortions, with service provision likely to account for the remaining variation (Bradshaw *et al*, 2005). Lee *et al* (2004) also found that the primary factor in variation of teenage decision-making about abortion is social deprivation, followed by interpersonal factors, and then service provision. The social class variation in outcomes of teenage pregnancy is commonly conceptualised in terms of the incentives middle-class young women have to postpone motherhood in favour of a career (thus making termination of a pregnancy more likely), as opposed to the disincentives working-class women have to continue education, their lack of professional prospects making early childbearing a rational choice for them. Walkerdine *et al* (2001) express it thus:

> The pressures presented by the fecund female body of the young woman result in a problematic path through education and life, whatever the class position. Middle-class young women take up positions in which their fecundity is regulated in favour of education, while working-class girls find it difficult to escape being the embodiment of fecundity.

(Walkerdine *et al*, 2001: 205)

Reinforcement of this simple dichotomy may, however, mean that a complex interweaving of factors with regard to early childbearing are overlooked. As Luttrell (2003) points out, there are as many different reasons for teenage motherhood as there are teenage mothers. While issues of social class and inequality frame teenage pregnancy, the way it is experienced relates to personal identity and biography, as well as to values concerning motherhood and success.

Classed differences in teenage birth rates may be understood by considering the 'different economies of value that may operate in different communities' (Thomson, 2000: 409), so that young women choosing to become mothers may draw on an economy of physical and symbolic capital, which would 'make sense' in a context 'where motherhood is valued more highly than work' (423). Alldred and David (2007) express this as 'see[ing] mothering as conveying a valued social role, promoting their community

inclusion and their elevation to responsible womanhood' (204). In discussion of their longitudinal biographical study into youth transitions to adulthood, Henderson *et al* (2007) suggest that young people's feelings of adulthood are related to their feelings of competence and the recognition that they may receive from others for this competence. In this way, fertility may be conceived of as a resource that may be employed in a particular way in a localised context.

Walkerdine *et al* employ a psychosocial classed explanation in relation to young motherhood, suggesting that middle-class girls have 'the prospect of a professional career, which acts as a contraceptive' (2001:194), while '[w]orking-class families may find some comfort in things staying the same and therefore give a less disapproving message to their daughters about unplanned pregnancy' (208). They suggest that a move to university may be a frightening prospect for some working-class girls. Walkerdine *et al* present a powerful analysis of class and education that resonates very strongly for me in terms of my educational experiences and ambitions as a white, middle-class girl attending a single sex private school. However, the implication that working-class girls may invest their primary identity in motherhood, while middle-class girls invest in a career, should be avoided. Not all working-class girls become teenage mothers, and many who do describe their pregnancy as an accident and profess to have ambitious career plans. Duncan (2005) has demonstrated that although social class is 'materially just as important as ever', and that there are class-based differences in primarily mother/primarily worker identities, these are not simply divided between working- and middle-classes, but 'refer to more nuanced social identities' (73). Mothers' choices, he argues, are structured 'through the development of career as an identity, through biographical experience, through relations with partners, and through the development of normative views in social networks. In this way they become social moralities...[which] are geographically and historically articulated' (73). Alldred and David (2007), however, also make the claim that mothering was more important to their participants' identities than education or employment. Most of the young mothers

they interviewed wanted to care for children first and return to education or work later. I discuss these issues further in Chapter 8.

There is surprisingly little literature about teenage mothers' mothering practices and identities. Common psychoanalytic concepts of maternal ambivalence, maternal love and hate, are most readily applied to middle-class mothers (although psychoanalytic treatment of case studies in the transition to motherhood for working-class women has been notably undertaken by Hollway, 2010). The idea of maternal ambivalence in particular is centred around the fear of and resistance against a dominant baby (Stadlen, 2004) and around women's conflicts between work and maternal care (noting that few women have the luxury of a choice of whether or not to combine motherhood with paid work). Hollway writes that:

> The idealisation of maternal love defends against the reality that women who are mothers are not only mothers. Mothers may be employed, engaged in some other productive or creative venture, have relational commitments outside the family. The fact that this is not reflected in the dominant discourses on mothering is significant and requires explanation.
>
> (Hollway, 2006: 76)

Notions of the 'good mother' are consistently constructed around middle-class women (Miller, 2005). These notions are enacted around practices such as breastfeeding, issues of consumption, and the reproduction of educational advantage. Teenage mothers have become split off into their own category and are assumed to engage in practices (such as bottle feeding, for example) that make them 'lesser' mothers and that lead to their denigration. New Labour policy was focused around the assumption that teenage girls do not possess the skills to be good mothers and around the imparting of these skills (in the form of parenting classes). In later chapters I engage with these 'good mother' practices in relation to my participants in order to highlight the pervasiveness of these discourses and how they are applied by professionals and taken up to differing extents by young women.

Much has been written about the strategies that young mothers employ to position themselves as 'good mothers' against negative stereotypes (Croghan and Miell, 1998; Kirkman *et al*, 2001; Mitchell and Green, 2002; McDermott and Graham, 2005). Teenage

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mothers must also show themselves as worker citizens in a way that middle-class, resourced mothers, who may be able to choose to care for their children full-time, need not. It has become the situation that full-time mothering is only acceptable if it is not performed while on income support. Thomson and Kehily (2008) state that the 'common culture' of mothering 'constructs motherhood as the centre of a female choice biography…This dominant representation marginalizes the experiences of younger and older mothers who are seen as suffering from insufficient or excessive agency respectively' (7-8). This idea that pregnancy must be a careful choice further denigrates those who fail to make this choice. Those who become pregnant by accident and then choose to continue with the pregnancy while living on state benefits are positioned as reprehensible and deviant.

Powerful ideologies of motherhood mean that diversity of experience is ignored and the idealisation of motherhood is reinforced (Miller, 2005). In relation to teenage mothers, Luttrell writes that:

> Without the means for social instruction and peer group culture that would prepare girls to see themselves as *subjects* in the figured world of motherhood (i.e. people who have mixed feelings, intentions, and goals, including maternal ambivalence), it is all the easier for them to accept myths of maternal omnipotence and idealized notions of motherhood that dominate the culture.
>
> (Luttrell, 2003: 100)

Here Luttrell is referring to the ways in which the girls' stories of romantic love were less idealised than their narratives of maternal love. Luttrell used collage with her participants to examine their self-representations; the girls' self-portraits engaged 'a dialogue between the self (Who am I?) and society (Who do others think I am?)' (78), and she is thus able to examine the girls' identities from sociological and psychoanalytical perspectives. This kind of approach provides a valuable starting point for thinking about teenage maternal identities. Transition to motherhood often entails significant identity change for any woman, involving a shift from an individualistic to an intersubjective position (Hollway, 2010). In their analysis of a single case study of a young mother, examining how practices are identity-forming, Elliott *et al* (2009) demonstrate that mothering identities are

continually in process; they are 'not simply pre-given and activated, but are dynamically and creatively made and remade' (35). In the following chapters I will aim to show how, similarly, the process of transition to motherhood for the young women in my study was dynamic and partly shaped by the interactions between them and the maternal practices they learned about in the setting. An engagement with the complex identity changes in transition to motherhood remains neglected in relation to empirical work with teenage mothers. My study seeks to capture and theorise some of these identity changes from pregnancy to motherhood through looking at education and relationships, as well as mothering practices.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to elucidate the policy context surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood, as well as looking more broadly at the complex issues of social class division, educational exclusion and mothering identities. As I have discussed, the tensions between feminist voices and New Labour policy in relation to teenage pregnancy are acute and wide-ranging. Feminist research has highlighted the notion of 'value' in relation to the mothering done by young women. New Labour policy, on the other hand, in some cases has *de*valued this mothering work, and the desire of young women for motherhood, as well as undervalued the importance of a commitment to educational provision for young mothers that is more inclusive and comprehensive than what is currently on offer. During their time in office, the dominant New Labour policy paradigm of teenage pregnancy as a tragic mistake was constantly upheld and given fresh impetus by negative media representations and sensationalised coverage. As Lisa Arai (2009a) argues, policy would be better placed in focusing on the well-being of young mothers (and fathers) and their children. A greater attention to the practical and emotional

resources needed for mothering would potentially be more relevant to their sense of social inclusion.

My project involves locating young mothers in the broader context of contemporary motherhood and thus making sense of their marginalisation in relation to the aging profile of first-time mothers. I see my project as continuing in a line of feminist inquiry, and as in dialogue with research that seeks out marginalized voices and attempts to think about how things could be otherwise. There is an urgent need to put in place a more socially just and sociological engagement with the issue of teenage pregnancy and motherhood, one that translates into practical policy ideas and implementation. My research provides a unique ethnographic approach to the education and 'social exclusion' of teenage mothers and seeks to contribute to discussions and critique of policy making in this area.

3.   Methodology

Introduction

Teenage motherhood is a subject that, when it arises in conversation, most people will volunteer an opinion on or enquire curiously about. People who ask about my research often want to know whether teenage girls plan to have babies, and whether they have got pregnant in order to 'get a council flat' (this continues to be a popular concern, it seems). It never seems a satisfactory response to me when I try to explain that no, most of them do not plan to get pregnant, but they were not using contraception or their contraceptive use was erratic, and that none of the girls I came across during my research said she had got pregnant to get a council flat (and in no case did I feel this was a motivation), but that several claimed that they knew other girls who *had* done it for this reason. People also often enquire as to how many teenage mothers are in relationships with their babies' fathers. I usually reply that in my small sample of sixteen girls, half of them were in a relationship with their baby's father at the time of birth. I remind myself that there is an understandable curiosity behind these questions as to why a girl would have a baby as a single parent teenager, a baby that she could not afford to support, with the financial and social costs falling to the taxpayer. I often found myself explaining to people that choosing motherhood might be a rational decision for some working-class girls, citing to them the question, 'How did opting for baby and motherhood over shelf-stacking ever become a tragedy?' (Bunting, 2005). Although I could not identify with the implied criticism of teenage girls wanting and having babies, these questions about my research served to remind me of the classed differences that come into play with regard to parenthood, and how far away I am located from a 'culture' of teenage motherhood.

As well as discussing the epistemological frameworks and methods involved in my research, this chapter will examine notions of difference and otherness in relation to the

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research process. I also want to illuminate some of the workings of identity and relationship that occurred during the research through a reflexive examination of difficult fieldwork incidents. My methods of framing research questions, engagement with literature, data collection and analysis have all been influenced by feminist approaches to qualitative research, as well as by ethnographic methods, discourse analysis, and psychosocial approaches. I hope to demonstrate how these have cohered in my study and how they have led to the five data chapters that follow.

Entering the field

I had initially been planning the possibility of undertaking a dual-site ethnography. At the start of my doctoral study I had a keen interest in attempting to research teenage mothers in prison, since I had been volunteering as a prison visitor at a women's prison in Surrey for two years. I considered the possibility of doing a comparative study of young women's experiences in a mother-and-baby unit in a prison, and those of the girls at the site I had already gained access to for my Master's degree in Research Methods the previous year (the vocational training provider). I was particularly interested in comparing the educational provision in these two sites as well as looking at the experiences of mothers and pregnant young women in custody. Gaining research access to a prison involves making an application to HM Prison Service, before approaching the particular prison you wish to research in. I made an application to the Prison Service, but this was unfortunately rejected, meaning that I was not permitted to approach any prison with regard to conducting research there. I had in the meantime, however, proceeded with my research at the vocational training provider, in the knowledge that I may not gain access to a prison, and that this may become a single-site study. In the end, focusing on this one site enabled me to concentrate all my energy on an in-depth study, and despite not having as

much access as I would have liked, I felt that I had spent a more than adequate period of time in the setting for the purposes of my doctoral research.

I negotiated access to my fieldwork setting in 2006 while doing my Master's degree in Research Methods. Gaining access to a teenage mothers' group in London was an extremely difficult process and took several months, but eventually a local teenage pregnancy coordinator referred me to the manager of a programme for pregnant teenagers aged 16-18 that took place at a vocational training provider both in my borough and a neighbouring one. The manager of the programme, Sue, replied to my email very positively, and the way ahead seemed hopeful. I was able to do some pilot interviews in the group running in the neighbouring borough for my Master's dissertation, and six months later I contacted Sue again about doing my PhD research there. The programme was experiencing a funding crisis at that time and the group in my borough had shut down, however, and although Sue was in theory willing for me to start my research, she wanted me to wait until funding was secure. After a five-month wait, and much persistence on my part, I was finally able to start.

I very much wanted to take an ethnographic approach, since I wanted to spend time getting to know my participants, and was eager to spend as long as possible in the field – at least a year. Given the obvious pressures on the setting, however, and the overwhelmingly negative responses I had received from every other service provider for teenage mothers that I had made contact with, I tried to strike a balance between a level of access to the setting that would allow me to generate good relationships and data, while not asking for too much. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) remark, the negotiation required to gain access to a setting involves a 'subtle process of manoeuvring oneself into a position from which the necessary data can be collected. Patience and diplomacy are often at a premium here, though sometimes boldness is also required' (62). I was afraid that if I did ask for too much, the answer would be 'no', and that I would jeopardise my chances of doing *any* fieldwork. The programme only operated on three days a week, and on one of these days

in the morning the girls all attended a special antenatal yoga class outside of the setting. We agreed to start with that I would attend the setting on one afternoon a week, although I was able to increase this and have more flexibility over time as I got to know everyone. It turned out that the first day of my fieldwork was to be Sue's last day of work, as she was seven months pregnant and about to leave permanently. The fate of my data collection was now in the hands of Karen, who had been teaching on the programme, but who was replacing Sue as the manager. I observed Karen once on that first day working with the girls, and after that she disappeared into an office down the corridor, always to be on the phone, in meetings, immersed in paperwork, or rushing to collect her daughters from after-school activities. However, she was able to find one minute of her time for me to check that it was all right for me to come in the following week. I liked Karen immensely, and marvelled at the 'way' she had with the girls: motherly, firm, and totally committed to their well-being and to the smooth running of the programme. My relationship with the setting was safe, although very fragile, as I tried to find a way to 'fit in' as a childless, middle-class, white, lesbian, thirty-one-year-old research student to a room of largely black, pregnant, working-class teenagers. It was to take some time, and considerable amounts of effort, along with some excruciatingly awkward moments of just wishing that I had a 'real' job to do in this setting, before I felt comfortable.

The setting

Although a whole chapter could be dedicated to a description of the geographical area that I conducted my fieldwork in, and its demographics, as well as a discussion of the borough's social history, I am bound for ethical reasons to maintain the setting's and the participants' anonymity. I can describe the area as very ethnically diverse and having pockets of extreme economic disadvantage, and the borough's teenage pregnancy rate as well above the national average. The vocational training provider was located on the third

floor of a building on a busy high street with no obvious signs of what might be located in the offices above the shops. The training provider was a private company but funding for the programme for pregnant young women came from the European Social Fund; one stipulation of this funding was that the programme 'progressed' at least thirty percent of its 'learners' onto education, training or employment. The girls were paid fifty pounds a week to attend the programme, an amount roughly equivalent to income support or jobseeker's allowance, and this money was contingent on the girls' attendance, unless they were ill or had a medical appointment. Many of the girls were referred by social services or midwives, and some heard about it through friends.

The programme provided the girls with the opportunity to complete a twelve-unit portfolio that gave them a Level One qualification (equivalent to a GCSE at grades D-G). This portfolio was a modular course of life and parenting skills, with emphasis on pregnancy and preparation for birth, as well as creating things for the baby. The programme also offered the girls study of a Key Skill at Level One chosen from Communication, ICT and Application of Number. The girls attended a weekly yoga class, and two midwives provided a monthly antenatal session. Emphasis on healthy eating was encouraged by the daily provision of fruit in bowls on the table, although most of the girls would go to KFC or McDonald's at lunchtime. The manager and two tutors offered the girls practical and emotional support; all were mothers themselves, and they drew on their own experiences to act as role models and advice-givers to the girls.

There were no formal teaching or 'classes' at the setting apart from the midwives' sessions. The girls would work individually on their portfolios or Key Skills supported by individual assistance from the tutors, Suzanne and Leyla. The tutor-learner ratio was one tutor for every ten girls, and the programme registered up to twenty-five girls at one time, although I never saw more than around twelve girls in attendance on any one day. It was very difficult for me to find a role for myself within this structure, and I desperately wanted one; I felt out of place and I wanted to offer something back. I was confronted, as

Hey (1997) remarks, 'by the difficulties of "learning a place"' (39) inside the setting. I had initially discussed this issue of having a role with Sue, wanting to make a contribution to the programme in return for her generosity in allowing me to conduct research there. She had not been able to think of anything specific that I could do, but was happy to simply let me observe everything that went on, and interview any girls who were willing in a private room. Wanting to be a participant observer, then, it was initially very difficult to participate in anything apart from the 'craft days' that would happen periodically. Jumping in as another tutor figure was out of the question, particularly at the beginning, as I had to gain Suzanne and Leyla's trust, and I did not want to make it appear that I thought I could do their job. They were more than happy for me to observe them, and I developed a very good relationship with both of them, but this took some time. I also made the decision not to take notes in the setting. Whether or not to do this put me in a quandary, as I wanted to be able to write thick ethnographic descriptions, but I decided against getting my notebook out at all as I thought it would make me a suspicious figure for the girls, which I wanted to avoid. I instead decided to start writing up my notes on the bus rides home; this was not ideal, but I was able to write detailed field notes for each visit. The only exceptions to this were that I did take comprehensive notes of what was going on during the midwives' sessions. I felt that this was information that I needed to learn too and justified my visible note taking to myself this way. My involvement with helping the girls with their work did increase over time. My role in the setting was, then, as is common to most field research, something between the two poles of complete participant and complete observer (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

The craft days were given over to the creative elements of the portfolio, which involved the girls designing and painting picture frames, and making 'baby books' for their babies. This proved an ideal way for me to participate in what was going on, and I was allowed to paint my own picture frame on a couple of occasions (budget restrictions being such that it would not have been appropriate for me to do so more often). Having on my

second visit interviewed Christina, who was to become the girl I had the closest relationship with, on my third visit I sat down at the table with her and several other girls to join in with the painting. Christina provided me with ideas for the frame, finding me coloured paints and brushes and showing me how to stick glittery bits on with the end of a paintbrush dipped in glue. When I got stuck with what to do next, she finished it off for me in spectacularly glittery style. She then fixed the back of the frame on for me and put it in a plastic folder that she stuck up with tape so I could take it home. A couple of months into my fieldwork, an occasion arose where I was able to help Christina with her work. While the tutors were otherwise occupied, I took the opportunity of helping her with the language on her maths worksheet that she was struggling with. It was a worksheet about averages, looking at the mean, mode and median. Christina, who had come to the UK from Jamaica aged nine and who had disengaged with school prior to pregnancy, was not able to pronounce and did not understand the words 'occur' and 'frequently', so I set about explaining those to her, and then tried to demonstrate to her why you might want to find out the average of something. I told her she might want to find the average age of the people in the room, so we asked the girls round the table and put my age in, and I got her to add them up on the calculator and find the average. I loved to be able to help the girls with their work in small ways like this; it made me feel useful and that I had something of value to offer them.

During my time in the field, I was able to formally interview sixteen girl participants, although I spoke to many more informally. Of these sixteen, I interviewed three (Christina, Danielle and Sabrina) both antenatally and postnatally. Five girls were of mixed White/Black Caribbean parentage (Danielle, Jade, Kelly, Kim and Claudia), five were Black Caribbean (Christina, Sabrina, Mia, Lorraine and Farisha), three were White (Samantha, Katie and Melanie), one Black African (Nicola), one Black African/Caribbean (Taylor) and one White/Middle Eastern (Amira). Christina was the only participant who was not born in the UK. In addition to the girls, I interviewed Karen, the programme

manager, Suzanne and Leyla, the tutors, Katherine, one of the midwives who provided the antenatal sessions, and Caroline, who was a Connexions[5] worker and careers advisor at a school that several of the girls had attended. Karen, Suzanne and Katherine were of White British background, Leyla of Turkish Cypriot parentage, and Caroline of Black Caribbean parentage. The following table summarises my sample:

Participant's name (girls)	Age	Ethnicity	Interviewed antenatally	Interviewed postnatally	Not interviewed formally
Alexandra					●
Amira	17	Mixed-race	●		
Danielle	17	Mixed-race	●	●	
Christina	17	Black	●	●	
Claudia	20	Mixed-race		●	
Farisha	16	Black	●		
Jade	17	Mixed-race	●		
Katie	19	White		●	
Kelly	18	Mixed-race		●	
Kim	18	Mixed-race	●		
Lorraine	19	Black	●		
Melanie	20	White		●	
Mia	19	Black		●	
Nicola	17	Black	●		
Sabrina	16	Black	●	●	
Samantha	17	White	●		
Taylor	17	Black	●		
Vikki					●
Zaide					●
Professional's name		**Ethnicity**	**Job**		
Caroline		Black	School Connexions worker		
Katherine		White	Midwife		
Karen		White	Programme manager		
Leyla		Middle-Eastern	Tutor		
Suzanne		White	Tutor		

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[5] Connexions offers careers advice and support with access to learning for 13-19-year-olds; funding for this service has been significantly cut by the Coalition government.

In addition to the time I spent inside the vocational training provider with the girls, I also accompanied some of them on a day trip to central London to film a pregnancy belly dancing class for BBC3. I once met Christina with her baby and her friend in McDonald's for lunch and a chat, and I re-interviewed Danielle in her tiny bed-sit after her son was born. I interviewed Caroline, the Connexions worker, in the school where she worked. I also spent a day travelling around the local area on buses, visiting places the girls talked about in interview, in order to gain a greater understanding of their everyday geographies.

The vagaries of funding for the programme, however, were to mean that I would only be able to spend seven consecutive months doing participant observation in the setting once a week, although my entire period of fieldwork did span a year. As I explain in more detail in Chapter 8, in October 2007 the vocational training provider, with very little notice, announced that it would no longer be funding or hosting the programme. This greatly inconvenienced my plans to re-interview the pregnant girls after they had given birth, since most of them tended to return to the setting with their babies to show everybody. It was subsequently much harder to make contact and arrange meetings with them, and I was ultimately only able to conduct follow-up interviews with three. This was a very disappointing aspect of my fieldwork experiences. After a few months, however, the antenatal programme re-opened with new local authority funding at a nearby vocational training provider. Karen was managing this programme, along with a sister parenting course for new teenage mothers. I was able to continue observations for two sessions on the parenting course, but due to prolonged problems in recruiting tutors for both this and the antenatal course, my fieldwork came to a halt.

Methodologies: my approach to data collection

The small study at the setting that I had conducted as part of my Master's degree in Research Methods the year prior to beginning my doctoral work formed a pilot study for

my PhD research. I had interviewed six pregnant girls at the setting, as well as talking to Sue, the previous manager. I determined from this that an observation- and interview-based doctoral study was going to be appropriate, and actually the only feasible method, there being limited scope for participation, particularly at the beginning. I approached my fieldwork in the spirit of a critical feminist ethnographer, while realising that full immersion in the field, although desirable, and necessary for a 'proper' ethnography, was not going to be attainable. I contented myself with the smaller scope of a type of institutional ethnography. The observational and participatory aspects of my study obviously necessitated an ethnographic concern with *action* and with 'understand[ing] the meanings generated in, and that generate, social action' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 168). As Hammersley and Atkinson state:

> This [ethnographic] emphasis on social action demands analysis of the socially shared means whereby people construct their social worlds through engagement in concerted social activities. The interest is in how people construct situations, and thereby their own identities, within institutional contexts which they must take into account in pursuing their goals and interests.

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 168)

I was very much concerned with the girls' shared experiences of pregnancy and their construction of identities in the context of the educational setting. I was also concerned with my participants as producers of knowledge and as meaning-makers who inform and shape the research agenda (Kehily, 2002). This perspective allowed me to engage with and alter my research questions throughout the fieldwork. It became increasingly clear to me that it was going to be difficult to answer ambitious research questions such as the reasons for teenage pregnancy, or the nature of transition to motherhood. My questions therefore became more focused on the setting, and I concentrated on three main areas. The first research question involved an enquiry into the girls' educational experiences both at school and in the setting, and the contrasts between these two. The second concerned the social and pedagogical interaction in the setting, looking at the formation of mothering identities

and practices. The third revolved around personal biography and how the girls' stories could be used to think about social inclusion and exclusion and related policy concerns.

I prepared a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 4) with a list of questions for my participants that I wanted to cover; these questions were largely of a biographical nature, including their educational experiences, but I also asked the girls directly what they thought about teenage pregnancy and policy. I attempted in my interviews to take a narrative approach and to allow the girls to develop lengthy accounts and to be attentive to these and to try to understand them by asking more questions. Riessman (2008) describes narrative interviewing as about relinquishing control of the interview and following the participant down her paths, so that the researcher's emotional attentiveness is more important than the wording of a question. I was also influenced by psychosocial approaches to interview involving the use of open questions and eliciting stories (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000), and by the use of my fieldnotes and responses to participants and to interview dynamics reflexively as an analytic tool (Walkerdine *et al*, 2001). I made extensive notes of my emotions during fieldwork, and my emotional responses to my participants, conscious that my experience of interactional dynamics may inform me about the participant's 'relationship to the wider world' (Walkerdine *et al*, 2001: 98). I strove to be aware of the affective dynamics – understanding affect as embodied experiences associated with emotions which occur in a relational context (Redman, 2009) - involved in the interview process, and to employ this awareness in the course of my analysis. However, I struggled to interpret and analyse my data using a psychosocial narrative approach; I discovered during the process of analysis that I was not equipped with the theoretical resources with which to do it. I found it difficult to theorise identity, and found myself constructing a more basic thematic analysis, one that resonated more easily with my more tangible research questions.

I did maintain an interest in the discursive, psychosocial approaches described above, however, and tried to approach my fieldwork and data analysis with a reflexivity

that was inspired by these approaches. McLeod and Thomson (2009) note that the reflexive and autobiographical turns in qualitative research have produced 'an intense self-consciousness and introspective gaze on the part of the [ethnographic] researcher' (89). This was somewhat difficult for me to avoid in undertaking a topic of study that I feel passionately about (motherhood), and it was difficult to prevent myself from an incessant anecdotal comparison between my participants' experiences and those of my middle-class pregnant friends. Reflexivity needs to be tempered with the dangers of 'a movement away from trying to understand the world of the "other" and toward a more cathartic psychological agency of the self' (Tierney, 2002: 392). Tierney is concerned, however, 'with the unreflexive use of one's voice, not the use of the first person in the text' (395). It was also difficult to avoid my emotional responses (of which there were many) intruding into the text. As Smart (2007) argues, there remains an assumption that emotions are the domain of psychology and not sociology, that sociological work has avoided love. She suggests that '…the way to incorporate emotions…is to allow observations about emotions into the methods and analysis of social research' (60), rather than the rational explanations that dominate most interview transcripts. Similarly, Luttrell (2003) has argued that 'there is an irresolvable epistemological tension in these two ways of ethnographic knowing – analytic distance and emotional participation. I don't seek a resolution in my work; rather, I see the rhythm of moving between these two as generative, especially when it comes to negotiating fieldwork relationships' (163). As Luttrell states, an analytic distance is crucial, but this does not have to mean a negation of researcher emotion.

Ethnography and the 'other'

What, then, is a critical feminist ethnography? Critical ethnography is concerned with the study of marginalized groups and with using knowledge of those groups to enable social change (Thomas, 1993). Feminist research often undertakes a critical examination

of gendered social inequalities, focusing on unequal power relations in the gender hierarchy. The 'point of doing feminist social research is…to give insights into gendered social existence that would otherwise not exist' (Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2002: 147). Judith Stacey (1988) asks the question 'Can there be a feminist ethnography?', detailing her concern with the inevitable intrusion into a set of relationships caused by the ethnographer's entrance into the field and the potential for the withdrawal of emotional support that participants may have come to depend upon once the fieldwork is finished. She concludes that while there cannot be a 'fully feminist ethnography, there can be (indeed there are) ethnographies that are partially feminist, accounts of culture enhanced by the application of feminist perspectives' (26). Stacey goes on to suggest that 'a fruitful dialogue between feminism and critical ethnography might address their complementary sensitivities and naivetes about the inherent inequalities and the possibilities for relationships in the definition, study, and representation of the Other' (26).

A significant part of this chapter is concerned with a reflexive examination of difference and otherness in the research process. As Paechter (1998) points out, 'some of the most important thinking and writing on Otherness has come from feminism' (8), with the influential idea of man as the Subject or Absolute and woman as the Other coming from Simone de Beauvoir (1949). Hammersley (2008) argues that the postmodern or poststructural concerns with difference and 'Otherness of others' (28), as well as a rejection of unitary truths and selves, have not been subjected to critical evaluation, with qualitative researchers using these ideas in *ad hoc* ways. He argues that 'the fact that they conflict, not just with the initial commitments of qualitative inquiry but also with the notion of "voice" and even with key elements of a "critical" orientation, has usually been overlooked or neglected' (28). Hammersley rejects the notion that the political concerns of critical researchers, rather than the production of knowledge, should be made the main focus of research. I do not concur with this, and nor do I believe that poststructural approaches are incompatible with a critical orientation, or with reflexive feminist ideas of

examining power in the research relationship. Valerie Hey's (1997) work is an important and for me highly influential example of feminist ethnography which does just this. Hey is able to reflexively assess the shifting nature of power relations in the field in her ethnographic study of girls' friendships and to analyse the regulatory practices of schooling and the privileging of white, middle-class values within these practices.

With regard to writing poststructural ethnography, Britzman (2000) states: 'all I could offer were partial truths and my own guilty readings of other people's dramas' (33). Readings do not have to be guilty, however, if there is an explicit understanding that all accounts are partial and co-constructed between researcher and researched. This does not absolve the researcher from a focus on how and why and in what context the accounts came to be constructed. I do have feelings of guilt when I realise the extent to which I, as a white researcher researching mainly black participants, could have been more thoughtful about the concepts of 'race' and racialisation prior to entering and during my time in the field. I have tried to compensate for this after the fact, by 'analysing it in' to this chapter (see later), but it still feels insufficient, and I regret that I had not been more aware earlier of racialised differences and dynamics that may have been important to my participants.

Knowledge of the 'other', argue Frosh and Baraitser (2008), is not impossible, but is 'contingent, strategic and provisional' (358), and a theory of the co-construction of research encounters does pose problems for the traditional notions of reliability and validity. I held an understanding of validity in the research process as described by Hammersley and Atkinson:

> The accounts produced by the people under study must neither be treated as 'valid in their own terms', and thus as beyond assessment and explanation, nor simply dismissed as epiphenomena or ideological distortions. They can be used both as a source of information about events, and as revealing the perspectives and discursive practices of those who produced them.
>
> (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 120)

While I sought to provide sufficient evidence for my analytical claims, these claims always remain my interpretations, and they remain fleetingly tied to a particular research moment

in time. Specifying criteria of validity can be about reflexivity, rather than about the prescription of rules, however (Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2002). As Ramazanoglu and Holland point out, it is the epistemic community that validates feminist knowledge. One of the suggested limitations of ethnography, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) note, is that because only a single case (or site) is studied, there is doubt over representations of the findings. Hammersley and Atkinson suggest that the problems of generalisation can be overcome by a strategic selection of cases. One example they provide is that of assessing 'the typicality of the case or cases studied by comparing their relevant characteristics with information about the target population, if this is available in official statistics or from other studies' (34). They conclude that although ethnography is weak in producing general conclusions, no other form of social research can definitively solve the problem of generalisation, and that ethnographers build on conclusions from particular cases in the same way that people do in everyday life, doing so sensibly and tentatively. My study 'fits in' and engages with other feminist qualitative research into young motherhood, and in this sense contributes to a more general picture. It also deliberately seeks to contradict official information that is 'known' about 'the target population', and in this sense is intended to replace existing knowledge with new knowledge, even though it is based on a very small sample of participants.

Ethical and practical dilemmas

I was very conscious that I was working with a vulnerable group, a population more widely considered to be 'socially excluded'. While I refer to the young women throughout the thesis as 'girls', purely out of affection for them, I did see them, with respect to understanding and agreeing to take part in my research, as mature young women who were capable of assessing and taking their own decisions about their interactions with me. I took great care to gain informed consent from all of my participants prior to

interview. I provided them with an information sheet[6] which explained the purpose of my research, and that their identity and that of the area and setting would be disguised, and confidentiality respected. I also explained that they could withdraw their participation at any time, and provided them with my contact number and that of one of my supervisors. I talked the girls through this information sheet before interview, explaining additionally that if I was concerned about significant harm to themselves or another person, I would have to talk to one of the tutors. I asked all participants if they minded me recording the interviews. All agreed, apart from Sabrina, Lorraine and Katie, who did not want to be recorded, and so in their cases I took extensive notes during the interview. I transcribed all of my recorded interviews myself. I gave all the girls a five pound voucher after the interview to thank them for taking part. The adult participants did not wish to take vouchers from me, but I bought Karen, Suzanne and Leyla presents at the end of the research, which stemmed from a genuine regret at the ending of our relationship and a grateful thank you for having facilitated and assisted with my research in multiple ways.

The biggest problem with regard to the ethnographic approach that I took was gaining informed consent from all the girls to be observed. The British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice states that as far as possible, participation in research should be based on the informed consent of those studied (BSA, 2002). Ultimately, while I had Karen's (that is, the gatekeeper's) full permission to observe in the setting, and the tutors did not mind being observed, it would have been extremely difficult for me to ask every single girl if they were willing to be observed. I made an attempt to introduce myself to girls and explain what I was doing as they entered the setting, but even this was difficult, since the turnover was rapid. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) remark, 'Ethnographers often try to give people the opportunity to decline to be observed or interviewed, but this is not always possible, at least not without making the research highly disruptive' (211). I justified this 'lack' of consent to myself by the reasoning that I

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[6] See Appendices 3 and 4 for copies of the Information Sheet and Interview Schedule.

did not think I was causing any of the girls harm by observing them, and that the outputs of my research would not harm them in any way either. Most of the girls did not appear remotely interested in me or ask me what I was doing. Very few of them proffered questions about my research once I had explained it to them. As a result, I felt that there was a definite bias in the choices I made in approaching the girls to ask if they would be willing to be interviewed. It was easier for me to build up a relationship with the more confident, talkative girls, and so it was usually (but not always) these girls with whom I broached the topic of an interview. A small minority of girls did not want to be interviewed, many appeared ambivalent (but sometimes these girls turned out to be loquacious, enthusiastic interviewees), and others were keen to be interviewed. I was also aware of the potential for the girls to bring up traumatic material in interview that would be upsetting for them. I did not wish to press the girls for 'uncalled for self-knowledge' or cause them 'unnecessary anxiety' (BSA, 2002), and to this end I conducted all my interviews with great sensitivity, never pushing for more information where I felt this would not be appropriate, but also allowing the girls to talk freely about whatever they wished.

I attempted to have a representative sample of girls in my study with respect to ethnicity in the setting, and I did roughly achieve this. While I am very reluctant to mobilise stereotypes, I felt that it was often harder to approach the white girls in the setting, as they appeared to me quieter and less confident than the black and mixed-race girls. As I discuss in Chapter 5, Samantha, who was a quiet white girl but who was an extremely 'good' interviewee, did talk about these racial dynamics in the setting, but on the whole they were not obvious, as there was not a great deal of ethnic separation in day-to-day interaction apparent to me. By designating Samantha a 'good' interviewee, I mean that she produced extended narratives that provided me with significant material for analysis. Approximately half of the girls produced these extended narratives, while for a couple of them it was sometimes difficult to elicit more than monosyllabic or one-sentence

responses to my questions. I had intended to interview as many girls as possible, and it was therefore disappointing when my research was cut short. However, I felt that overall I had a more than adequate sample and quality of interview and observational material, given that I felt that the eight very long interviews alone would have been rich enough sources of data for the purposes of the thesis.

Data analysis

I uploaded all my interview and observational data onto NVivo, on which I coded the material prior to analysis. As I discussed earlier, I attempted to analyse my data by drawing upon various features of different but complementary methodological approaches. My first undertaking was a thematic analysis, involving a search for themes and patterns across my entire data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I then attempted to look at my data from a discourse and narrative analytic standpoint, and this perspective did influence the way I have analysed the data. As well as the ethnographic treatment of seeking relationships across the whole corpus of data and generating concepts that make sense of the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), I was interested in '*how* and *why* incidents are storied...For whom was *this* story constructed, and for what purpose? Why is the succession of events configured that way? What cultural resources does the story draw on, or take for granted?' (Riessman, 2008: 11). My constructionist approach sought to 'theorize the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 85). Narrative methods examine an individual's perspective as mediated by context, including the social context of the interview itself; thus, the situational dynamics of the interview interaction are important (Miller, 2000). Narrative approaches are particularly useful as a way of understanding 'how individuals make sense of, and ascribe meanings to, periods of biographical

disruption or transition' (Miller, 2005: 19) as well as experiences of trauma (Riessman, 2002a), making them especially appropriate for a study of transition to motherhood.

