TEENAGE MOTHERS AS RHETORS AND RHETORIC: AN ANALYSIS OF EMBODIED EXIGENCE AND CONSTRAINED AGENCY

by

Jenna Elizabeth Vinson

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
WITH A MAJOR IN RHETORIC, COMPOSITION, AND THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2013

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Jenna Elizabeth Vinson entitled "Teenage Mothers as Rhetors and Rhetoric: An Analysis of Embodied Exigence and Constrained Agency" and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

_____ Date: February 20, 2013
Adela C. Licona

_____ Date: February 20, 2013
Amy C. Kimme Hea

_____ Date: February 20, 2013
Sally Stevens

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

_____ Date: February 20, 2013
Dissertation Director: Adela C. Licona

STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This dissertation has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at the University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this dissertation are allowable without special permission, provided that an accurate acknowledgement of the source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the head of the major department or the Dean of the Graduate College when in his or her judgment the proposed use of the material is in the interests of scholarship. In all other instances, however, permission must be obtained from the author.

SIGNED: Jenna Elizabeth Vinson

AWKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of faculty. I first wrote about my experiences of teenage motherhood in Dr. Alison Hawthorne Deming's undergraduate creative non-fiction class, and her overwhelmingly positive reaction to my stories and arguments motivated me to keep writing. Thanks to Dr. Roxanne Mountford who encouraged me to pursue this project. To my fantastic dissertation committee members, Drs. Amy C. Kimme Hea and Sally Stevens: thank you for supporting the goal of this project while also challenging me to improve my thinking and writing. And to my dissertation chair and mentor Dr. Adela C. Licona: you have always approached me as a colleague with something to contribute and I have tried my best to live up to this expectation. Thank you for being a fierce feminist ally and friend.

I am thankful for the funding, support, and research opportunities offered by the Crossroads Collaborative, made possible by the great Drs. Adela C. Licona and Stephen Russell.

I am especially grateful to my dissertation writing group—Dr. Ashley J. Holmes and Dr. Faith Kurtyka—for helping me to achieve my academic goals and for reading (and re-reading) large portions of this dissertation. Your feedback and encouragement pushed me to do better. A special thanks to Dr. Rebecca S. Richards for being a role model, mentor, and dear friend. I could not have done this without you.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of the pregnant and mothering women who took the time to share their stories with me as well as the organizations that helped me and Dr. Stevens recruit participants. I hope that this dissertation demonstrates that I listened well.

Most of all, I am thankful for the loving support of my entire family who believed in me when I did not and who helped me with whatever I needed, whenever I needed it. To my sister, Jessica, whose confident expressions of sexuality, unending wells of strength, and amazing lived experiences taught me from a very young age to question, critique, and find joy in the unconventional. To my mother, Beth: I am eternally grateful for your patient guidance, unconditional love, sharp insights, and wise-ass humor. I still have much to learn from you. Thank you for raising us kids while working full-time; for coming home from an eight hour day to "What's for dinner mom?!"; and for spending long mornings trying to get me out of bed to go to school.

To my gorgeous partner, Robby, who rubbed my back, snuggled me close, and made me laugh when I sat at the computer too long. To my darling son, Haven, whose giggles, games, and sweet love brought much needed energy and fun to this process. And to my brilliant and beautiful daughter, Marijayne: you brought new light to my life. Every step I have taken since the day I learned you were coming has been a step toward a better future for us. Thank you for being who you are.

DEDICATION

For my grandmother, Mary Lou

For my mother, Beth

For my daughter, Marijayne

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the rhetorical function and social implications of the "dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy"—that is, the popular depiction of young motherhood as the tragic downfall of a woman's life. I employ feminist poststructuralist and visual rhetorical critique to analyze historical and contemporary teenage pregnancy prevention materials as well as journalistic representations of young mothers. Building from this analysis, I argue that the dominant narrative pathologizes teenage mothers, prevents a focus on structures of inequality and poverty, sustains racialized gender ideologies, and encourages practices that perpetuate disparities for pregnant/mothering young women. In addition, this project explores strategies for resisting this discourse. Specifically, I review scholarship that has contested the dominant narrative and identify counter-rhetorical practices that some young mothers use in their published first-person narratives. Finally, drawing on focus groups I conducted with 27 young mothers, I illustrate that visibly young pregnant and parenting women are often publically confronted by strangers because they embody an urgent and much-debated social issue. I offer the concept of "embodied exigence" as a way to understand how discursive and material realities of the body may construct rhetorical situations and how the body may function as a site of constrained agency. Building from rhetorical theories of agency, exigence, and feminist work on the visibility of motherhood, I assert that in moments of embodied exigence, marginalized young mothers may seize the opportunity to resist dominant rhetoric and act as rhetors in their own right.

CHAPTER 1: TEENAGE MOTHERS AS RHETORS AND RHETORIC

She could have been a movie star
Never got the chance to go that far
Her life was stole
Now we'll never know

--Kelly Rowland, "Stole"

In 2002, R & B artist Kelly Rowland dropped her album, *Simply Deep*, featuring the popular song called "Stole." Shortly after the album's release, the music video for "Stole" premiered on major music video stations. The song tells the story of three teenagers—two male and one female—whose lives are "stolen" too soon. The first young man, "a good boy" and "the brightest in school," is bullied by his peers until he eventually commits suicide. The second young man, a promising basketball player, is shot in a drive-by. The third character, Mary, is a teen whose life is "stolen" when she becomes pregnant. The discovery of her pregnancy is conveyed by intimate camera shots of her seated in a doctor's office and later on a bathroom floor pounding the cabinets, mascara streaming down her face. Afterward, Mary pushes a stroller—the action dramatized in slow motion—toward a mural commemorating the dead boys. The camera shots alternate between the baby sleeping in the stroller and Mary writing with a large Sharpie, "Think before you act," on the mural. In the final scene, Rowland sits at a classroom desk lamenting, "We were here all together yesterday," drawing attention to the absence of the three main characters of her lyrical narrative. Obviously, the two dead boys can no longer attend school. Less obvious is the reason why Mary is no longer there. Why is her life over because she is a mother?

Audiences of the song are likely able to understand the implicit correlation of teenage motherhood with death by filling in details about Mary's life with the gendered and classed ideologies underpinning the well-known consequences of teenage pregnancy. The unstated reasoning behind Mary's absence is that she cannot (or will not) return to school because she is a mother, and mothers—particularly teen mothers—drop out of school in order to raise their children. Mothers must prioritize the needs of their children. This is a tragedy for Mary because, audiences may note, a timely secondary education ensures a more prosperous vocation or pathway to higher education. Mary pushes the stroller by herself, her sex partner never mentioned in the song, because teenage mothers are single mothers whose male partners leave them. This is sad because families with children should include two parents, with two stable incomes (or at least one substantial income), to be happy and have the resources necessary to be economically self-sufficient with healthy and well-educated children. In short, Mary's life is over because she is a teenage mother. Her inability to control both her sexual desire (and/or the sexual desire of a boy/man) and her body's ability to reproduce leads to the end of her life, or at the least any positive public recognition of it. Now, she can only reflect upon her actions and mourn the loss of her life ambitions.

While this music video is a product of members of the music industry, the parallel that Rowland and the producers of the video draw between suicide, homicide, and a young woman's pregnancy reflects persuasive cultural discourses that suggest the timing of a woman's pregnancy determines her success in life. More specifically, this video (re)constructs the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy.

I am trying to recall the moment my life was stolen. The moment that I became a failure, a statistic, a part of the "epidemic" ravaging our nation. What I remember is that the two bright pink lines on the Error Proof Test signified nothing to me because in order to steal the pricey pregnancy test from the big box store next to my work, my boyfriend had taken the packaged sticks out of the box. I remember thinking over and over again, "This moment is important. It determines the rest of my life," and pinching the stick with all my might as my boyfriend called the very same store to ask an employee to go get the box and read us the explanation of the two lines. I did not wait by the phone as he discussed the results with the late-night worker; I stood in the bathroom, enveloped in soft yellow lighting, and looked into the mirror. I knew I was pregnant even before my boyfriend broke the news to me. I could see it in my eyes, feel it in my gut; but there was a disjuncture between the two. In the mirror I saw a failure—in my gut I felt a mother.

1.1 The Dominant Narrative and Preventative Discourse of Teenage Pregnancy

In this dissertation I consider the rhetorical framework, function, and social implications of the "dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy" by which I mean the hegemonic depiction of young motherhood as the tragic downfall of a woman's life. It is a rhetorical practice of words and images that persuade many to believe that a teenage pregnancy leads to devastating consequences for a young woman, her child, and the nation in which they reside. The story goes something like this: an immature, unsuspecting, or irresponsible young woman makes the mistake of having sex and is plagued by pregnancy that—if she carries to term and keeps the baby—leads to an unsuccessful childrearing experience, and a life of poverty. While at the time of this

writing, the consequences of teenage pregnancy seem like a given, and any young mother who avoids the prophesized outcomes is deemed "exceptional," these common sense facts are the product of persuasive, well-circulated stories. The fact that many perceive teenage pregnancy as a social issue—often sandwiched in lists of other issues plaguing youth including gang violence, sexually transmitted infections, and drug abuse—illustrates that the narrative currently enjoys a "dominant" status. But, as I will show throughout this dissertation, this discourse is challenged and resisted by many.