Following a psychosocial approach to narrative analysis, in which neither the social nor the individual is privileged, 'the "self" can be located as a psychosocial phenomenon, and subjectivities seen as discursively constructed yet still as active and effective' (Andrews *et al*, 2000: 1). As Phoenix (2008) puts it, local (as in the immediate interview context) and wider, societal contexts are linked, and she 'extends the notion of context to considerations of how social-cultural issues and dilemmas are evident in talk, even if they are not explicitly oriented to...[this form of narrative analysis]...is a version of psychosocial analysis in that it attempts to give equal importance to individual and social processes' (66). Within poststructuralist discursive analytic work on identity, the self can be seen as both constructed and constrained by discourse, in the sense that wider discourses are implicated in talk and in that speakers 'are positioned by who they already are' (Taylor and Littleton, 2006: 25). What is key here is an examination of how discourses function in regulatory ways, and in feminist poststructuralist analysis, a focus on the 'processes of gendered *subjectification'*, with gendered experience often 'understood as being constituted through multiple discourses which give rise to *ambivalent understandings and emotions*' (Davies and Gannon, 2005: 320 [emphasis in original]). In the following data chapters I examine how the production of 'teenage mother' as a damaged or stigmatised identity is implicated in the girls' identity constructions, and how they worked to distance themselves from this identity.

I coded my data extensively and relentlessly, finding that small, interesting themes would arise, particularly from my observations, that I had not given any thought to (sex, shopping, hospital visits!). However, I had an overwhelming amount of data about pregnancy, education and relationships (from both observations and interviews), which was my intention, and so I attempted to mould these large, unwieldy themes into chapters that each told a relevant story. Given the unique and gripping nature of each girl's

individual story, I initially wanted to write a thesis that dedicated a chapter to each one of the girls, and thus to concentrate more on an in-depth narrative analysis of case studies. Clearly, however, this did not make for an efficient or concise way of examining my research questions or presenting data that spoke to policy concerns. I reluctantly forced the many intimate and fascinating biographical details of the girls to take a secondary role, while trying to maintain a sense of the coherence of a girl's individual story being threaded through the thesis. I wanted the reader to be able to trace these narratives and to come to have a picture of the girls as I saw them. In my chapter organisation, I therefore tried to answer my research questions through a logical structure of setting the scene ethnographically (Chapter 4), examining the girls' experiences of school (Chapter 5), examining the learning for motherhood that took place in the setting (Chapter 6), followed by important themes relating to becoming a mother (Chapter 7), and then a policy-related chapter focusing on teenage pregnancy and social exclusion (Chapter 8).

(Racial) Otherness

As I have already touched upon, there were many ways in which I was an outsider to the group that I was studying, and the intersections of class, 'race' and sexuality that I found in the setting were often complex for me to understand. Seeking to become an insider and to have a genuine and helpful role in the setting sometimes felt like an impossible task, and managing feelings of impotence and anguish at not being able to provide practical help to girls with many complex needs was always challenging. As I will go on to explore in the next section, I was prone to defensiveness against my being without a role in the setting. Additionally, with the 'other' in question being a vulnerable and stigmatised group to which I did not belong, there seemed to me to be an even greater responsibility to examine power in the research relationship, to work reflexively, and to be politically aware of how my representations may be understood in a wider domain. The

dilemmas of representation – what to do, for example, with the few sections in my fieldnotes that describe the girls discussing benefit fraud and other illegal and violent occurrences – were a thorny issue. In the end most of these problematic issues disappeared under the weight of the large amount of data that spoke to my key themes – there simply was not the space to cover them, nor were they relevant to the central concerns of my study.

It is important to recognise the simultaneous and intersecting effects of 'race', ethnicity, class and gender (Phoenix and Husain, 2007), and while no one category of difference should eclipse consideration of other differences in the research encounter (Gunaratnam, 2003), I felt that racial difference in my study needed particular attention. As my fieldwork progressed, I realised that the issue of 'race' was an important one, to which I had not paid enough attention in constructing my research design, and I began to question the ways in which my whiteness might be salient in my fieldwork encounters and in the ways that I was interpreting and representing these encounters. Having described myself as an outsider, I also recognised that the insider-outsider model of inquiry has been destabilised. Nayak points out that 'the truths that emanate from "crossing the tracks" and engaging in research across the "race divide" are no longer seen as part of an inauthentic "outsider" approach but as a meaningful, if partial representation of race relations' (Nayak, 2006: 424). He continues:

> the complicated task for contemporary ethnographers is not to ignore race and racism by constructing blank, de-racialized accounts, but to re-write race outside of its attendant categories by using an imaginative post-race vocabulary...Instead of seeing race as a dimension we bring to the interviewing table, a post-race reading would stress the *impossibility* of this identity. The radical potential in this perspective lies in the understanding that our cultural identities are *produced* in the ethnographic encounter itself rather than coming to precede the event.
> (Nayak, 2006: 424-6 [emphasis in original])

I interpreted this to mean that I should not make prior assumptions about racial power dynamics in the research relationship, but I found the task of using a 'post-race vocabulary' indeed complicated. I was further intrigued by Paul Gilroy's work on conviviality and his plea for a shift away from a focus on 'race' and towards one on

racisms. Racisms continue to be present, he argues, yet he describes a 'convivial culture' in which there is a mainstreaming of black culture and a sense that racial differences become unremarkable (Gilroy, 2005; 2006). I initially felt that this description resonated with my experiences of the multi-ethnic research setting. However, while I carefully included questions about the girls' ethnic identities in interview (Jade, for example, being mixed-race, told me she felt 'closer to the black side'), I became concerned that there was a strange silence about 'race' and racisms in my data. I was aware of the pervasive historical and continuing weight of racist discourses, particularly in relation to Caribbean migrants in an educational context (Phoenix, 2009). While I did ask the girls about their experiences of racism, it was only Jade who brought this into her narrative, explaining to me that she had felt that her permanent exclusion from school had been due to racist teachers. Samantha, similarly to many of the white girls, and also to the tutor Suzanne, had a black boyfriend, and obviously in this setting, being mixed-race was quite unremarkable. Samantha did explain to me that her grandfather was racist and no longer spoke to her because she had a black boyfriend. I am not attempting to portray the setting as an unproblematic example of multiculturalism, but rather to examine the silences and to question dynamics that I may inadvertently take for granted.

I was also conscious of the representation of teenage pregnancy and motherhood in popular culture and in the media, where teenage mothers are usually represented as white. Angela McRobbie explains this in terms of the frequent symbolic violence against the working class in the form of insults and ridicule in popular media. She notes the absence of 'race' here, and states that 'Black people have been understood as racialized subjects rather than class subjects historically, and so in effect they have not been included in this particular vocabulary of symbolic violence. Insults directed at them are invariably racialized' (2004: 108). However, as I briefly discussed in the previous chapter, a New Labour policy document notes that 'the rates of teenage *motherhood* are significantly higher among mothers of "Mixed White and Black Caribbean", "Other Black" and "Black

Caribbean" ethnicity. "White British" mothers are also over-represented among teenage mothers' (DfES, 2006: 18). I felt that it was important to juxtapose these contradictory aspects of representation of teenage motherhood, and to use them as a context from which to examine my analytic responses. Ultimately, I was worried that my whiteness may have rendered me unable to see racism, or the significance of racialised experience for my participants including during their interaction with me, even while I was looking for it.

Difficult moments of difference

It is easy for me to recall difficult moments of difference during my fieldwork, and yet hard to decide how to interpret and represent them. I could have written about both of the episodes that follow differently, with a greater emphasis on Christina's and Sabrina's stories. Here I focus on two examples of my (over)-involvement with them – instances when I felt very strong maternal, protective feelings towards them.

My contact with Christina after she had had her baby forced me to examine my position and feelings in relation to her, which were symbolised by an exchange of gifts. I arranged to meet Christina after she had left the programme when her daughter Tanisha was three months old. I bought Christina and her friend Sarah lunch in McDonald's and we sat down to talk over burgers and fries, though I didn't partake (telling them I'd just eaten, rather than that McDonald's was the last place I would eat anything). Christina had been Christmas shopping in the pound shop, and when I gave her a present for Tanisha (a book), she promptly gave me some body lotion from her bag of presents. I protested, but she insisted that I have it. Presents were a key theme in my relationship with Christina, and her repeatedly stated desire for them seemed to me to represent Christina's explicit struggle to compete with her baby's needs, and to gain recognition as a mother in the face of others' focus on her baby. Hollway observes that the 'child's ruthless demands place great pressure on mothers to develop out of their own childlike narcissism' (2006: 77), and

I felt that this was particularly acute for Christina. In her first interview with me Christina had complained that her relatives were buying presents for the baby and not for her. On several occasions Christina asked me if I had a present for her. On this occasion in McDonald's, Christina was very indignant, saying that she wasn't going to receive any Christmas presents from her family because they were all going to buy for the baby instead. Her sense of unfairness at her daughter having displaced her in this respect was palpable, and I felt as if I'd made a mistake in giving her a present for Tanisha, rather than for her. It is also possible to interpret this exchange of gifts as the playing out of power dynamics in my relationship with Christina. Christina had a considerable amount to give me (not least, material for my research, as well as playing into my desires to mother her), but she demanded compensation from me, which I was bound into giving her in the form of material gifts, both because I felt that I should and because I very much wanted to. I discuss this aspect of our relationship further in Chapter 7.

I was haunted by the idea of reciprocity in the research process, and by my expectation that I would have something to give the girls and finding that this was not as straightforward as I had thought it might be. When I spoke to Christina on the phone shortly before our second postnatal meeting in February and shortly after her eighteenth birthday, she instructed me playfully yet seriously to bring her a birthday present, something from me that she could 'cherish' – this was the word that she used. While feeling somewhat affronted by the way she literally demanded this from me, I nevertheless set out to find her an unusual present, to represent this unusual relationship I had with her. Christina's demand for me to give her a present reinforced her child-like status in my eyes. At the same time, the duality I saw in her, as mother and childlike young woman, represented her ambiguous status in terms of girlhood and adulthood. I saw a toughness in her now as a mother that I had not observed when she was pregnant. However, I was consciously invested in positioning Christina as childlike and in need of something I could give her, and I had become very attached to her. Our relationship of mutual affection

allowed me to feel powerful and competent and to gain recognition that I had succeeded in fieldwork relations. Her demand for a present from me allowed me to step into a care-giving role that I eagerly embraced, yet at the same time, this perpetuated my view of her as a child (obviously playing into discourses of teenage mothers as children), albeit one who was tougher than me. I brought the special present - a hand-made make-up bag that I had found in a shop in Covent Garden, as Christina had studied hair and beauty - with me to our meeting, but this was not to be the private and meaningful affair that I had hoped for. Christina brought along her cousin and friend, as well as Tanisha, who all wanted to sit in on the interview. I gave her the present, which she loved, but the interview was constantly interrupted, and it was clear that it had not been a good idea to meet at the vocational training provider, as the staff were being disturbed by Tanisha's crying, and they were trying to shut the building and go home. After this occasion I tried to make further contact with Christina, particularly as I was concerned about her. She had a turbulent history involving both of her parents' deaths in Jamaica, the death of her first daughter who had been born prematurely, and had had a violent relationship with her ex-boyfriend. We did arrange another meeting over the phone, but she didn't turn up for it, and did not answer her phone when I called her. She had my number in her phone and knew that she was able to make contact with me, but she didn't respond to the message I left, and I decided not to pursue her. I did not hear from her or see her again.

Reflecting back upon these incidents, I am aware that they represented my intense need for a role in relation to the girls and my desire to take up a position of a teacher or a mother for them. I felt that Christina had given me the opportunity to get to know her and her daughter, and had enjoyed the interest and concern I had for her, and yet our relationship had trailed off. I felt guilty about this, perceiving her as incredibly needy and worrying about her vulnerability in her relationships with men, and worried that I had withdrawn my support from her in an 'un-feminist' way. I also felt disappointment, in that

in reality I had not been able to provide Christina with much of significance. This encounter resonates around the ideas of a 'post-race vocabulary', in that previously taken-for-granted power dynamics in the research process need to be made complicated. The researcher and the researched can be both powerful and vulnerable simultaneously, and these power dynamics may not necessarily or purely revolve around issues of 'race'. There were many aspects of my relationship with Christina that made me feel powerless, not least in terms of the fact that I was reliant upon her allowing me to build up and use our relationship for the purposes of my research.

Another difficult moment occurred similarly at the very end of my fieldwork period. This was a dispute that I was witness to that developed between one of the girls and a tutor, and involved me being drawn into the argument in a way that I wanted to avoid at all costs. The dispute happened in the new location for the programme, on the sister parenting course. Karen had recruited a temporary tutor for the programme, Sophia, with whom she was not very happy. Sophia was inexperienced and in contrast to Suzanne and Leyla, did not, from the two occasions on which I observed, appear to have a particularly good relationship with the girls, either personal or pedagogical. One of the girls, Sabrina, had done the antenatal course, and I had interviewed her five months previously, as well as the previous week. I had only ever seen Sabrina act in a quiet and non-confrontational way, and so her behaviour towards Sophia, whom she had told me she disliked, surprised me. Sabrina and her friend Joanna had finished the parenting course and one morning were hanging around in the classroom, not, to my mind, being particularly disruptive. After lunch Sophia decided that she didn't want them to stay, so she told them to leave. They refused, telling her that Karen had said they could stay. Sophia left the room immediately to find Karen. Karen came into the room, and Sabrina became rude and confrontational, insisting that Sophia was lying, and that she'd said they could stay there. Sophia said she didn't remember what she had said. Karen told Sabrina and Joanna that their attitude was unacceptable, and told Sabrina to take a step back for her own safety.

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Sabrina would not apologise or back down and continued to state that Sophia was lying. Karen repeated that their behaviour was unacceptable and threatened to revoke their places on another course at the vocational training provider, telling them that they might get a letter from her informing them that they could not continue, at which Sabrina and Joanna left the premises.

My response to this episode was a sinking feeling that I would be called upon to verify what had actually occurred between the girls and Sophia, and I also felt that I needed to defend Sabrina. I called Karen when I got home, and she was pleased to hear from me, saying that she'd been going to phone me to ask me about what had happened. I told her that I felt that Sophia was inconsistent and not authoritative enough with the girls, and that while this did not excuse Sabrina's behaviour, I felt that it would be unfair to revoke her place on the course because of this incident. Karen said that she had come to this conclusion herself, and thanked me for the conversation.

These episodes illustrated to me the sheer impossibility for me of remaining uninvolved with my participants, my desire for a role, and the 'dangers' of being without an official role in conducting fieldwork, particularly where I had developed equally strong relationships with both the gatekeepers (who were also participants) and the girls (the 'main' participants). Even had I not spoken a word during that day in the classroom and purely observed the goings on between Sabrina and Sophia, I would still have ended up being drawn in as a participant, as a responsible adult, over and above the other girls who were present. I disliked this, but knew it was inevitable, and felt grateful that this had been the worst confrontation that I had witnessed during my fieldwork, and that at least Karen had not put me on the spot. I felt that, having spent so much time with the girls, and particularly having interviewed Sabrina twice, I was bound to 'take her side', but this felt to me like the right thing to do, and that I was giving an honest and instinctive response when asked to comment on the situation. In both of these difficult situations, I was aware

of the seductions of the power inherent in the professional role, which I found very hard to resist.

Not having a role made me feel vulnerable in many ways, and yet perhaps this also allowed me to recognise the vulnerability of many of the girls. I was also aware that being silent about my sexuality in the setting in a certain respect made me vulnerable. I often worried about what would happen if I was 'spotted' outside of the setting with my partner, having made the decision to allow an assumption of heterosexuality with my participants. This was a decision I took seriously and carefully, given my knowledge about the heterosexism and homophobia in many educational settings and the concomitant need for identity management (Rudoe, 2010). Even when Suzanne asked me towards the end of the fieldwork if I had a boyfriend, or a girlfriend, I replied in the negative, still not feeling that I wanted to come out to her and deal with the possible implications of everyone else finding out. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) write that the ethnographer often faces the problem of 'deciding how much self-disclosure is appropriate or fruitful. It is hard to expect "honesty" and "frankness" on the part of participants and informants, while never being frank and honest about oneself' (72). I had to weigh up the costs of this secrecy, even though the girls and the tutors were (in this latter case sometimes inappropriately, I felt) exceedingly open about their personal and intimate lives. Ultimately I did not feel that the decision had an enormous bearing on the process or quality of my data collection; it was only my feelings of vulnerability and disappointment that things could not be otherwise that I felt simply needed to be reflexively acknowledged here.

While I have focused here on difficult moments of difference - on moments outside of the everyday experience in the setting - too much of a focus on difference, however, may lead to a reinscription of negative cultural stereotypes of teenage mothers. I am aware of the construction of a 'normalised absence/pathologised presence' (Phoenix, 1987: 51), particularly evidenced in excessive and negative media attention towards 'deviant' teenage mothers. As Les Back points out, there is a danger of perpetuating a preoccupation with

the spectacular, rather than, by paying attention to the unspectacular, seeking to disrupt essentialisms that have formed with the demonisation of young people (Back, 2007). At the same time, Back argues, we need to allow the people we write about to be complex, frail, ethically ambiguous and damaged.

Conclusion

I have tried in this chapter to render explicit my theoretical and methodological assumptions and struggles, and to convey a sense of my experiences in doing this research. The chapter seems to me to reflect the 'messiness' of many aspects of the research process, as well as the process of changes that occur during the lifetime of 'doing a PhD'. My relationship to my topic of study in terms of its central subject matter – pregnancy and motherhood – changed over time. While the many aspects of difference contributed to a certain level of dis-identification with the girls, this feeling of distance was much stronger than it would be if I were doing fieldwork *now*. Becoming pregnant and giving birth to my son in the process of writing up this thesis casts a new light on my relationship to my research. While previously being immersed in the journey of 'doing a PhD', and holding firmly onto the identity of 'research student', it was possible at times to put feelings of wanting to have a baby aside. Upon becoming pregnant, my own process of transitioning to motherhood seemed to overtake the feeling of connection to the thesis. Becoming a mother allowed me to gain a greater understanding of my participants, and a much deeper appreciation of the joys and struggles of childbirth and early motherhood.

As much as being able to contribute to sociological knowledge, and to academic journals and audiences and so on, then, my research has also enabled a personal learning and growth, as well as my academic and sociological learning. My small study cannot be used to generalise in any definitive sense, my sample was never intended to be representative, and yet this thesis *is* the result of an honest and deep engagement with

participants, many of whom for a short period I came to know and love, and with social theory, research and policy that I have loved and hated, puzzled over, and in my own small way, tried to contribute to and re-shape.

4.   Setting the Scene

Prologue: Starting out

I venture into the stories of my fieldwork encounters by beginning at the end. In this prologue I set the scene of my research and try to illustrate how some of my early encounters in the field were indicative of the discomfort I often felt with my class position and with the identities constructed during these encounters. After spending many months with the girls at the vocational training provider (VTP), which ran the programme for pregnant 16-18-year-olds, I had wanted to extend the scope of my study by visiting Greenvale School, which was the school that the largest number of girls on the programme had attended, to see where these girls had started out. My visit to Greenvale was the final excursion of my fieldwork, and yet I was coming full circle back to the place where Christina, Nicola, Katie and Zaide, and many of the other girls, had been to school and left, pregnant. This school-based interview was the most difficult one to obtain, and I arrived very early for my appointment with Caroline, the school's Connexions worker. I turned off the main road onto a quiet street with terraced three-bedroom houses, passing a few kids from the school on the way. At the end of this road, the school consists of a modern and an older building and is surrounded by a park and some sports pitches. The big black gates were padlocked, with entry via a door with a buzzer. Our meeting was not for another quarter of an hour, so I decided to hang around outside until the kids started to come out at 3.20pm, in order to watch. This felt awkward because I was the only person around; no parents were waiting to collect their children. A black male teacher came out and unlocked the gates, and sat on a post just outside as the pupils began to pour out. Some of the kids, who were of all sizes and ethnicities, chatted to him as they passed. I noticed that all the girls were wearing their ties in that loose, dangly way around their necks, their light blue shirts untucked over their pleated navy skirts.

At 3.30pm I rang the buzzer and the teacher asked me what I wanted and then told me to go straight in to reception. While waiting for Caroline to come down and meet me, I scanned the glass-cased notice boards in front of me; in addition to the photos and newspaper cuttings documenting Greenvale's exam successes was a long list of students' names together with their attendance records and their GCSE results. From my quick scan, it seemed to be a list of the top results; students had attendance records of 90-100% and the best students appeared to have achieved about five A grades. Also included on the board was a newspaper cutting of the head teacher's announcement of the A grades achieved in her BTec by a 17-year-old black female student, known to Christina, who had been shot dead the previous summer nearby the school. Katie and Zaide left Greenvale before their GCSE year and before their pregnancies, and did not achieve any GCSEs. Nicola was moved to a children's home outside of London at the age of 15, and she gained two Es in her GCSEs. Christina attended the local FE college one day a week as well as Greenvale from Year 10, achieving three Gs and a 'pass' in Health and Social Care at GCSE. What then happened to these girls, who all became pregnant at 16 in their GCSE year?

A short bus ride away from Greenvale, the VTP is situated on a busy, ethnically diverse high street, on the third floor of an office building. Staff and students frequently congregate on the pavement outside to smoke. Buses crowd the street, which is always full of shoppers. The lift to the third floor is cramped and only just fits a buggy inside. The girls will squeeze in with their newborns in large Mamas and Papas buggies to proudly show their babies off to everyone. Even in the later stages of my fieldwork, I continue to feel the nervous anticipation of an interloper, unsure of what I might be confronted by when I get to the VTP. Karen, the manager of the programme, is always overworked and has often forgotten that I am coming. The turnover of girls on the programme is fast and so I have to prepare myself for meeting someone new and once again explaining who I am and what I'm doing, and somehow try to create a role for myself, which varies from week to week. Apart from the staff, Christina is the only girl with whom I manage to maintain a

relationship over the course of the entire year, from day one of my fieldwork, until the end. Christina is the girl I come to know the best, and the one I think about long after the fieldwork is finished.

However, even my relationship with Christina is not enough to cement my sense of belonging here. While this part of London is familiar territory to me, there is so much here that is unfamiliar and I have a huge amount to learn. Even though I have spent lots of time in prison (as a visitor), this is somehow harder and my access and position feel so tenuous. I am a university student researcher, and I need to be able to become an insider. My nervousness brings to mind a passage from Zoë Heller's *Notes on a Scandal:*

> Like so many members of London's haute bourgeoisie, Sheba is deeply attached to a mythology of herself as street-smart. She always howls when I refer to her as upper class. (She's middle, she insists; at the very most, upper-middle.) She loves to come shopping with me in the Queenstown street market or the Shop-A-Lot next to the Chalk Farm council estates. It flatters her image of herself as a denizen of the urban jungle to stand cheek by jowl in checkout queues with teenage mothers buying quick-cook macaroni in the shape of Teletubbies for their children. But you can be quite sure that if any of those prematurely craggy-faced girls were ever to address her directly, she would be frightened out of her wits. Though she cannot say it, or even acknowledge it to herself, she thinks of the working class as a mysterious and homogeneous entity: a tempery, florid-faced people addled by food additives and alcohol.
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> (Heller, 2003: 45-6)

I feared being regarded with suspicion as an outsider. Some aspects of my difference were hidden during my fieldwork, but I still carried them with me, as I tried to contain anxiety about my clothing, my accent and my very flat belly. After I had finished the fieldwork, I did find myself one day, in my local Sainsburys, face-to-face with Zaide. Her one-year-old daughter was in a pushchair, dressed in pink with her ears pierced, beaming at me from behind her dummy. I exchanged brief words with Zaide, but we had never spoken extensively, and it felt awkward. For some reason the shock of this unexpected encounter still resonates. I had been caught unprepared.

The programme at the VTP occupies two rooms, taking up about a third of the office space on this floor. The girls sit, on a busy day about ten of them, on blue swivel office chairs scattered with pink, green and brown cushions, around two round wooden tables in the middle of the room, or around the edge of the room at computers. The most

interesting thing in the room to me is the constant and yet changing presence of the large flip chart that is updated every week, usually by one of the girls with a marker pen, with a list of the current students' full names, their due dates, the sex of the baby if known, and the name of their tutor. In the many moments when I am not sure what to do with myself, I am assiduously studying this list, trying to match names to the girls and to work out how pregnant they are. The beige walls are covered with pictures: four large glossy posters showing the stages of gestation, some material about the VTP and the programme, a local newspaper article featuring an interview with Karen. Leyla, one of the tutors, has stuck up two photos blown up onto A4 paper, one of her and her daughter, and one of both her daughters. One of the walls has a white board, on which are written dates of first aid, yoga, and antenatal sessions, as well as dates of girls' hospital appointments, and a list of their completed portfolio units and Key Skills. The room also contains filing cabinets, a cupboard and a bookshelf with various baby books and magazines and the girls' portfolio ring binder folders in it. There is a plastic box of kids' toys on top of the cupboard. Arranged on tables and windowsills are a printer and scanner, the girls' craftwork, and pots of pens, pencils and paintbrushes. There is usually a fruit bowl on the central tables filled with apples, bananas and grapes. The room is rarely used as a classroom (apart from for the monthly antenatal sessions with the midwives), and the girls are left to get on with completing their portfolios at their own speed. The tutors help them one-on-one, and although conversation usually abounds - it is a social space - sometimes the girls are on the internet or just doing nothing. I often feel there is something stagnant about the room, perhaps because it is occupied with slow and heavy pregnant bodies. It is almost as if the room seethes with a ponderous, expectant feeling of late pregnancy.

In attempting to make sense of some of my early fieldwork encounters, two incidents involving a particular girl come to mind, and capture something of my feelings of nervous discomfort starting out in the setting. Lauren, a white girl, was one afternoon doing an exercise from the Key Skill in Communication (literacy). She had to write three

letters to the housing association, pretending to be the character in the portfolio: one aggressive, one passive and one assertive. Her aggressive letter read along the lines of: 'You have pissed me off, you prick. If you don't do this, I'll get my babyfather to come and beat you up and you'll end up in hospital'. Suzanne (her tutor) crossed out some of the more violent statements and re-wrote them, allowing the gist of the letter to remain, but telling Lauren that she wasn't allowed to swear. Lauren asked Suzanne, 'Is shit a swearword?'

I puzzled over what Lauren's history might have revealed that would have allowed me to better understand this episode. Unfortunately I was not able to interview her, despite the fact that I observed her on a couple of occasions, and she once returned to the setting with her baby, looking unhappy. I found myself surprised by Lauren's threatening tone in the letter, and wondered where a line was to be drawn between aggressive and offensive. Was she having a joke? The exercise had, after all, requested her to write in an 'aggressive' way. Her question to Suzanne appeared to me to be in earnest. Portraying this incident makes me feel deeply uncomfortable, as I am positioning Lauren as ignorant and belligerent, as a 'chav' who is vulgar and excessive not (only) in her consumer choices (Tyler, 2008) but in her linguistic choices. I wanted to interrogate this incident because it conveys my initial shock at the 'low level' of education in the setting (the limited and basic nature of the qualifications offered), and my feeling that in a more structured environment with a more flexible and stretching range of tasks, the education provided could have been reconfigured to offer the girls more. However, as I came increasingly to understand, part of the appeal of the setting rested in its sociable, casual, not-like-school atmosphere. The complex relational dynamics between the tutors and the girls functioned in different pedagogical ways. These relationships also operated as a site of pastoral care, concern and advocacy. Every girl had a different relationship with the setting, her peers, her tutor, and her work, and these interweaving layers require careful attention.

Another episode involving Lauren demonstrates the informal nature of the girls' relationships with the tutors and how didactic interactions took on different forms. Lauren was sitting around the table with me and several other girls and we were all painting picture frames. She asked everyone if you could tell whether or not a boy was a virgin. I said that you couldn't tell. Making conversation, I then told the girls about a programme called 'Virgin School' that had been shown on Channel 4 recently (a couple of them had seen it). I described how a 26-year-old male virgin had gone to take part in a course in the Netherlands, where they were much more open about sex than us, to learn how to be intimate. The girls couldn't believe that the man was 26 and still a virgin, and they thought that the fact that the women (who were teaching this man how to be intimate) were old enough to be his mother was disgusting. I said that it was part of one of the women's job to have sex with the men who go to the Netherlands to do the course. Lauren insisted that this meant she was a prostitute. I said that it wasn't quite the same. Vikki (another girl) tried to help by explaining that it was her professional job to have sex. Lauren then left the room, and announced on her return that Leyla (her tutor) had told her that you can't tell if a boy is a virgin. I wondered if Lauren was questioning my attempt to be authoritative here. This was one of my early attempts to join in with the girls' banter, which was often around the topic of sex and their boyfriends, something most of the girls had in common. The ironic fact that the girls probably knew more about heterosexual sex than me did not stop me from wanting to play a didactic role in relation to them here, desperate, in fact, to find some way of relating to them. It also seemed to me that I had unwittingly facilitated some kind of peer learning and bonding between the girls. While I was quietly amused by the episode, the girls did not seem to be amused at Lauren's expense, instead rather politely contradicting her assertion about the woman being a prostitute. I realised that it was going to be very difficult for me to take on a role as teacher to the girls.

The remainder of this chapter examines the positions and views of the staff at the VTP: how they framed the purpose of their work with the girls and how they understood teenage pregnancy and motherhood. It provides an insight into the skilled and subtle ways in which they mediated the space between policy discourses and their experiences working in the setting. It also demonstrates the importance of relationships in terms of the functions and value of the setting. The chapter provides a context for the chapters that follow by examining some of the key material arising from my interviews with the manager (Karen) and two tutors (Suzanne and Leyla) on the programme.

Some further description of the programme is necessary at this point. At the heart of the programme is a twelve-unit portfolio that includes education for birth and parenthood, life skills, communication and creative skills and preparation for the workplace or further education. The emphasis of the portfolio, as of the programme in general, is on treating pregnancy in a positive, nurturing and practical way, while at the same time encouraging the young women to see training, education or work as viable options after childbirth. The funding provided by the European Social Fund stipulates that the programme must provide evidence of a thirty percent rate of 'progression' to education, employment or training (EET). The programme achieved this at a rate of approximately sixty percent, with many of the girls going on to further education colleges or to study vocational childcare courses, for example. Karen noted to me, however, in qualifying her quotation of this statistic, that the girls' take-up and drop-out rate of different courses was very high. It was also impossible to keep track of the nature of the girls' progress after having been accepted on or starting a course at a particular institution.

I did not manage to ascertain what the majority of girls did on the two days a week that they did not attend the setting. I was aware that one went to college, and one went to work, but I received the impression that mostly the girls did not work or study on these

days. Of the small number of girls that I asked about the fact that the programme operated on three days a week, most of them said that they would prefer to attend the VTP on four or five days a week. The girls were overall extremely positive about the programme, including the educational and social aspects. For some it gave them the opportunity to gain their first ever qualification, although for others, being able to study for a Level Two qualification (equivalent to GCSE grades A*-C) would have been more appropriate (only Level One was offered). Some formed lasting friendships and saw it as an opportunity to meet people, while others were more distant and did not go out of their way to make friends. I examine the educational aspects further in Chapters 5 and 6, and the girls' social networks and friendships and the role of the setting in relation to this in Chapter 8.

Karen was a white woman of Irish Catholic heritage with two daughters, one of whom attended the same school as Samantha, one of my sixteen girl participants. Karen began working life as a beauty therapist and then set up her own hairdressing salon before moving into account management for a large company. She first became a part-time tutor working on the programme before becoming its manager, and was at the time of my fieldwork doing a foundation degree in working with young people. Suzanne, a white woman who grew up in the local area, began her career as a personal trainer before beginning a certificate in further education teaching, and had a thirteen-year-old son. Leyla, of Turkish Cypriot background, also grew up locally, and after leaving school at 16, worked her way up in pharmacy, before moving into personnel and management. Leyla had two daughters aged twelve and seven. I focus in these next sections on how these women saw their roles in relation to the girls. Many of the girls had a complex relationship with educational authority, and the tutors made this relationship 'work' partly through their considerable efforts with the girls, also partly helped (in Suzanne and Leyla's cases) by their shared experiences of having been working-class young mothers themselves. In the final section I discuss the value of the setting, a theme which occurs throughout the study and which I link to policy in the final two chapters.

The concepts of 'nurture' and 'support' for the girls were very prevalent in Suzanne's and Leyla's description of the setting in their interview accounts. The space was a site for the demonstration of love and care both for the sake of the girls' emotional needs and their development as future mothers. Suzanne explained that:

> ...they come in and they flourish like flowers. You see people coming in with not very good social skills, they have anger problems, personal problems, and just by, because of the ratio of teachers to students as well, we can give them support. It just makes them feel nurtured. And I think that that is the basic kind of need that maybe some of them are lacking or are reaching out for. So when you can provide that nurturing, that sets a good foundation for them, not only now, but when they're mothers, parents.

Suzanne suggests that the nurture the girls receive in the setting will be transmitted on to their children. The idea that the capacity to care is not innate - or cannot be assumed - (Hollway, 2006) was prevalent in these narratives, and yet the accounts did not follow dominant discourses of teenage mothers being incapable of good mothering, as I will later describe. Karen also described loving her job, saying that the girls came to her to ask questions they couldn't ask their own mothers or because they didn't have a mother, calling the setting an 'extended family'. The holistic and intimate nature of the setting allowed the girls to be treated as individuals, something that all three women emphasised. Leyla looked at the setting as a 'holistic way of learning if you like, but also nurturing the learners and being there for them and treating each one individually, coz that's what they are'. These discourses of nurture as at the centre of educational provision contrast with the concept of school as largely about academic provision - or about the gaining of qualifications - with nurture and pastoral support perhaps being relegated to the edges. The small size of the setting, of course, was particularly facilitative of individualised, caring relationships.

Karen also acknowledges the difference between the girls both in terms of educational level and social support:

> ...what A would get from the course is totally different from what B would get from the course and what C would get, but just by them being on the course themselves and interacting with the others, they cascade *their* knowledge and experience, which 90% of the time is positive. 10% of the time is negative, but that 90% is phenomenal – that these young people go away and think yeah, what is it – a problem shared is a problem halved, and I really can see that with these young people. Erm, it's a very safe, non-judgemental environment for them to be able to grow. You know, they've never been allowed to grow as individuals before. They've been able to grow as teenagers and one of the pack, and this is the first time that they don't have somebody beside them saying 'you have to do that'. What we say to them is 'we *want* you to do that, we think you're able to do that and we hope you enjoy doing that – have a go at it'. And take it from there.

Karen here captures the essence of the separate nature of the educational provision – not being located in a school or a pupil referral unit, and only being surrounded by other pregnant teenagers, means that the girls are free from stigma, unfair judgement and bullying. They are also able to enjoy an environment that does not have the pressures, expectations or associations of school and in which they can develop better relationships with their teachers (Dawson, 2006; Hosie and Selman, 2006).

The tutors sometimes talked to me about being able to penetrate and get beyond the girls' tough exteriors, and my observations of Alexandra serve as an example of the ways in which this occurred. I observed Alexandra, a black girl, several times over a period of four months (although I did not have an opportunity to interview her), during which time at the setting she appeared to soften from the tough exterior she arrived with. I noted in my fieldnotes upon first encountering her that she was 'stroppy' and that Leyla was having some difficulty in working with her. Alexandra was living on her own during pregnancy, although she moved in with her mother after the birth of her son while awaiting allocation

of a larger flat. She had a history of depression and self-harm, slash-marks being visible on her arms, and was resistant to Leyla's efforts to encourage her to stop smoking. She had cut down from twenty-five to ten cigarettes a day during her pregnancy, but said that everyone around her smoked and that her baby was passive smoking anyway so there wasn't any point in giving up. One day Suzanne suggested to me that I help Alexandra with her CV. Alexandra seemed happy with this and I worked with her on her spelling mistakes, and suggested that she put in some experience relevant to computing, since she wanted to work in administration. She added Word, Publisher and the internet to her list of skills. She got on with the task slowly, but was distracted by what else was going on in the room and every sentence seemed to be an effort. I saw that she had gained a C in GCSE Drama, an E in Maths and an F in English. She had then started a childcare course and an administration course at different colleges, but hadn't finished either one, telling me that one college was too far away so she dropped out. At the end of her CV Alexandra had listed 'socialising and partying', 'eating out and cinema' and 'music and dancing' as her interests. I wanted to suggest that she remove 'socialising and partying' but decided against it, thinking that it might be relevant to a job after all. In spite of Alexandra's resistance to authority, she was willing to let me help her, and by the time of this episode, she did appear to me to be showing less resistance towards her education.

On another occasion, Alexandra was complaining about the amount of work she had to do on the programme, in response to which Suzanne told her to wait until she had the baby as that would be even harder work. Alexandra responded that it was more work than she'd done in an entire year in college. Leyla said to her that it was good that she was working harder than she'd done before. Alexandra was doing a piece of writing about her experiences of the programme. On reading it, Suzanne exclaimed to Leyla, 'oh, she does love us, look'. Leyla read it and said, 'oh yes, I knew you loved us really. You pretend you haven't got any emotions but you have really'. This was a key example of the constant nurturing work that Leyla and Suzanne did with the girls; this nurture came across

to me as entirely genuine and given without effort. I felt that possibly Suzanne's and Leyla's remarks here were also a way of demonstrating to each other, and to me, that they were able to effect positive change in some of the girls' attitudes and behaviour.