As a feminist rhetorician, I am concerned about language that oppresses women. In this dissertation, I examine how the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy constructs young pregnant and mothering women as rhetorical exigencies and rhetorical appeals by using young women's bodies and personal testimonies to reify the belief that the nation should control women's fertility to prevent societal ills. Employing feminist poststructuralist rhetorical critique, I explore the consequences of these representations for young mothers. I analyze both the rhetorical practices which produce teenage pregnancy as a social problem for the United States to solve and rhetorical practices that resist the idea that the age of the mother determines the success of her pregnancy, her children, or her life. Specifically, I turn to the works of scholars from public health, family studies, sociology, history, education, and adolescent/youth studies; journalists and journalistic photographers; counternarrative writers who are/were young mothers; and current pregnant and mothering young women who shared their stories with me.

Although teenage pregnancy discourses circulate (differently) beyond national borders, this project is focused on US rhetorics.[1]

In this opening chapter, I describe the feminist poststructuralist theories supporting my rhetorical analysis of teenage pregnancy discourses, situate the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy as a historically specific event, and illustrate how it has shifted into a preventative, disciplinary discourse in-and-of-itself. Drawing on historical documents, current public service announcements, and a recent memoir, I argue that the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy prevents a focus on structures of inequality and poverty; pathologizes young mothers; perpetuates harmful discourses about women; and sustains gender ideologies that construct women's bodies as sites of intervention and control. This narrative about teenage pregnancy is primarily constructed by preventative discourse—that is, the verbal-visual rhetoric forwarded by family planning and public health initiatives to persuade individual women to time their pregnancies according to specific cultural logics. In doing so, this narrative disciplines women into self-surveilling subjects who take strides to plan their pregnancies according to norms that serve the interests of the people and institutions that enjoy the benefits of current power relations.

[1] By focusing only on the US context, I most certainly miss transnational implications of US/Britain/Canadian discourses of teenage pregnancy as well as other ways of representing young motherhood in different nations. For example, medical anthropologist Pamela J. Downe draws on 30 interviews with 22 women in the urban-poor context of Bridgetown, Barbados to explain that "unlike the globalizing discourse of teen mothering—emanating primarily from the United States, Canada, and Britain—that demonizes young mothers and attributes negative community change largely to them, the women participating in this research saw young motherhood as a historically generated site of strength and community well-being" (139). Downe found that memories of slave-mothers and references to the strength women derive from young motherhood came up again and again during her interviews about community well-being. However, Downe highlights that recent editorials and community commentary in Barbados suggest that US/Britain/Canadian discourse about "teenage pregnancy" is making an impact in Barbados, challenging the more positive, matrifocal constructions of young motherhood.

Should women fail to conform to social norms for pregnancy (whether as teens or as older women), the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy—and the ideological premises underpinning it—encourage women to readily accept the material consequences that are actually constructed by racialized, classed, sexist oppression.

1.2 Feminist Poststructuralist Rhetorical Criticism

I interpret the power and impact of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy through theories of feminist poststructuralism, as influenced by philosopher Michel Foucault and feminist theorists of discourse and the body including Susan Bordo, Judith Butler, and Chris Weedon. For Foucault, it is "in discourse that power and knowledge" come together (*History of Sexuality* 100). Discourse is "a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (Foucault *History of Sexuality* 100). Feminist poststructuralist Weedon explains that discourse includes "competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes" (34). Through a Foucauldian lens, meaning is constructed and deconstructed through discourse. "Truth" or knowledge-claims are partial and always sites of political struggle. In "The Discourse on Language," Foucault explains that discourses are historically situated events: "discourse is really only an activity, of writing in the first case, of reading in the second, and of exchange in the third" (228). Poststructuralism, then, is concerned with how subjectivity is constructed through discourse and how discourses are productive of material conditions. Focusing on language, subjectivity, discourse, power, and ideology the poststructuralist method includes analyzing how a particular discourse

functions in a historically specific way, consistently asking of discursive constructions: Whose interests are served here?

Guiding my poststructuralist method is a feminist agenda as well as my own experiential knowledge of marginalized motherhood. bell hooks writes that "feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression" and, as such, demands careful attention to "systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression" (240). Feminist poststructuralists, then, are concerned with identifying and intervening in discourses that sustain oppression. I maintain that teenage pregnancy is such a discourse. This chapter will situate the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy as a historical event, working "on behalf of specific interests" to construct young mothers as embodied exigencies to solve. In sketching a brief history I can better analyze "the opportunities for resistance to it" (Weedon 40). Further informing my analysis and fueling my passion for changing these discourses are memories of my experiences as a "young" mother who had my first child at 17. As a reminder that knowledges are produced from a variety of locations and that I bring my histories to bear on my inquiries and analyses (as all scholars do), personal narratives participate in this project. In many chapters I have incorporated my stories as a mothering woman, deliberately situating these short vignettes where non-dominant perspectives further analytical claims.