Alexandra returned to the setting when her son was four weeks old, looking extremely slim and pushing a Mamas and Papas buggy. She told everyone that her son had been born, as had she, with an extra finger on each hand, and that he had just had surgery to remove them; I could see tiny stitches on the edges of his hands. She also reported that social services had arrived unannounced at the hospital because of her history written up in her hospital notes, and had questioned her and her mother about how they had prepared for her baby, warning her that if she began self-harming or anything else they considered a danger to the baby, they would take her son into care. Suzanne expressed her indignation at this, and advised Alexandra to write a letter of complaint. Alexandra passed her baby around the other girls, letting Sabrina feed him. She remarked that her baby son was her best friend because she could joke with him and that he didn't 'chat her business'.

Presenting a tough exterior, or an 'attitude', was common to many of the girls I encountered, something I examine further in Chapter 7. Suzanne talked to me about the girls' 'bad attitudes', telling me that these came from the need to build up a façade in order to survive living in the area, and about the need she felt to break this façade down with some of the girls. While it is too simplistic to claim that Alexandra had let down her guard and begun to 'flourish' in the setting, there was one episode with her towards the end of her pregnancy that I found particularly interesting. One afternoon I had accompanied Alexandra, Sabrina, Kyra and Amira, along with Suzanne, to a BBC filming of a pregnancy belly dancing class in the centre of London. The girls got to take part in a belly dancing class that, although filmed in a rather salacious manner by two cameramen and a male director, they appeared to enjoy. At one point Alexandra, who was seven months pregnant, sat down, saying she felt faint, and was given some water. The director decided to give everyone a break, and afterwards Alexandra joined back in, now radiating a big

smile over her face. At the end I asked her if she'd enjoyed it, to which she replied, 'yeah, it was all right'. Similarly to Leyla's exclamation that Alexandra pretended not to have emotions, it occurred to me that perhaps Alexandra was deliberately underplaying her enjoyment as a way of maintaining her protective façade. It struck me that Suzanne, Leyla and Karen made considerable attempts to peel away some of the girls' defensive layers and allow them to develop as individuals. Karen's metaphor of growth ties in with Suzanne's of the girls as flowers, needing the right kind of nourishment and nurture in order to flourish. The tutors constructed the setting, then, as an environment of care and nurture from which each individual could benefit.

Tutors' conceptions of teenage pregnancy and parenting

Karen: I would ask the question: they want to be a mother, do they want to be a mother or do they want to play with dolls? And...if you ask any of my girls, used they play with dolls, a lot of them will say, well we didn't really have the chance to do it – they never had that stage of their development. ...And does the baby replace the doll? And then you've got attachment, you've got all that kind of theory going on, ...I think what's happening here, but are we allowing it to happen because we're saying it's ok? And I *do* believe it's ok, but I believe that it's, it's also got to be said that it is ok, however, it might oft be best for the person to not go down that route...And somehow we have got to break that cycle, because I *have* got third generation teenage parents here, erm, and it is the norm, but what is that saying about us? We're not getting it right, are we? That's what it says to me... There's something wrong, and we need to look deeper into it and see where it is. I do believe it comes down to the early education of the child and the fact that certain things are not acceptable but they are allowed to be acceptable, and that's the thing when it comes down to morals, ethics and beliefs. Where are the boundaries between being a child, a teenager and an adult? There isn't any. So what we're near enough saying is it's ok for a child to be an adult.

This dense extract contains many references to 'typical' issues invoked in discussion of teenage pregnancy, including it being part of a cycle of deprivation and a result of poor parenting. What I find particularly striking in Karen's comments above is her suggestion that many of the girls had missed out on the 'normal' feminine childhood activity of playing with dolls. Having never been allowed to be childish, or to *pretend* to mother a doll/baby, she asserts, was an omission in their development. Mothers not giving their daughters dolls to play with could also symbolise here a lack of love, that the girls want to compensate for, echoing the common idea that teenage girls become pregnant to have something to love. Thinking about the doll as a toy in relation to childhood brings to mind Carolyn Steedman's (1986) observation about toys as 'the possible symbols of easier childhoods...Toys belong to a world of things that we know immensely and conventionally about' (137). Steedman also writes about girls who occupy 'the contradictory and categorically diffuse place between infancy and womanhood' (127). While she is not talking about the teenage mother, she is talking more generally about working-class childhoods and about being perceived, like the teenage mother, as somewhere between girlhood and womanhood, problematically not quite one or the other, perhaps as a result of girls taking on adult roles. As I have already discussed in Chapter 2, this idea of teenage mothers as children, particularly those who lack love and are seeking to compensate for this, is a prevalent one, and the idea that teenage pregnancy is a result of a disrupted childhood is embedded in Karen's account.

Karen also emphasised that girls knew full well about contraception and how to use it, but that education in the relational and communicative aspects of sex was lacking. The 'something wrong' that she refers to earlier therefore implies a belief that there is something wrong with a culture that accepts teenage pregnancy, rather than with girls' sexual behaviour or contraceptive mistakes. Suzanne echoed and summed this up in remarking, 'by the time you get to be having sex you know about contraception...people

choose just not to use it, don't they?' Karen, Suzanne and Leyla all commented in interview that teenage pregnancy was a fact, that it was inevitable, and that although they endorsed its reduction, 'with the best education in the world, you will always have teenage pregnancy' (Karen). However, a very striking divergence in their opinions was apparent in the degree to which they thought that the girls planned their pregnancies. Leyla stated:

> ...society's views I think are rubbish, personally. Society's views about young mums is, oh they only get pregnant to get a flat, and they only get pregnant to get money off the government. Erm, in all the girls that we have here, 99% of them have fallen pregnant by accident. So then that doesn't justify the fact that they've done it on purpose, you know, to get a flat. 99% of them have got pregnant, erm, not knowing that they were going to get pregnant. Some of them have obviously been silly, foolish, misguided if you like. Some of them are genuine cases where the pill didn't work...A lot of them are getting on the bus, being looked down at, you know they think they're immoral, promiscuous, not able to be a good mum, they don't have the makings to be a good mum – they're being judged. Even before they've had their baby - it's not fair.

While on the whole Leyla's statement is highly defensive of the girls, she does position some of them as ignorant and irresponsible, contrasting these girls with those who have made 'genuine' mistakes. Leyla's position here brings out a stark contradiction with Karen's accounts, in the degree to which teenage pregnancy is considered the result of girls' mistakes. Their responses demonstrate the range of discourses employed in debates around teenage pregnancy, from the policy insistence that it is always a mistake, to the idea that wider cultural and social issues need to be addressed. This also highlights the difficulty in thinking about teenage pregnancy and motherhood in terms of the conflicting discourses that surround these issues, and in providing a common educational framework within which to address teenage pregnancy in current policy.

While Leyla emphasised that society is wrong to judge young mothers because their actions in getting pregnant have not been purposeful, Suzanne, on the other hand, stated:

A lot of them are planned, funnily enough. They all want babies! I would say, if I had ten in a class, eight of them would say they wanted a baby.

Naomi: But planned it?

Suzanne: Er, a couple of people have planned it, ok, maybe not so much as eight, but I've definitely had learners who've planned it. They said, yeah, they wanted a baby.

Suzanne here presents another opposing account of the girls' intention and agency, again striking in its difference from Leyla's assertions above. Notably, Luker (1996) interrogates the notions of wanted and unwanted teenage pregnancies in relation to contraceptive use, and points out that these two extremes rarely capture girls' more complex lived experiences. Karen presented a more nuanced perspective:

Naomi: And often it's not very clear cut, but could you sort of give any indication of how many are planned?

Karen: A lot. I would say, initially, when you first interview a lot of the young mums, it will come across as though they've planned the pregnancy. And they will come out with comments like, oh, I've always wanted a baby, erm, my friend had a baby and it really really made me feel I wanted to have a baby, and all of that, but then when you kind of talk to them again, they will say to you, well, I wasn't really sure but when it happened, I just let it happen. And that kind of sends a trigger to me, because I think, ok, so that young person was on the cusp of becoming sexually active, became sexually active: had they been given the right advice at that time, would they have got pregnant, or would they have planned it? If biologically they are destined to be a young mum, which I think there are, and I will always say there is that percentage, but it's a lot lower than the percentage that just let it happen. Then when they get pregnant, a lot of them go into denial, they're not really pregnant, or maybe their periods have been irregular and whatever, before you know it, they're three months, four months down the line before they really realise they're pregnant. And it's too late then. Because even if they *were* going to go to terminate a

pregnancy, a lot of them are already beginning to feel the pregnancy and don't want to go down that route.

Karen here captures the ambivalence that I also discerned in many of the girls' narratives ('I just let it happen'), which, although rarely phrased in such a way, was evident in the accounts many of the girls provided of not using contraception and claiming to be surprised to be pregnant, or of using contraception (possibly not efficiently or regularly) but not being surprised to be pregnant. There is of course a wide spectrum between 'planned' and 'unplanned' pregnancy (Barrett and Wellings, 2002). The point here is that again, the stereotyped notion of teenage pregnancy is that it is unplanned and that teenagers lack sex education, and yet actually, the issue is significantly more complex than this.

As can be inferred from Karen's accounts thus far, she emphasised far more than Leyla and Suzanne the role that education could and should play in relation to teenage sexuality and pregnancy. Karen spoke passionately about education and about her vision in educating young people. I found her warm and captivating and a person of great integrity, dedication and skill in working with young people. Karen came from a family of business people who instilled in her the need to have her 'own standing and be able to survive independently'. She told me she wanted to return to the teaching, but this seemed unlikely in the short-term since she was later again promoted to a more senior management position at a different vocational training provider. Her emphasis on education implied her belief that better education would inform and motivate more young women to be able to avoid early pregnancy.

The tutors, then, were largely accepting of the existence of teenage pregnancy, and acknowledged that in many cases pregnancies were planned and wanted. At the same time, however, they indicated that more and better education was necessary – albeit not the solution. Caroline, the Connexions worker I interviewed at Greenvale School, who was of

Jamaican origin, but had lived in the UK since the age of thirteen, also described the simple inevitability of teenage parenthood, and stressed that there were a variety of reasons why teenagers became parents:

> Caroline: We will always have teenage parents – in my days, in my parents' days [laughs] it was just more hidden [laughs].
>
> Naomi: And what about the girls who plan it, at 16, because that's very much absent from government policy, they don't want to deal with girls who say I chose it, I did it on purpose.
>
> Caroline: Mm. And certainly leaving care. Some young people want to be parents because they've got this perception that they can be so much better parents than the parenting they had themselves. And sometimes it works out fine and sometimes it's absolutely atrocious, but you know, what can you do? You can offer guidance, you can provide support, you can't judge young people by what they do because [pause] there's lots of influences. Once you've offered the information and the guidance and it still happens, then all you've got to do is be there to support them. There are various reasons why people get pregnant. Some just want to be parents at a very early age.
>
> Naomi: And what's your personal feeling about teenage pregnancy then?
>
> Caroline: My personal feeling about teenage pregnancy? Erm [pause] I wouldn't want my own daughter [laughs] to be pregnant, well she's past the teenage stage now. Not because I think there's a huge stigma, but because erm, life is so much harder now, and I think really you need to get your education first. I really do feel that's really important, because once you've had a child – it's not impossible – but it's harder to pick up and go back to school or college or wherever, and get your education, get a job...I can't say that [pause] apart from my own children, I can't say that I can be judgemental with anyone else's children or anyone who becomes pregnant as a teenager because like I said before, you don't know what's happened. It could just be an accident. Accidents happen to adults! You know. And there are various reasons. So, no judgements!

Interestingly, both Leyla and Caroline took a somewhat defensive position with relation to teenage mothers, indicating that the burden of societal judgement was unfair, but stressed that they would not want their own daughters to be pregnant as teenagers. I felt that this position was representative of all of the professional women I interviewed (including Karen, Suzanne and Katherine, the midwife). Caroline suggests that one reason for teenage pregnancy is girls' desires to compensate for their own bad parenting. However, she cautions against judgement, pointing out that pregnancy could be an accident, and stressing that there is no one reason for it. What most of these accounts have in common are references to discourses in which a decision to become a teenage parent is either a result of individual psychological deficits (albeit that these are passed down from their own mothers), or it is the result of ambivalence caused by a lack of education. However, these discourses are heavily cross-referenced with others involving a defensive notion of girls' agency and sexual competence and a certain inevitability of teenage motherhood. The fact that Karen, Suzanne and Leyla all felt, and conveyed to the girls, that their pregnancies were something to be celebrated, was held in tension with their concerns. In this way they enacted a modification of negative policy discourses, holding a more nuanced perspective that came from working closely with the young women. Their nurturing and support for the girls was constantly evident to me – these were not simply words, or a philosophy that was not adhered to in practice. The delight with which the girls' babies were received in the setting, with the tutors frequently holding them with adoration and congratulating their mothers, was plain to see, and provided clear evidence of their love and care. Whatever concerns the tutors may have had about teenage pregnancy, the setting was a place in which the girls could be free of judgement about their pregnancies.

Despite the setting's emphasis on and requirements for progression into EET, and the importance that Karen, Suzanne and Leyla placed on this, the vehemence with which Suzanne and Leyla defended the right to full-time motherhood was very striking. Iris Marion Young (1997) argues that the social contribution of those who do 'dependency work' (full-time mothering, for example) is undervalued in society, and that those who are not self-sufficient should be materially supported rather than stigmatised. Debates about the valuing of mothers' care work and its conflict with paid work continue unabated, along with the increasing trend of mothers entering or returning to paid work after having children for reasons of financial need, government exhortation, or the desire to work. With regard to their study of working-class women's childcare choices, Braun *et al* (2008) note that 'the policy discourse positioning employment as a social responsibility and central to a positive sense of personal fulfilment was powerful and ubiquitous' (544). Leyla framed this in terms of the importance of having a right to make a choice between full-time mothering and entering the labour market, and she repeatedly articulated the sense of a lack of choice in having to return to work after childbirth:

> Leyla: …just because you're not career-minded doesn't mean you should be judged for that either. There's nothing wrong with being an at-home mum for the *first five years of your child being at home.* I personally don't think there's nothing wrong with it – it's a matter of choice and I wish at the time I had more of a choice. I had to work because I had to support my child and I was a new mum with a new mortgage and I had to work, it wasn't the case that I was going to be supported. It would have been nice to have had a choice…Whether I've paid taxes for the last fifteen years or not is irrelevant – it's irrelevant. If I have a baby I think it's a human right – if I want to stay at home with my child I should be able to, and not be made to feel guilty, if I'm claiming income support or whatever it is that I'm claiming. You know, why should I feel guilty for wanting to bring

up my child? I can understand if the child's at school full-time, then obviously you can work, I'm not saying that you can't. What I do is I take my children to school and I pick them up from school, so I work around my children. Coz to me my children are priority, they still need me - even though one's nearly a teenager and one's almost eight, they still need me. But why should I be made to feel guilty for wanting to stay at home with my children?

Leyla strongly states here that the policy imperative for mothers to work induces a sense of guilt in those who do not[7]. She argues that mothers on income support should be allowed the same choice as mothers who are not supported by the state to be a stay-at-home mother (for the first five years of a child's life), without being stigmatised by the decision not to work. I asked her whether she thought income support was sufficient:

Naomi: So do you think that income support should be more?

Leyla: [sighs] Can you live on forty-five pound a week?

Naomi: No! [laughs]

Leyla: No, I can't live on forty-five pound a week either. You physically cannot. I can't understand what government or how they believe that forty-five pound a week is enough for you to get by...I do feel that mothers are pressured into going back to work because of the way society will view them.

These comments were suggestive of an immense conflict that, as Leyla remarked, mothers may experience between a desire to mother and a duty to work (or indeed a duty to mother and a desire to work).

Karen, Leyla and Suzanne all felt that mother-child bonding and attachment was very important:

Naomi: What do you think about the emphasis on getting them into EET? ...

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[7] From 2012 parents of children aged over five claiming income support will be switched to jobseeker's allowance and required to seek work.

Karen: Ok. Erm, again it comes down to the needs of the individual. Like any other mother, I think that they have a right to maternity leave and I think that should be respected no matter what age. I think it's very important for the future development of the child that they are given time to be able to bond with their child. And if you look at attachment, it's also very important that the mother is ready for that transition, to leave and to move on, as well. Erm, and it is also important, we have to look at the side, you will always have those learners who have their babies and within three months, six months, are prepared and ready to go back into education or to go and get a job. ...It might well be that they have a need to continue with their education ...And then you have the person who needs to go to work because they feel the need to bring in an income, they don't want to stay on benefits, they want to provide a better future for their child.

Karen was more ambivalent than Leyla about mothers living on benefits and thought it was important to 'instil in everybody that they have a right to be whatever they want to be and to do whatever they want to do'. While Karen in the above extract simply stressed the importance of bonding and then moved on to talk about returning to work or education, Suzanne and Leyla stressed the importance of the first five years of a child's life in relation to mothering. I have italicised Leyla's remarks above on this, and she repeats this later in the interview, saying 'I do feel the first five years of your child's life are very important'. Suzanne similarly commented:

Yeah, personally I believe about a year is good [to stay at home with your child] - I think you need a year for you to heal physically and mentally, not heal mentally, adapt mentally. Physically when you're young it all comes back pretty quick, but you still need some time, and I think adapting mentally and I think focusing, we all know that the first five years of a child's life is when we get all our make up for the rest of our life. If that kind of research has been changed I don't know, but I do believe in that, I really feel strongly that the first five years make you, and if you can spend that year with your mum, or your dad, and people that love you, and they love you and nurture you and help you to develop, in all the ways that you

need to develop in the first year of your life, that's more beneficial than leaving your child with a childminder and going off to college.

Suzanne did not necessarily assert these personal beliefs to the girls, however, since progression to EET was such a major focus of the programme. While Leyla made a similar emphasis, she also described having to 'drum it into their heads' that the girls have possibilities in their lives, since many of them 'are made to believe that a big part of their life is over' when they get pregnant. 'You do have a choice whether you want to be an at-home mum, or do you want to make something of yourself?...you can still make something of yourself being an at-home mum...you can be a wonderful mother...[but] the questions are arisen...and they do start looking at their future again' (Leyla). This uneasy oscillation between the choices of full-time motherhood or work/education is indicative of the very difficult decisions that many of these girls faced, and which many of them did not conceive of as a choice at all. The competing discourses of the importance of care and mother-child bonding were here sharply juxtaposed with those of the need to 'make something of yourself' and 'provide a better future for your child'. I felt that the tutors were more open with me with their views on early mothering than they were with the girls and that because they were genuinely committed to the course's emphasis on preparation for future education or training, they stressed the importance of the girls making a career for themselves over that of full-time motherhood. Austerberry and Wiggins (2007) similarly found that Sure Start Plus programme coordinators perceived the needs of young women they worked with very differently to those prescribed by the national policy agenda, and detail the tensions between these positions. They advocate a broader approach to addressing social exclusion that includes supporting full-time mothering as well as gaining skills. The fact that there exist enormous tensions for many women of all social classes between paid work and caring for children highlights the emotive and morally charged nature of this issue.

This conflict between mothering and paid work or education highlighted for me one way in which the tutors negotiated the space between policy discourses and their own opinions and experiences of working in the setting. On the one hand they felt strongly about the importance of full-time early mothering, but on the other, they saw a need to persuade the girls of their 'right' and 'choice' to return to education. The tutors thus tread a subtle and fine line between these positions, highlighting the difficult balance between a 'good mother' and a 'good worker' identity.

The value of the setting

Several of the girls had experienced bullying at school prior to pregnancy and many had feelings of hatred towards school, a topic that I explore in the following chapter. Most of the girls preferred the setting to school because it was more like college and they responded positively to being treated like adults. Five girls out of the sixteen participants were permanently excluded from their schools for fighting, truancy or other misdemeanours. Six girls attended schools that the government classifies as 'failing', that is, where fewer than thirty percent of students were achieving five A*-C grades at GCSE. Suzanne and Karen argued for the value of the VTP setting over a school setting, for reasons of a 'holistic' service and of protection:

> Suzanne: I think at school there'd be too much, there's already lots of bullying and teasing. Teenagers can be quite cruel to each other. So that reason for one. For two, I don't think the schools have the funding to provide the holistic environment that they need. They definitely need a lot of one-to-one. You couldn't have thirty pregnant young ladies in a room and one teacher, it just wouldn't work, so I don't think schools have the resources to provide it. I think they're much better off in an environment like this, because a lot of them say I hated school. So you wanna get them away from something they feel they hated and so that they can learn in a new environment... I think the school is really... it's like a

battleground, it's where you learn how to survive and stick up for yourself. I think it's quite bad at the moment with the teenage attitude, if you haven't got the latest trainers on you can get picked on for that. So I think pregnant girls would be like a target and I wouldn't wanna support that.

Suzanne's description of the school as a 'battleground where you learn to survive' was illustrative of many of the girls' struggles and possibly formative of their resilience. She echoes the words of Sally Tomlinson, who writes that education has 'become a competitive battleground' in the 'reality of a society still divided along class lines' (2005: 180). The geographies of urban education, framed by the self-excluding choices of the privileged middle-classes, have reinforced representations of inner-city schools as places of 'unruly' working-class students (Reay, 2007). However, constructing a comparison between the programme at the VTP and the schools that most of these girls attended is somewhat misleading, since most of the girls' peer groups who remained in education were at FE college rather than school. Of the two girls (out of the sixteen) who did continue to attend school after their GCSEs in Year 11 (Danielle and Lorraine), both of them left school for FE college in or after Year 12. The main disadvantage of the VTP programme compared to FE college, though, remains the same as that of the programme and school: the programme has a very limited curriculum and offers a limited level of qualification.

With respect to the value of the setting, Karen similarly commented:

The learners feel comfortable to learn [here], in a non-biased holistic learning environment. It's difficult enough to get a 16-year-old to attend either school or college, erm, let alone heavily pregnant, and I think it takes a strong individual to be able to walk into a classroom of their peers and not feel intimidated or even be a product of victimisation or bullying because of it. Erm, and that's why I think the government and education authorities have to realise that they should have this kind of service somewhere housed within the borough so that they can simply say ok, congratulations – who ever says to these teenagers, congratulations you're pregnant, it's not a problem, you can continue with your studies?

Karen makes a powerful statement here, turning on its head the idea that teenage pregnancy need be a disruption to education or cause for peer isolation or exclusion. She makes the observation that it is always considered negatively – nobody ever says 'it's not a problem', indicating the role that the setting plays in normalising young motherhood and allowing the young women a sense of achievement in having a baby.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated the importance of the tutors' support for the girls and of their conviction in the value of the work that they undertook with them. I felt strongly that one of the keys to the value of the setting lay in the quality of the relationship between Karen, Suzanne and Leyla and the girls. After several months I came to experience a similar kind of relationship with all three of them as they had with many of the girls. I developed a particularly relaxed relationship with Suzanne. Interestingly, many months later, Karen (after she had moved to another vocational training provider to run the programme together with the sister parenting course, and after Suzanne no longer worked for her) told me that she felt that although she could not fault Suzanne as a tutor, she thought she had sometimes overstepped the mark and become too close to some of the girls. It was also notable that the tutors really only interacted with the girls individually, and rarely as a group (as teachers in a school would do). Katherine, one of the midwives who provided the antenatal sessions, found it particularly difficult to interact with the girls as a group in a teaching role, telling me she found it much easier to relate to and work with them individually. I develop an analysis of the multi-dimensioned relationships that Suzanne and Leyla had with the girls and how these functioned in the context of the setting in Chapter 6.

In this chapter I also interrogated the tutors' views about teenage pregnancy and mothering; an analysis of these views is crucial in gaining an understanding of how the setting operated as a site of refuge and empowerment for the girls. It is also key to an understanding of how policy discourses are negotiated and transformed in the context of 'real', lived experience. I provided an insight into the multiplicity of explanations for teenage pregnancy and the complexity of decision-making around mothers' choices with relation to parenting versus paid employment.

Of course the value of the setting did not solely lie in the quality of relationships; equally important were the peer relationships between the girls, the nature of the educational (not just in the academic sense) provision, the fact that this was not a school setting, its ethos, incentives for attendance, and so on. It is, however, important not to neglect the relational aspects, as these are so often overlooked in traditional measures of inclusion/exclusion, achievement and progression. Crucial to the strength of these relationships were the tutors' actions of care and nurture towards the girls, a sense of them as individuals requiring patient support and encouragement. The tutors deviated from policy discourses holding teenage pregnancy as always a mistake, instead outlining a wider context in which it can be viewed as an achievement, as well as an indication of the need for more comprehensive education and support structures.

5.   Education and school exclusion

Introduction

> If I didn't know better, if I was not one of 'them', one of those dumb and hopeless women, I may even be persuaded by the fear produced by the rhetoric of the underclass cancer in our midst. But I was one of them. I did and still do live in the inner city, I went to school in Brixton, I was a teenage mum, I am a lone mother – hey, I must be stupid, of course I am: remember: I failed my IQ test! But this is just anecdotal evidence, not real research. Anyway, as I am always reminded by those who do not want to upset the comfortable parameters of their social order, 'you are an exception to the rule, not like the others, the one that got away'. But I am not different. It is the myths that structure our ideas of social reality that are the problem. Myths about teenage mothers, who become lone mothers. Lone mothers who cannot read and write, who are themselves poor parents and whose children without love and care go on to join the ranks of the educational under-achievers. That is the abiding logic, the mythical cyclical causation that lies at the heart of the black underclass debate.
>
> (Mirza, 2009: 54)

The relationship between teenage pregnancy and educational exclusion sits at the heart of policy and of this study, and as Heidi Mirza's excerpt above demonstrates, teenage motherhood continues to be associated with educational underachievement. Young women who become pregnant while at school may represent 'an oppositional version of success to school-based success, structured around desire', one which 'puts them beyond schooling, or modifies the meaning of schooling by allowing young women to assert their adulthood' (Epstein *et al*, 2002: 278). Pregnancy, however, should not necessarily be held in opposition to an *educational* desire. While it often puts girls physically 'beyond schooling', or is the culmination of several years spent disaffected from school, it may also represent a period of retrospective regret, a turning point, and an opportunity to create a new identity around motherhood, as well as in relation to education.

In this chapter I examine the contrast between girls' previous 'bad' identities, associated with secondary schooling, and their 'good' maternal identities. The girls' often negative accounts of secondary school were interestingly contrasted with their positive constructions of education, qualifications and having a job, which went hand in hand with their transitions to motherhood. Pregnancy was equated with a re-valuing of and re-

inclusion into education. Motherhood signified the ability to take responsibility and to be a good parent. I examine the process of exclusion from school by focusing largely on the narratives of Jade and Samantha, because their contrasting stories demonstrate the problems of school inclusion for the 'bad girl' or the 'bullied girl' who subsequently becomes a pregnant teenager. I contrast their educational identities and experiences, and examine how their transitions to motherhood present them with solutions to the crises resulting from their school exclusions. I look at how both girls resolve their negative educational experiences into positive current and future orientations. I then focus on the example of Taylor to demonstrate how the girls often find a way back into educational engagement by way of the setting, and how this represents an educational re-inclusion. I discuss how the structural problems of the current neoliberal emphasis on educational standards and targets – and the immense pressure schools are under to achieve these – can be seen to result in exclusion for those students who have difficulty in meeting these standards.

Bad girls?

> Carol had not bought the ticket to self-improvement though meritocratic escape – the glamour of work was of less immediate appeal than the glamour of being a woman and of pushing your own baby as opposed to your mother's. As a white working-class girl who positioned herself and who was positioned as marginal to the education system, she insisted on taking her chances in another desiring system. How else could she have been addressed? What other forms of 'maturity' and femininity were available?
>
> (Hey, 1997: 101)

In her ethnographic study of girls' friendships, Valerie Hey describes how Carol, a white working-class girl who had a reputation as a 'no-hoper' and who found school 'boring', gave up on schooling and instead 'took up the seductive pleasures of heterosexuality' (92). Carol's mother 'had seven other children living at home as well as a third husband…[and] called her a "bad girl"' (90). This description of Carol's large family evokes the (middle-

class) discourse of working-class women's excessive sexuality and fertility, by the use of which negative value is assigned to working-class embodiment (Skeggs, 2004). Girls becoming mothers are seen not only as being under-educated or incompetent in contraceptive use, but as having been promiscuous and failing to delay sex and pregnancy until properly ready for it. They are often seen (and may see themselves) as 'bad girls' who have turned their back on education and opted out of the responsible and normative route to adulthood.

Jade was a self-confessed 'bad girl', using the adjective 'bad' to describe her previous self in interview, although she clearly allocated this spoiled identity to her past. Her desire for sexual relationships and her image as a 'bad girl', having at age thirteen first chosen to sleep with her boyfriend, was now less apparent than her 'good girl' desire to get on with her education and provide her child with the best life possible. Jade was an only child of mixed parentage. She was one of three girls from my sixteen participants whose biological parents remained in a relationship at the time of interview[8]. She was the only girl to bring up experience of racism in her interview, and was very specific about how she saw her racial identity:

> My dad's from here, but he's Jamaican and Montserrat, and my mum's from here, and I
>
> think she's Irish or Scottish. But I class myself as mixed race, but I see myself, not as
>
> black, but I'm coloured, but I do class myself closer to black. I'm not bringing up the
>
> olden days, but if it was like in slavery days, I would've been classed as a black person,
>
> because I'm coloured. I'm mixed race, but I'm closer to the black side, coz you'd never
>
> mistake me for white, would you? [laughs]

Jade here continually qualifies her statements, making sure that I understand that she considers herself to be closer to black than white and the historical context for this. She presents a complex identification which involves her sense of self as 'mixed race' with her

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[8] Four of the girls' biological fathers were deceased. One girl had lived with her father before pregnancy, and the remaining eight girls' degrees of contact with their fathers ranged from no contact to some.

parents being 'from here' yet having origins outside of the UK. Her racial identity was important in her identity construction, and as I discuss later, when Jade narrates the story of her school exclusion, she tells me that two teachers at her school, including the head, were racist, and that this had been the cause of her permanent exclusion.

Having run away from home several times, Jade had been taken into care for a period, and had been arrested for and charged with common assault by the time she was sixteen. Although she was living on her own at the time of interview, she now had a good relationship with her parents, and described herself as 'really privileged' and 'lucky' to have support from her parents and grandparents. She succinctly summarised the reasons for her 'bad girl' behaviour when she was growing up:

> she [mum] wasn't very understanding when I was growing up...I grew up in Parkside, right next to Neville Estate, so I wasn't around the best people. My mum didn't quite understand that, but now she does, and she wish she did before, because them things that happened wouldn't have happened, me running away and stuff, if she'd handled things a bit different. I don't know how to put it in a way that doesn't sound like abuse, but I don't see nothing wrong with giving your child some smacks, right, and my mum never thought there was anything wrong with it, and sometimes she would get a bit out of hand, coz I'd run away for like three months, and obviously through that time my mum was stressed and she was drinking and I'd come home and she was pissed out of her head, and stuff, but then I didn't understand, but now I do. ... But she just wanted the best for me. But I couldn't live up to that, my mum wanted me to go to university and do this and do that, but I grew up in Parkside and I wasn't very, like, I didn't have no one around me, I didn't have friends that were doing them kind of things, and I was following my friends, who were going out partying and smoking weed and beating up girls and stuff like that, so I didn't have that in me, and my mum didn't understand that. But I *will*. Specially being a young mum, I will understand it, because I won't ever forget where I come from.

Here Jade reflexively communicates an analysis of her childhood, describing a realisation that whatever her mother's problems or failures, she simply 'wanted the best' for Jade. She anticipates the disturbing nature of her narrative of her mother's drunken behaviour ('I don't know how to put it in a way that doesn't sound like abuse') and is able to demonstrate her empathy and ability to make sense of it. Jade indicates that her mother's aspirations for her to go to university were unrealistic because of the negative influence of her peer group, who were not 'the best people', and that her mother did not understand this. Jade consequently distinguishes herself from her mother as having an understanding of her social background that she will bring to bear on her (better) parenting. This excerpt provides insight into the considerable identity work that Jade does to critically analyse her childhood and to distance herself from her mother's lack of understanding.

Jade was an attractive girl, large-boned and short, with a piercing below her lower lip. What was most striking to me about her was her reaction to the arrival of babies in the classroom at the VTP (vocational training provider). When girls returned to the VTP to show everyone their babies, she would be the first, and often the only, girl to jump up and take the baby out of the buggy and hold it adoringly in her arms for a long time. I identified with her when she did this, because it was what I always wanted to do as well, but never did, not least because I often did not know the mother in question. However, Jade's identities as 'bad girl' and reformed 'good girl' manifested themselves simultaneously in the setting on one occasion. This occurred during an antenatal class with the midwife, Katherine, at a point at which Katherine was attempting to quieten the group down, telling the girls that this was a waste of her time and that she could just leave and it wouldn't matter because she'd still get paid. Jade said to Katherine provocatively, 'That's rude'. However, after a few tense exchanges, Jade settled down, and was the only girl to consistently and correctly answer every question Katherine asked the girls. Jade later told me that she:

had to confront her [Katherine], like, that's rude, you don't say things like that, because I remember teachers used to say that at school and I used to get so offended like, what, that's the only reason you're here – to get paid – not because you enjoy teaching. Even if we are being disruptive, you don't need to say something like that. And in the end she did apologise. But I understand where she was coming from, coz the class was being disruptive.

Jade was reacting against a situation that she knew only too well - one in which a teacher would react against disruption in a classroom. This replay of classroom dynamics obviously held many negative resonances for Jade, but what I found particularly interesting was that she managed to be 'the good student', even while behaving in a confrontational manner, and after the episode, to evaluate it from Katherine's perspective. There are echoes here of her critical and yet empathetic account of her mother's parenting.

Jade was in the process of applying to college when she discovered she was pregnant. She told me that she was surprised and upset at the pregnancy, and considered abortion, although she admitted that she had been 'just a bit silly really', explaining that she had not been using contraception because a doctor had told her that she had low fertility. Her baby's twenty-one-year-old father already had a child with another woman, and Jade was somewhat ambivalent about the future of their relationship:

> Jade: He basically lives with his mum, but he lives with me, basically. Erm, if all things work out between us, yeah, we'll live together, but if things don't, then he has to move on.
>
> Naomi: What does he do?
>
> Jade: Nothing. [laughs] He's quite bummy right now. He worked in Ikea and then the hours were a bit too hard for him, coz it was like, the warehouse, getting up at 4 in the morning, being there for 5, working till 10, 11, and it was a bit too much for him, a bit too early, so he stopped working. And now he just signs on. It's quite rubbish. I do better than him - I bloody work on a Friday - but I can't, I can only push him so far. He has to pick himself up.

Here Jade produces herself as strong and determined, in relation to her boyfriend, whom she describes as 'bummy', although again, at the same time she is sympathetic to the unsocial hours of his former job.

These motivational problems that Jade describes in her boyfriend are echoed in her account of her prospective future, although she ascribes a new-found motivation for herself to her pregnancy and the prospect of motherhood. She is certainly not ambivalent about her mothering:

> Naomi: Do you think being pregnant's made you more motivated to work harder?
>
> Jade: Yeah. Because I'm gonna have a child, it's making me think, if I'm not doing it for me, I have to do it for my child. I don't wanna be living on benefits for the rest of my life. … That's one of the reasons why I wanted to keep her – so I can motivate myself. Because I'd just be really lazy, not go to college, not do absolutely nothing. Now I feel I have no choice but to make the best life for my child.

As this account progresses, Jade shows that the potential to be a better mother than others, perhaps including her own, is central to her mothering identity:

> Like I remember I was on the bus one time and there was a little boy and he was like, oh, he wanted a toy for his birthday and the mum turned around and was like, oh, we'll get it, but it's going to be from a second-hand shop, yeah. And I was like, no, that's not the way I want to live. I don't want to go and buy my child's birthday presents from a second-hand shop – I want her to open the *plastic*, take off the wrapping and undo the plastic, everything's there in one piece, not a second-hand shop, because you can't afford it, no. And luckily, with me, I have a lot of support. It's only maybe four people that I have the support from, but it feels like ten, and that's like my mum, my dad and my nan and my granddad, and I know I would never go without. *Never*, ever.

Jade is doing significant work here to narrate herself as a good mother who works in order to provide for her child, and who will not live on benefits, but is motivated to make a better

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life for her child. She distances herself from the position that she knows is already laid down for her in popular discourse – that of benefit scrounger and unfit mother. Interestingly, at the same time as she suggests that she is not working harder for herself, but for her child, she indicates the value for her own self and motivation that being pregnant now plays. Similarly to many other girls, her construction of wanting the best for her child involved a reference to having a job and thus money to pay for material goods. She employs graphic imagery of the shiny newness of the toys that she will buy for her daughter to unwrap; she uses this story to indicate that she will be a *better* mother than one who can only afford toys from a second-hand shop. In contrast to ideas around middle-class consumption practices of the virtue of recycling material goods, Jade implies that second-hand toys are a shameful admission of poverty and inadequate mothering. Although I have here illustrated Jade's equation of good mothering with being a good material provider for her child, Jade also talked at length about how she was going to be a strict mother and her intention to monitor her daughter's educational progress at school and ensure that she didn't 'mess up' in the same way that she had done. She was not motivated to work at her education for her own sake, but saw her pregnancy as an opportunity to reform herself, to shed her 'bad girl' image, realising that, 'I'm gonna have responsibilities, my life's gonna change completely'. Jade is thus able to seize upon a 'good mother' identity in the process of repudiating her former 'bad girl' identity.

School exclusion

Experiencing pregnancy between the ages of fifteen and eighteen allowed the girls access to the programme at the VTP. Many of them had already decided that school was not the place they wanted to be, and/or had been excluded. The girls received a different type of education at the VTP, one which prepared them for childbirth, motherhood, negotiation with the benefits system and other life skills, as well as basic instruction in

literacy or numeracy or information technology, depending on where their need lay. The only group teaching they experienced was the monthly antenatal sessions with the midwives, and the yoga class they attended each week. Not only were the girls able to assert their adulthood, but they also asserted their sexuality, both discursively, and physically in terms of their pregnant bodies. A (peer) sex and sexual health education was never far from the surface, be that through discussion of their sex lives, or, for example, through being given information about a do-it-yourself chlamydia test. This openness about sexual matters contrasted with the girls' experience of sex education at school. Jade commented that at school 'it just shows you about the body and stuff, not about all the diseases you can get'. Claudia told me that school sex education 'doesn't really help'. Mia suggested 'more teaching in the schools about sex education, I think that should be brought up a bit more', and Kim explained, 'I don't even remember doing it at school. I think I done it in Year 7, but then it was all a joke to everyone. Never take much notice'. In spite of these comments, it was clear to me that none of the girls I spoke to had become pregnant due to ignorance about contraception.

Educational success at school was not impossible for some of the girls, and five girls said that they liked school, and one that she loved it. Sabrina, Danielle and Lorraine each achieved five GCSEs at grades A-C. Almost all of the sixteen girls I interviewed, however, experienced some kind of difficulty with school. Lorraine, the highest achiever, attended three different schools in Year 9 due to her mother escaping domestic violence. Melanie had to move from a northern city to London between Year 10 and 11 for the same reason and achieved no educational qualifications until after the birth of her twins, at the age of 20. Six of the girls simply did not sit their GCSE exams. Five were permanently excluded for fighting, truancy and other misdemeanours. Katie, Mia and Samantha reported being bullied at school.

The girls often gave negative accounts of their teachers, sometimes blaming them for school exclusion or disaffection. A recent London-based study found that teachers'

views of girls' 'bad' behaviour involved judgements based on gender normativity, and that this linked to instances of permanent exclusion (Carlile, 2009). Several girls in my study expressed an extreme dislike or hatred of school, mainly because the teachers were 'rude', other girls were 'bitchy' and because they were bored. Amira, excluded in Year 9, bluntly stated: 'I hated secondary school. It was rubbish [laughs]...Just wasn't a good school. The teachers were rubbish, half the time they didn't know what they was teaching, all the children there are facety[9], it's so hard to fit in. They're all rude and bitchy and arrogant and they're just annoying'. Kelly also disliked school, saying that she was bored, and that 'teachers are just there to teach and that's it – they don't wanna know nothing else'. Kelly's statement here is particularly striking, and indicated that school was unable to support pupils' pastoral needs. In contrast, the girls' emotional and practical needs were at the forefront of the provision at the VTP. While these girls' orientations towards school were negative, the fact that they attended the VTP (albeit with a financial incentive) suggested that education was very important to them. As Gillies and Robinson (2010) describe in relation to their ethnographic study of 'challenging pupils' in school behaviour support units, the pupils were not disengaged from learning; their problems were often exacerbated by being marginalised in school.

Jade's description of her school exclusion needs to be contextualised in terms of the structural disadvantages that continue to affect some minority ethnic groups in schools. Institutional racism continues to play a role in racial inequalities in the education system (Gillborn, 2005; Warren, 2007), and black students have historically been and continue to be over-represented in school exclusion statistics (Wright et al, 1999; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Ethnic inequalities in attainment are persistent, with African-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils in particular retaining a disadvantaged position (Mirza, 2009). School exclusion is inextricably linked to poverty and social deprivation (Macrae et al, 2003), and it is important to note the structural factors on a policy level which continue

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[9] Jamaican/London slang meaning rude [see www.urbandictionary.com].

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to disadvantage minority ethnic groups, such as the freezing of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant, money which was ringfenced for the support of minority ethnic groups (Archer and Francis, 2007), and the fact that until 2008, the highest grade achievable in the Foundation level GCSE maths was a D. Gillborn (2005) points out that the Foundation level is 'disproportionately taken by Black students' (496), students who are being failed before they have even begun.

The process of exclusion from school began for Jade when she was aged thirteen or fourteen and was excluded for forty-five days[10] for involvement with a robbery at school that she said was committed by an ex-boyfriend. She recounted to me the episode that had caused her to be permanently excluded:

> It was in my PE lesson and I was with a girl that I used to hang around with. I was kind of intimidated by her, because I was quite young and she was quite aggressive. And I can't remember quite why we done it, but we decided – she decided that she was gonna tie a tie round this girl's neck and she put the tie over there [indicates ceiling]. Basically, it was like she was trying to hang the girl and she told me to do it and I done it, like a idiot, to the other girl. And everyone was laughing and whatever, including the girls, coz the teacher came in and she pulled it down and everyone was laughing and everything, so we thought everyone, like it was a joke, or whatever. Then my teacher came and got me out of class and I was permanently excluded from the school.

Jade's move to a pupil referral unit and then to another school was concurrent with her running away from home, being placed in care, and being charged with common assault (for beating up a girl on the street with two other female friends) and placed under the supervision of a Youth Offending team for a year. This seems to have been a turning point for her ('from that day I've never got into crime again') and an important shedding of her 'bad girl' identity. Jade's disengagement from her first secondary school appeared to be

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[10] 45 days is the maximum time for a fixed-term exclusion from school, under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

heavily implicated with her sense of racial identity and experience of discrimination. She commented:

> I just felt like they didn't like black people. They were just so horrible - I remember there was a white boy, ginger boy, and he got expelled from school, and he'd done so much badness and he got expelled for slapping a teacher's arse, right, and he appealed and he got back in. Now, we appealed, and we didn't get back in. Do you know what I mean? ... They messed me up, man. I would have been perfectly fine if I'd stayed in school, but they kicked me out.

Jade here identifies the double standards that resulted in her permanent exclusion, analysing the situation as one in which institutional racism meant that she could no longer remain in mainstream schooling. Deborah Youdell argues that the marginality of black femininity in the school system renders black girls as 'bad students – a constitution that...is inseparable from their subject positions as Black girls [and which] clashes with a normative notion of the good student-ideal learner' (2006: 122). For Youdell, Jade would be what she calls an 'impossible learner', someone who, because of her racialised bad girl identity, is a bad student before she has even begun. Youdell stresses that there is no straight-forward inverse relationship between school and subcultural values, and that learner identities are not fixed or simply taken up; however, she implies that there exists a deeply sedimented institutional racism in schools.

‘Race' and racism took on an increasingly important part in my study, as I have detailed in Chapter 3. As Tracey Reynolds (2005) points out, Caribbean mothering occurs in the specific context of racism. The fact that the girls were not, with the exception of Jade, bringing up racism in constructing their experiences of school disaffection, obviously does not imply the absence of racism and racial inequalities in school. Gillborn and Youdell (2000) describe how the pupils in their ethnographic study in two London schools in the mid-90s were not prepared to explicitly name racism at the outset of their research. I

also do not know how interaction with the girls might have differed had I not been a white researcher. However, because 'race' and racism formed an important part of Jade's educational and biographical narrative, and because of the continuing racial injustices in the school system, I wanted to explore and situate her story in a wider educational context. I felt that I could not do justice to Jade's story without interrogating her understanding of her racial identity and experiences.

Girls in Archer *et al*'s (2007) study of 'at risk' pupils in London schools constructed bad behaviour as being 'loud' and 'speaking their mind', and experiences of conflict as a result of this behaviour were pronounced among minority ethnic girls. Jade refuses to submit to the confines of 'proper' feminine discourse in speaking her mind to Katherine, and it seems likely that she was outspoken in this way at school also. As Archer *et al* suggest, 'girls' assertions of "loud", active and visible femininities can be understood as challenging the forms of submissive, passive and quiet femininity that are usually rewarded within schools...such...behaviours may bring young women into conflict with schools because they are interpreted as deviant and undesirable aspects of femininity' (555). The intersection of Jade's 'race', class and gender position, together with her bad girl behaviour and tendency to 'speak my mind: if I've got something to say, I'll say it', conspired in her permanent exclusion from school.

I was struck by the experiences of Farisha when examined alongside those of Jade. Farisha was a girl of black Caribbean heritage who became pregnant at the age of 15 during her GCSE year. She lived with her mother and brother, and saw her father 'once in a while'. Her boyfriend was a year older than her and Farisha told me that she became pregnant the first time she had sex due to a split condom. Farisha made an appointment for an abortion but changed her mind, deciding that it wasn't right. She had plans to be a youth worker, and did not want to go to university, although her mum was encouraging her to do so. Farisha, aged 16 at the time of interview, was a quiet and serious girl whom I found difficult to interview because she responded to many of my questions with

monosyllabic 'yes', 'don't know' or 'no' answers. However, her narrative around her educational experiences was particularly interesting:

> Farisha: At first I liked school. And then I hated it, coz I didn't get along with the teachers.
>
> ...
>
> Naomi: Why didn't you get on with the teachers in secondary school?
>
> Farisha: Because they're too rude. They think, yeah, I don't know how to explain it, but they don't like to listen to what students have to say, innit, and I'm a person who if you don't listen to me, then we won't get along. So I don't get along with half the teachers.
>
> Naomi: Was it a problem with racism?
>
> Farisha: No. I think they just thought I was too rude, so they don't like me.
>
> Naomi: You don't strike me as very rude [laughs]! Were you rude at school?
>
> Farisha: Yeah, to the teachers. If they got rude to me, then I'm not a person who will just sit there and take it, I will talk back, that's why I was always in trouble.
>
> Naomi: Mm. But you did your GCSEs.
>
> Farisha: Yeah.
>
> Naomi: And what did you get in your GCSEs?
>
> Farisha: Better than they said. Coz they said erm, well actually, not all of them. Some of them said I'd get, I was predicted around 2 Cs and then the rest Es and Fs. But I actually got all Ds except for Science – Science I got a F.

Although Farisha was, in my experience, much less of a bold and outspoken girl than Jade, the similarities in their self-constructions as assertive were striking. Farisha here constructs her negative experiences at school as a result of her rudeness to teachers – she identifies that although she disliked the teachers because *they* were 'too rude', the reason she was 'always in trouble' was because she 'talked back' to them. She explicitly denies that racism was at play here. However, at the same time as constructing herself as at fault for getting in trouble, Farisha indicates her strength of character and ability to challenge teachers in her characterisation of herself as 'not a person who will just sit there and take

it'. In another act of resistance, Farisha also points out to me that her GCSE results exceeded her teachers' lower expectations of her. Heidi Mirza (1992), in her ethnographic study of black girls' education in two London comprehensives, describes how the girls dealt with teachers' negative evaluations of them by challenging these low expectations and criticising the teachers. These girls, she argues, were driven by a 'desire to succeed against the odds' (Mirza, 2006: 144). Archer *et al* (2007) also evidence the continued problem of lower teacher expectations of minority ethnic students.

Many of the girls expressed a liking for primary school but a dislike of secondary school. Farisha's description of problems beginning in secondary school was mirrored in other girls' accounts:

Naomi: How did you get on at secondary school?

Kelly: Oh, I didn't like it at all...I was in and out of trouble all the time. Having fights, getting kicked out. I was quite bad in school.

Naomi: Why was that, do you think?

Kelly: I was bored.

Mia: I was there [primary school] for a few years, and I got on really well in that school. Secondary school...I didn't really get on. I had a lot of troubles there. Bullying...It was hard, I was scared I was terrified even to come through the school gates.

The girls' accounts of secondary schooling involve common narratives of 'badness', physical violence leading to exclusion, being 'rude', and of bullying. It is notable that these girls' behaviour led to exclusion for Jade and to 'always [being] in trouble' for Farisha, and I have demonstrated how this behaviour and its consequences need to be seen in the context of the school experiences of minority ethnic students and of institutional racism. The girls' self-constructions as 'bad' (Jade) and 'rude' (Farisha), and as unwilling to sit back and take things, are striking, and in this sense it could be argued that the girls

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take responsibility for their behaviour, although ultimately they place explanations for their difficulties on teacher racism (Jade) and the teachers being 'rude' and undermining her capabilities (Farisha).

School exclusion: Samantha

Samantha, pregnant at 18 and one of only three white girls in my study, was the only girl who had planned her pregnancy without the history of a previous complication.[11] Samantha was a girl who appeared to me as subdued in group interaction with the other girls, but who had many extended self-narratives and was articulate in interview. She always wore her long straight blond hair in two immaculate French plaits with a middle parting and large silver hoop earrings. Samantha was the second oldest of six children; her parents were together, but she, like her older sister, had to move out of home when she was 15 because she was arguing with her parents. Samantha had been with her 24-year-old Congolese boyfriend for five years and she described him as 'one in a million'. While many of the girls in my study followed a pattern of what could be described as 'chaotic' contraceptive careers (Williamson, 2007), Samantha was unusual in her abstinent attitude towards condom use in the context of her long-term relationship:

> he's [boyfriend] my best friend so, it's like I known him for ever and I trust him.... I think it's different to use a condom, like if you use a condom there's no trust in the relationship, you're just sleeping with someone, and I don't see it as that.

Her implication here that using condoms indicates a lack of trust in the relationship strongly echoes the findings of research conducted with young women in the *Women, Risk and AIDS Project* in the late 80s (Holland *et al*, 1998). Samantha lost her virginity to her boyfriend at the age of 14 and had never used contraception, saying that the fact that she

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[11] Several other girls had planned their pregnancies as a response to prior abortion or loss of a baby.

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had not got pregnant earlier was 'a miracle'. Samantha had very strong views about what constituted good and responsible mothering, repudiating women who drank and smoked during pregnancy, and like Farisha, used the word 'stupid' to describe women who had abortions.

Samantha's educational story was particularly difficult, her experience of being bullied having started in primary school, yet it was also one of defiance and achievement in the face of this difficulty. The secondary school that Samantha had attended was notable for being a relatively high-attaining school in the borough league table; most of the girls in my study attended schools which were either very low in attainment, judged inadequate, or had recently been placed in special measures by Ofsted. Karen, (the manager at the VTP) after much deliberation between this school and the highest-achieving school in the borough, decided to send her daughter to this school (the same school as Samantha had attended), and was happy with it. Samantha's pathway out of the school, however, happened before she was pregnant, and in her narrative the school played a passive role in this:

Samantha: It's a nice school, but I got bullied there, until Year 9, and I dropped out coz I started smoking and stuff.

Naomi: You dropped out coz you were being bullied?

Samantha: Mm.

Naomi: What kinds of things were happening?

Samantha: They were calling me vampire, it was just dumb words, coz I sucked my thumb, and I've got a gap and I got them fangs. It used to really hurt. I don't pay attention to anyone any more, coz it's just malicious. And then yeah, in Year 9 I was smoking cannabis and my boyfriend was like, you need to go back to school coz your parents are blaming me, and I went back to school just to get social services off my mum and dad's back. I dropped out in Year 11 coz my mum kicked me out.

Naomi: So the school didn't come to try and get you back?

Samantha: The school did, but my uniform was at home and my mum wouldn't let me in, and the school wouldn't take me without my uniform so they just told me to continue on what I'm doing and wished me all the luck with the future. I suppose you learn from your experiences.

Naomi: Didn't the local educational authority get involved and try to take you to a pupil referral unit or something?

Samantha: No. ...

Naomi: So you didn't take any GCSEs?

Samantha: No. We were taking our mocks and my mum kicked me out, so I missed out on a lot.

Samantha's drifting through a series of problems into exclusion that seemed to culminate in an institutional lack of responsibility was troublesome for me to get to grips with. She indicated the difficulty she had in thinking about her schooling at such a time of personal trauma:

Naomi: And then what did you do during the day with yourself?

Samantha: Worrying about what am I gonna do next. Like you can't think about education in that time, you just think about what am I gonna do, I'm actually in a situation like, and then once you get yourself back on your feet and you know, by the time I moved to the hostel I knew what I was gonna do, I knew I was going back to college and I knew what I was going to study. I've always wanted to be a [nursery] teacher, so childcare was the only option at that time anyway, so I did childcare and I did work experience.

Samantha constructed her story as one in which she had 'been through more than teenagers go through' and in which she was now 'really proud of what I've achieved'. Karen also commented to me that Samantha was a 'sweet girl, but oh, what she's been through'. Samantha's story indicates how apparently 'easy' it can be to simply disengage from school, and her description of being a victim of bullying was a familiar one in the context

of other girls' accounts. Similarly to many of the other girls, she had gone through challenging personal experiences that made focusing on schooling very difficult.

Although Samantha had for a time lost focus with regard to her own education, she was able to think about the kind of education she envisaged for her daughter, one that contrasted with her own:

> I know my boyfriend will be there in the evenings, but he won't be there at the night, and it's always down to the mother, and I'd rather stay at home and be a good mum and then go and develop a career. Coz I don't want my child to go to a secondary school - I want it to go to a private school, coz I just wanna see how it is. I wanna see if she can get better grades doing that way. I know it's kind of like, it sounds a bit stupid, but I just wanna see the difference in the grades that you get in private school than you do in secondary school. Coz I've heard that, like one of my best friends, she's got all A stars, and she was in private school. I'm not saying my child could achieve that, but she might. And I just want the best for my child, and if that means costing hundreds and thousands of pounds, I'll do it. And when she's in nursery and primary school, I'll work my arse off in college, just to make sure my child gets the best.

Her narrative here echoes the common maternal discourse of wanting the best for her child, and particularly to make up for what she herself missed out on. Like Jade, she equates giving her child the best with financial provision, in this case to pay for her daughter's education. Perhaps Samantha places more emphasis on her daughter's education, with a vision of privately educating her, as a form of compensation for her own negative experience of school. Her determination in this was considerable; as she said to me, 'some people think I'm a pushover, and I'm really not'. In spite of her boyfriend's commitment and involvement, Samantha recognises that the main responsibility for the child is always 'down to the mother', and identifies being at home with her daughter in her early years as constituting 'good mothering'.

Samantha and Jade construct different responses to their respective disadvantage. While Jade refuses the fragility of being a victim of disadvantage, constructing herself as a bad girl (now reformed), Samantha positions herself as a victim of bullying, yet putting up a quieter and more private response to this. Both girls use their new maternal identities to distance themselves from their negative school experiences, and to demonstrate their ambition for themselves and for their children. Pregnancy is used as a way of mobilising a responsible, maternal identity, a shift away from victimhood (for Samantha) or badness (for Jade), and a resource in achieving an optimistic stance towards the future. The girls make shifts from 'bad (or bullied) girl' to 'good mother' identities, shifts that mirror their transitions from educational exclusion to inclusion.

Educational exclusion and re-inclusion: Taylor

All of the girls in my study had re-engaged with their education following previous difficulties with school, and all of them intended to continue with their education in one form or another at some point after their babies were born. In this section I focus on Taylor as an example of one girl for whom the antenatal provision appeared to be a convenient stepping-stone in her educational journey. Taylor was at the time of interview aged 17 and seven months pregnant. She was of Black African and Caribbean parentage, and lived alone, having moved out of home at 16, but was in a relationship with her baby's father, aged 21. Taylor had an extremely lively personality and I enjoyed a lot of interaction with her. Almost every time I observed her in the setting, she was wearing enormous gold heart-shaped earrings, a pink cap not quite on her head properly over hair in two long plaits, a black hooded top or a white one with a monkey print on it, and grey tracksuit bottoms.

Taylor's education had been extremely disrupted due to her truanting and fighting at secondary school:

Naomi: What did you do to get kicked out [of school in Year 9]?

Taylor: I'd been suspended about seven times for erm, fighting and for truanting. I kept on truanting. Coz one time I truanted, like me and my friend Selina, we went to go and see David Blaine in the box thing. Yeah, so, I don't care, it was good, yeah, and he waved at us. And, yeah, and then the headteacher, I don't know how, but he had people there following, you know, they know, they know, and they had us on CCTV on the camera, and they just knew. It was exciting, innit? I got suspended for that. I couldn't believe it. I got suspended for fighting with this girl called Lianne. And I got suspended for fighting with this other girl called Emma. I got, I kept on getting suspended for smoking in the toilets, smoking in the bushes, erm smoking [laughs], basically smoking, innit?

Naomi: Was it physical fighting?

Taylor: Yeah, physical fighting, not verbal. They wouldn't really kick you out for verbal. They just put you on report, innit, headteacher's report, you know what I'm saying? But I was already, but I'd gone past the headteacher's report. The headteacher just wanted me out of the school, so I just thought, I'll leave your stinky school, innit. Like, your school's not even that good *anyway*. I wanted to go to Manorview, but they didn't accept me [sighs]. And then after that I was just out of school, you know when you just don't really bother.

...

Naomi: And then what happened?

Taylor: Even the shit schools they wouldn't accept me. But, so then I just like, not even, you know like when people just don't go to school. Stayed at home, smoked fags.

Taylor's narrative of her involvement in physical fighting at secondary school was, again, a familiar one, and it produces her as a tough, 'bad' girl. Her emphasis on the number of times she had been suspended for bad behaviour rendered her string of suspensions almost as an achievement. Her narrative here, however, ends in a downbeat, regretful fashion, indicating that Taylor had given up on her schooling. Similarly to Jade, Taylor indicates that it was an unwarranted response from the headteacher to her as an individual that

caused her exclusion from school. Taylor's use of derogatory terms to describe her school and other 'shit schools' and her desire to go to a different one suggests that she was well aware of schools' league table rankings and that this negatively affected her perception of her school. While the school she attended until Year 9 is an averagely-rated mixed comprehensive, the school she wanted to go to is, interestingly, a voluntary-aided girls' Catholic school with extremely high results. This suggests that Taylor did in fact have educational aspirations but, I surmise, that her behaviour was such that other schools were reluctant to take her on.

Taylor's disengagement from school began at 14, before she was pregnant for the first time, aged 16. Taylor told me that she had become sexually active at the age of 12. Having been excluded from school at 14 in Year 9, Taylor entered a pupil referral unit and then attended a college in Years 10 and 11, where she gained Maths, English and Science GCSEs at grades E, F, and U as well as some Key Skills. She became pregnant the first time shortly after this with a previous boyfriend who had told her he wasn't ready to be a father. She consequently decided to have an abortion 'before I get too attached, but I was attached', suffering from depression after the termination:

> Naomi: And then what happened when you left the college?
>
> Taylor: … I was supposed to start one course for, erm, I wanted to do, erm…sports science. Yeah, sports science, but I was pregnant. I found out when I was pregnant them times, innit? I wasn't really bothered about doing anything apart from being sick, being depressed and crying. So I never really, that never really followed through, innit. That's it really.
>
> Naomi: So then you had the abortion, and then what did you do after that?
>
> Taylor: And then I just [pause] didn't really do nothing for two months and then I went to back to the college, and I done a childcare course. I was there for like about two months. I was a bit depressed about the abortion so learning about babies wasn't really my thing.

You know what I'm saying? I wasn't really doing anything until I come here, I'm not even gonna lie. I weren't doing nothing. That's it really.

Taylor painted a graphic picture of despair here, lifted only upon coming to the VTP. Taylor told me that two years previously she had decided she wanted to become a physiotherapist. In spite of this desire, following her termination she started a childcare course. Similarly to Samantha, who had felt that childcare was the 'only option', Taylor followed a stereotypically gendered (and low status) vocational path (see Carlile, 2009).

It was only upon becoming pregnant for the second time that she began to attend the VTP. Taylor appeared to me to be thriving in this environment, describing it as 'relaxed', 'friendly' and 'supportive', and 'not too college-y, you know what I'm saying, where you just get down, and if you don't do your coursework they kick you off the course'. Taylor found the antenatal course valuable for its teaching about motherhood and for its social aspects, and she enjoyed mixing with other pregnant girls. Given her disrupted educational trajectory and her low level of GCSE grades, it seemed to me that the academic aspects of the course on offer and the low-pressure environment were well suited to Taylor, and that her being on the course represented her educational re-inclusion. It thus became possible, remarkably, for Taylor to gain access to an education, and to move beyond her previous position as an 'impossible learner'.

Schooling the pregnant teenager

In spite of significant improvements in the awareness of the problem of education for the pregnant teenager and in social support and provision, exclusionary effects continue. The experiences of girls becoming pregnant in school are still entwined with racist practices, with discourses of inappropriate sexual conduct and stigmatised reliance on benefits, and with the exclusions that result from the neoliberal educational policy focus

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on school 'choice' and exam results as indicators of success. As Shereen Benjamin (2002) remarks, 'the standards agenda positions students to whom normative versions of success are not accessible as marginal, thus producing the conditions of exclusion within a system that claims to be moving towards inclusion' (136). The gendered effects of neoliberal policies have meant that middle-class girls are perceived as the hardest working, 'ideal clients' in a highly masculinised school system (Dillabough *et al*, 2008). I have tried to show here how Jade, Samantha, Farisha and Taylor experienced the process of marginalisation from school, and yet how their pregnancies allowed them to steer their narratives away from a sense of failure.

Inadequate educational provision continues to be a problem for pregnant young women, and it is notable that girls attending FE colleges are still often channelled into traditionally feminine and low-paid vocational work (Osler and Vincent, 2003). School responses to pupil pregnancy can vary enormously (Vincent and Thomson, 2010). Sabrina, a girl of black Caribbean heritage pregnant at fifteen while doing her GCSEs, attended the school which was at the bottom of the borough league table and which had been judged inadequate by Ofsted at its last inspection. She told me[12] that her teachers had been negative about her pregnancy. Sabrina achieved good grades in her GCSEs in spite of her pregnancy and wanted to go to a local sixth form college to do A levels (her school did not have a sixth form), but the college would not take her pregnant. During her first interview Sabrina told me she wanted to be an accountant, but after her daughter was born she appeared less sure. She still intended to go to the same sixth form college the following September to do her A levels, but in the short term was concerned with getting a part-time job.

In her study conducted almost two decades ago, Mirza (1992) documents the school's reaction to the pregnancy of a black girl in the fifth form[13]:

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[12] Sabrina did not want to be taped.
[13] Year 11, aged 16 or 17

> The reaction to Anita's pregnancy revealed that the control of black female sexuality presented a constant and underlying concern with regard to the schooling of young black women....The shame of the event was evident....the staff who had previously professed an interest in Anita's academic ability as one of the most promising students of the fifth year washed their hands of the matter. They made no attempt to assist her in her studies or to advise her on her educational future...Because the obvious expression of her sexuality had caused the school embarrassment, Anita was now regarded as being an immoral individual...
>
> (Mirza, 1992: 72)

Due to the fact that most of the girls in my study were at college when they became pregnant, and that I was only able to conduct one school-based interview, it is difficult for me to comment on schools' reaction to pregnancies at the current time. It is striking, however, that Mirza's description does have contemporary resonances, particularly with the notions of black underachievement and of shame and immorality in relation to teenage pregnancy.

As I detailed in the previous chapter, I was able to interview a professional from Greenvale school, which was the school that several of the girls at the VTP, including Christina, had attended. Caroline was the school's Connexions Personal Advisor and the Head of Careers, and she had many years of experience in social and youth work. She presented Greenvale as a harmonious environment, very strong on discipline, with an extremely popular headteacher. When I turned off the tape recorder at the end of the interview Caroline told me she loved her job and she loved the kids, which had been evident to me throughout the interview. Her description of the school's response to pregnancy was positive:

> The school is really good. Obviously we'd rather it didn't happen because it's impacting on their education, but they don't hide them away. It's very very supportive, they're protected, it's a need-to-know basis, because it's very confidential, ...there isn't any stigma attached to them. And often they stay on until they start showing and become a little bit embarrassed. There was one girl not last year but the year before who actually did her GCSEs just before she delivered. ...And yeah, they do get support, they can definitely stay on – if they want to stay on there's always that support for them to stay on. And there will

always be work sent home if they're not well. But if they don't want to stay on, they're referred on to someone who can support them outside the school.

Caroline did not have direct responsibility for pregnant girls in the school, and so it was difficult to ascertain either the scale of pregnancies in the school (I assumed it must be larger than average for the borough given that so many of the girls at the VTP had attended the school) or the numbers of pregnant girls who did not access either school-based education or alternative provision. Caroline went on to indicate her view that the current situation was not ideal, and that it would be ideal for pregnant girls to receive individual tuition at home, though she realised this would be very costly.

While I noted with interest Caroline's description of the school as very supportive of girls who became pregnant, I couldn't help thinking back to what I had first seen when I entered the school reception. The display of successful exam results for public scrutiny reflected the major issue that schools are forced to focus upon, often to the neglect of concerns other than qualifications, and literally to the neglect of students who may not be deemed capable of achieving five A*-C grades at GCSE. The current pressure that schools face to make gains in the borough league table and to avoid government intervention as a 'failing school' is immense, and cannot but impact upon some pupils' well-being. As Pring (2009) has pointed out, the government response to educational 'failure' has been to set targets (for GCSE attainment, NEET reduction, and so on), a strategy that has utterly failed to take into consideration the social and economic context within which schools operate, causing a culture of school-blaming for students' 'failure' to achieve certain standards. Pring argues that there is a need to think differently about the purposes of education and what 'quality of learning' means. He suggests that the continuing divide between academic and vocational learning has meant a failure to recognise the importance of practical and experiential learning. Further, there is a need for an increase in collaborative learning systems, with, for example, more joined up thinking between

education and social services. Finally, he emphasizes that the 'professional role of the teacher has been emasculated by the centralised and detailed organisation of learning by the government operating through targets and through ever more restrictive specifications for learning' (203). The dominance of the language of performance management has meant the erosion of the view of the teacher as expert and her creative role being undermined.

The fact of the provision of special and separate educational units and programmes, like the one under study, indicates the possibility of moving across the spectrum of educational provision to a model that does in fact offer 'quality of learning', if not in an academic sense. Clearly there is the potential for the programme to operate in a more collaborative way with local schools and colleges, especially given the three-day week. In some respects this kind of provision operates as a response to the failure of mainstream education to respond to the diverse needs of young people and to recognition of the fact that education should not and cannot simply revolve around 'teaching to the test'. It is clear that my participants highly valued their education, but that they were not indifferent to the context and manner in which it was offered to them. They frequently emphasised the importance of the relaxed and intimate environment in which tutors were able to respond to their pastoral as well as their academic needs.

Conclusion

Archer *et al* (2007) argue that educational success for urban, working-class girls 'appears "impossible" because the girls inhabit social positionings and embodied identities that are always already read as "wrong" within dominant educational discourses' (565). The pregnant teenage body can be read as 'wrong' or as better off elsewhere, outside mainstream education. Many of these girls have been 'bad', 'wrong' and 'impossible', and even embrace this identification. Jade describes her former self as 'bad' on two occasions

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in the interview, and refers to the pupil referral unit she attended as containing 'badness' and other pupils there having a 'bad vibe'. Perhaps Jade was told on so many occasions that she was bad that she came to take this on as part of her discursive identity. Indeed, she uses this as a narrative resource to construct her contrasting, reformed self. Perhaps also she was proud of her badness, linking it with being rebellious and not following rules, and ultimately with being able to stand up for herself.

In this chapter I have argued that the girls used pregnancy and re-inclusion into education to make an identity transition from 'bad girls' to 'good mothers'. Interestingly, it is more possible and acceptable for them to formulate themselves as 'bad girls' than 'bad mothers'. This can be seen as a classed issue, whereby having less cultural capital means that working-class girls must work hard to compensate for educational disadvantage by demonstrating good mothering. Attending the VTP made it easy for them to activate a positive learning identity. There is a clear sense here of a re-valuing of education coinciding with a desire to be a responsible mother, which implies the value in education, leading to employment, leading to being able to provide 'the best' - notably in financial terms - for a child. Securing educational advantage for one's child is increasingly central to the definition of 'good mothering' in the contemporary period (Vincent, 2010). The girls' negative accounts of their schooling, revealing an absence of parental intervention, contrasted with their aspirations for their own children's education. The girls were able to achieve educational inclusion for themselves by virtue of their becoming mothers and the educational opportunities afforded them by the VTP following previous school exclusion.

I have also demonstrated the difficulty that schools may experience in including challenging students, particularly in the face of a forced focus on results and targets. The creation of the concept of 'failing schools' operates as a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that students in these schools understand all too well the school's low status, which then creates a negative relationship to their education. What can be seen in the girls' narratives is a shift from a failure in school to a success in motherhood, a success that is bound up with a

re-engagement with education, something that the VTP programme allowed and encouraged them to do (and that school did not). Given that the girls appeared to flourish in the programme at the VTP, it is hard to argue that these girls were impossible learners. Their problems occurred in their negative relationships with authority in secondary school, a period during which many girls constructed themselves as 'bad' or 'rude' or became involved in violent incidents. The links between dislike of school and teenage pregnancy are no coincidence. For most of the girls, the school system worked to exclude - or simply did not work positively to include - them.

6.   Learning for labour and motherhood

Introduction

This chapter examines the means through which the girls come to learn about childbirth and motherhood in the setting. The girls learn a great deal about pregnancy, labour and parenting over the duration of the course, and this education takes many different forms. I set the girls' education for motherhood - their 'empowerment' in becoming knowledgeable, caring subjects - against the tension of their regulation into 'good mothers'. This is a complex set of interactions and should not be seen as a binary construction whereby formal education is considered a process of straightforward transmission from teacher to learner. The girls' peer interactions constitute informal learning; they regulate and exclude each other using discourses of 'good mothering' to distinguish themselves from other 'bad mothers'. They also sometimes resist attempts to educate them. I will show that the educational process that occurs in the setting equally should not be seen simply as an attempt to teach 'middle-class' mothering practices to working-class young women, even if this is what the broader policy discourse implies and intends. The chapter demonstrates the many ways in which the tutors identify with the girls and how this often eases the educational interactions in the setting. After looking at the more formal learning structures in the setting, I go on to examine the ways in which knowledge is constructed and circulates in the setting, and how the girls, while being positioned by their 'lack' of appropriate knowledge, use processes of regulation and exclusion to affirm themselves as good and competent mothers.

I examine the girls' education for motherhood by focusing on different kinds of childbirth and parenting education revealed in episodes that I witnessed in the course of my fieldwork – antenatal sessions run by two midwives, a birthing film shown to the girls by

the tutors, and a session during which the girls studied parenting skills. These episodes formed part of the girls' regular preparation for labour and motherhood in the setting. The antenatal sessions occurred once a month, the birthing films were put on quite frequently as new girls came into the setting, and the study of parenting skills formed part of the postnatal (sister parenting) course that I observed towards the end of my fieldwork in a different location. These occasions were as much of a learning experience for me as they were for the girls. Although learning about pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood forms only part of the official curriculum (which includes basic skills, creative skills, money management, healthy eating and future planning) at the setting, these issues dominated discussions and of course pregnancy was the one thing that all the girls had in common.

While all pregnant women 'must be guided or disciplined into the correct modes of behaviour' (Gross and Pattison, 2007: 2), the particular attention currently paid to women considered potentially unfit to mother has a long history in the context of the education of working-class girls and women in Britain. The Maternity and Child Welfare Act of 1918, which established child welfare services including nurseries, clinics and health visitors, was aimed at monitoring working-class mothers 'to ensure that they did their proper job of bearing and rearing healthy children "correctly"' (Skeggs, 1997: 44). Bowlby's heritage, strongly felt in the 1950s and 1960s, ensured that the presence of mothers was seen as vital in children's development (Arnot et al, 1999). Rose (1999 [1989]) has described how 'the environment of the growing child' has come to be regulated 'pedagogically through programmes of education directed at the parent-to-be' (123). He observes that since the 1960s, the mother has been incorporated 'as an actual or potential ally into pedagogic programmes advocated by reformers' (182), with the importance of 'the early years' meaning that the mother's pedagogy must precede the teacher's for the sake of her child's development. In 1960s America, the Head Start programme sought to provide an intervention of 'compensatory education' in order to break 'the cycle of poverty' (194) apparent in deprived communities. This programme was an inspiration for Sure Start in

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the UK initiated by the Labour government in 1998, which was a cornerstone initiative in their determination to pursue 'early intervention' as a way to tackle social exclusion.

The anxieties that govern the framework and thinking around the moral panic of teenage pregnancy are fuelled by assumptions that teenagers, whether due to their age or social class, will be inadequate mothers, unable to provide for their children emotionally, educationally or financially. Psychoanalytic theories of maternal caring have stressed the need to have experienced 'good-enough mothering', a concept introduced by Winnicott in 1953, in order to provide a basis for the relational capacity for parenting (Chodorow, 1999 [1978]), or to put it another way, that early maternal care 'is a prototype for the capacity to care' (Hollway, 2006: 128). Programmes of educational intervention such as the one I studied target the poor, 'socially-excluded' mother-to-be, the pregnant teenager who does not read parenting books and whose own mothering may not have been 'good enough', and who is therefore at risk of perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage. The contrast between assumptions made about the competencies of working-class and middle-class potential mothers is a stark one. Some of the books written recently for mothers-to-be are addressed to a very specific (middle-class) audience. Psychotherapist Naomi Stadlen's (2004) *What Mothers Do* is exclusively addressed to the middle-class woman who has supposedly been socialised into a career woman and consequently may never have held a baby and will not be prepared for the shock of motherhood, unable any longer to recognise her familiar efficiency and unable to see mothering as work. Stadlen wants to increase the status of the loving, socialising, vital work that mothers do without realising it or without others recognising it. In contrast, lots of the girls in my study had held and cared for babies and young children prior to becoming pregnant and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, many described themselves as ready and prepared for motherhood.