1.3 The Rhetorical History of the Teen Mother

In this section I draw on comprehensive histories of teenage pregnancy politics and discourse to sketch, briefly, the origin of the discourses I analyze in this dissertation. I highlight that the now-dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy was constructed

through what I call preventative rhetorics. Throughout history there has always been a prescriptive norm for the experience of motherhood, as with anything that is deemed a woman's experience. In order to establish these norms, public attention is often drawn by various "experts" to bad mothers—women who fail to meet hegemonic standards. Intersecting with social norms for motherhood is the general patriarchal interest in controlling women's sexuality (Nathanson 4).[2] In order to understand how the teen mother currently functions as a rhetorical figure, it is important to understand the history of public attention to "teenage pregnancy" and how it developed as a story told in family planning campaigns.

Many scholars agree that public attention was drawn to "teenage pregnancy" in the early 1970s by advocates, politicians, and lawmakers whose rhetorical efforts secured federal funding and legal permission for contraceptive services for minors (Arney and Bergen 11; Luker 15; Nathanson 23; Vinovskis 22). In her book, *Dangerous Passage: The Social Control of Sexuality in Adolescence,* sociologist Constance Nathanson dates the emergence of "teenage pregnancy" in United States discourses to 1972, when President Nixon's Commission on Population Growth and American Future identified a

[2]Of course, the "teenage mother" is related to many historical representations of bad women—the "ruined woman" of the late 18th century, the "fallen woman" of the early 19th century, the "unadjusted girl" and "unfit" mother of the 20th century, the "unwed" and "welfare" mothers of the 1960s—all of which required different kinds of national interventions ranging from institutional rehabilitation, punitive laws, and forced sterilizations (Luker 20-34). Historian Rickie Solinger draws on the very different reproductive experiences of women across time and lines of difference to show how constructions of motherhood and reproductive politics in general is rarely about the needs or well-being of mothers and children. Instead, reproductive politics—or what she defines as "who has powers over matters of pregnancy and their consequences"—reflect the specific political needs of the moment (*Pregnancy and Power* 2-3). There are many excellent books that analyze the ways in which motherhood is made visible in order to support particular national agendas. Readers can consult the works of Solinger, Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, Susan Chase and Mary Roger's *Mothers and Children: Feminist Analyses and Personal Narratives*, and Dorothy Roberts' *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* for analysis of politicized images of motherhood.

need to provide information and birth control to adolescents in its published report on *Population and the American Future*. At this time, political figures and health organizations explicitly discussed concerns that overpopulation would strain United States' resources. Beginning with Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty," "family planning" was seen as a way to curb growing population rates. Patricia Hill Collins explains that "family planning comprises a constellation of options, ranging from coercion to choice, from permanence to reversibility, regarding reproduction of actual populations" (75). Family planning reflects efforts to encourage women to impose a cost/benefit rationale on their reproductive decisions, using birth control and other contraceptive methods to control their fertility. Preventative rhetoric includes rhetorical symbols (both verbal and visual) that—along with material practices—persuade people to take measures to stop a certain action. In the case of preventative family planning rhetoric, the action to stop is conception and births that are not seen as beneficial to the woman, family, community, or nation.

The Commission's report advised the president that there was no foreseeable benefit to continued population growth in the United States. [3] The report, thus, recommends a series of progressive measures to stabilize the population, including "maximizing information about human reproduction and its consequences for the family, and enabling individuals to avoid unwanted fertility" (Rockefeller "Letter of

[3] In her book *Fertile Matters: The Politics of Mexican-Origin Women's Reproduction*, sociologist Elena Gutierrez explains that the phrase "population bomb" was circulated during this period to reflect/construct fear of overpopulation manifesting after WWII with the baby boomers and reaching heightened attention in 1970s with President Nixon's focus on family planning. Gutierrez suggests that this fear stemmed less from actual birthrates and more from fears about immigration and the growing numbers of people in poverty (27).

Transmittal"). Adolescents were identified as one of the demographics who struggled to access comprehensive information about reproductive health and resources to manage their fertility. In a section titled "Adolescent Pregnancy and Children Born Out of Wedlock," the Commission contends that "the problem of pregnant adolescents requires special attention by our society" because "pregnant teenagers, especially those in the early teens, often experience serious health and social difficulties quite different from those of women over 20." References to "girls" and the "pregnant adolescent" throughout this section emphasize that the problem was focused on young women.

In order to help adolescent females avoid the health and the social consequences of pregnancy and motherhood the Commission recommends, "The elimination of legal restrictions on access to contraceptive information and services, and the development by the states of affirmative legislation to permit minors to receive such information and services."[4] The report suggested that many medical and health personnel were wary of giving sexual health information or resources to minors and in some states they were legally prevented from doing so. Interestingly, at the same time that the report was published, the Social Security Act was quietly amended to include, among other things, funding for family planning services for minors. Nathanson points out that *this* amendment did not result from public concern about adolescent pregnancy, per say,

[4] The Commission cites an increased likelihood of premature births and infant death in births to young adolescents. As will be reviewed in chapter two, some researchers point out that infant mortality rates and premature births are more common in births to women 15 and under, who make up a small percentage of the teenage pregnancy birth rates and are more often victims of sexual abuse and rape. Arline Geronimus specifically targets the inaccuracy of research which claims teens have higher infant mortality rates, by comparing their birth outcomes with women in the same socioeconomic context whose infant mortality rates increase with the age of the mother (253).

(which, had just recently been identified as "problem" in-and-of-itself and would have required frank discussion of teenage sexual behavior) but was instead the outcome of Senate Committee on Finance Chairman Russell B. Long's agenda to encourage others that "birth control might be the answer to illegitimate babies and expanding welfare rolls" (39). While federal legislation to help adolescents manage their fertility was motivated by national concerns about the economy, situated in the context of "population bomb" discourses that (re)produced fear of overpopulation among the poor (Gutierrez 27), the Commission's attention to adolescent pregnancy was not. The report suggested that young women's "education and employment opportunities may be seriously impaired" by a pregnancy but did not detail any other specifically "economic" consequences of the problem. In fact, the Commission's report also recognizes that some of these consequences are the result of stigmatization and punishments placed on pregnant adolescents:

> When an adolescent does become pregnant, however, she should not be stigmatized and removed from society. In the past, pregnant girls almost always had to leave school as soon as their condition became known. Today, more and more school systems are making efforts to see that the pregnant adolescent does not suffer from lack of educational opportunity. . . [We] believe that society will be well-served if all school systems would make certain that pregnant adolescents have the opportunity to continue their education, and that they are aided in gaining access to adequate health, nutritional, and counseling services.

Part of the impetuous for "school systems making efforts" to allow pregnant students to remain in school included federal mandates to provide pregnant and parenting school-age students with an education equal to that of their non-pregnant or parenting peers.[5] Prior to 1972, pregnant or mothering female students (and teachers) were expelled from school but male students who impregnated women were not—a clear indication of sex discrimination. The National Women's Law Center explains that Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments

> bans educational institutions that receive federal funds from discriminating against students based on their "actual or potential parental, family, or marital status" or a student's "pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy or recovery there from." Generally speaking, this means that the law requires schools to give all students *who might be*, *are* or *have been* pregnant (whether currently parenting or not) equal access to school programs and extracurricular activities, and to treat pregnant and parenting students in the same way that they treat other students who are similarly able or unable to participate in school activities. (8, emphasis in original)

The follow-through on this legislation and its ultimate impact on pregnant adolescents has been questioned by Wanda Pillow in her book *Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and*

[5]As will be discussed further in chapter three, the verbal-visual rhetoric used to secure educational rights for pregnant and parenting female students may have led to racialized differences in access to education. Wanda Pillow points to sociologists Dawn Upchurch and James McCarthy's findings to suggest that "after the passage of Title IX, immediate access to schooling for school-age mothers increased dramatically between 1975 and 1986 for white teen mothers, while *decreasing* for black teen mothers" (3, emphasis in original).

the Teen Mother as well as feminist organizations like National Women's Law Center and California Latinas for Reproductive Justice. Notably, the early 1970s marked both a time of extending legal rights to adolescents in the form of funded family planning resources and equal access to educational and athletic opportunities as well as a moment when "adolescent pregnancy" was narrated as the beginning of unique social and health problems for young women. The Commission categorizes "Adolescent Pregnancy" in its own special section of the report, but also discusses issues with the reproductive outcomes of older women, minority populations, unwed couples, and other demographics. The Commission sought policies, programs, and methods to improve life outcomes across lines of difference.[6] Adolescents were just one more demographic in need of supportive structures and resources.