Classed differences in motherhood and mothering practices were never far from the surface in my interactions with the girls. One afternoon in the setting, when I introduced myself to Taylor, a black girl who was seventeen and seven months pregnant at the time,

and told her I was studying motherhood, she grinned at me, and asked me where I was studying and what I'd 'found out about motherhood'. When I said I was studying young mothers, she asked, 'what, like how we're different?' I was momentarily thrown by her question, but told her no, that everyone did motherhood differently. Later on, during a discussion about birthing methods, Taylor told me that she did not want a water birth, informing me that 'posh people – like you – have water births'. One of the midwives working in the setting, Katherine, stressed to me how different the antenatal sessions with the girls were from the ones she ran for older, middle-class mothers. As I will discuss later, Katherine was largely referring to the structure of the classes and the difficulty that she had with the girls as a group that she felt reflected the difficulties many of them had had with formal education. This focus on classed differences, however, somewhat homogenises the girls as 'teenage mothers', obscuring the differences between them and the ways in which these are manifest. As I will show later in this chapter, the girls maintained an active process of trying to draw the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate maternal behaviour.

'You're learning about something that's happening to you.'

One of the key differences between the girls' experiences at school and in this setting was the fact of the centring and valuing of their personal experience. Kelly's comment that I quoted in the previous chapter that teachers were simply there to teach and did not want to know about anything else was not borne out in this setting. The tutors were devoted to care of the girls, as pregnant and sometimes vulnerable young women and as future mothers, and to care of their babies. The girls more often than not returned to the setting after they had given birth to show everyone their babies, sometimes when they were only a few weeks old. The babies were admired and held and fed by the tutors and the other girls. The girls were encouraged by the tutors to go to the weekly yoga class

provided as part of the course, as well as to eat healthily, to give up smoking, to breastfeed, and to consider what they might do educationally after they had their babies. None of this was coercive, or delivered with anything other than a loving commitment to the girls' and their babies' well-being. The girls appeared to relish being on the course, making friends, and enjoying personal attention from the tutors. As part of the creative projects required by the course, they spent many hours making baby books and picture frames for their unborn children; they often put nursery rhymes and fairy tales in these books, and pictures for their child of its parents and grandparents or scan pictures of the baby from the hospital, and sometimes I had my breath taken away by the painstaking care that had gone into them. All the girls had opted to find out the sex of their babies and almost all had named them already. Samantha painted a pink picture frame and then printed her daughter's name on the top of it. Kyra wrote 'mummy' on the top of her picture frame, and then started on one that said 'daddy'. Kim drew a beautiful family tree in her baby book detailing all the members of her son's family. These activities allowed the girls to enjoy a space to engage with their babies on a creative level.

The one-to-one format of the care and teaching provided by the tutors was crucial to the way the programme worked and to the hybrid of antenatal and traditional education that it encompassed. It was a space in which care of the self was promoted as a technique, and in which practical information and guidance was given in relation to early motherhood. Samantha and Jade described to me what they got from the course:

> Samantha: When I wasn't doing the course, before I started I didn't really know anything. I didn't know how to sterilise bottles or breastfeed and stuff like that – I was gonna do it the way I wanted to do it. But you always need guidance and you don't wanna ask your parents coz they might think you're not ready for it and they wanna take it off your hands and stuff. Erm, I don't really want anyone's help, so this course has helped me a lot. Erm, plus you get like 50 pound a week, so that helps you buy essentials for the baby.

Jade: It's really helpful coz it opens your eyes to a lot of things. ... It's just really good educational-wise, it opens your eyes a bit more, coz I didn't know certain things. Like, even now I'm like, oh, when do you start giving the baby food – is it 3 months or 6 months, but I could come here and find out. There's always somebody to ask, and the teachers will – I don't even call them teachers, I don't know what to call them, yeah, but they're very supportive, very supportive. They'll help you. I was able to gain a key skill as well.

The setting operated as a safe place for the girls to learn things that they did not already know. Samantha indicates that this is a way of finding out information about motherhood without having to involve her parents. Some of the girls did not have good relationships with their mothers and therefore the learning in the setting took on a special importance. Some developed close relationships with the tutors, who would take on maternal roles. Taylor and Mia suggest that the course provides girls with the opportunity to meet other people in the same situation, and to provide girls with motivation after birth:

Taylor: ... trust me, if you're a pregnant woman, you don't wanna be around, you just really wanna be like, hibernate, like a mouse. You know what I mean, you're not really bothered about anyone apart from you and your child. So like meet other pregnant people that are on the same level. And like they're friendly, and the tutors are friendly and they're supportive. ... Everyone's just nice, everyone's funny. ... You're just there to learn, and you're learning about something that's happening to *you*.

Mia: I think this is really good, what they've done…it's a good course. It gives, erm, young mums, erm, better expectations, they know what they could do after doing this course. It could help them to move on - no I don't have to sit at home, I can do something.

Sabrina, who did not want to be recorded, told me that she found the course very sociable. Aged 16 and pregnant at 15, she was one of the youngest mothers-to-be I interviewed. She told me that she thought she would be left out because of her age, but said that her best friends on the course were Jade and Danielle, and that she found it hard to relate to friends who weren't pregnant, envisaging that she would keep in touch more with her friends from the course than with her other friends after she'd had her baby.

The girls were also able to learn from each other's experiences of labour and motherhood when mothers returned to the setting after childbirth, and the tutors sometimes used this as a teaching opportunity. One afternoon Rebecca returned to show everyone her six-month-old son. Leyla took the baby onto her knee and played with him, commenting on how mellow he was. Rebecca chatted with the girls, asking them their due dates, then asked me if I was pregnant, at which the girls laughed. Leyla asked Rebecca if she had any parenting advice to give the girls, to which she responded 'let them cry'. Leyla said, 'well, one question in the course is: can you spoil a baby?' She continued by telling the girls that when a baby is newborn they only thing they do is sleep and cry, and if they cry it means they need something, so you should not let a newborn cry. However, she said, when they're a few months old, they start to realise that if they cry they'll get something, so then you shouldn't pick them up on demand. Leyla, on this and many other occasions, used these informal situations to casually introduce her ideas about parenting to the girls.

Modelling successful 'working-class' mothering

An analysis of the relationships between the tutors and the girls revealed subtle affiliations and yet important differences between them. While their class backgrounds were similar - Leyla and Suzanne both identified as 'normal working-class' from the 'ghetto' - the tutors took on a didactic relationship to the girls, at the same time as forming

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caring relationships with them. Interestingly, Leyla, who was pregnant with her first child at 19, described herself as 'from a normal working-class family, I'm a normal working-class person myself'. Born in the UK to Turkish Cypriot parents, she left school after her GCSEs, dropped out of college after a year, and began working at 17. Leyla was 32 at the time of interview, just a year older than I was, and she became pregnant with her third child shortly afterwards. Leyla was a confident and physically very striking woman who exuded an air of glamour, and never seemed fazed by me turning up and observing her. She would frequently eat McDonalds and drink Coke with the girls and was preoccupied with losing weight, even though she was not remotely overweight. She also often emphasised to the girls how much better she felt having given up smoking after the introduction of the ban in public places, and that if she could do it, so could they. Leyla's authority was somehow mesmerising and reassuring, and her imparting of knowledge to the girls ranged from how to cope with childbirth to what to do with a crying baby to shopping. This was another passion she shared with the girls, and she and Suzanne would sometimes come back after lunch and try on and display an item of clothing they had just bought. She involved the girls in telling them about her engagement and forthcoming wedding and the girls advised her on the latest pregnancy tests when she was trying to get pregnant.

I experienced Leyla's alliance with the girls as a complicity that I was excluded from, being neither working-class, heterosexual, pregnant or a mother. While I occasionally felt that she was being too ostentatious about her personal life, I was fascinated by her self-confident performance of femininity and how she was modelling successful 'working-class' mothering for the girls. I discussed Leyla's parenting with her in interview. While very protective and defensive about the girls' early pregnancies, she admitted that she would be 'devastated' if her teenage daughter got pregnant, saying that she had 'high hopes for my children [aged 12 and 7], that they will study, go to university, have a career and then engage in that side of things'. She told me that a girl in her

daughter's class was pregnant and going to become a mother at 13, and I observed her say

to Suzanne on one occasion that she wasn't happy with her daughter's school (which was

the lowest-performing school in the borough) and that she wanted to get her out of it.

Leyla left the setting early every day in order to collect her daughters from different

schools, a process that took her nearly two hours.

I wanted to know what Leyla thought about the necessity or otherwise of teaching

pregnant teenagers, or indeed any pregnant woman, how to parent:

> Leyla: I think everybody could benefit from parenting skills because obviously times have
>
> changed, erm, what's acceptable and what isn't acceptable – years ago you'd get a
>
> backhand, that's no longer acceptable for parents.
>
> Naomi: Hitting?
>
> Leyla: Yes, hitting was acceptable and if you liked, something which worked bringing up
>
> children, but I don't agree with it personally and it's not accepted anyway. So I think some
>
> people don't really have the skills or the patience to learn some valuable skills like the
>
> naughty step, coz I do, I watch these parenting programmes
>
> Naomi: Supernanny?
>
> Leyla: Supernanny, I love it, my kids love it as well. We don't have a naughty step in our
>
> house – just talking alone does the job.

Leyla presents herself as a parent who is able to invest time in learning parenting skills,

and as able to discipline her children by 'talking alone' without resorting to the 'naughty

step'[14] or to physical punishment; she does not need Supernanny's strategies. Leyla is also

deeply invested in her children's education and does not expect them to follow an average

working-class trajectory. Leyla's narrative constructs her as a good mother who does not

allow her children to get out of control in the way that the 'failing' parents on Supernanny

do.

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[14] The naughty step is a technique used by Supernanny Jo Frost on her TV show, where parents send their children to sit alone and calm down rather than shouting or using other methods of discipline.

Much sociological work has investigated the differences between working- and middle-class parenting in relation to educational or childcare practices (Walkerdine *et al*, 2001; Ball, 2003; Gillies, 2007; Vincent *et al*, 2008), and has stressed that working-class family practices should not be seen as pathological, but as 'produced in an attempt to adapt to much more difficult conditions' (Walkerdine *et al*, 2001: 120). Working-class parents have limited economic resources with which to meet 'good mothering' criteria (Braun *et al*, 2008), and may be engaged in giving their children emotional resources to boost their resilience (Gillies, 2006). While the programmes I studied did not come under the umbrella of Sure Start, in theory they could have done, as their aims of supporting disadvantaged families and preventing social exclusion are similar. Val Gillies describes these kinds of interventions as a regulation of working-class childrearing practices, 'part of an almost evangelical drive to equip working-class parents with the skills to raise middle-class children' (2005: 838). However, when closely examined, it is not at all clear that in practice these sorts of initiatives work in this way. As Leyla's example demonstrates, at the same time as she is teaching the girls skills for childbirth, motherhood and life, she is also showing them that she is one of them, a working-class girl from the ghetto, and that she is a successful mother. Suzanne similarly identifies with the girls:

> because I grew up in this area, and a lot of them have, I can kind of relate to it, kind of connect, it's really weird, but I just know what they're going through. I can feel it, I've been there, I've been a single parent most of my life. I've travelled, I understand, erm, a lot of the mixed cultures ... I was on benefits, I had to go in a bed and breakfast, I can relate to them because I have actually been through it. ...I think that's maybe the difference that helps me to build that trusting relationship with them... and although I've progressed, I've still got the roots of the ghetto.

Suzanne was a 36-year-old white woman whose 13-year-old son's father was black. A significant number of the girls on the programme were of mixed parentage with white

mothers and black fathers and many of the white girls had black boyfriends, and Suzanne was able to identify with them in this respect. Suzanne was not together with her son's father, and once advised Lauren, who was having problems with her baby's father, to 'think of him as the sperm donor – that's what I do for my son's father because that's all he was good for'.

Suzanne also felt very strongly about the importance of parenting. When I asked her a question about teenage pregnancy and social exclusion she responded:

> I don't know, it's hard to be judgemental. A lot of things come down to parenting, I know
> to say that is, erm, it's really, I feel bad saying it, but as a parent myself, I can only hope,
> I've made it top of my list, as a parent myself, to install the right ethics and morals into my
> son so that he can grow up and be grounded and be a leader not a follower and all those
> things I've been conscious about as a parent. You may call me extra conscious or a normal
> parent, but some parents don't have that, and if they don't have that consciousness of
> bringing up their children and they don't worry about school and they don't support them,
> it comes down to that [Linda, who runs the adjacent childcare course, comes in]
> Naomi: I've got a question about Supernanny: what do you think about it?
> Suzanne: That one who goes to America and
> Naomi: She has been in America but she's on TV like every Tuesday or something
> Linda: She's the one with the naughty corner
> Suzanne: Oh I quite like her methods actually. From what I've seen. I used to do that with
> my son, just calmly send him to go and sit away – I don't believe in shouting, I don't
> believe in smacking, so I quite like her methods. She's quite firm, consistent. I'm only
> going by what I've seen, I've only seen one programme, but I quite liked it.

Suzanne stresses the importance of 'ethics and morals' for her son, and wonders if she is 'extra conscious or a normal parent', and also talks about having left school at 16, at the 'normal age'. In being a single parent without any support from her son's father, Suzanne

has had to raise her son in difficult conditions, similarly to many of the girls. Suzanne felt that a 'support network' for teenage mothers was important:

> if it's happening, and teenagers are deciding that they want to go ahead and have the baby – which is completely their right to do that – then the support network needs to be there in order to do that, coz otherwise we will have people bringing up children who maybe lack certain skills, certain knowledge, and that can be dangerous. ...most of them are actually incredible mums - when they come in with their babies, they're absolutely incredible and they surprise me every time, but I think sometimes with the immaturity, the mentality, just not living enough life, sometimes that worries me a little bit.

Even though here Suzanne refers to a 'lack', or uses a deficit discourse, it is contextualised in her statement that most of the girls are 'incredible mums'. This is a powerful adjective – the girls are not just adequate or good enough, but incredible. Overall, the tutors' message seems to be one of the girls needing *support* rather than a re-education; *help* rather than an evangelical approach to their becoming 'middle-class' parents.

Caroline, the Connexions worker at Greenvale School, had strong opinions about making distinctions between middle-class and working-class parenting:

> Naomi: Do you think that's [parenting classes] all necessary and a good idea, because there's been a lot of criticism of it for trying to make working-class parents like middle-class parents.
>
> Caroline: I think that's rubbish. ... Parenting's parenting. How are you gonna distinguish between middle-class parenting and working-class parenting? Good parenting is good parenting and I don't think there is a class barrier between them, or at least there shouldn't be. If you have a child and you love the child, then you want that child to be the very best the child can be. And if you're going to provide the support and guidance and love to make that child, it's not because you're a middle-class person why you're going to do that.

You're not going to be less of a parent because you're working-class, so rubbish, yes I do think it's necessary sometimes.

Caroline uses a 'common sense' discourse (that criteria of good parenting can be agreed upon and is not class-bound), and interestingly does not make any reference to the idea that working-class parents have fewer economic and cultural resources to bring to bear on their parenting. She implies that 'support and guidance and love' are things that every parent can and should provide. However, what Vincent (2010) calls 'professional mothering' (the practice of middle-class parents seeking out and evaluating advice in relation to their children) goes beyond support, guidance and love; this kind of mothering, Vincent argues, has become normalised and is universally promoted. I am arguing here that Caroline, Suzanne and Leyla did not necessarily see middle-class economic and cultural resources as crucial to successful parenting.

It is possible that I have idealised Leyla and Suzanne in their mothering practices, seizing every opportunity to portray them as model mothers in order to further my argument highlighting the false dichotomy of the good middle-class/bad working-class parenting binary, and to complicate the notion of middle-class parenting being imposed on working-class women. I did not agree with every aspect of Leyla's parenting philosophies. I have used my emotional responses in the research encounter to assist in reflexive analysis. When I write about Leyla's mothering, or about feeling a strong emotional and maternal attachment to Christina, it is clearly not a rational explanation following an observation of her actions, but rather an observation of emotions in the research process, an attempt to 'take love seriously' (Smart, 2007). From my perspective, Leyla's and Suzanne's successful mothering involved love not only for their own children but a loving understanding of and identification with the girls. The way that love was deployed and modelled in different ways in the setting was very powerful, and appeared to me to run as an undercurrent to many of the interactions between the staff and the girls.

Antenatal sessions

Once a month two midwives came to the setting to provide an antenatal session. Katherine (the more experienced of the two midwives) ran the sessions, and her dedication, patience and love for the girls was evident in a similar way to the tutors'. She was very interested in my study, and lost no time in telling me that these sessions were extremely different to the antenatal classes she ran for older, middle-class mothers in the area, which she invited me to attend. The more formal, planned structure they used there simply did not work with the girls, she said, so they used a question and answer format instead. I was able to observe two antenatal sessions at the setting. I decided that it would not undermine my delicate status in the setting to take intensive notes during these sessions with the girls, since this was an education that I needed to receive as well.

Katherine explained to me that her remit at the setting was to provide antenatal education, rather than antenatal care, which the girls received individually from midwives at hospital, although it was difficult to separate the two. The sessions felt to me like lessons, simply because Katherine had to struggle with gaining the girls' attention and she sometimes felt she could not engage them as a group. Katherine provided the girls with information by first asking them questions, to find out what they already knew. I made the following observations in my fieldnotes:

> Katherine asks the girls if they know when they'd need to go to hospital. Jade says when your contractions are every 5-10 minutes. Katherine says yes, and that you can get four contractions per ten minutes by the end of labour. The womb is working hard to open the cervix. Oxytocin is the hormone produced in labour that makes the womb contract. She asks the girls about pain relief. Jade says you can use paracetamol. Katherine says yes, at the beginning, and it'll work better for you if you don't take it regularly. She describes the pethidine injection, which is given in the leg with another substance so that you're not sick.

It doesn't take the pain away but spaces you out and can make you dizzy and drowsy. Gas and air also relax you and take you away from the pain. The more relaxed you are, the better you can cope with birth. Once you get used to being dizzy on the gas and air, it's great for getting through labour. Zaide asks if it makes you high, and everyone laughs. Katherine smiles and says yes, it's a bit like that.

Katherine, who had two adult sons, identified as a 'working-class girl' herself, and she was a strong advocate for the girls' integrity, stressing to me that most of them wanted to be mothers and that contrary to popular opinion, the late teenage years were the *best* time physically to have a baby. Katherine found that many of them had a resistance to being put in a class and taught about birth preparation, as this resonated with negative school experiences, and she told me that she found it very difficult to act as a 'teacher' in this kind of setting, feeling that the girls were more receptive and willing to engage with her on an individual basis:

> They come out with such nonsense some of the time. Some of them say I'm gonna carry on smoking because that means I'll have a smaller baby and it'll be easier to push out. That's a very common one. But then you get others, and I really believe that if they get good antenatal care and a midwife who wants to look after them, erm, and they get continuity of care with the same midwife, you can change their thinking. Not all the time, but there are things you can change. And what I've found is that they *want* to do the best for their baby. Again, not all, but most of them want to do the best for their baby. And they will listen, and they will change behaviour, sometimes. Not all the time. I'm certainly not naïve. Most of them don't change their behaviour, but some do. And some *amaze* you, and sometimes these girls, that are written off educationally, the things that they ask you, you think where has that come from? How have you come up with a question like that? So there's a lot of latent potential.

Katherine here identifies that some of these girls, who were indeed permanently excluded from school, 'amaze' her and have 'potential'. Many of them have a lot to learn, she implies, but it is possible to teach them. Although overall the sessions ran smoothly, with the girls participating and learning, there were several occasions when I observed tension between Katherine and the girls, most acutely during the episode with Jade that I discussed in the previous chapter. Although Jade told Katherine she was rude, Katherine was able to diffuse the situation, and during the break she talked to Jade and gave her a back rub, with Jade later telling me, 'She gave me a back rub. So she's all right.' A similarly difficult situation arose when Christina, whose first baby had died prematurely in hospital and who had told me of the bad experiences she had had in this hospital (not the hospital that Katherine worked in), interrupted Katherine to state that she objected to midwives examining her. Christina said to her that the midwives in this hospital didn't respect her, to which Katherine responded that Christina wasn't respecting *her* by talking over her. I felt extremely defensive of Christina during this exchange, wanting to tell Katherine what had happened to her (Christina did not say anything about her baby's death) but feeling it would not be right to intervene or even to say anything to Katherine later. However, I also identified with Katherine's frustration. She was trying to engage, as a health worker, with the girls on an educational level in a classroom setting that many of them were resistant to. These tensions were also representative of the contrast between the girls as knowing sexual young women and the traditional notion of the school as a site of childhood sexual innocence (Monk, 2007).

During the sessions the midwives sought to convey the message to the girls that breastfeeding was the best way to feed your baby. I observed an interesting exchange between Katherine and the girls during one session. One of the girls asked Katherine if it was bad to feed your baby on demand. Katherine told her no, that it was good, and that the baby will tell you when it needs to feed. She then said, 'Babies are *not* naughty. This is a

misconception. The only way your baby can survive is for you to love it'. She told the girls that formula milk isn't a patch on your body's milk, and that your body is perfectly designed to breastfeed. The same girl said to Katherine that she knew someone whose baby refused to breastfeed. Katherine replied, '*All* babies like breastfeeding. If the baby refuses, something isn't right'. Katherine here took up a position that implied that women who do not or cannot breastfeed are doing something wrong. She was also attempting to counter the assumption she had observed some girls make that babies misbehave. While I did not observe any other professional talk around breastfeeding, I did discuss it with the girls in individual interviews. Amira was the only girl I interviewed who was determined she was going to breastfeed her baby. Kim declared she was not going to breastfeed because it would make her breasts saggy. Most of the girls I interviewed postnatally attempted breastfeeding but changed quickly to bottle-feeding, citing reasons such as that the baby would not latch on, they did not produce enough milk, or experienced a blocked duct or other kind of pain associated with breastfeeding. My personal experience of breastfeeding as possibly the most physically and emotionally challenging - and yet simultaneously wonderfully intimate - aspect of early motherhood, and the fact that I was reliant upon so much specialist breastfeeding support in order to achieve and sustain it, caused a shift in my understanding of the fraught discourses and the silences around the issue. It strikes me that the 'breast is best' discourse seems to mask any discussion of the difficulty and pain that women can experience in breastfeeding, the perseverance that may be required, and crucially with respect to young mothers in particular, the *support* that may or may not be in place. As Elliot and Gunaratnam (2009) state, the antenatal provision of information about breastfeeding is insufficient; new mothers need support in breastfeeding (or bottle feeding) their babies in the crucial time immediately after the birth when they are at their most vulnerable.

Katherine, like Suzanne, drew on the discourse of teenage mothers having a baby in order to have something to love or to receive unconditional love:

> Not all of these girls are getting pregnant for the right reasons. A lot are doing it because they're not loved, and they think that having a baby will, the baby's gonna love them...I think sometimes a lot of these girls haven't had good mothering, or their mother isn't around anymore...so having a baby is trying to replace something that's gone.

Katherine shared her belief with me that 'you repeat whatever kind of mothering you had'. This notion has its basis in psychoanalytic ideas, as I discussed at the beginning of the chapter. I am noting the prevalence of this idea and how often it is addressed to pregnant teenagers, as well as the idea that there is a correct or incorrect reason for wanting to have a baby (and that judgements of women can or should be made about this), rather than entering into a discussion as to whether these ideas are right or wrong. The prevalence of this notion of repeating one's own good or bad parenting plays a key role in perpetuating the stereotype of the teenage mother as inevitably a bad mother. In some respects, then, the professionals working in the setting were attempting to re-model loving parenting for the girls.

The use of birth films in the setting also formed part of the girls' antenatal education. The midwives did not use them, but once every few weeks Suzanne and Leyla showed the girls one of two birth films. If the girls had seen the film before, they would get on with other work, but the tutors saw this as an opportunity to show the girls a real birth and discuss it with them. The first film I saw was *Birth: Eight Women's Stories*, made in 1993 in Canada by Nancy Durrell McKenna, which Suzanne put on. This film features older, heterosexual couples (at least one is black) where the father is present at the birth. It shows a variety of different births, ranging from a two-hour water birth to a 36-hour labour[15]. Several weeks later, Leyla put on a different birth film, telling me she preferred this to the McKenna film. Leyla started the film when the woman was in the first stage of labour with the baby's head about to crown. Leyla commented that it was very

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[15] This variety of lengths and methods did in fact reflect the girls' experiences; although few were planning a water birth, their labours lasted from between one and 37 hours.

graphic - the 'natural' one. The woman was giving birth in hospital, seemed to be in her twenties, and was with a male partner who held the baby when it came out, and possibly her mother as well. It spared no details, with extreme close ups of the baby's head coming out and delivery of the placenta. I asked Leyla if the woman was still having contractions while pushing the baby out; she said she was working with her contractions to push it out. The woman was squatting, or leaning on a bed with her back to the camera, and Leyla said she recommended that position. Throughout the film Leyla interjected with descriptions of her own births of her two daughters – for one of them she had only dilated four centimetres so they had to cut six centimetres. She talked about her episiotomy as if it were cutting a piece of paper, rather than her anatomy. She kept exclaiming how cute the baby in the film was, and stressed that there was nothing more natural than giving birth. Observing the expression of muted fear on my face, Leyla said to me, 'aren't you glad you came today?!' Leyla, who became pregnant with her third child towards the end of my fieldwork, and who was made redundant when the vocational training provider abruptly announced that it would be terminating the course, intended to change career to become a specialist teenage pregnancy midwife. She was able to share her experiences of childbirth with the girls without any inhibition or embarrassment and to do it in a way that was reassuring and positive.

After the film had finished, Amira commented darkly, 'that wasn't nice – I'm not doing it natural, no way'. One girl, having seen that nurses were wiping the woman in the video, asked 'if they had to touch you'. Leyla said that they had to do that to check what was going on. Another girl said, 'that looked quite easy, having it like that'. Leyla replied that it was not easy, but it was the most effective way. She encouraged them to put their yoga skills into practice, saying 'that's why we send you'. She said she wanted them to watch the whole video the next day, with the lead up, which would be useful for them,

ending with the instruction that 'if you breathe and work with your contractions, it ain't that bad'. Amira later commented to me in interview:

> ...watching that birth video definitely made me see things a bit more real from how I saw them before, because I didn't imagine birth to look like that – I thought there'd be less blood, more baby. It prepared me for the reality of what childbirth is really like.

I presumed that most of the girls had not seen a birth film before, and that this had not formed part of their school sex education. In a sense, the films operated in the setting as a graphic illustration of the discussions with the midwives around labour. Leyla seized the opportunity to turn the film into her own childbirth education for the girls. While Katherine stressed the difference between her antenatal sessions for the girls and the ones she provided for a middle-class clientele, it struck me that the input of information – albeit in a less structured format – was very similar, and that the main difference rested in the fact that middle-class women seek out and pay for this kind of education through National Childbirth Trust classes, for example, while in this setting, professionals brought the education to the girls at no cost to them. This served to emphasise to me the value of this service in this setting.

Maternal learning

After the course was terminated and relocated within the borough, a parenting course was offered alongside the antenatal provision. Several of the girls who had attended while pregnant returned when their babies were quite small to do the parenting course. Sabrina, whom I had interviewed ante-natally, had placed her daughter in a nursery for three days a week from the age of three months, so that she could attend the course, and was planning to study for her A-levels the following year. The parenting course is accredited as a Certificate at different levels in a similar way to the antenatal

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course. It contains three mandatory units: Child Safety, Practical Parenting, and Bonding and Play, and is aimed at new parents with little or no experience of childcare and child development.

I sat at the table with the girls one afternoon while they were doing the Bonding unit, which is focused on how children develop through play and the relationship between bonding and play. Natalie was using an Argos catalogue to find appropriate toys to complete a table to show 'social', 'emotional', 'physical' and 'intellectual' toys for babies' developmental stages. Zaide was doing the wordsearch, but the tutor encouraged her to do the task together with Natalie. Zaide pointed to the word 'physical' and asked me what it was. I told her and asked if she knew what it meant and she said yes. I asked her if she found the course useful and she smirked and shook her head. Natalie had put down 'baby gym' under 'physical', and Zaide commented, 'I've got a baby gym - so what?' Zaide here appeared to resist the idea that she needed to be taught how to bond and play with her daughter.

As I looked through the course material, I saw that it said that children needed a good role model of their own sex, and that children should have contact with males, which could be uncles, grandfathers or others. On the multiple choice unit assessment test, the mothers are asked how a strong parent-child bond benefits children, how playing with others teaches social and emotional skills, and what the benefits are of developing social and emotional skills for school. The choices for the answer to the question 'What helps your child develop into a well-balanced adult?' read: 1) contact with mum, 2) contact with dad, 3) contact with both parents, or 4) contact with pets. The final question, 'Which social skill helps develop concentration?' requires a choice between: 1) talking to others, 2) reading, 3) playing cards, or 4) eating ice cream. Karen, the programme manager, commented to me that this question was hard, and that the girls would often choose number 2, instead of the correct answer, number 1. I had been unsure of the answer,

feeling that although reading was not a social skill, it may help develop concentration as much as, or more than, verbal communication.

Feminists have repeatedly identified the problems with policies and legislation encouraging father involvement with children without due regard to fathers' domestically violent behaviour (Hester and Harne, 1999; Featherstone and Peckover, 2007), and the implication that a child will only develop into a well-balanced adult if it has contact with both its parents was particularly problematic in this setting. Sabrina's daughter's father had indirectly attempted to cause her to miscarry when she was in the early stages of pregnancy, and Melanie's ex-boyfriend and father of her unborn twins had tried to attack her with a knife with intent to kill them during her pregnancy, wounding Melanie's mother in the process. Despite these potentially fatal incidences, Sabrina wanted her daughter to have contact with her father, and Melanie, although refusing to let the twins' father see them, could not envisage ever letting another man replace him as their father. While I cannot make inferences with regard to how the girls interpret the message that a child should ideally have contact with both parents, this teaching draws on conservative discourses of a 'proper family' including the importance of a father figure or male role model, implying that single parenting is not a desirable option, and in fact that single parenting in and of itself might be damaging to a child. That a child's father might pose a risk to both mother and child is conveniently passed over. However, the message of the importance of a child's contact with its father was not one that was taken up by Suzanne. As I quoted earlier in the chapter, she once commented to the girls that her son's father was not good for anything except as a sperm donor. This is indicative of the complexity of the teaching and learning in the setting.

The parenting course attempts to teach the girls how to communicate, interact and play with their children, and to demonstrate the importance of this in relation to bonding. This kind of intervention needs to be examined in the wider context of policy. When I asked Zaide, whose daughter was seven months old when she began the parenting course,

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if she felt she had a choice as to whether to be a full-time mother, or participate in education, she told me that she felt she did not, and that the Job Centre had told her that she had to be in education. New Labour policy simultaneously encouraged these mothers to place their children in childcare and return to education, and to precede this with education in parenting skills, skills which must then be put into practice outside of working hours. As Lister (2006) comments, 'the responsibilities expected of parents…[place] strains on lone mothers in particular. On the one hand they are increasingly being encouraged to participate in the labour market as responsible citizens while, on the other, they are exhorted to do more to control their children's behaviour and involve themselves in their education as responsible parents' (61). Although New Labour policy was by no means *coercing* teenage mothers into education or work, it provided financial incentives for them to do this. This contradiction, involving morally-charged debates over exclusive mothering versus public childcare, is one that all mothers face, yet is more acute for the teenage mother who will be pathologised for bringing up her children on benefits.

As was demonstrated by Zaide's reaction to the maternal teaching offered by the parenting course, the girls sometimes resisted attempts to teach them how to mother. Zaide was pregnant at 16, and planned her pregnancy with her boyfriend. When I asked her why she'd decided to have a baby she said to me coyly 'because I was in love'. She was an incredibly thin girl of Turkish Cypriot background, who turned up at the course dressed in a tight black jacket and black stiletto boots, with large hooped gold earrings, a long thick gold necklace and a stud above her upper lip. She had attended Greenvale school, had no GCSEs, and had been under the supervision of a Youth Offending team. When I asked her why, she looked vague and said, 'What was it? I've done so many things. Robbery – what's it called when you break into someone's house?' 'Burglary', I told her. She said that she had only been arrested because she'd been there at the burglary with her friend, and she assured me that she didn't 'do that stuff anymore'. As I indicated above, Zaide felt that she did not have much of a choice as to her participation in the parenting course,

although clearly she was not being coerced into being there. As I only observed Zaide for this one session, I cannot comment on her long-term engagement with the course, but it is possible that her decision to attend the course meant that there was more to her apparent resistance to this maternal learning than met the eye. It is also possible that she did feel coerced, or encouraged by financial incentive, and that she continued to consider it a waste of time.

While I have here analysed the problems with this maternal learning, and set it in a wider (contradictory) policy context, again I think it is important to draw attention to the similarities between this kind of 'official', accredited, early parental learning, and the kind which occurs in a middle-class context. Middle-class parents also negotiate the parameters of 'good parenting', yet this may occur in a less structured or regulated environment. In my own National Childbirth Trust classes, the mothers-to-be engaged in a discussion (while the teacher was absent from the room) about the material goods that could be considered absolutely necessary for a newborn child. One mother suggested that toys were necessary, but was immediately contradicted by several others in the group, who opined that actually toys were not a necessity. My point here is that learning about other parents' ideas in relation to childcare and parenting, and doing work to define oneself as a 'good parent', operate constantly in all kinds of class contexts. The major class difference here again involves the fact that more resourced parents *pay* for classes and books through which they learn about childbirth and parenting (as well as using classes as a way to form social networks and maintain cultural capital).

Being a good mother: regulation and exclusion

The ways in which the girls negotiated the boundaries of appropriate maternal behaviour were complex and sometimes extremely judgemental. The process can be seen as an informal peer learning – a process by which they learn how 'other' mothers do

things, and they work at forming a positive maternal identity for themselves. The girls were all sensitive towards negative stereotypes of teenage mothers and were defensive against the notion that they were not good mothers (see Kirkman *et al*, 2001). The concept of 'appropriate' maternal behaviour, or good mothering, however, was unstable and contested amongst the girls. Their defence against a label of 'bad mother' sometimes took the form of a subtle regulation of each other's behaviour. Some girls did not question smoking, wearing 'inappropriate' clothing, eating McDonald's twice a day during pregnancy, or smacking their children, while others strongly distanced themselves from mothers who did these things. Although there were few arguments between the girls, they would occasionally express their disapproval to the girl in question. The girls would sometimes berate each other for not giving up smoking; many had done so upon becoming pregnant. Melanie had started smoking when she was nine, and now smoked between twenty and forty cigarettes a day. Samantha expressed to me her disgust at the girls who continued to smoke. Kyra, whom I noted had travelled into the centre of town on the underground for the BBC filming of the pregnancy belly dancing session wearing 'an extremely low-cut dress with a pink bra that was entirely visible', appeared to be quite unpopular with the girls. Danielle told me:

> I don't like her dress sense. I don't think it's very suitable for being a mum [Naomi
> laughs]. And I don't think you should walk down the street like that, with your big belly
> and this bum hanging out. I don't think it's suitable, and when I first said that to her, I
> asked her why she dressed like that.
>
> Naomi: And what did she say?
>
> Danielle: She [Naomi and Danielle both laugh] oh she said that those are the only clothes
> that fit her during the pregnancy, and I was like, don't you ever buy clothes, coz you get
> money, so you can buy clothes. I wouldn't walk out with just leggings and a top. I
> couldn't walk out with leggings and a top – I got a big belly and I've gotta prepare to be a
> mum, and I'm not having my butt hanging out [Naomi laughs] and it's see-through, and

everyone can see what knickers you got on! I can't walk around like that, that's not very presentable. It's hard enough walking down the street being young and pregnant, let alone walking down the street with your bum hanging out, and being pregnant! It's too much, that's like asking for people to stare at you and make funny looks at you. Because you gotta try and like show people that you dress like a mum and that you have a bit of respect for yourself. And I said to her why do you just wear leggings and a t-shirt, coz she just wears a top, she doesn't wear a long one

Naomi: And she didn't get insulted and get cross with you?

Danielle: No. Don't think so, she might have secretly, but I just asked her, curious question, because I've never seen anyone who's pregnant dress like how she dresses. And she hasn't got like the wonderfullest figure…and the back of her legs doesn't look pretty. She just walks around freely, so I, I just can't do it. So that's why people don't like her, that's why she's always by herself.

Danielle implies that Kyra does not perform the dress practices that enable her to act the part of a mother (Elliott *et al*, 2009). In laughing with Danielle about Kyra's 'inappropriate' attire, I colluded with her in her attempt to regulate Kyra's behaviour. I noted in my fieldnotes that Kyra's underwear was visible, distancing myself from her bodily display, as Danielle here distances herself from Kyra's lack of respectability. Being a pregnant teenager requires an extra effort to appear respectable ('you gotta try and show people that you dress like a mum'), but it is a performance that, according to Danielle, Kyra cannot pull off, and as a result of this and of her aggression, she was quite visibly excluded by most of the other girls.