Nathanson suggests that it was President Nixon's explicit rejection of the *Population and American Future's* recommendation to provide birth control to adolescents that made adolescent sexuality and reproduction an exigence to debate (23-24; 32). President Nixon argued that providing "family planning services and devices to minors . . . would do nothing to preserve and strengthen close family relations" (qtd. in

[6] Throughout the report, the authors carefully emphasize that these "issues" stem from institutional and other structural constraints as well as some noted biological/health issues. In a section titled "A Diversity of Views," the report authors maintain, "Full equality both for women and for racial minorities is a value in its own right. In this view, the 'population problem' is seen as only one facet, and not even a major one, of the restriction of full opportunity in American life." Placing fear of a population problem in quotes and pushing against a reading of the report as a singular approach to economic and social issues in the United States, the committee appears to question the rhetoric and intent of population bomb rhetorics. As Gutierrez explains in her analysis of the discourses of this period, an outcome of overpopulation fear was the mistreatment of poor and racially minoritized women by doctors who felt the national imperative to do something to prevent a population problem—like sterilizing women (21). The Commission also addresses family planning discourses which, at the time, idealized two-child families: "We should strive for the ideal of diversity in which it would be equally honorable to marry or not, to be childless or not, to have one child or two or, for that matter, more. Our goal is one of less regimentation of reproductive behavior, not more." ("Institutional")

Nathanson 23). Nixon's sentiments about adolescent sexuality as a personal family matter, along with his administration's lack of support for funding family planning initiatives for the poor, became an explicit challenge to be taken up by advocates for birth control. Nathanson explains that family planning advocate-organization Planned Parenthood, and their research initiative the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), used contemporary concerns about poverty and overpopulation to gain support for the pill and other contraceptives as solutions to a newfound problem with teenagers (see also Luker 64). That is, in order to persuade Congress to approve of reproductive health resources for minors, family planning advocates positioned teenage pregnancy as a problem for the United States.

In her history of the politics of teenage pregnancy, social policy scholar Kristin Luker suggests it was the conversations among family planning experts and politicians debating the 1975 National School-Age Mother and Child Health Act that made much of the now well-known dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy "official" (71). In his opening statement at the congressional hearings, Senator Ted Kennedy explains, "All the experts agree that the birth of a child to a school-age parent has tremendous consequences to the mother, the father, and the child" (1). Written into the act and discussed aloud during the hearings were lists of "burdens" brought on by school-age pregnancy. These lists functioned as expert stories about what pregnancy does to young women and their children's health. "Representatives from the federal government, state and private health service agencies, and medical doctors" participated in constructing "school-age" motherhood as a tragic life path that the government could help to improve by funding

services for young mothers and their families (National abstract). Although those promoting the act were ultimately unsuccessful in getting it passed, the rhetorical narratives exchanged during the hearings—fueled by the AGI's research on adolescent sexuality and reproduction—continued to bring attention to teenage women as a group in danger.

The clearest and most-cited example of this discursive shift to teenage pregnancy as a national problem is AGI's influential 1976 booklet titled, *11 Million Teenagers: What Can Be Done About the Epidemic of Adolescent Pregnancies in the United States*. In 1974, Planned Parenthood transitioned from its "5 Million Poor" campaign, which had helped to successfully advocate for federal support and funding for poor women from 1967-1970, to "11 Million Teenagers" as a population in need of birth control advocacy (Nathanson 46).[7] The title of the booklet drew public attention to data on the sexual activity of teenagers aged 15-19. Out of 21 million teenagers in the United States, 11 million were thought to be sexually active and, thus, potentially susceptible to what they called the epidemic of pregnancy (Alan Guttmacher Institute 9).

The AGI's explanation of why "we," in the US, should be concerned about the epidemic of teenage pregnancy includes a series of points made by statistical data about young mothers and their children. It is worth analyzing these data in detail as they

[7]"5 Million Poor" made reference to demographer Arthur Campbell's finding that 5 million women in poverty needed assistance in accessing family planning resources (Luker 57). Nathanson suggests that this "5 Million Poor" rhetorical tactic of Planned Parenthood and the Alan Guttmacher Institute had been challenged by research showing the adult women used birth control and medical consultation fairly regularly and typically limited their families to 1-2 children. In order to secure funding for their research and resources, these organizations needed a new "problem" to solve that would similarly appeal to politicians' concerns about women's fertility and strains on the economy (55-6). However, Luker suggests that the switch from a focus on poor women to a focus on teenagers reflected new demographic data that suggested increasing pre-marital sexuality rates among teenagers and a general rise in out-of-wedlock births (62).

comprise the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy that is told and re-told – almost point-by-point– in preventative rhetorics today.[8] In the booklet's opening quote, taken from the First Interhemispheric Conference on Adolescent Fertility, the AGI singles out the time period of adolescence—as opposed to the marital status of the woman—as the focus of national concern: "Adolescent pregnancy is a serious threat to the life and health of a young woman . . . whether the birth occurs in or out of marriage" (5). AGI explains, "Teenage childbearing is a serious and growing social, economic and health problem in all regions and most countries of the world," and the booklet features charts and rates to illustrate that the United States has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates of all the industrialized nations (7). After situating pregnant teenagers as the embodiments of national trouble, the report describes birth, abortion, adoption, and miscarriage rates among women aged 15-19. (Re)producing national fears about growing populations and the sexual liberties of women, AGI conjures an image of inflated birthrates among teenagers.