I asked Melanie what she thought about her friends' parenting, and she described one friend with whom she had a problem:

I've even got quite a close friend who I think, like, how is your mind working for you to think that that is ok, or for you to do that in that way? Like, why don't you get that that's what's causing this problem in your child? You can tell them things, but one thing I don't

do is I can't tell my friends this is how it's supposed to be or that's how it's supposed to be, because if people told me that I wouldn't like it, erm, so I would say, in a roundabout way, why don't you try this, or this might work, or this worked for me. But this one particular person, she just don't listen, can't take advice. From knowing her mum, and her mum's still got young children, erm, she does exactly the same as what her mum does, and it's so obvious that it's not quite right. I know everybody has their own different, erm, parenting skills and whatever, I just, it annoys me so much. She's not a bad mother, she takes care of her child, but it's just little things.

Melanie here illustrates the differences that she perceives between her parenting techniques and those of her friend. She observes that this friend is repeating her own mother's mistakes, and subtly attempts to change her behaviour by suggesting alternative ideas. In referring to her own upbringing, Melanie described her mother as giving her quite a lot of freedom, saying 'I quite like my upbringing' and that she'd be 'pretty similar' to her, although she portrayed herself as being stricter with her sons than her mother was with her. Melanie had strong views on how to discipline her children, which included smacking them. In her comment that this friend 'does exactly the same as what her mum does, and it's so obvious that it's not quite right', Melanie echoes the concept brought up by Katherine, as I discussed earlier, that repeating one's own parenting is inevitable. Whether or not this is the case, many girls did tell me that they were intending to do things very differently to their own mothers.

Danielle contrasted herself to her two older sisters, both of whom had children, but had not worked or studied since having them:

She's like, my two older sisters are one of them people that loves to be on benefits, because they don't have to do nothing. I'm not one of them people. I can't stand being on benefits. If I had a choice, I would rather work than be on benefits. I know benefits is free money and everyone says that it's better and blah blah blah, but I'd prefer to work...They say they

wanna work, but they're lazy, and they don't wanna work. They lie, they lie to make themselves look good.... You get them people that prefer being on benefits than working because it's free money, and that's how they are. They're them people.

Danielle here is very resistant to the idea that she might be 'one of them people' who claims benefits because of laziness, and none of the girls spoke favourably of benefits, or of wanting to live on benefits, despite the fact that some of their parents did (although most of the girls' parents worked in traditionally working-class jobs, such as Taylor's and Lorraine's mothers, who were beauty therapists). The girls were alert to the stereotype of the welfare scrounger, and to the idea that some girls get pregnant deliberately to 'get a council flat'. Melanie told me that she knew people who 'openly say I got pregnant to get money and a place of my own'. However, none of the girls I spoke to claimed that this was the case, and in fact, most of the girls in the study who were living in council accommodation had received this prior to becoming pregnant, having become 'homeless' following family conflicts.

Samantha, Danielle and Melanie can be seen to produce their 'good mother' identities by distancing themselves from mothering or femininity practices (smoking, wearing sexually provocative attire, lack of parenting discipline and claiming benefits) of which they do not approve. Melanie's smoking of between twenty and forty cigarettes a day did not preclude her from positioning herself as a good mother, and even after describing her friend's problematic parenting techniques, Melanie admitted 'she's not a bad mother'. These differences again complicate the notion of distinctive 'middle-class' and 'working-class' (hitting one's child, for example, is usually – although not exclusively – associated with 'bad' working-class parenting) practices, although as Luttrell (2006) points out, the separation of mothers into two moral types - those who are good and respectable versus those who are bad and unrespectable - continues to reflect a split along 'race' and class lines. Thinking about my encounters with the girls from a wider, reflexive

perspective, it was also important for them to produce themselves as 'good mothers' for the purposes of their interviews and interactions with me. Although I tried at all times to be sensitive to the girls' ideas about mothering practices - trying hard never to make assumptions or comments about breastfeeding, eating habits, smoking or parenting practices - on the occasion I described above with Danielle I did not manage to remain impartial, partly because I got on particularly well with her, and partly because I entirely agreed with her. This episode demonstrated to me how easy it was to participate in regulatory and exclusionary practices in relation to 'good mothering'.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have undertaken an analysis of the antenatal and maternal teaching that the settings provide and the educational interactions that take place. In the process, I have attempted to pay attention to some of the structural and circumstantial barriers facing these young women, such as lack of family or partner support, and constrained financial resources. While recognising the necessity of structural changes to alleviate disadvantage, I do not see a reason to dismiss the educational provision the girls received out of hand as a misguided 'deficit' approach. It is very easy to see it as a direct attempt to compensate for lacking parental guidance and skills. What is less easy is to understand how the professionals deliver the 'messages' (or different ones), how the recipients understand these messages, and how 'good mothering' is negotiated in the girls' regulatory interactions with each other, irrespective of dominant understandings of 'good motherhood'. Gewirtz *et al* (2005) argue that, in the case of their study of Education Action Zones, practitioners implementing government schemes do not operate with a deficit model, but that the premise underpinning the establishment of such schemes is a model of the deficit working-class family. Social policy, they argue, needs to be

responsive to the material constraints of those defined as socially excluded. This idea can be directly applied to the girls in my study. Although they appear to be free to choose from the options of exclusive mothering (while claiming benefits), returning to education (including a parenting course), or working, these 'choices' must be made in the face of considerable economic constraint. Many of the girls cannot call on the luxury (and increasingly, the middle-class 'norm') of relying upon their partner or own mother to take some responsibility for childcare.

This chapter has demonstrated how the girls are simultaneously 'empowered' and regulated by knowledge, knowledge that is both known *about* them and used to educate them. It has also shown the ways in which the girls attempt to regulate each other and define their own ideas of good mothering. I have argued that the interactions that occur between the professionals and the girls do not rest on assumptions that working-class young women are 'bad' mothers. The teaching in the setting does not involve a simple model of working-class mothers being equipped with 'middle-class' mothering skills; the tutors themselves embodied the notion of successful working-class motherhood. I have complicated the notion of 'good' middle class mothering versus 'bad' working-class mothering in a demonstration of the variety of ideas held by the girls around what constitutes good mothering. That the girls mostly already consider themselves ready to be mothers and that they will be or are good mothers (as the next chapter will examine) complicates the notion that they somehow *become* good mothers as a result of the education they receive. However, analysis of the educational process reveals that the girls are taught, and appear to learn, a considerable amount. Significantly, this learning does not take place in school, or through a service they have purchased, but in the context of an 'intervention' which seeks to compensate for disadvantage, and which situates the girls' personal experiences at the centre of its teaching.

7. Readiness, resilience and maternal love

Introduction

In this chapter I explore the girls' maternal identities through the lens of the themes of readiness, resilience and maternal love. These themes burst out throughout my fieldwork, and I felt that capturing a sense of how the girls often constructed themselves as ready for motherhood, as tough, and as full of love for their children, was a vital part of my ethnographic picture. Some of the material is highly emotional and challenging to analyse and to represent to the reader, yet these experiences formed part of the girls' changing identities in the process of becoming mothers. The chapter examines the ways in which the girls accommodated pregnancy and motherhood into their often complicated and difficult lives. It also examines the moral stance that the majority of the girls took against abortion.

The fact that most of the girls' pregnancies were unplanned did not necessarily mean that they felt unready for motherhood. McRobbie (2009) writes that:

> Having a well-planned life emerges as a social norm of contemporary femininity. And conversely the absence of such styles of self-organisation becomes an indicator of pathology, a signal of failure or a symptom of some other personal difficulties…Young motherhood…now carries a whole range of vilified meanings associated with failed femininity and with disregard for the well-being of the child.
>
> (McRobbie, 2009: 77-85)

In this chapter I also engage with and challenge the idea that girls' 'lack' of planning with regard to motherhood equates to a 'failed femininity'. Although the girls talked differently about their intention and degree of readiness in relation to becoming a mother, they often appeared to embrace this new identity as part of an ability to adapt to difficult circumstances and as part of an understanding that young motherhood was neither unusual nor wrong. Drawing on the work of Luttrell (2003), I suggest that the girls' agency needs to be thought about in terms of taking responsibility, rather than in terms of intentions and

choices. While it may be difficult to deploy working-class identity as a resource (Skeggs, 2004), the girls mostly conceived of their youthful maternity in a positive way, often defending themselves with the argument that age is not an indicator of the ability to be a good mother. Feminist sociologists have repeatedly drawn attention to the idea that motherhood can provide working-class girls with adult status, conferring them with a sense of purpose and respect (Kehily, 2005; Alldred and David, 2007; Henderson *et al*, 2007). As I discussed in Chapter 2, Henderson *et al* (2007) suggest that young people's feelings of adulthood are related to their feelings of competence and the recognition that they may receive from others for this competence. Being frequently positioned as incompetent, indeed as failures, with regard to their educational experiences, is an important link to the girls' desire for motherhood, and yet pregnancy had caused many of them to re-engage with their education. In direct contrast to official discourses of social exclusion, motherhood was not seen as a barrier to future educational success, and youthfulness was not seen as a barrier to successful motherhood. Importantly, the girls sought to position themselves as competent at motherhood.

The girls can in one respect be seen as 'model' teenage mothers, who re-engage with their education, and who articulate the goal of a specific future occupation in the labour market. While a significant part of this thesis is concerned with their educational pathways, I also want to pay attention to the experiences that shape their mothering identities. In discussing the concepts of readiness, resilience and maternal love, there is a danger of idealising or simplifying their experiences. However, given that teenagers are often positioned as *not ready* to become mothers, and as lacking in qualities that older, middle-class women are considered to possess, these ideas deserve further consideration.

Teenage mothers are often constructed as 'children having children' (Lesko, 2001: 137), the discourses of premature sexual activity and the rupture of childhood sexual innocence being never far from the surface of debate. Teenage mothers are also 'accused of "looking for love" in a pathological way that other mothers are not' (Alldred and David, 2007: 180). Viewed through the lens of their sometimes traumatic childhoods, it would be easy to see these young women in terms of stereotypes. The stereotype of the 'looking for love' explanation, I would argue, needs to be rigorously questioned. Of course the girls' mothering identities are bound up with their life histories and experiences, as any mothering identity is. I did not ask any of the girls why they wanted to become mothers, feeling that they should not have to justify this to me. As the parent/childless division becomes increasingly wide, however, with more women in the UK remaining childless than ever before, the notions of 'choice' and decision-making come to the fore. The meanings attached to the idea that reproduction must be undertaken 'responsibly', or for the 'right' reasons, form a contested terrain, even ranging to the extreme that reproduction is not now ecologically responsible and therefore should not be undertaken at all. Discourses around the idea that having a baby (as opposed to adopting a child) 'is a selfish thing that we all do' and that 'everyone does it to have unconditional love'[16] are emotionally charged in debates around parenthood and whether or not to reproduce. They also give an indication that the reason of 'looking for love' might not be restricted to the working-class teenage mother.

The idea of a planned teenage pregnancy does not resonate with the kind of 'well-planned life' that McRobbie alludes to. It is, after all, indicative of a young woman exercising agency that she is not considered to have, or to have the right to exercise. While the girls who had planned their pregnancy appeared to have done so in response to a

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[16] These are phrases that I have repeatedly heard in the course of my own journey towards motherhood.

previous trauma, such as stillbirth or abortion, for one girl, this was not the case. Samantha had decided, at the age of 18, that she wanted to have a baby with her boyfriend of five years, and consequently had a planned pregnancy. Samantha told me that:

> even though she's [baby] not out yet...she's mine, and no one's gonna take her away from me... I was like [to her GP], oh, I'm ready to get pregnant, I'm ready to have a baby, and she was like, if you're ready I'll give you some stuff [folic acid].

Samantha was passionate about being ready for motherhood and about providing her child with the best. For her this meant taking a break from her education to look after her daughter: 'I'll take a year out, I'll take two years out if that's how long it takes me to be the best mum I wanna be'. As I detailed in Chapter 5, Samantha had had to move out of home when she was 15, because she was arguing with her parents, and had experienced severe disruption to her schooling because of bullying and problems with her family. Although her approach to planning may not make sense from a policy perspective, it made sense to her, and she did not see having a child at 18 as incompatible with achieving her ambition of becoming a nursery school teacher.

Danielle was 17 and was seven months pregnant at first interview. She was of mixed parentage and lived alone in a bedsit. She had met her child's father at school and they had been together for three years, although he was no longer in the picture when I re-interviewed her after she had given birth. Danielle had lost her first baby, at the age of 16, to Edwards Syndrome. This pregnancy had been unplanned, happening, she told me, despite using both the pill and a condom. She narrates her subsequent desire and readiness for a baby as growing from her experience of this loss:

> So and then that's why it happened this time, and I *wanted* to be a mum this time and I think I'm more ready to be a mum this time than I was before. So in that sense, I'm kind

of thankful for what happened to me, because it made me stronger and then made me know that I can handle it this time, and my commitment and stuff like that...

Danielle goes on, however, to complicate this narrative, distinguishing between subjective and objective definitions of readiness:

> So but where there's people that when they get pregnant they don't look ahead, they don't think about all that stuff, so I don't think anybody is truly truly ready no matter how old you are. I don't think you're ever truly ready coz you never know what could happen around the corner, you never know what kind of kid you could have, you could have an angel, and then you could have a child that wants to kill everybody. You just never know. So if you *feel* ready, then that's a different story.

She positions herself as a resilient and reflexive character, who thinks about the consequences of her actions, and as ready for motherhood, but who also recognises the profound uncertainties involved in parenthood. While alluding to the trauma of her earlier experience of losing her child, she told me that she couldn't feel sorry for herself and didn't like people feeling sorry for her. She had quickly 'moved on [and]...made other people move on as well'. Danielle described herself to me as 'a lot wiser than my mum', and as more motivated and 'a little bit smarter than my older sisters', explaining that they were content to remain on benefits and not work. In contrast, she wanted to be a physiotherapist, and when I interviewed her in February when her son was two months old, had already secured a place at college with a crèche for the following September. Danielle, then, distanced herself from her sisters, and as a single mother living in a bedsit when her son was born, she was determined to pursue her education in spite of having relatively little support.

Danielle's story is one of how she had become, at the age of 17, ready to become a mother, in spite and because of her previous traumatic experiences. Samantha and Danielle demonstrate how, in the context of the fragmentation of the staging posts towards

adulthood (Henderson *et al*, 2007), they are able to construct their adult identities through becoming mothers and the weight of their past life experiences. In spite of the fact that in the educational and economic fields, the girls are not self-sufficient or considered adult, and that policy constructs them as children, their sense of themselves as tough and wise provides them with their alternative discourse of readiness.

Readiness and adulthood

Being 'ready' for motherhood can be seen as being tied up with taking on an adult identity. The girls' 'transitions to adulthood have been fast-tracked' (Ball *et al*, 2000: 129) in the context of young people now having 'delayed access to the identities and activities which were previously regarded as signifying adult status' (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005: 32). Sex and parenthood were once considered straightforward markers of adulthood, but the tension between those who follow the 'right' sequence of events and those who deviate from it has complicated this, and has turned the parenting teenager into the 'socially excluded' individual. Both Amira and Jade expressed some equivocation with regard to their readiness to be mothers but both discussed the anticipatory sense of responsibility they felt. Amira became pregnant at 17, telling me that although the pregnancy wasn't planned, she wasn't surprised by it: 'I kind of wanted it anyway - that's why I wasn't being as careful as I should have been'. She had no relationship with her (white, British) mother, had been brought up as a Muslim by her Egyptian father, and married her 18-year-old boyfriend (a non-Muslim) after she became pregnant. Whereas Danielle presented herself as undergoing a traumatic experience that made her ready for motherhood, Amira thought that motherhood would force her to become more mature:

> Naomi: Do you see motherhood as taking on an adult responsibility, or how does the
> marriage fit into that?

Amira: Erm,

Naomi: Does it represent any kind of significant

Amira: Change? Er, it does. I think I'm gonna have to change a little bit before I have

the baby, because I am a little bit childish still. Like, I think I might need to stop my

tantrums before the baby's born. I wouldn't want to encourage those. But no, I think

everyone has room to grow, you know. I think there's always something that you can

change or improve about yourself, no one's perfect....I don't really feel like I'm losing

out because since I'm doing all of this now while I'm young - when I'm older, it's not

gonna be an issue, you know.

Amira goes on to explain that her youth makes her amenable to change, whereas women

who have babies later in life are less adaptable:

How can I explain? A lot of people when you get older, like if someone had their first

child at 30 and got married at 30, like for example, erm, they might not be able to cope as

well, because financially they'd probably cope a lot better, but when you're young to

tend to deal with change a lot more easily, you're more adaptable when you're young.

When you're old...or you're used to doing things in a certain way, a baby can really

disrupt that, but when you're young and you're used to your life being hectic and all over

the place and your life isn't that organised anyway, so when you have a baby, all it

means is that you have to step up and organise yourself around the baby. But the baby

doesn't really disrupt your life really in any way.

Amira here confidently minimises the disruption she thinks that the baby will cause to her

already 'hectic' life, positioning herself as more than capable of rising to the responsibility

that she knows will suddenly be upon her. She goes on to question the assumption that

education is something restricted to young people and which must be completed by a

certain age:

I mean, college is gonna be there forever. I mean, I don't know how much I agree with girls having babies right in the middle of college, like the way I've done, like I wouldn't advise it, or like in the middle of secondary school, at least wait until the holidays or something [laughs] like. But at the end of the day, there's nothing really stopping you from getting your qualifications, so I don't think there should be a problem with age.

Amira recognises that she is 'childish still', but talks about 'stepping up' to her responsibility and does not consider having a baby to be a disruption in the context of her life.

Pregnancy had precipitated Amira into marriage and also into a deeper commitment to her religion, as she had decided that she wanted to bring her child up as a Muslim. She had been attending the mosque more often and was 'learning how to pray', since she could not read or speak Arabic. She calmly described to me the way in which she tried to persuade her husband to come to the mosque with her, telling me that he was interested, but 'not that bothered'. I experienced Amira as extremely self-possessed, although during her interview she sometimes looked and sounded embarrassed when she revealed something negative to me. She often appeared laid-back, but this belied her determination to do what she thought was right for her child. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Amira was the only girl I interviewed who was committed to breastfeeding her baby. She continually emphasised her sense of responsibility towards motherhood and of putting her baby's needs before her own:

I reckon if you can go through the pain of giving birth, you should go through the pain of breastfeeding, because it's the best option and on top of that, it's free, you know. That's what god gave you boobs for - use them, you know! I mean if you can't breastfeed then it's no one's fault, but if you can then I think you should. I don't think that people should have this attitude that bottle feeding's just easier, because as a parent you're supposed to be picking what's best for your child, not what's best for you. You need to put your needs

aside for your child. And I think that's very important. So if I can breastfeed then I'm definitely breastfeeding.

Amira countered her admitted childishness with her ability to take responsibility and do the right thing for her child. She narrates herself as a moral agent who, unlike others she encounters, would choose the best option for her child by breastfeeding it.

Jade, as I discussed in Chapter 5, became pregnant at 17, and had been in the process of applying to college when she discovered this. She expressed ambivalent feelings about her impending motherhood:

> Erm, sometimes it scares me, but now I'm fine. I think oh, I'm gonna be a mum, I'm gonna have responsibilities, my life's gonna change completely. Some girls I don't know if they think of it like that – they don't last as babies forever, they grow so quick and so much things you have to do and sometimes it really does scare me; sometimes I really, not that I wish I wasn't pregnant, coz I'm very grateful to have her, but if, I wish things were different sometimes, I don't know. I don't know, I'm ready to be a mum, but I *don't* think I'm ready to be a mum, like I feel so young, I'm only 17 and I'm about to become a mum, which is really scary.

Several times in the extended narrative from which this is extracted, Jade describes becoming a mother as 'scary', and at one point she says she wishes she still lived with her mum, but that now there was 'no chance' of that. At the same time, she recognises that she is lucky to have both her parents' emotional and financial support. For Jade, keeping her baby was part of her getting her life back on track, putting her 'bad girl' past behind her, and making up for having missed out entirely on her GCSEs. Although she is equivocal about being ready, becoming a mother fits into her narrative of redemption, and of doing the right thing. Like Samantha, she says that she does not want to be living on benefits for

the rest of her life, and if she cannot motivate herself, having a baby can provide her with the means to do it.

I asked most of the girls directly what they felt about the relationship between their becoming a mother and adulthood. Taylor's response to the question was interesting: 'I was a adult when I started living by myself. But I'm a woman because now I'm having a baby'. She equates motherhood with womanhood, which gives her a certain status. It is almost as if motherhood has reaffirmed Taylor's sense of her adulthood, in a very positive way. Mia's and Melanie's responses below are to this particular question, although Samantha's excerpt is not, coming rather in the middle of an extensive narrative in response to a question about her background:

> I think it's made me more adult…things change, things you used to do before, you can't really do them. You *can,* but certain little things you leave out, like childish behaviour – you're going to be a mum, so you act like a mum…I guess it's because I feel, even before I had Tyler, I felt quite old, like I'd grown up too quickly, I don't know if it's coz of my mentality or my upbringing. But for some reason, I really do feel like I wasn't 17, or 18, or even 19 – I felt like I was 20-something, even certain little things I do. So I just have to tell myself, sometimes I have to remind myself, you're still 19, you're still young, so what I do I go out now and again, a bit regular, sometimes take things off my mind… [Mia]

> Erm, I've classed myself as a adult since I was about 16, purely because I had seen things that people wouldn't normally have seen…. I started going to clubs when I was 13, erm, so I've kind of done all that, every weekend going out going out… [Melanie]

> I don't consider myself as a teenager because I've been through more than teenagers go through and, saying that, I have been bullied since I was in primary school until Year 10, so um, I do know what teenagers go through, but I don't think everyone goes through that. [Samantha]

The concept of 'growing up too quickly', as expressed by Mia, plays into the discourse of 'toxic childhood' (Palmer, 2006) and into the mire of surrounding moral panics. Melanie and Samantha also indicate, although not in such a direct way, that they have reached adulthood faster than other teenagers, and again, Melanie's assertion that she has been through experiences that other teenagers might not, plays into the notion of a disturbed childhood. For these girls, however, this signified maturity prior to having their babies, although Mia, like Amira, recognised the need to leave 'childish' behaviour behind. The girls insisted that age was not an indicator of the ability to be a good mother. Several of them suggested that sixteen was an acceptable age for sexual activity and therefore for motherhood also. However, Farisha, who conceived at 15, thought that motherhood under the age of 16 was not right. Claudia thought that 13 or 14 would be too young to have a baby. A few of the girls told me they had been sexually active from the age of 12 or 13. The recent case of Alfie Patten, who was alleged to have fathered a child at the age of 13, seized upon by the media perhaps due to Alfie's display of physical characteristics of a much younger boy, fuels the Conservative cry of 'broken Britain', and in the description of a *Telegraph* journalist, teenage fathers become metonyms for wild animals:

> Teenage pregnancies have become child pregnancies, and the buck must stop with parents. What hope is there on estates where semi-feral children have intercourse with multiple partners, men routinely father children with a series of women and little boys who become dads before their voices break are in line to be paid a fortune for the television rights?
> (Woods, 2009)

The sexualisation of children cannot simply be dismissed as a moral panic, however, and is frequently invoked as a concern by critics on both the left and the right. Kehily (2009) suggests that the contemporary 'crisis' in childhood can be understood as the collision between competing concepts of childhood, signified by the depth of emotional investment in children, and contradictions between their (excessive) freedom on the one hand, and the protection and over-regulation of childhood on the other. From both of these perspectives, however, teenagers should not desire babies. According to New Labour, teenagers should

desire their education and economic productivity; babies are to be desired ideally in the context of a financially secure marriage.

While the girls demonstrated some ambivalence and variation around their status as adults and around their feelings of readiness for motherhood, on the whole they took up positions of readiness to become a mother. It is notable that 'readiness' can take on different meanings for different girls - Samantha's location in a stable relationship meant she was ready, compared to Melanie's feeling like an adult because of her rich life experiences, for example. In a similar respect to the variations in the ways that young people talk about being ready for sex, with the definition of 'ready' being complex and shifting (Thomson, 2004), being ready for motherhood is a flexible and subjective idea with contested meanings. It is difficult, however, to imagine the extent to which it is possible to articulate a position of *not* being ready for motherhood while being pregnant as a teenager, and needing to defend yourself against stigma and negative stereotyping. The girls' talk about being ready can be seen as narrative pieces of work which form an important part of their identities as 'good mothers'.

Abortion

I move here to examine the subject of abortion, since this was a very striking and important theme in the context of the girls' moral identities and life experiences, and it provides a prelude to the following section on trauma. Many studies have identified a working-class rejection of abortion and a valuing of motherhood (Hirst *et al*, 2006; Alldred and David, 2007; Henderson *et al*, 2007), in contrast to the powerful expectations and incentives that exist for middle-class girls to delay motherhood and thus to terminate an unplanned pregnancy. The attitudes towards abortion held by pregnant young women are deserving of closer attention. It was particularly notable that, while opinions differed

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among the girls, few of them held a view of abortion as entirely unproblematic. Most who disagreed with abortion said that they did not condemn other women who had abortions. However, this exact point came up on one occasion in a discussion a group of girls were having with Leyla. While I did not hear the preceding comment or discussion, I heard Leyla tell the girls that they shouldn't look down on women who had abortions, because they might have very good reasons for having one, including that they might not be able to give the baby the best care. This exchange was possibly indicative of the extent to which many of the girls saw abortion as morally wrong.

Brady *et al* (2008) argue that, in contrast to many professionals' views that termination is a positive choice in relation to teenage pregnancy, for many young women, 'the premature ending of a pregnancy, through miscarriage or termination, invokes emotions including loss, grief, relief, concerns about self-identity and future reproduction' (189). While only one of the girls told me she had had an abortion, these themes were apparent in the girls' decision-making processes. Lorraine had initially booked an appointment for an abortion, as she knew her mother wanted her to have one, but then, she told me, her 'emotions took over', and she realised she was doing it [the abortion] for other people and not for herself. Jade told me that 'if I don't keep it, there's a possibility I won't be able to have kids, it could mess me up, and I was just like, oh, what shall I do? In the end, I guess I always knew I'd keep it'. The decision was a difficult one for Jade, as she had been applying for college when she found out she was pregnant, but she eventually decided that 'for me personally it wasn't the way I wanted to go'.

It was striking that five girls out of the sixteen had an appointment booked for an abortion after discovering they were pregnant, but could not go through with it. When Melanie found out she was carrying twins, she instantly changed her mind. In Claudia's case, it was seeing her baby on the hospital scan which made her unable to go through with an abortion:

Naomi: And so did you think about having an abortion?

Claudia: Yeah, I did. But I just didn't want to. I just, once I saw the scan, I couldn't do it. I just started to enjoy it after that. ...I think, I don't think it's wrong. In a lot of circumstances it could be right for people. ...But I don't think they should give it away as freely as they do.

Walkerdine *et al* (2001) write that 'If we look at the difficulties the working-class girls and their parents had in contemplating abortion – for most it was not seen as an option, or definitely not a route they wanted to take – then separation comes up in various ways, such as not wanting to separate themselves from the baby they were carrying because they identified too strongly with it' (196). While this may be applied too literally to Claudia's seeing her baby on the scan, it is interesting as an individualised, psychological approach, and an idea to which I return below.

Apart from Taylor, who had had a previous abortion which left her depressed and keen to become pregnant again, and Katie and Jade, who both considered having an abortion but decided against it, and the five who initially planned an abortion, the remaining eight girls felt very strongly that abortion was wrong. However, some of them felt it was acceptable if there was a reason such as rape:

Danielle: Nope, I don't believe in abortion. In certain circumstances, I believe that you should be able to have an abortion, like if the person had got raped or something like that, but I don't believe in abortions if you're going out, just sleeping with people freely and you're not using contraception and you fall pregnant, and you just think ok, I'm gonna settle for an abortion. If you put yourself through that, you should have thought about it first. ...I think if you're that irresponsible, you should be able to face your responsibilities.

Amira: So I understand in certain situations it might be a bit different, but if you think it's something that you can handle, basically if you can cope then I suppose you just have to

take responsibility. Like, you got yourself in that position, like, I think it's a bit unfair to take a life knowing that just because it wasn't the right time for you, you know, like if you've got someone there who could support you and you know that you could cope with having a child, I think it's a bit wrong to say, yeah, to take a life just because it's not the right day or whatever. I think there has to be a deeper reason than that. If you got raped, I'd definitely understand that.

The discursive similarities here are striking. Danielle and Amira talk about taking responsibility for one's actions, which for them does not involve having an abortion, but rather facing up to the consequences of their actions and having the baby. Both Farisha and Samantha use the word 'stupid' in relation to unprotected sex and abortion:

Farisha: Erm, if you get raped or something, that I can understand, if you don't wanna keep the baby. But if you're stupid enough to have sex without condoms - if it splits that's a different story, but if you have sex without a condom, like if you're on pills and you get pregnant, that's a bit stupid, and then for you to go and abort it, it's not right. Three of my friends that got pregnant around the same time as me, they all aborted it.

Naomi: From school?

Farisha: Yeah. At the same time. But, that's their business.

Samantha: I think people who get rid of their babies are stupid because you should have used contraception - if you're gonna get pregnant you should've used it. You shouldn't spoil an unborn child's life just for your mistakes.

By using these discursive strategies the girls place themselves in the position of doing the right thing morally. Alldred and David (2007) also found in their study of young mothers that going ahead with pregnancy was framed as taking responsibility. As I discussed in the previous section, Jade talked about having a choice in relation to keeping her baby or not. However, if this choice is perceived in terms of a right choice (keeping the baby) and a

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wrong one (terminating the pregnancy), it becomes about defending a path of action. Luttrell (2003) in her study describes this anti-abortion sentiment in a section entitled 'Defending the Moral Self'. Rather than using the word *choice*, she found that 'the girls drew on a lexicon of words and phrases that had to do with decision making, but not options or choices' (123). In realising that one girl perceived abortion as killing, as about violence, she saw how the girls felt 'connected to and responsible for others' (126-7), their agency being more about taking responsibility rather than making choices. In this respect, to separate from an 'unborn child' would be to 'take a life', and would be a cause of trauma. The notion of separation, while used as a symbol, is perhaps not strong enough to convey the moral position that so many of the girls took in relation to abortion.

Trauma and resilience

Having considered abortion as a potential trauma, I here move on to consider violence and loss of a child in the context of the girls' many traumatic narratives. Danielle, as discussed earlier in the chapter, was a girl whose narrative of loss positioned her as tough and as resilient. While I do not want to erase the concept of vulnerability (and there was much in many girls' narratives to suggest extreme vulnerability and difficulty in overcoming structural disadvantage and poverty), it was difficult for me to see the girls as victims, or as 'socially excluded'. Luttrell (2006) notes that teenage mothers use toughness as a defensive strategy in the context of the denigration of teenage pregnancy. This is not to imply that this is simply a narrative device; as I will demonstrate in this section, many of the girls had undergone experiences that I felt had toughened them. Leadbeater and Way (2001) observe that although 'resilient [teen] mothers told many stories of hurt, vulnerability, and suffering, they were not overwhelmed or incapacitated by their difficult experiences. They were able to move forward in their lives despite and occasionally because of their difficulties' (28). While it is also important to guard against

the danger of romanticising resilience and the omnipotent belief that anything can be overcome (Baraitser and Noack, 2007), I am interested in the ways in which the girls narrated their traumatic experiences and the meanings these held for them. The girls' narratives are stark reminders that self-reflexivity is equally a part of marginalized, working-class women's discursive interactions (McLeod and Wright, 2009). In contrast to the idea that reflexivity involves a mobilisation of privileged cultural resources (Skeggs, 2004), it can be seen here that practices of self-discovery and self-reflection in relation to the suffering that is part of the contemporary processes of individualisation are not limited to the middle-class reflexive self (Roseneil, 2007). It has been extremely difficult to work with some of the girls' devastating and disturbing narratives, particularly Melanie's, but they are often central to a deeper understanding of their maternal identities.

Melanie was at the time of interview a 20-year-old white girl who had given birth to twin boys at the age of 17. She lived with her mother and her sons and had just finished a vocational qualification in childcare. Due to serious disruption of her education experienced when her mother moved her to London from the north of England for a new start because of problems with Melanie's father, who subsequently died, Melanie had dropped out of school and had no qualifications before she came to the vocational training provider[17]. She had met the father of her sons when she was 16, and just as she was splitting up with him a year later, discovered she was pregnant. Intending to have an abortion, she changed her mind when she discovered she was carrying twins. The father of her sons attacked her while she was pregnant with her twins after his new girlfriend discovered that Melanie was pregnant with his children:

> He [the babies' dad] was on the phone saying to me, is this true, are you pregnant, and I was like, but you know I'm pregnant. ... He said I'm coming to see yer. So I said ok. He said I'll be at yours in a hour. Now I was out, so, I went home, erm, I had a phone call a

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[17] Melanie was the only girl I interviewed who had not attended the antenatal provision, but had completed the childcare course that operated in the next-door room.

few minutes before he got to mine, telling me, erm, he's got a knife. This is the place I've just left, telling me he's got a knife on him. I was like, all right, whatever, because him as I know of him, I just thought nothing of it. And then when he came, erm, he's telling me mum I want Melanie at the door now. He barged past me mum. I was sitting on the sofa, I had the, pulled the cushion on me belly. He was in me face, so I booted him, off me, coz he was like here, booted him off me and we started fighting, I went in the kitchen. Me mum told me to go in the kitchen, coz she seen the knife

Naomi: That he had a knife?

Melanie: Yeah. And I just thought nothing of it, because I didn't think he would do that to me. Erm, he was telling me I'm, what was it? I'm gonna kill them two little cunts in your belly, this that. So me mum told me to go in the kitchen, I locked myself in the kitchen. And then me mum was fighting with him. He cut me mum with the knife. Erm, he eventually got into the kitchen to me – he just kicked the door off, he was just mad, there was like nothing there behind his eyes, he was just, the door just snapped in half, went in two, and he just battered me round the kitchen. He didn't have hold of the knife any more – that was still in the living room. And then we eventually got him out after that. But if me mum weren't in the way I probably would've lost them. Coz me mum was like getting in the way so that he couldn't hit me properly. Erm, and then we got him out the door, locked the door, phoned the police. He'd left the knife in the hallway. We didn't touch it, we just, they came, they got him round the corner.

Melanie related this violent episode to me calmly, in the context of an extremely long interview, and although she did not go into detail about some of the other things that she had experienced that other people 'wouldn't normally have seen', this was clearly a very traumatic episode in her life. Melanie later in the interview told me that her boyfriend had never previously been violent towards her and she saw her relationship with him as 'not a typical kind of teenage relationship', indicating that for her friends, a typical relationship would involve violence. While Melanie remained angry that he was released from custody

after only a few months on remand, and refused to see him and to let him see his sons, she felt strongly that he would remain their father, and that no one could replace him:

> I'd never let anybody take on the role of dad to them. Even when I'm big and grown I would never, even if I'd been with the person for years and years and they'd basically brought them up, I'd never want that.
>
> Naomi: What if that person wanted to adopt them?
>
> Melanie: No. Coz they've got a dad. I would say it depends on how old they are, if they wanted him to. But no, they've got a dad. Whether he's good or bad. They've got one.

Despite having described herself as an adult since she was 16, Melanie felt she had become a mother too soon, and that she had suffered from post-natal depression:

> I think even though I've got a good, erm, intelligence or whatever, I think even I was too young to be having children. Even now I can cope with it, I can deal with it, even though I done a lot of things, I think mentally, it depends on like who you've got around you and whatever, it would've been better if I was older, to cope with for instance things like baby blues and how do you cope with baby blues, moving into, the depression, what's it called?
>
> Naomi: Post-natal depression?
>
> Melanie: Yeah, post-natal depression.

Melanie positions herself as being able to cope with motherhood, and as having coped with depression, while at the same time considering herself too young to be having children. She had her mother to help her with the twins, although they struggled to manage living in a small two-bedroom house. However, Melanie demonstrated her physical and mental resilience, placing herself in the position of having saved her children twice – from abortion, and from their father's attack. Her attachment to them having a father was quite considerable; perhaps this insistence was due to her wanting to protect her children from other potentially violent father figures, or perhaps she simply wanted to maintain the existence of their biological father and her sons' right to know who he was. Thomson *et al*

(2009) suggest that for many pregnant women, men are central to the shaping of a maternal identity, and that for one of their teenage mother participants in their study of first-time motherhood, the baby's father 'is the absent centre; his role as the baby's father counts but cannot be counted upon' (203). I felt that this description was particularly apt in Melanie's case.

Christina, like Danielle, had experienced the death of her first child at the age of 16. Christina, 17 years old at first interview, was born in Jamaica and came to the UK when she was 9 years old. Both of her parents subsequently died, in circumstances that were unclear to her, and she had been living with her aunt. Christina's first baby was born prematurely at five months and died within twenty-four hours. Christina had not planned this first pregnancy, but it was apparent that she had planned the second one, perhaps as a response to her grief at the loss of her first child. Christina's description of her daughter's premature birth and death was raw and distressing. To reproduce her graphic and disturbing imagery, in spite of the fact of its flowing out rapidly in interview, feels very difficult, as Christina repeatedly says that she does not want to talk about it. However, I felt strongly that Christina did very much want me to hear her story, so I re-tell a part of it here myself.

Christina went into premature labour at home, seeing her baby's foot appearing when she went to the toilet. She began to lose a lot of blood and was in considerable pain and was taken to hospital in an ambulance. She describes giving birth in the hospital and being left alone with her baby daughter on her chest until she died. She tells me that the baby was not taken to intensive care, and that no explanation appeared to be forthcoming as to what was happening. She cradled her 'bare[18] tiny' daughter on her chest in towels, trying to keep her warm, yet she cried continuously. The baby, as she put it, 'cried herself to death', and she describes the hospital staff as 'evil people' who, in response to her begging them to do something, could only ask her 'is she dead yet?'.