The first section of the report establishes that teenage pregnancy exists among young women who, for the most part, did not intend to become pregnant but decided to keep the baby. Section two constructs what has become the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy. Titled "What a Difference a Year Makes," this section uses statistical comparisons to the reproductive and life outcomes of women aged 20-24 to make clear that all women under the age of 20 are at risk of pregnancies that are socially, economically, and physically compromised. By listing a series of statistical points about

[8] A quick search on the Internet using the search term "teenage pregnancy" illustrates this point.

young women and their children, adjacent to bar graphs that visually explain those statistics and black and white photographs of young mothers, AGI suggests, "The girl who has an illegitimate child at the age of 16 suddenly has 90 percent of her life's script written for her" (Campbell qtd. in Alan Guttmacher 18). AGI quickly justifies its focus on the bodies and experiences of young *women* with a brief qualification stated in the middle-to-last paragraph on page nine: "Although the consequences of adolescent pregnancy and childbearing must be extensive and serious for males as well as females the unavailability of data make it necessary in this report to focus on young women aged 15-19" (9). As we will see, at the time of this writing (37 years later), the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy is still about women—their mistakes, their health complications, and their impact on their children and society. This suggests that there is something more than missing data fueling the continued and nearly exclusive attention on young women.

1.4 Statistical Storytelling and the Dominant Narrative of Teenage Pregnancy

The dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy began, and continues, to be produced by and productive of statistical representations. Statistics are persuasive, in part because demographic research is often represented and received as objective or even neutral scientific data, collected by credentialed experts who seek numerical truths. However, the collection of quantitative data, the construction of the statistics, and the sentence-level explanation of their meaning highlight that cultural narratives produce and

are produced by the quantification of bodies and lives.[9] The list of statistics in "What A Difference A Year Makes" characterizes young pregnant and mothering women as stock figures in a troubled life that experts should pay attention to. These numbers construct the exigence of teenage pregnancy, the urgent feeling the something is going terribly wrong and the need to help the general American public to better understand the life of women like Mary—the doomed teen in the Rowland music video.

This first part of the story is that pregnant teens and their children are plagued by health issues. A series of statistics are listed to illustrate that "very young women . . . are biologically too immature for effective childbearing," a point evidenced by studies which suggest young mothers are more likely to give birth to low-weight infants and/or infants who die in the first year (21-3). Readers are told that pregnant teenagers also face more risk of maternal death or pregnancy complications like toxemia and anemia than other women. The second part of the story is that mothering teens face a complicated life path because they desperately need to be "more mature and better able to cope with the realities and responsibilities of parenthood" (21). As evidence of teen mothers' so-called immaturity the AGI explains through its booklet subject headings, "Teen Mothers Lack Key Skills" since they have not completed their high school education and are less likely to have had job or marriage experience (24). Furthermore, "Twice as Many Teenage Mothers Drop Out of School," because they cannot handle multiple demands and schools

[9] Feminist medical social scientists Monica Casper and Lisa Jean Moore conduct a Foucauldian analysis of demography as a discipline that classifies, normalizes, and regulates bodies. Contesting the assumption that demography is an objective science, Casper and Moore write, "Yet demographers *constitute* the truth about populations at the same time that they are measuring them. That is, embedded within the science are a whole set of assumptions about the world and its inhabitants that shape the sorts of questions asked and knowledge produce in the first place" (64, emphasis in original).

often encourage them to leave (25). The AGI also suggests that teenage mothers are destined for loneliness by quantifying the average length of their marriages: "Three in Five Pregnant Teen Brides [are] Divorced Within Six Years" (28). Finally, after facing obstacles to their health and social development, mothering teens embark on a life of poverty, more children, and dependency on public assistance: "Teen Mothers Face Greater Risk of Unemployment and Welfare Dependency" and "The Younger the Woman at First Birth, The Poorer the Family" that she creates (25).[10]

AGI uses numerical and verbal rhetoric about immature, doomed young women—sentences explained (or not so clearly explained) by statistical information comparing groups of women—to achieve its purpose of gaining funding and establishing policies which help teenagers access comprehensive sexual health information and contraceptives. By focusing on young women as too "immature" for motherhood, "ignorant" of effective preventative practices, and unable to access much-needed contraception, the booklet encourages preventative intervention in teenagers' lives because each of these problems may be solved with time, education, and contraceptive resources. The narrative constructed by these statistics relies on the absence of data about men who remain unaccountable for their actions, choices, and desires. It is important to note that demographic researchers often focus on women's bodies and lives. Feminist medical social scientists Monica Casper and Lisa Jean Moore critique this gendered pattern in their study of representations of Infant Mortality Rates (IMR). They write, "It

[10] As will be discussed in chapter 2, many researchers contest these findings. Luker, Mike Males, Geronimus, Lee Smithbattle and others point out the teenagers who become young mothers are often from families who are poor. A pregnancy does not change the poverty level of the girl.

is *women's* (not men's) bodies, behaviors, habits, employment, relationships, choices, and practices that are seen to determine whether their babies will live or die" (72, emphasis in original). This leads Caper and Moore to conclude that "women are highly visible containers of blame" (72).