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[18] Slang meaning 'very'.

Christina invoked in me a response of intense sadness, and of horror at her and her baby's treatment. While she was telling me her story I forced myself to hold back tears. She did not cry. Later I reflected that perhaps she did not receive the same kind of treatment as an older, white, middle-class woman may have done. I heard many 'horror stories' about this particular hospital during the course of my fieldwork. I find it very difficult to subject this narrative to a sociological analysis. When working with Christina's data, apart from feeling an immense sorrow, I experience a constant struggle between wanting to position her traumatic experiences as somehow evident of her resilience and as 'normal' for her in the context of the violent relationship she had with her boyfriend and other traumatic events in her life, and as experiences that are unbearable. In common with Riessman's (2002b) account in relation to the sexual violence experienced by Tessa, one of her research participants, I felt powerless, and frustrated that I was unable to help Christina. Two decades after her encounters with Tessa, Riessman re-evaluates her analysis, now able to see Tessa's complex narrative framing positions of both victim and survivor, rather than solely the 'heroic self' that she was able to witness at the time. I also want to position Christina as a survivor, and to make her experiences bearable for me. I continually feel that it is impossible for me to make sociological sense of her immensely complex narratives, particularly this one, which is so unresolved and so troubling.

In my encounters with Christina after she had given birth to her daughter, Tanisha, this oscillation between seeing Christina as tough and vulnerable continued. It was as if we were both wrestling with the ambiguity in her position between girlhood and adulthood. It also felt as if I was struggling with feeling the maternal need and desire to protect her and at the same time feeling that she was tougher than me. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Christina had frequently asked me whether I had a present for her, which emphasised her childlike vulnerability. At the same time, seeing her as a mother outside of the educational setting gave me the feeling that motherhood had toughened her. On one occasion while we were having lunch in McDonald's, Christina suddenly decided to remove the sleeping

Tanisha from her buggy and place her in my arms, as she knew I wanted to hold her. Christina tried to wake Tanisha up by pulling at her eyelids and tapping her hands. I protested gently, saying that I didn't mind her being asleep while I was holding her. Christina told me that motherhood was 'hard'. Although her labour had been distressing, and she had required stitches for a tear that she still hadn't recovered from, it had been better than her previous experience in the same hospital, and she told me that she had refused to have an epidural, presenting herself here as agentic and able to resist external medical control over her labour. My previous sense of her as a fragile girl provoking strong maternal feelings in me was now replaced with a sense that Christina was preparing her daughter for a life as difficult as hers.

The experiences of Christina, Melanie and Danielle, and Taylor's experience of depression following her abortion, all involve the trauma of the potential or actual loss of a baby. The girls narrate their responses to these losses in different ways, but particularly in the cases of Melanie and Danielle, their stories form part of their resilient identities, and in all cases, the girls' experiences of loss of a child are an important part of their maternal identities, as well as of their feelings of adulthood.

Maternal love

In this section of the chapter, I want to juxtapose the 'hard' themes of trauma and undergoing difficult transitions with a consideration of love. This was not an obvious 'theme', as although I asked some of the girls I interviewed post-natally to talk about their feelings of love for their children, it was a difficult question to phrase, it was not a subject of extensive narratives, and did not necessarily arise amid many graphic descriptions of birth (perhaps it was taken for granted). Maternal love is often idealised and assumed to be natural (Hollway, 2006; Baraitser, 2009), and I did not want to make these assumptions. I also did not want to make assumptions that maternal ambivalence is inevitable (Stadlen,

2004). I wanted to allow maternal love a place in my study, in spite of the fact that I had not given it much consideration either during the planning or doing of fieldwork. As Smart (2007) notes, an account can be read as saturated with love, even if the word is not mentioned.

Psychoanalysts have attempted to theorise maternal love as self-love. Asking the question as to why women have maternal love, Lisa Baraitser (2009) suggests that it 'can provide a bridge back to the mother's self-experience but via her specific relationship with the child-as-other' (98). Tina Miller (2005) writes that 'it is the dependency of a child, and our culturally shaped expectations of meeting needs and having responsibilities to and for our children, that lead us to a relationship of love, which as a mother (or father) may be experienced immediately or only gradually acquired' (145). The girls did in fact talk about the ease with which they loved their children, and in Melanie's case, the way she loved her twins 'instantly':

> I'm one of them people where I don't care what anybody else thinks. People like to be told your child's gorgeous, your child's beautiful, but I don't need to be told that. I know this sounds really bad, but I know my children are gorgeous, obviously because I'm their mother and I'm biased, and I don't feel the need to be told that all the time, but some people do.
>
> Naomi: Mm. What about your love for them, has that surprised you? I know that's a cliché – people say I didn't expect to love them so much?
>
> Melanie: No, because I was dying to meet them. Through the later stages I was absolutely dying to meet them, and as soon as they came out I loved them. Some people say that they need time to bond with them. I didn't. I just instantly loved them. So I've never, I don't understand when people say I needed time to bond with my baby, obviously some people do, but I just don't get it.

When I interviewed Danielle in her tiny bedsit when her son Lewis was two months old, we sat together on her bed (there being nowhere else to sit in the hot and crowded room),

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Danielle with her sleeping baby on her lap. When he woke up she fed him and then sat him up and rubbed his back. Writing my fieldnotes after the interview, I noted how loving she was with him. I asked her the same question:

> Naomi: ...do you feel surprised by how much you love him and want to protect him?
>
> Danielle: Yeah, it's so weird, because you think you love your family and stuff like that, but when you have a baby, you haven't got the time to love anyone else, even though you do love other people, how do you have the space to love everyone else? Like, I love my sisters and everything, but it's not how much I love him, still. Like, it's not in comparison, it's just different. Like I would protect my sisters and everything, but if I had to make a choice between my sisters and him, like he'd be my choice.

Before I left Danielle, I gave her a baby book for Lewis. She happily put it on a dresser with books she had already bought him, telling me that her mum had commented that Lewis was too young to read (her mum had never read to her as a child), but that she didn't understand that she was going to read them *to* him. I felt moved by this episode, and noted to myself that she was, as she constantly re-iterated to me in interviews, trying very hard to do things differently to her mum.

Claudia sought to reassure me, unprompted, that she loved her daughter, even though she thought she should have waited until she was more settled to have her:

> Claudia: I love my daughter, I do love her. I don't regret anything, but I would have waited until I had full-time work, house, car, all them things, coz it is a help when you have your own car and you can put your daughter in the car seat and drive up the road, instead of getting on buses with a buggy, all sorts of things, just little things like that, to have a secure future for your child.

I was struck by these invocations of love, and wanted to interrogate them further both in terms of the stereotypical assumptions that teenage mothers are just 'looking for love' and

that they somehow do not love their children in the 'right' way. I was concerned that my description of Melanie, for example, as a mother who smoked (and had done since the age of 9), did not breastfeed, and smacked her children, would reinforce stereotypes that she did not provide them with an appropriate kind of love, and that she had had children for the 'wrong' reasons, or that she was an unfit mother. I perceived Melanie to be a mother who loved her children deeply.

Christina talked about loving her child in the context of my asking about the actual experience of motherhood compared to the expectation, as did Mia:

Naomi: So can you tell me about how you think motherhood is compared to how you expected it to be?

Christina: It's, I thought it was hard, it is hard, but to me it's not. And like coz I love my child, I enjoy looking after her, although I probably need free time to go out clubbing [laughs with her friend who is present in the interview] but, otherwise from that, I enjoy it. [pause] What else can I say? I don't have no trouble with her. Although she cry. The only trouble I have with her, she cry for feed. That's the only thing. …She just want her bottle, she good to go. And right now she's holding her bottle. And I can't believe that for a four months baby.

Naomi: And how is being a mother compared to your expectation of it?

Mia: Oh. Being a mother, it's fun. I just think it's, I don't think it's hard, I think it's well easy, it's something you just get on with it, you have no choice, you get on with it. I mean, some mothers, they're different, some of them they can't cope, everyone's different coz everyone has different feelings, but for me, I think it's easy, it's not hard. I mean, I can do anything around him, anywhere I go, he comes with me – he's my handbag, you know, he's my little handbag [Naomi laughs]! And he's good as well when we go out – I love taking him out with me, I love taking him on journeys and you know, love looking after

him, I love feeding him, I love doing all sorts of stuff you know, and I don't really complain because it's my son, I had him, you know, so yeah, there's nothing hard about it.

The girls imply that it is easy to love your own child. It may be that taking care of a tiny baby is easier - and more rewarding - than many of the girls' past experiences. Mothering a baby is something at which they can excel, in contrast to many of their school experiences. Meeting their babies' needs may mean that some of their needs are met, and this should not be so readily taken up as a criticism. The assumption is often made that young women who have experienced poor parenting will reproduce this with their own children. The girls' stories indicate how much more complicated it is than this, however, and many of them explicitly sought to distance themselves from the ways that their mothers brought them up. 'Looking for love' is not a comprehensive explanation for teenage motherhood, and nor is it necessarily an action confined to those who have not received love.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the ideas of readiness for motherhood, trauma and resilience, and maternal love, in order to try to expand the context of some of the girls' experiences and therefore to better understand the construction of their mothering identities. The girls can be described as making an accelerated transition to adulthood, and not necessarily only because of early pregnancy, but also because of their wider life experiences. Their resilient mothering identities, while needing to be constructed as a defence against accusations of 'bad motherhood', can be seen to have emerged, in some cases, prior to motherhood. Several of the girls had moved out of the parental home into a council flat prior to their pregnancies, precipitating its own kind of independence and resilience. In spite of the occurrence of unplanned pregnancy, a failure to use

contraception consistently and efficiently was not necessarily indicative of a lack of agency or of the ability to take responsibility. Having the baby – as opposed to an abortion – was considered to be taking responsibility for the results of sexual relationships.

I felt that one of the reasons for locating and analysing the existence and experience of trauma in my study was precisely because it is typically silenced in mainstream social and educational spheres of young women. These experiences were given the space to be brought into discourse in the context of the alternative educational setting. The girls had the opportunity to tell these stories not only to me, but to the tutors and to each other. In many cases, rather than causing social exclusion, their experiences had made them more resilient and certain in their transition to motherhood, which, in turn, was often viewed as a route to inclusion in a community of mothers, as well as a route to educational re-inclusion.

Rather than these girls signifying a 'failed femininity', as noted by Angela McRobbie and discussed in the introduction, there is a failure of policy discourses to comprehend alternative meanings of desire and success with regard to young women. Mainstream meanings of desire and success are, particularly in the fields of sexuality, parenthood and education, very highly regulated. Dominant ideas about working-class fatalism and low expectations need to be replaced with an appreciation of agency and purposefulness, as well as of structural barriers which may be operating in young women's lives. The girls in my study were not invulnerable, and they were not equipped with the resources to map out a 'well-planned life'; as such, their maternal desire and capability is often denigrated. It is imperative to look beyond this denigration and to understand the relevance and importance of biographical experience in the formation of young women as mothers.

8. 'Teenage pregnancy' and 'social exclusion'

Introduction

This chapter approaches young motherhood, education and social exclusion from the perspective of a focus on the young women's voices. It demonstrates how a holistic examination of these areas is important in understanding the girls' changing identities. I asked the girls to comment directly on policy as well as asking them about their relationships and their future aspirations. My analysis suggests a wide gap between the realities of young mothers' lived experience and pejorative policy discourses of mistakes and low aspirations. As I have previously argued, a key element in the girls' constructions of identity involves a resistance against and a refutation of many of the more stigmatising aspects of policy and popular discourses about teenage motherhood.

I take a purely discursive rather than an ethnographic approach in this chapter. I work solely with discursive interview material and I draw together the themes running throughout the thesis and attempt to challenge the familiar constructs and tropes in relation to the 'teenage mother'. The chapter deepens an engagement with the nature of the constructs of 'teenage pregnancy' and 'social exclusion', two terms that were problematically entangled together in New Labour policy. I examine what the girls themselves have to say about becoming a teenage mother and about their family relationships and friendships, and I develop the idea that their fertility and relationship choices made sense to them, and did not constitute a social exclusion or represent a lack of aspiration. I argue that there is a significant disconnection between policy assumptions and the girls' lived experience.

While analysis of empirical data from a small qualitative study cannot make any ambitious claims to the 'truth' in relation to these concepts, and while my interpretation of the girls' narratives will always be a partial account, it is an account that nonetheless

questions these constructs. I was careful never to use the term 'social exclusion' with the girls, nor did I ever seek to explain its meaning, feeling that it would be insulting. While I often needed to explain the word 'policy' to the girls, asking them what they thought about the government intention to reduce teenage conceptions was not so difficult, and their responses indicated that they were aware of - and indeed frequently had to negotiate and resist - the stigma widely attached to teenage motherhood.

Timing in becoming a 'teenage mother'

I explained to the girls in interview that government policy on teenage pregnancy sought to reduce the number of teenage conceptions, and asked them what they thought about this. Most of the girls reacted to it with scepticism and sometimes took a very defensive position. Taylor, Jade and Mia all drew on the idea that the government could not stop people from having babies. They conveyed this to me with a sense of indignance, which was common among many of the girls on the course to whom I asked this question informally. Many thought that age simply was not an indicator of the ability to be a good mother:

> Naomi: So they've [government] got a policy which means they want to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies.
>
> Taylor: And how are they gonna do that? They can't stop us from having sex. They can't stop us from having sex. What are they gonna do? Handcuff us, you know what I'm saying? If they wanna handcuff us, they handcuff us to the bed, mate, then we'll make more [laughs]! I'm being honest. You can't stop teenagers from having babies. ... And when they turn round and their child's 13 and telling them I'm pregnant, see how they feel, innit, and then they won't be so prejudiced. I don't really, you know what I'm saying. It ain't happened to them yet, do you know what I'm saying, they don't understand nothing.

Taylor here indicates that middle-class policy makers have a lack of understanding of the issue, as their 13-year-old daughters may not have experienced pregnancy. She highlights the difference in perception of the issue, suggesting that teenage sex is not preventable and will inevitably, in some cases, lead to pregnancy. Jade had a similar response, stating that the desire to have a child at a young age was unpreventable:

> Jade: Some people generally want to have kids young. Seriously some people, from really young, have always wanted to have babies. You can't stop it, you cannot stop it, and if somebody really doesn't want to have a baby, they'll have an abortion. If I really didn't want to have this baby, I would have had an abortion. But you can't prevent somebody, you cannot do it. And, why do they class it as just 'teenage pregnancy?' It's just somebody having a baby. Forget the teenage bit, coz in a couple of years they'll be a adult.

Jade also points to the fact that she had a choice as to whether or not to keep her baby when she became pregnant – she had the option to have an abortion (as I explored in the previous chapter, however, abortion was not an option for those girls who considered it wrong). Mia similarly suggests that while more information and advice is necessary, it will be an individual's choice as to whether to have a baby. She points out that accidents and rape are factors involved in this 'choice':

> Naomi: They've got a policy which basically says we want to cut the number of teenage pregnancies, because they say it's a problem for various reasons. What do you think about that?
>
> Mia: Erm [pause] I don't know, I don't think that, at the end of the day, it's down to the individual. You can't stop somebody from, you can only talk, give encouragement, give advice and education, but at the end of the day, it's down to the individual whether they want to listen to that or not. So, if they wanna go out and get pregnant, whatever, that's what they wanna do – you can't stop it. However, accidents happen and also you have to remember rapes, and all that stuff that's happening, so I don't, the government, all the

government can do is give advice and education, and also... I think more teaching in the schools about sex education, I think that should be brought up a bit more. ... whatever they say to me, you're too young to have the child or whatever, I say to them, well, for your information, I think this is the best time that I've had a child actually, I think it's the best time.

Mia's statement here that it is the 'best time' for her is powerful and acts as a complete contradiction to the policy construction of teenage years as the worst time to have a baby. Carabine (2007) argues that New Labour policy on teenage pregnancy attempted to produce a self-governing, knowledgeable and rational individual, a young woman who, equipped with effective sex education, can then be held responsible for making the 'right' decision to delay motherhood. This is, in fact, almost the position that Mia takes up, echoing the pragmatic realism and distancing from a conservative moral framework, which Carabine suggests is infused in policy. Carabine argues that New Labour approaches to improving sex education ignored the 'chaos and unpredictability of desire' (960) and that while policy did not stigmatise pregnant teenagers for making an immoral choice, it did stigmatise them on the basis that they have not been responsible with information they have been given and have not rationally chosen to delay motherhood. While providing comprehensive sex education is far from the sole solution to the 'problem', it remains important. New Labour did not go far enough in terms of a progressive approach to young people's sexuality and to breaking out of the promotion of traditional family forms, although it did finally instate PSHE as part of the compulsory curriculum.

Taylor, Jade and Mia here demonstrate themselves as knowing and reflexive subjects who contradict yet are not able to disrupt policy discourses. Some of the other girls, however, had a more mediated response to the question of government policy on teenage pregnancy, and their narratives are infused with a more cautious element, and with a weighing up of positives and negatives:

Claudia: I don't think it's ever a mistake to have a baby. If you really wanted to have a baby, I don't think it's a mistake, but I would tell young girls, like to wait a while, live a bit, before you have your child, because it does change your whole life, it does change it completely. But like some people it changes them in a good way, like there's kids, like young girls I know, who's been like really street, like getting arrested, whatever, parties, then they had their daughter and now they're just homely, like, a homely person, so in a way it is good – there's good changes, there's bad changes. If it's the right time I think you should do it, but if not then, you know, just wait.

Naomi: What do you think about government policy that wants to cut the number?

Claudia: I don't think they've cut it at all really. [laughs] Not round here, maybe they have in other places, but, they haven't, nothing's really changed where I live. Like, sex education, school and that stuff, it doesn't really help.

Claudia's response addresses policy concerns succinctly: having a baby in your teenage years may not be the right time, but it is never a mistake. She also expresses her scepticism at policy intending to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies, a sentiment echoed strongly by the midwife Katherine, who felt that this was a very class-based judgement, and commented to me that the government had about as much chance of halving the teenage conception rate as they had of flying her to the moon. Claudia had been studying beauty at college when she dropped out following a car accident. She then went to the Prince's Trust, after which time she became pregnant and went to the vocational training provider. When I interviewed her, Claudia's daughter was 14 months old and Claudia had just begun the Childcare course located in the room next to the antenatal course. Although she did not regret having her daughter, and spoke of her love for her, she told me that she did regret becoming sexually active at the age of 15, and that the reality of the consequences of her pregnancy, at age 18, had shocked her.

Danielle similarly articulated two sides of the issue to me, also drawing on the idea that having a baby as a teenager was 'good for some people'. Notably, Claudia and

Danielle do not place themselves in the category of girls for whom having a baby was a way of calming them down or seeking love that they had never had. As explored in the previous chapter, Danielle's first pregnancy had been accidental, but her second pregnancy was planned and very much wanted:

> Danielle: Like when young mums say who is the government to say that they can't [have a baby] – it's true. It is true, who are they to say it? Coz it's their body and they can do what they want with it. At the same breath, yeah, you haven't lived your life. You haven't done everything that you wanted to do. ...And that's why I think the government are right in what they're saying, because everyone should get an education first before they think of kids, and be into work, before they start thinking about kids, because otherwise they are just gonna be living off of the benefits. ...some people have lives where they never got loved, so they want a baby to like kind of reflect and want someone to love them back, so that's why I feel like sometimes it is good for some people, because it's for their sanity as well. ...So I'm kind of mixed, I can't say much, otherwise I'd be being hypocrite, because I'm in that situation, so but I think it depends on what situation you're in. But there's certain people who'll do it just to get a house or a council property or for the money and stuff like that and that's where it becomes all a bit like, what are you doing, like why are you doing that? ... So it's hard to put a view on it, because it's wrong and right for certain people.

Danielle begins by employing a feminist defence of the autonomy of the female body against the control of the (masculine) state, although she then goes on to acknowledge that at the same time, the government does have a point: it is wise to gain an education before having children. Interestingly, Danielle is very clear about the girls for whom pregnancy is *wrong*: those who are doing it for a council flat or benefits. While Danielle sought to distinguish herself from girls who became pregnant because they were looking for love, she was not critical of them. Danielle draws on a number of different discourses here, and is able to examine them together by looking at contrasting ideas around the issue.

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In response to my questioning them about policy, Kim and Melanie, however, both drew on official discourses of teenagers being too young to have babies. Kim, who was pregnant at interview, and Melanie, the mother of two-year-old twin boys, both felt that they should have waited before having children. Both Melanie and Kim had support; Melanie was living with her mother, and Kim with her boyfriend. Despite the fact that Melanie had stressed to me that she had experienced considerably more than other teenagers, felt she was an adult from the age of 16, and considered herself already very responsible before her pregnancy, she thought she would have coped better being older:

> Naomi Do you think there's an age where you're old enough to become a mum, or do you think it's very difficult to put an age on it?
>
> Melanie: Erm, I would say it's very difficult because there's people in their 30s and 40s who just haven't got a clue, and shouldn't have babies. But as far as young, I think even though I've got a good, erm, intelligence or whatever, I think even I was too young to be having children.

> Naomi: What do you think about people who say that teenagers are too young to have babies?
>
> Kim: Erm, well, I wish I waited. I don't know really. ...If you want your baby to have the best life, you'd wait until you're working and you've got money. The right time and stuff.
>
> Naomi: But the right time might be before all that for some people.
>
> Kim: Yeah. For *some* people, it might be before.

From all of these responses it is possible to see a range of discourses infused in the girls' narratives; sometimes an acknowledgement on the one hand of the difficulties of early motherhood is mixed with an assertion that it might be a positive decision and experience for some. The girls' incisive comments give pause as to the black and white casting of teenage motherhood as 'always a mistake', and yet also show them reflecting from multiple angles on the issue. There is also a sense here that I have asked the girls to

'account' for themselves; faced with these kinds of questions, the girls are able to evaluate different discourses, but, as Danielle points out, individuals' choices and constraints are always contingent on their particular circumstances.

'Social exclusion': friendship networks

In Chapter 2, I discussed the way in which social exclusion operated within New Labour policy discourses, and I argued that the categorisation of teenage mothers as 'socially excluded' was a problematic construction that should be viewed critically. As I demonstrate in the following two sections, this is a slippery concept that I found difficult to apply to my participants. Although the emphasis in policy discourses has been on the economic aspects of social exclusion, the term also involves reference to social relationships. I decided to examine social inclusion/exclusion in relation to my data from the perspective of the girls' relationships with their friends and families, because this aspect has been neglected in policy terms, and because I am particularly interested in it. First I will address the girls' friendships, and their peer social support and interaction on the course. This latter aspect was highlighted by the tutors as being one of the key functions of the course. Kidger (2004) and Yates and Payne (2006) have made reference to social isolation of teenage mothers, but this is an under-researched area, and not easy to examine either quantitatively or qualitatively. The inclusive and exclusive practices of the girls' friendships were shifting and elusive. I tried to understand something of the meshing of the girls' social worlds – the external identities they took up on the outside world, of which I was not a part, and the inside world of the course, of which I was a part, and the identities the girls took up during my observation and participation. This was a difficult endeavour given my reliance on the girls' narratives of their friendships beyond the setting, and the constantly shifting group of girls present on the course, but I was able to gain a

picture of the girls' understandings of their friendships in relation to their transitions to motherhood.

About half of the girls told me that they had a few close friends, in most cases between one and four, and these girls did not appear to have a wider circle of friends (as opposed to the remaining half of the girls, four of whom appeared to have lots of friends, and four of whom the precise nature of their friendship network was difficult to ascertain). Most of these girls with a few close friends also had the close support of a parent and/or a partner. Taylor and Danielle were typical of these girls:

> Naomi: Can you tell me about your friends?
>
> Taylor: Oh yeah, I got one, I don't really have a lot of friends. I'm not gonna lie. I don't really have a lot of friends. I have one friend called Lisa. She's a good friend of mine. She ain't gonna be the godmother though, because I'm sorry, I ain't being funny but I don't want no godmother, because I don't want my child getting attached to them. I'll get jealous! That's why I was keen to start here, because I could make more friends. I don't really have a lot of friends. I'm not antisocial, I'm friendly, I'm a friendly person but like, I don't really like, ever since I got pregnant, like, just not really, my friend is my baby, innit? And my boyfriend, and my mum and my sisters, and Lisa. That's it really.

While Taylor was a gregarious girl who clearly, from my perspective, wanted to make friends on the course, Danielle was much more circumspect - and introverted - and appeared to be satisfied with her small but close social network:

> Naomi: So who would you say are the people that you're closest to out of friends and family?
>
> Danielle: I would say I'm closest to my oldest sister and my little sister and the guy I see as my dad and his girlfriend, and that's it from my family. I don't talk to my nan, well I talk to her, but I don't like her.
>
> Naomi: Your mum's mum?

Danielle: Yeah. She's very opinionated. And um, some friends, my mum's next door neighbour, and a girl called Rebecca and a girl called Natalie, and they're the only ones I talk to. ...

Naomi: What about here?

Danielle: I would say hi to them, but they're not people that, some of them are people that I would hang around with, but coz I met them through this course, I don't really know them. How I could see them in the course is completely different than how they might act like on the outside world. But I mean, I just kind of like see them as people I would say hi to.

Danielle's and Taylor's remarks here about their attitudes towards making friends on the course represent the split between some girls who looked to the course with alacrity as a vital way of making new friends, and others who approached the social scene in the setting with some aloofness. This was in spite of the fact that all the girls I interviewed said that they enjoyed the course and would recommend it to others. Danielle and Taylor were both present when the closing of the course was announced, and were both especially vocal in their dismay about it. For Samantha, her distancing from some of the other girls on the course was about her positioning herself as a good mother, in contrast to those girls who smoked while pregnant and were too loud. Similarly, Danielle distanced herself from girls such as Kyra, whom she considered dressed inappropriately while pregnant. Many of the girls were eager to make friends, however, and several of the girls I interviewed post-natally had kept in contact with girls they had met on the course.

I attempted to gain a sense of how the girls' friendships had changed upon them becoming pregnant or having a baby. Most of the girls talked about losing touch with some friends at this point. However, several girls attended mother and baby groups outside of the course, and made new friends there. Danielle talked about the changes she had experienced upon becoming pregnant:

Naomi: Can you tell me about your friends?

Danielle: I talk to my friends, but because we're all going through different things, I don't

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have nothing to talk about with them anymore. I've got like a friend that she's had a baby, so I got something to talk about with her, she was my neighbour and I've known her since forever. So like I still talk to her, but the rest of them, I have nothing in common.

Naomi: Girls from school?

Danielle: Yeah, they're still like immature and going out clubbing and things like that, and that's just not what I'm thinking about now so, they're worried about boys and things like that.

...

[From my post-natal interview with Danielle:]

Naomi: What about your friends?

Danielle: Yeah. It's hard to talk to friends because they don't understand where I'm coming from. There's one girl, she's got a baby, but it's still hard to talk to people who don't have babies.

For Danielle, her pregnancy represents maturity and a seemingly profound separation from her past social circle that involved some loss for her, although she narrated this to me in a very matter-of-fact way. Danielle had at this point already been through the death of her first son. She had also moved out of home prior to her pregnancy and had been living in a tiny bedsit for eighteen months. It was notable that many of the girls (Melanie was a prime example) did not appear wistful about having missed out on their youth because they had 'done it all' already. Many girls also appeared pleased to be able to distance themselves from previous friendship groups because they felt they had moved on to something more important.

Amira, Kim and Kelly all described how their friendships had changed upon becoming pregnant (Amira and Kim) or a mother (Kelly) in terms of avoiding 'trouble':

Amira: Friends at secondary school – all bitches, don't talk to even one of them any more, no, I talk to one of them, like on and off, one girl called Carmel. I sort of made friends with her after I stopped talking to the bitchy girls. ...

Naomi: I'm interested in how relationships change when you have a baby.

Amira: Yeah, Louise [another friend], she stopped talking to everyone for months. She was just in her house with that baby all the time, didn't talk to anyone. Then she started calling me again, and for a while we kept in contact, and then when I found out I was pregnant, she, trouble seems to follow her, like I don't think she means to get herself in these situations, but she always seems to have girls after her or boys after her or some kind of problem like someone's out to get her, so I don't think it's wise for me to hang around with someone like that, being pregnant and all, because I wouldn't put myself in that situation. Coz I don't want to get involved in that right now.

For Amira, a wish to avoid dangerous situations having become pregnant meant a severing of previous friendships. Kim also took up this idea of a newly experienced threat from existing friendship networks upon becoming pregnant, and she too used the word 'trouble' to describe previous friends:

Naomi: And what about your friends? Can you tell me about friends you've got outside of here, what they're doing?

Kim: I had loads of associates before I got pregnant who I used to hang out with. I wouldn't exactly call them my friends – I used to associate with them. But now I'm pregnant it's like you don't really have time for all that. Like my *best* friends – I've got two best friends who are girls and one who's a boy. I speak to them on the phone and stuff. I would invite them to come down to my house, and they would come down but who I used to hang around with most of the time, these were associates, I don't really check them anymore. They would be trouble.

Naomi: So you don't feel your close friends have changed since you got pregnant? They're going to stick with you?

Kim: Yeah.

Kelly refers to having been arrested and charged for assault, for which she had had to do thirty hours of community service. She had now put this behind her, similarly to many of

the other girls who told me they had consigned their violent behaviour to the past. Echoing Claudia's earlier remark about girls being arrested and then having a baby making them 'homely', she herself admits that having a baby changed her for the better:

> Naomi: Have your friendships changed since you've had the baby?
>
> Kelly: Yeah.
>
> Naomi: Have they, sort of split off, some of them like to go out and party all the time, or do you still go out and party all the time? Maybe you do?!
>
> Kelly: No, well before I had Luke I got into a bit of trouble, like all the people I was hanging around with, they was getting arrested, and I got arrested as well. And then having the baby actually calmed me down, coz I knew I couldn't go out and do what they was doing, coz then I'd get arrested and there's a child with no mum. So that calmed me down a lot and them sort of friends I don't talk to them no more, coz I don't wanna do what they're doing.

Amira, Kim and Kelly all associated moving away from previous friendship networks with distancing themselves from trouble, growing up and taking responsibility, and thus equated motherhood with a positive identity change and with having a better life.

Jade and Claudia told me that most of their friends were pregnant or mothers, however, and so becoming pregnant had not represented a major change for them:

> Naomi: What about other friends? Have your friendships changed since getting pregnant?
>
> Jade: The majority of my friends are pregnant.

> Naomi: Did your friendships change?
>
> Claudia: Not with my close friends. My close friends I'm still the same with, but other friends that I wasn't as close with, I've lost contact with them now and stuff, because that's the friends I used to be out on the streets with and stuff like that, so I don't really have time for them no more. I see them, like by and by, but not really. But my proper good friends, we still see each other.

Naomi: Are they also mothers?

Claudia: Yeah, most of them are.

This shift in friendship circles upon becoming a mother seems similar to any pregnant woman who may experience a severance with childless friends and a new connection with other mothers. Perhaps the reason for some of the girls' suspicion of merging into the social scene on the course was due to a resistance to identity change, a resistance to being seen as a 'teenage mother', with all the stigma that entails. I have tried to demonstrate here the complexity of the girls' friendship practices and dynamics and the variability of their friendship groups and networks. While the setting did appear to be a vital place of social connection for some, the fact that many of the girls already had close friends who were pregnant or mothers, was also significant. Interestingly, while Kidger (2004) discusses the experience of teenage mothers having been physically moved away from existing friendship networks, this was not mentioned by any of my participants. McLeod *et al* (2006) found that while statutory services did provide a support network of services contributing to social inclusion for teenage mothers, these services did little to enable social inclusion at a community level by developing social networks amongst peers. In contrast, it appeared that the setting did provide the opportunity for girls to make new friends, but that some of them did not consider this to be a priority as their friendship groups already consisted of other young mothers, or they felt adequately supported by a few close friends and family members. Loss of friends was in actuality often equated with a positive step, as some friends were considered to be 'trouble' and the girls wanted to move past this stage in their lives. While it is impossible, as I have already stressed, to make any truth claims as to the degree of 'social exclusion' the girls may be experiencing, and while 'relational exclusion' (Kidger, 2004) is only one dimension of this, it is hard to make a generalised connection between becoming a teenage mother and experiencing relational exclusion.

The girls also provided me with rich narratives of their relationships with their parents (mostly mothers) and partners. Many of the girls had very strong relationships with either a mother or partner, and sometimes both. Only in the case of Nicola, who had been in care, did there seem to be no strong family or partner relationship at all. All of the five girls who lived with their mothers at the time of interview (Melanie, Claudia [both of whom had children already], Sabrina, Lorraine and Farisha) told me that they had good relationships with their mothers. Eight other girls described a good relationship with either one or both of their parents. Only Danielle, Christina and Nicola did not; Danielle had a very difficult relationship with her mother, saying that having a baby made her tolerate her mother, and that she wouldn't be talking to her if she hadn't had a baby; Christina's parents were both dead (and it was difficult for me to ascertain what kind of relationship she had with her aunt, with whom she lived); and Nicola, although she had contact with her mother, told me, 'I don't really talk to her...I just don't like her'.

The girls' narratives varied greatly in terms of intergenerational connection or rupture with their mothers upon becoming pregnant (Thomson and Kehily, 2008). Almost all of the girls had a view, when I asked them, about whether they were going to bring their children up similarly or differently to their own mothers, and this was not necessarily influenced by the quality of the relationship with their mother. Some said they thought they would be exactly the same kind of parent. The differences several girls specified included talking about sex openly with their child (Claudia), moving to a better area and having more discipline (Kelly), being more understanding (Amira) and not hitting their child (Kim). Danielle strongly distanced herself from her mother, saying, 'we will be complete opposites. Completely opposite. We're just completely different people. I believe I'm a lot wiser than my mum'. The girls' thoughtfulness about generational

differences in parenting was striking; as Hollway *et al*, (2008) describe in their study of first-time mothers in Tower Hamlets, new identifications and disidentifications with their own mothers were powerfully evident upon becoming mothers themselves, with the women functioning as 'intergenerational pivot[s] because of their simultaneous access to identifications with their mothers and babies' (25). This intergenerational transmission of mothering, Hollway *et al* argue, accounted for continuity against a background of social change in parenting practices.

One study has indicated that for some teenage mothers in the care system, relationships with their mothers improved upon becoming pregnant (Reeves, 2003). Samantha and Jade both felt that they had better relationships with their parents since they moved out of home:

> Samantha: I got kicked out coz I was complaining about home life and stuff. And I lived with my boyfriend for a couple of months, then I was put into a hostel for two years and then I got a flat which I'm living in now...My mum and dad just want peace and quiet. My dad's really ill, he's got diabetes...he's in a wheelchair...I do go and see them, I just feel like I've got a better relationship with my parents than I did have when I was living at home.

> Jade: So I used to rebel a lot [laughs] but now things have changed. Me and my mum, she's still my mum, but we're friends as well. And same with my dad. ...I left my nan when I was 16 and moved in by myself, and from then I've been living by myself. It's quite hard, it's not easy. But I kind of prefer it now; my mum and dad have got their own routine. So it's like, it wouldn't work out if I moved back. ...they wanted me to come back home, but there just wouldn't have been no point. Coz then our relationship wouldn't be the way it is. I think it would be a lot different. But it's all right. I'll survive.

Although Samantha and Jade dealt with their problems in quite different ways, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, their trajectories of home difficulties and educational disengagement, coinciding with having to look after themselves for a couple of years,

followed by a period of relative stability by the time of pregnancy (Samantha with her boyfriend, and Jade alone), were quite similar, and both had made peace with their parents after previous hostility.

Several of the girls spoke of their relationship with their mother in quite glowing terms:

Melanie: I got on well with them. Me mum, she's always been more like a friend than a mum. Erm, me dad, erm, I knew me boundaries with me dad [laughs].

Kelly: Oh, me and my mum have got a lovely relationship. We're proper close, I think. Yeah.

Taylor: Oh I get along fine with my mum, but I don't really particularly have like a relationship with my dad because he was like most other dads, and just like, I don't know, he just done what he wanted to do and just got on with his life. But I have a mum, and she makes up for it. Being a single mum, coz you know they've gotta do twice as much, innit?

Mitchell and Green (2002) found in their study of young working-class mothers in the north east of England that female kinship networks – especially participants' mothers – provided an important source of support for the young women. Vincent *et al* (2008) also found in their study of London mothers that working-class mothers derived their main support from family (as opposed to middle-class mothers who were less likely to have family living close by and had extensive networks consisting of other mothers, for example from antenatal groups). In Melanie's case her mother's support was vital, as she lived with her and her twin sons in a small two-bedroom council house in which she shared a room with her mother and her sons had their own room. These girls' experiences of maternal support and connection were striking, and do not align with widespread pejorative

discourses of working-class family breakdown and intergenerational cycles of poor parenting and deprivation.

Half of the girls were in a relationship with their boyfriends at the time of interview (including Amira, who was married, and Katie, who was engaged), although not all were living together. Melanie, Danielle and Nicola had had no contact with their babies' fathers after they were born. Kelly, Sabrina, Christina, Mia, Nicola and Farisha all had problematic relationships with their babies' fathers, but all of them were firm about wanting their children to have contact with him. Even Danielle, who appeared unconcerned about the fact that her son's father had 'disappeared' after his birth, felt that it was important for her child to have a dad (although perhaps not a relationship with his biological father). Danielle described the relationship to me in her antenatal interview:

> We ain't together, but we're on talking terms. Like, I can't be with somebody that tells me how to live my life. Coz only I can do that. So I just said I can't be with him. Maybe it's the hormones, but we'll talk after the pregnancy and stuff like that.

After the birth of her son, she told me:

> Erm, he never called when he was born, and he never turned up.
>
> Naomi: You told him, did you?
>
> Danielle: Yeah. I sent him a text saying that I'm in labour, coz I couldn't speak to anybody, and then he didn't turn up or anything. He never called, so I'm not bothered...I don't really mind, coz it's his loss not mine.

Danielle was highly unusual in this respect, and her attitude contrasted with other girls feeling that a relationship for their child with its biological father was very important:

> Kelly: I don't wanna get back with him [baby's father] now. I think me and Luke are better off without him. Yeah, get more money and everything. ...
>
> Naomi: Do you want Luke to have a relationship with his dad?

Kelly: Oh yeah, definitely. I do. Coz I didn't know my dad, I thought it would be better off if Luke *did* know his dad. And coz he's a boy as well.

Christina: I'm not keeping this child away from him. He can see him child if he wants. A lot. Coz at the end of the day, yeah, he's the father of the child, and when as soon as she grow up, she's gonna ask, where's my daddy? And what I'm gonna say? Ah, your daddy's gone somewhere. Whatever, so, get me.

Mia: I want my relationship to work, if you get what I'm saying – I don't want to be another, um, young mother without a full-time dad.

Naomi: And did you want your boyfriend to support you, or you were quite happy when he left?

Nicola: I didn't really care. The only thing that I cared about was my child not having a dad. But, like, I don't need any like financial help from him, but I just want like, even if it's just once a month, like, him coming to see his child or something, to let my child know his face.

The girls suggest here that they want their children's fathers to be involved with them for the children's sakes, rather than for their own. Mia suggests that she doesn't want to become a stereotyped and stigmatised teenage single mother. As I detailed in Chapter 6, what I found particularly striking were the girls' statements of wanting this involvement in spite of the adverse circumstances and relationships many had experienced. Christina had suffered considerably at the hands of her baby's father, who was prone to violence. Sabrina suffered similarly, her baby's father having told the mother of his other child to beat Sabrina up. Sabrina was in a park in the early stages of pregnancy when the woman kicked her in the stomach, and she was taken to hospital, where her baby's father came to visit her and informed her that he had slept with her best friend. In spite of the fact that she

knew he was 'no good' for her, Sabrina maintained the relationship and wanted him to have contact with his daughter. Nicola's baby's father was denying the existence of his child, but she wanted him to make monthly contact. Kelly, Mia and Farisha had difficult relationships with their babies' fathers (the men were not violent towards them), but wanted their children to have contact with them. I felt that these strong feelings about their children knowing their fathers were partly about resisting stereotypes of teenage mothers, and partly (as I discussed in Chapter 6) about a belief that having a father figure, and in particular knowing one's biological father, was important for a child's psychological well-being. Bad behaviour on the part of the child's father did not appear, on the whole, to make a difference to this belief. Of course the girls' feelings may change over time, and may have been informed by idealistic feelings during pregnancy of the roles that their children's fathers might play in their lives, but still their attachment to the importance of these paternal links was very strong.

Some of the girls' relationships with their babies' fathers, however, were remarkably strong, given their fledgling status or initiation at a very young age. Samantha described her boyfriend as her best friend, and spoke enthusiastically about their relationship:

> Naomi: And does he support you? He gives you money?
> Samantha: Yeah, a lot. He does a lot for all my family – if they ask, my boyfriend will always be there to do it for them. ... He's bought her nearly all the baby stuff.
> Naomi: He sounds really amazing.
> Samantha: He's one in a million. ... I don't ask anyone for help – my boyfriend just gives me help because we're together. And if I've got something that he wants, I'll give it to him. And if I ask for something he'll give it to me. So it's a two-way street. We love each other and we listen to each other.

Taylor described her relationship in similar terms:

Naomi: And is he quite involved with the baby?

Taylor: Yep, too involved. It's like he's having the baby. He said to me one time, if I could have a baby, I would have a baby. ... He's very happy, innit. You know, he's telling me about my birth plan, he's telling me what to do, so I just don't argue with these Portuguese people [he was from Angola], innit, they're very family orientated.

Naomi: So do you see it as a long-term relationship?

Taylor: Yeah, if *I've* got anything to do with it, it will be a long-term relationship. He ain't going nowhere [laughs]!

The girls did not maintain relationships with their boyfriends for reasons of financial support. Several of their partners were unemployed, and did not appear to be looking for employment. Farisha's boyfriend was at college, but many were several years older than the girls. I asked some of the girls if they envisioned getting married one day and most responded affirmatively. Danielle was the only girl I asked who was categorically against marriage, telling me, 'I don't think you need to have a piece of paper to say how much you're committed to the person'. While some of them were struggling to maintain their family relationships, most of the girls aspired to conventional family forms and none of them seemed to have set out to be single mothers. This, along with my analysis of the girls' friendship networks, links back to my discussion of social exclusion in Chapter 2, where the official policy definition includes the description of an 'inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society...' (Cabinet Office, 2009). This is a particularly individualised and stigmatising approach that does not take account of factors such as local social networks legitimising early pregnancy and providing support, as MacDonald and Marsh (2005) suggest. Reflecting on these girls' complex and varying situations, I would argue that the concept of the inevitability of teenage motherhood being linked with 'social exclusion' and a cycle of poor parenting and poor or no relationships with parents and boyfriends needs to be questioned.

In this section I argue against the idea of a working-class educational exclusion that is premised on 'low aspirations'. Francis and Hey (2009) have argued that New Labour policy, using the language of 'low expectations' as part of a discourse of individual blame, abhorrently focused on working-class children's failure to grasp the opportunities education has to offer. They suggest that 'lack of aspiration' could be read as realistic rather than 'feckless', pointing to the disadvantages accrued to those without financial and social capital in the quasi-market practices of the education system. However, what was very striking in the girls' responses to me to questions about their future plans, was the firmness and specificity of their aspirations. The girls wanted to go into childcare, teaching, youth work, physiotherapy, psychology, design and media:

> Danielle: Oh I decided that I was going to be a physiotherapist when I was like a baby, I was really really young. ... I was always into sports and stuff like that, and I used to be a good runner, they used to wanna put me into, like the secondary school that I went to, when I did sports day, I did nearly everything in sports day. ...So from young I've known I wanted to do something with sport. But it's just, what, so in Year 7, I think I decided I was going to be a physiotherapist.

> Naomi: What kind of teacher do you want to be?
> Samantha: A nursery teacher. I grew up with children and I'd love to work in a nursery and see them develop until they're in Year 6 and see how far they've come, be proud of each and every one.

> Naomi: So back to your future plans – you were saying you wanted to have your own business – have you got an idea of what that would involve?

Amira: Mm. Erm, I want to be a nursery designer, so I want to design nurseries for people, so people could pay me to come into their house and see how their child's bedroom looks and then come up with ideas, like they could come up with a theme, and I could come up with ideas like storage solutions.

Naomi: Do you know what you want to do for a job?
Mia: I want to be a psychologist. Yeah, I heard that it's very very hard, a lot of work, but I'm willing to go through it. I got a child and stuff, so I don't know how it's gonna work. I'll do it, anyway.

These seemed to me to be well-rehearsed narratives, spoken without hesitation, and the examples I give above were typical of most of the girls' responses to my questions about their future plans. None of the girls wanted to live on benefits and all references to benefits were disparaging, including Amira's, whose single-parent father had brought her and her two siblings up on benefits. McRobbie (2009) suggests that occupational status is now of primary significance in the presentation of self, with girls of all social classes having clear plans as to their future ambitions; this in turn renders those without a well-planned life particularly outside of the boundaries of the norm. As Alldred and David (2007) point out, my questioning of the girls about their existing qualifications and future educational and career plans *required* them to narrate themselves as 'lacking in education and with future plans to make educational self-improvements' (143). However, these were not necessarily new plans or aspirations conceived after becoming pregnant, but were often longstanding career aims that the girls did not consider to be hindered by having a baby. While several of the girls had 'fallen into' childcare courses, this did not necessarily represent their long-term plans.

I also attempted to gauge the girls' aspiration levels by asking them to weigh up the importance of 'motherhood versus a career'. With hindsight this was not a particularly nuanced question, failing to distinguish between a job and a career, and I did not ask the

girls to consider how the economic implications of working or not working might affect their parenting practices and identities. The responses I received were mixed. Similarly to Duncan and Irwin's (2004) findings in relation to working-class mothers' attitudes towards care and paid work, the girls placed themselves variably along a 'primarily mother' to 'primarily worker' continuum. However, many of the girls were vociferous that being a mother was much more important to them than a career:

> Melanie: If I had to choose between being a full-time mother or having a career, it would be motherhood, all the time. I don't particularly agree with people who still strive to have that career and all them goals and stuff, obviously still have goals, but to have that particular career that you wanted before you had children, I don't agree with it because you're devoting all your time to your career and not to your children. But at the same time, erm, I do think it's ok to have a job and be a mother. But only after a certain time in a child's life. There is a big difference between having a career and having a job – when the kids are older, at school full-time, if you wanna pick up back on your career when you left off, that's fine.

> Naomi: How do you see, do you see motherhood as more important than a career, or as equally important?
>
> Farisha: Mm, I see motherhood as more important. Much more. Much more.

These responses were particularly interesting in the light of the emphasis that all the girls made on having future career aspirations. Melanie and Farisha and several other girls did not feel required to narrate themselves as needing a career in order to construct themselves as good mothers; in fact Melanie disagreed with putting career needs before those of children.

Some of the girls thought both motherhood and a career were important, and some qualified their primary attachment to motherhood by saying that a job would *enhance* motherhood, both in material terms and in setting an example to their children. Jade put it

to me, for example, that 'for me to be a good mum is to have a good career, to have a good life'. As I discussed in Chapter 5, many of the girls considered it important to work so that they could provide financially for their children, and it is notable that African-Caribbean mothers have historically seen employment as part of 'good mothering' (Duncan *et al*, 2004). Both Kelly and Claudia spoke from the experience of already being mothers:

> Naomi: Can you talk about what's more important to you – being a mum or having a career, or are they both important?
>
> Kelly: Oh, I think being a mum's more important to me. But if someone gave me a choice either to look after Luke or have my own job and run my own business, I would choose to look after Luke. Yeah, definitely. I do want a career as well. Be better for me and better for Luke in the long run.

> Naomi: What do you think about a career versus motherhood; is one more important than the other, or is it important to go out to work?
>
> Claudia: I think it's important to have both. Because you do get a bit trapped in motherhood, like you feel like that's all you've got, you just do the same thing every day – nappies, bath, bed, nappies, bath, bed and that's about it. But once you get work you get social again and you have a bit of time apart, it's always good like that as well, coz they get a bit clingy otherwise - it's nice to have a little bit of time apart.

Claudia indicated that the social benefits of working were important to her. It is difficult to know the extent to which the girls were influenced by government attempts to encourage mothers into the labour market and by discourses propounding the benefits of combining work with motherhood and the possibility for young women to 'have it all'. The split between some who felt motherhood was more important and others who disagreed with this makes it difficult to generalise, but indicated that the girls' values were contrasting and complex and not necessarily predictable by the fact that they were working-class teenagers. They were also struggling, like many women, with conflicting identities of mother and

worker and with finding solutions to these difficult tensions. As Vincent *et al* (2010) argue, working-class women are often 'expected to be, and see themselves as, both "earners" and "carers"...these mothers, and in particular the lone mothers, struggle within an acute nexus of impossible expectations' (136).

Conclusion and postscript

This chapter has exposed and complicated some of the assumptions that are inherent in both policy and in wider cultural and professional discourses, in relation to teenage pregnancy and relational exclusion. It is clear that not every pregnant teenager experiences these issues in the same way, and I have tried to point to some of the patterns and contradictions involved. The problems with New Labour's teenage pregnancy strategy have been widely identified (Arai, 2009; Carabine, 2007; Duncan, 2007) and the questioning of teenage pregnancy's relation to 'social exclusion', while this is a recent construct, goes back to the work of Phoenix (1991). It did not take very long after I entered the setting for me to feel defensively indignant on behalf of the girls that policy that, as they saw it, sought to prevent them from having a baby, was at the very least, irrelevant to many of their personal and social concerns. For my participants, having a baby as a teenager was not indicative of a lack of aspiration or desire to live on benefits or of a rationality mistake. This disconnection between policy and lived experience arises out of a class-based clash of understandings of success and aspiration.

The implications for policy here involve the urgent need to end widespread stigmatisation of teenage motherhood and place more emphasis on support for young mothers. The insufficient funding and importance given to projects that support young mothers, such as the one that formed the basis for my study, is indicative of the problems with New Labour's approach to and construction of 'teenage pregnancy'. My fieldwork came to an abrupt and premature end when Karen, the manager of the course, announced

that it would be closing with a month's notice, because the private vocational training provider had decided it did not wish to run 'touchy feely' courses any more, despite the fact that the course had a continual waiting list. They wished to focus on work-based training rather than in-house training, which they felt was more economically viable. Everyone was palpably distressed by this news, not least Taylor, who exclaimed to Karen 'We're not touchy feely! That's discriminating against us! Who can I take to court?!'. I struggled to understand why no public or private funding could be found, given Karen's contact and efforts with various funding bodies and enterprises. Eventually, after a period of closure of a few months, Karen managed to secure a home for the course at a nearby vocational training provider, whose services were largely publicly funded, by the Learning and Skills Council, the European Social Fund (which had provided funding for the previous course) and other development agencies. Karen also managed to start the sister parenting course up there, and encouraged many of the girls to take this course after they had had their babies.

In April 2009, *The Telegraph* announced the headline 'Pregnant schoolgirls to get "GCSE" in parenting skills' (Paton, 2009). The very same antenatal course that the girls had studied, and its sister parenting course were, apparently, to be turned into GCSE qualifications. Right-wing commentators had a field day, complaining that awarding this qualification to pregnant teenagers sends out the message that teenage pregnancy is an achievement. What had occurred was that, from September 2009, the courses would gain national accreditation, the qualifications now being mapped onto the Qualifications and Credit Framework and provided by the exam board Edexcel. The qualification would be at Level One, equivalent to a GCSE at grades D-G. The way this news was greeted with a popular mobilisation of derision is again indicative of the low status fixed not only to teenage mothers, but to vocational education and qualifications in general, as well as to care work. Raising the status of the course in this way does represent a lessening of the divide between the formal academic school curriculum and vocational education (this was

already apparent in New Labour's introduction of the Diploma in 2008 in schools and colleges). This issue is symbolic of the continuing tussle between left and right over the merits of a 'traditional', academically rigorous curriculum, versus a more vocational one, with right-wing concerns over schools entering their pupils for more vocational GCSEs in order to boost their status in the league tables.

It remains difficult to explain how teenage pregnancy and motherhood have become such a significant focus of policy and yet how misunderstood the lived experiences of young women actually are. The focus on educational inclusion is an important aim for policy-makers. In this neoliberal era and with the demands of the knowledge economy it is difficult to disagree with the idea that educational inclusion should be prioritised. While New Labour sought to provide educational opportunities for pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers, however, this should not be at the expense of an understanding of the importance of motherhood and mothering and the need for support in this endeavour. Tackling the problem of educational exclusion requires a deeper engagement with some of the underlying reasons for school disaffection, which often occurs prior to pregnancy, and an understanding of why it might be preferable for a young woman to take care of her baby than to enter the training or labour market, and why she should not be condemned for this 'choice', a choice which middle-class mothers are permitted to make, but working-class teenagers are not.

This chapter has demonstrated how the three areas of young motherhood, education and social exclusion are intricately related. Throughout the thesis I have examined the girls' wider social, biographical and educational contexts, shedding light on their changing identities in the process of becoming mothers. Their narratives often contradict policy discourses that construct and claim to 'know' the teenage mother. The girls provided counter-narratives to the ideas that teenagers will be inadequate parents, that teenage motherhood will inevitably cause social exclusion, and is indicative of family breakdown and low aspirations. For many of these girls, transition to motherhood proved to be its own

form of educational project, in the widest sense of education, precipitating an opportunity for self-evaluation and changes in family and friendship networks. Becoming a mother can represent a new identity and a new form of social participation for them, rather than a social exclusion.

9.   Conclusion

> Especially if this is her first child she experiences the birth as a transition to a new self that she may both desire and fear. She fears a loss of identity, as though on the other side of the birth she herself became a transformed person, such that she would 'never be the same again'.
>
> (Young, 2005 [1984]: 55)

This quotation from Iris Marion Young's powerful essay 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation', first published in 1984, beautifully captures the idea of newness and profound identity change in becoming a mother. I cite it because when applied to the 'teenage mother' it completely sidesteps the stereotyped tropes of stigma attached to her. It has been very difficult to think about young motherhood away from these tropes and to relate it to sociological work on motherhood in general. Yet, no matter how old or young the pregnant woman, transition to motherhood can be an important time of identity change. In the course of the thesis I have considered different spheres in which identity change may occur for young pregnant women: the spheres of education, transition to adulthood, friendships and family relationships. Motherhood often provides young women with the opportunity to change a negative relationship with education. It sometimes allows them to re-evaluate previous behaviour, friendship groups or family relationships. It can be a cause of a new sense of responsibility and a determination to provide the best for their child. It may also be a planned decision, one that follows from a reflexive consideration of life circumstances. However, these young women's mothering identities are commonly formed from a position of resistance, in particular a resistance to the widely-held belief that a teenage mother will be an incompetent, irresponsible, 'bad' mother.

Returning to my research questions, my enquiry into the contrasts between the girls' educational experiences at school and at the setting found the latter to be constructed

as a place of nurture rather than involving a focus on qualifications or rules. The girls were in many cases able to replace a 'bad girl' identity (associated with school) with a 'good mother' identity (associated with pregnancy and with attendance at the setting). In response to my second question concerning the social and pedagogical interaction in the setting, this was facilitative of the transmission and regulation of 'good mothering' practices, although it was a complex and contested process. Transition to motherhood could be seen as a powerful moment of self-evaluation and self-motivation. With regard to my third question focusing on the girls' narratives, these were indicative of resistance to stigma of social exclusion and the label of 'bad mother'. Their situations of disadvantage were in tension with an agentic and resilient sense of self. Becoming a mother meant taking on a valued, responsible and mature role.

This thesis tells many stories, and I hope I have managed to take the reader on a journey through an understanding of the setting of my fieldwork, via a contrasting examination of the girls' previous education compared to the learning for motherhood that takes place in the setting, onto a deeper engagement with the girls' maternal identities and with 'teenage motherhood' both as a policy construction and as lived experience. In Chapter 4 I demonstrated the tutors' views of how the setting I studied, in contrast to that of a school, provided the girls with a space to flourish and the opportunity to learn in a safe environment that was socially supportive both in terms of pastoral care from the tutors and peer support. I also showed how the tensions between the policy encouragement to bring teenage mothers back into education and into the labour market conflicted with tutors' views about the importance of mother-child bonding in the child's early years. In Chapter 5 I argued that pregnancy allowed many of the girls to shed a 'bad girl' identity or to move away from a position of educational failure to one of a 'good mother' now concerned with doing the best for her child. For many of the girls, the setting represented a re-engagement with education, and pregnancy proved an immense source of motivation to succeed. I set these stories in the wider context of the problems of neoliberal educational policy that, in

the course of the quest to raise standards, inevitably marginalizes those who cannot achieve these standards.

In Chapter 6 I demonstrated the complexity of the transmission of maternal education in the setting, showing that it was not a straight-forward case of girls learning how to use 'good' middle-class parenting techniques. I showed how these classed ideas were blurred and made complex by the tutors' own class positions and views, as well as by how these discourses were taken up and sometimes employed and sometimes resisted by the girls. The girls regulated their own ideas of 'good mothering' in the setting in peer interaction. I also demonstrated the complexity of real interventions and their multiple understandings as opposed to the relative simplicity of policy discourses. In Chapter 7 I argued that toughness and resilience were key to many of the girls' maternal identities, and that even before becoming pregnant, many felt that they were already adults. I showed how the girls took a moral stance against abortion and how having the baby was indicative of a logic of taking responsibility for their actions. I also examined discourses of maternal love and the ways in which the girls talked about and demonstrated love for their children. In Chapter 8 I allowed the girls to speak directly to policy that constructs them as unfit mothers and socially excluded. Their words were powerful contradictions of these stereotypes, and yet they also showed them struggling to manage their identities in the face of official discourses that tell them that they are too young and that they will fail to provide the best for their children without the support of a partner and without an education. I went on to argue that despite having high aspirations, the girls attached great value to motherhood and struggled to reconcile conflicting positions of being a good worker and being a good mother. I have, throughout the thesis, tried to show how these conflicts are not unique to teenage mothers, but exist as structural disadvantages and barriers for mothers of all ages. What is often particularly difficult for teenage mothers is a lack of economic stability, which is compounded by the difficulties of achieving this when young and sometimes single.

There is a large disjunction, then, between policy constructions of the 'teenage mother' and the lived experience of young women who become pregnant as teenagers and who resist the term 'teenage mother' and its associated stigma. It is also clear that there is considerable resistance - both from young mothers and from service providers - to the idea that teenage motherhood is invariably a mistake and should be prevented. My research echoes the conclusion reached by Ann Phoenix in 1991 – that the girls in my study suffered not from an inability to parent, but from economic disadvantage. This economic disadvantage will continue as long as government fails to attend to rising inequalities and the gendered inequalities that accrue to many working-class mothers. As Lynne Segal has remarked:

> there will be little significant change [in Britain] in the situation of women who are worst off until public resources are shifted to provide greater welfare provision, without the constraints of market considerations.

(Segal, 1999: 36)

This does not mean that I view interventions that involve learning about childbirth and parenting as misconceived, but they are certainly not the sole 'answer' to the 'problem'.

Contrary to widely-held assumptions, teenage pregnancy should not be thought of as a rupturing of educational opportunity, but rather as a time to capitalise on increased motivation and a desire to re-engage with education. There is a need for policy to take this much more seriously, and to ensure that provision is there to support the needs and aspirations of young women. Schools have a responsibility to support pregnant young women to remain at school if they wish to do so. There is also a need to revise the equation of teenage pregnancy with low expectations and aspirations; this problem arises rather from the low expectations of others and from the insufficient provision of appropriate educational opportunities. Furthermore, the construction of teenage mothers as 'children having children' needs reconsideration. The young women in my study commonly perceived themselves as adults, particularly in the case of those who had moved out of the parental home prior to pregnancy. None of the girls thought that age was an

indicator of the ability to be a good mother. Most of them, sometimes having rejected abortion, thought of themselves as having taken responsibility for their actions. The concept of social exclusion was also difficult to apply in the case of my study. There is no doubt that these young women were facing considerable social and economic challenges in having children at a young age. Some of them regretted early sexual activity and pregnancy. However, social exclusion must be considered in a much broader and more structural sense (with an understanding that it is not something that young women bring on themselves by deciding to have a baby), and solutions to disadvantage seen in reducing poverty and providing support rather than trying to change behaviour.

Limitations and strengths of my study and its contribution to knowledge

My study has taken a journey into the lives of young women becoming mothers for the first time. It provides only a transitory account of brief moments in time. The study does not fulfil one of my original aims, which was to place significant focus on young women's *transitions* from pregnancy to motherhood. I wanted to be able to compare narratives of pregnancy with later narratives of motherhood, looking in depth at young women's expectations, both in relation to the practices of mothering and also in relation to educational plans, and how these trajectories played out after young women had given birth. As I discussed in Chapter 3, however, this part of my research design was thwarted by the sudden and unexpected closure of the setting, making it very difficult to follow up with girls after the birth of their babies. The implication for further study here would involve longitudinal research that can study young mothers for several years after they have given birth. My study is also limiting in the sense that it is very hard to analyse the value and meanings of a particular intervention and the educational and employment consequences of the options taken by young mothers after childbirth in a short space of

time. It is also difficult to fully examine identity change in transition to motherhood within the confines of my data.

The limitations of my study arise mainly from its small size and scope and thus from its lack of generalisability. I am also aware that there are many different dimensions to 'social exclusion', and that in choosing to focus solely on educational and relational aspects of inclusion/exclusion, I have not been able to consider other important factors such as access to services and economic exclusion. My decision to do so was deliberate, in that the relational aspect is a neglected area of research, and rarely considered in policy (Kidger, 2004). It is also hard to consider social exclusion in the context of an intervention that has reached part of a target audience and thus 'included' them; more 'hard-to-reach' parts of those populations are not served by the intervention and thus no firm conclusions can be drawn about whether 'teenage pregnancy' should rightly or wrongly be linked with 'social exclusion'. However, it was never my aim to simply try to sever a link between the two phenomena; rather I sought to deconstruct these essentialised and stigmatising terms in order to question and challenge the categories they invoked and thus the identities they made possible. Furthermore, in relation to my interview data, it is impossible to know the extent to which participants provided me – a university researcher – with the answers that they thought I wanted to hear or that they thought they *should* give, particularly in relation to their educational aspirations.

This thesis has succeeded, however, in raising questions about the simple link between 'teenage pregnancy' and 'social exclusion', and in challenging assumptions about teenage mothers' immaturity and low aspirations. It has also questioned the commonplace idea that their sexual activity and decision to have a baby are irresponsible (or happen out of ignorance) and that they are unfit to parent or undeserving of public money to support them. I have tried to show how the young women I studied are active agents who work hard to avoid stigma and to distance themselves from negative stereotypes that are unfairly applied to them. My careful engagement with them has involved an attempt to realise

them as young women often struggling in adverse circumstances but nevertheless having a profound determination and capacity to love their children and do the best for them.

The thesis' contribution to knowledge is focused on my analysis of the interplay of policy discourses and lived experience, and the way these discourses are transformed in the reality of an intervention. The young women resist their marking as 'bad mothers' at the same time as the workers resist the deficit discourse on their behalf. I show the setting as one which complicates the policy intention to equip working-class young women with *middle-class mothering skills; that the setting is staffed by* 'successful' working-class mothers who nurture and support the young women makes this very concept an unstable one. I have provided an insight into the way that policy unfolds in a practical context, and into the way that the young women's identities are re-made in the transition to motherhood.

The thesis' additional strengths rest in its original ethnographic and discursive examination of the young women and staff in an alternative educational setting never previously studied. I have tried to show how the three concepts of 'teenage motherhood', education and 'social exclusion' can be examined together to indicate how young motherhood can represent a key turning point, and an educational and social *inclusion* which is all too frequently obscured in negative policy and media constructions of these issues. I have also shown how important it is to focus on *supporting* young women who become mothers, many of whom already have family and educational difficulties. I have demonstrated the complexity of the young women's learner identities – that of the 'bad girl' associated with school, contrasted with that of the 'good mother' that re-constitutes a positive and compliant educational identity which can be demonstrated in willingness to be educated for motherhood. My study captures a sense of the educational potential of these young women and that education and mothering are not mutually exclusive. The transition to motherhood works as a powerful moment of self-evaluation, and this setting as an

important therapeutic and nurturing environment for young women often previously excluded from the mainstream.

Final, feminist conclusions

I want to return at this point to the notion I discussed in Chapter 2 of, as Wanda Pillow (2004) writes, separate educational provision as a potentially feminist space that is 'critically empowering' for the pregnant teenager. In one sense, the setting I studied was a fine example of a feminist space that, through the empathy and dedication of wonderful staff, was empowering for the girls. It was, of course, an all-female space. It was a space in which personal issues could be brought and discussed and support given, particularly to the girls' relationship difficulties. It was a space in which girls had the freedom to reveal their pregnant bellies and did not have to worry about the gaze of others. It was a space in which babies cried and were adored and fed. Most importantly, it was a space in which the personal was never seen as an interruption to the educational – everything could be used as a learning experience. The insufficiencies of the setting were clear, however. The girls' access to educational breadth and depth, in the academic sense, was extremely limited. This links back to the problem, as identified by Angela McRobbie in 1991, that without access to excellent training and educational opportunities young mothers will find it impossible to gain financial independence. New Labour went a significant way to making it easier for young mothers under 20 to return to study by paying for their childcare, but the barriers to employment that pays a living wage remain considerable. There remains a gender pay gap, as well as the low-paid nature of much of women's work. Mothers of all social classes suffer from a large 'fertility penalty' to earnings associated with childbirth, with 28% of women returning to work in a lesser paid job than before giving birth (Dixon and Margo, 2006).

The setting may be an empowering feminist space, then, yet it is hard to see how a space like this can be given a chance to thrive when its funding sources are so vulnerable, and market logics of private training providers mean that it is seen as 'touchy-feely' rather than a safe retreat and educational opportunity for girls who have complex needs and are already marginalized in educational terms. This situation hardly spoke to New Labour's commitment to the supportive strand of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. As I concluded in Chapter 2, this strand was marginalized in relation to the emphasis on reduction in conception rates, which was always openly given priority in policy documents. It seems that feminist voices in relation to teenage pregnancy and motherhood have had such little weight because government continues to be focused on neoliberal solutions to social 'problems', without any recognition that a working-class teenager might legitimately choose motherhood and be a responsible and loving parent, or may need considerable support in order to do so. The onslaught of cuts to public services (which will more greatly impact women than men) implemented by the current Coalition government makes the very existence of this type of setting seem even more fragile.

One solution to the question of separate or inclusive provision for pregnant and parenting young women is, as Alldred and David (2007) suggest, for schools to alter their structure to be able to fully encompass the pregnant teenager as an educational subject. While mainstream schooling could, with the required dedication and financial input, provide support for pregnant and parenting young women, there remain considerable advantages to separate settings, not least in their ability to provide preparation for childbirth and motherhood. Another solution would be that some alternative educational provision - such as the separate setting that I studied - is entirely re-conceived to work against the premise that pregnant teenagers will come to the setting with a very low level of educational qualification and will only aspire to or be capable of a similarly low level. Many of the girls I encountered *did* come with a low level of or no qualifications, but the scope to pursue higher level academic study was non-existent, and this, as I have already

argued, is a deeply-engrained structural problem relating to the reproduction of working-class inequalities in education.

It will take significant educational reform to begin to remedy some of these problems of inequality. Changing the current gendered and classed experiences of schooling needs to involve moves to educate girls about a broad range of career options, and the raising of the status of vocational education. It will also involve re-thinking the current educational agenda of high-stakes testing and the A-C economy, which actually serve to further disadvantage those who do not achieve at the required level. Ending the segregation of pregnant young women will also mean that schools need to re-consider the nature of inclusion and how this might be constituted for a pregnant teenager. Perhaps this would involve schools and alternative provision working in partnership to achieve the most appropriate education for each individual.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to focus attention on the gendered, classed and racial inequalities in education, as a result of what Angela McRobbie terms the 'new sexual contract'. This reflects a situation in which girls are now seen as capable educational subjects, feminism has won reforms in education and is seen by some critics as having feminised the system to the detriment of boys (the introduction of coursework being seen to favour girls, for example), and in which if girls work to gain qualifications and control their fertility, they will be able to participate in 'contemporary modes of feminine citizenship' (McRobbie, 2009: 54). Freedom and success are assigned to girls without question, McRobbie argues, and women take their places alongside men under New Labour's meritocracy. Harris (2004) states that:

> The investment in young women as those most able to succeed involves an enormous amount of regulation and work in order for a mainstream image of young female success to be perpetuated, and the large numbers of those young women who do not succeed to be corralled into positions of bad choices and personal limitations.
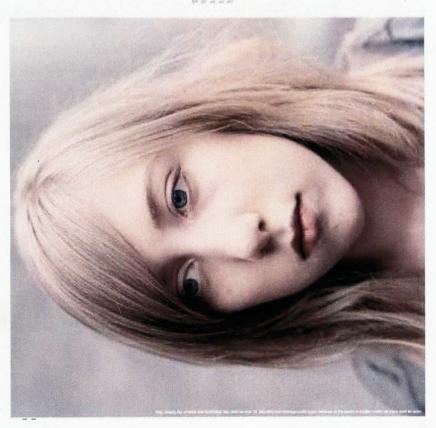>
> (Harris, 2004: 184)

Even though girls are now assumed to 'know it all' about sex and contraception, and to learn this through peer culture and magazines (rather than from parents or school), clearly

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this cannot be perceived as a substitute for comprehensive sex and relationship education from an early age. Girls who cannot control their fertility are blamed, and structural factors of disadvantage subside into the background. Girls who are not able to take advantage of school education or who are excluded will slip through the net, or possibly find their way into a pupil referral unit, or become pregnant and find themselves in a programme for pregnant teenagers. In these ways some who found themselves previously excluded may experience a sense of inclusion. However, the competitive and results-based values of education remain so opposed to values of nurturance and community, values which would, as Wendy Luttrell (2003) writes, rethink the 'educational enterprise, as aiming for more than academic achievement. It would mean providing students with an authentic audience for their interests, creativity, and work, an audience that is not solely to evaluate or judge' (178-9). This educational enterprise would be one that did not evaluate or judge the pregnant teenager but that embraced her as a subject of potential and of respect.

Would you abandon the child threatening to abandon her own child?

It's no surprise that so many teenagers can't contemplate parenthood. They are, after all, only children themselves. At Barnardo's we support them during this difficult time. We make sure that their education isn't compromised, and that they have the same opportunities as other children. And if they're overwhelmed with fear and responsibility, then we'll whisk by them, until the day comes when they can enjoy being a Mum.

Believe in children
Barnardo's

To show you believe in children, text 'Believe' to 84088 or visit barnardos.org.uk

Research with [NAME OF PROGRAMME*]

<u>About my research:</u>

I am a student at The Open University. I am doing research about motherhood, and I am spending some time with the * group. I want to learn about you and your experiences of pregnancy and motherhood, and also about your time with the * group. I am interested in what you are learning here, and what you would like to do in the future.

If you would like to take part in an interview, you can do so at any time. You do not have to take part in an interview. If you decide to take part, and at any time you want to stop, that is fine.

You don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to.

Everything you say will be private and confidential (although if you tell me anything that indicates a risk of significant harm to yourself or another person, I will need to talk to the tutors at *).

When I write up my research, I might use some of what you say, but I will not use your name or the name of the place where you live or the name of this group. My research might be published in an academic journal or book.

I hope that my research will be useful and supportive to young mums. I will show you an example of what research looks like when it is finished and explain how it might be used to help young mums.

<u>About me:</u>

My name is Naomi Rudoe. If you have any questions about my research or about me, please ask me. If you need to contact me you can call my mobile:

If you would like to take part in an interview, I will give you a consent form, which I will ask you to sign, to show that you understand what is involved.

Appendix 2 (cont.)

The Faculty of Education and Language Studies, The Open University

| **Research with NAME OF PROGRAMME** | (name of project) |

Agreement to Participate

I, [   ] (print name)

agree to take part in this research project.

I understand what the research project is about and what my agreement to be interviewed means.

I know that I may refuse to participate at any point by simply saying so.

I understand that my confidentiality will be protected as described on the leaflet I have been given.

I agree that the information that I provide can be used for educational or research purposes, including publication.

I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact:

| *Naomi Rudoe* | at: | **The Open University** **(phone number)** |

(name of the researcher)

If any issues arise during this project that cannot be resolved with Naomi Rudoe, I can contact:

Dr Mary Jane Kehily
The Open University
(phone number)

Signed: [   ]   Date: [   ]

Appendix 3

Interview Schedule for [*NAME OF PROGRAMME**]

What does motherhood mean to teenage women in terms of changing identities, priorities and motivations?

- Tell me about you: where were you born; where do you live?
- Tell me about your family.
- What is your relationship with your family like?
- Was your pregnancy planned?
- What is the father's involvement?
- What were the reactions of family and friends?
- Ask about experiences of sex, relationships, contraception, etc.
- How does being pregnant make you feel?
- How do you imagine motherhood? What are your hopes and fears?
- Ask about taking on 'adult responsibility' and perceptions of age.
- How has becoming pregnant changed your ideas about you as a person and what kind of mother you want to be (compared to your own mother)?
- Fertility history/abortion
- Preparation for birth and motherhood

What form does education take in the setting? How does experience of education post-conception compare to that prior to conception?

- What are you learning at *?
- What do you think of your experiences here?
- Can you talk about your experience of school?
- Tell me about how school differs from *.
- Ask about bullying, friendships, teachers, sex education at school, etc.
- What would you be doing now if not pregnant?

How do young mothers experience themselves as socially included/excluded? What are factors other than economic that contribute to social inclusion?

- Ask for detail about family and friendship networks.
- How old was participant's mother when she gave birth to her?
- Are siblings/friends having children at the same time?
- Ask how relationships with family and friends have changed and are changing over the course of pregnancy and childbirth.
- Ask how * has provided social support.
- Ask what other forms of support they have.
- Ask about money and benefits.
- Ask what their attitude is towards work v. staying at home with the baby, and towards childcare.
- Do you know other young mums?

What is the value of educational intervention?

- What skills or qualifications are you gaining?
- What have you learned that is important for becoming a mother?
- What are your hopes and plans for the future?
- Impact of project on educational/work plans
- Importance of motherhood v. career

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