In the next section of the booklet, "What is Being Done," AGI identifies a failure of policies and institutions to provide American youth with sex education and family planning resources, as well as medical care and secondary education for pregnant and parenting teens. In the final section, "What Could Be Done," the Guttmacher details a laundry list of needs, focusing most intently on the need to prevent young motherhood through "realistic sex education," "more preventative family planning programs," "adequate pregnancy counseling services," increased accessibility of abortion clinics, and "expansion of biomedical research" for "new fertility regulation" strategies for teenagers. In the end, the tragic life of unskilled, immature, and unsuccessful young mothers functions as a rhetorical appeal for actions that will prevent them from existing. Young mothers are constructed as figures to be upset about. Helping to legitimize the story as "fact" is the *ethos* of medicalized experts and demographers whose generalizations are accepted as truth. Nathanson understands the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy as a rhetorical means of ensuring funding for family planning and the medical officials who seek to prescribe birth control. At the same time, the story functions as a rhetorical strategy to achieve seemingly good things for young people.[11]

[11] Although the focus was on the outcomes of young women, the policies and funded contraceptive services that AGI advocated for would have benefitted female and male adolescents.

Well-intentioned or not, the story told by the AGI was persuasive, to say the least. By 1977, the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Health Services Administration built on the information in *11 Million Teenagers* to create and circulate a more concise pamphlet titled, "Teenage Pregnancy: Everybody's Problem." This pamphlet repeats points made by AGI in order to grab the attention of teenagers, parents, and even "taxpaying citizens" who are prompted to do something to prevent this problem (6). In 1978, the rhetorical depiction of a teenage pregnancy epidemic helped to pass the Adolescent Health Services and Pregnancy Prevention Act—a more successful and more prevention-focused version of the 1975 School-Age Mother and Child Health Act (Vinovskis 22-3). Illustrating the wide impact of this new way of talking about prevention issues, Nathanson points out that while no articles mentioned teens and pregnancy in the *New York Times* index in 1970, 14 articles used the terms in 1978 alone (46). The statistics and the narratives which brought attention to these terms became commonplaces of US discourse during this decade.

Considering this history, I maintain that the term "teenage pregnancy" does not just describe people who experience a pregnancy before the age of twenty; instead, it describes a problem the nation has with women aged 13-19 who give birth. Although sex educators, researchers, medical experts, politicians, and media figures talk about preventing *pregnancy*, the list of statistical evidence used to support the urgent need to prevent pregnancy most often describes the outcomes of women who choose to mother. It is the story of the teenage mother, and often images and descriptions of her body, that grounds prevention approaches.

While I maintain that the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy was structured by preventative rhetoric, it is important to note that stories about young mothers can (and do) stray from this framework. Even a tragic narrative of a young mothers' life of struggle and health risks can disengage with the preventative framework to function differently. As I will discuss in chapter four, women who became mothers in their teens tell stories of hardships, but their rhetorical purpose is to change institutional structures or attitudes toward women. What this brief history of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy illustrates is that the preventative rhetorical framework authorizes experts to position young motherhood as a rhetorical appeal for pregnancy prevention. As I show in this next section, pregnancy prevention rhetoric seeks to discipline women's bodies, relies on problematically gendered, classed, and racialized claims about motherhood, and is, ultimately, a rhetorical framework that makes it difficult to sympathize with or provide for young mothering women.

As a young woman, I certainly did not want to ruin the life of a child, and I was willing to admit I knew nothing about how to be a parent. I was a 17-year-old high school junior. I had ambitions of being the first in my family to graduate and go on to college, and naturally, now that I was pregnant I couldn't. Even a quick search on the Internet for "help for teenage mothers" led me to websites proclaiming "violence and mental health problems are common among teen mothers," and even more dreadful, "children of teen mothers face suicide risk."As the story goes, if a girl becomes pregnant, she eventually drops out of school to lead a devastating life as a poor, lonely woman raising a child who becomes a criminal, insane, or worse—another teen parent.

1.5 Teenage Mothers as Rhetoric: The Common Ground

The preventative rhetorical frame makes it difficult to disentangle pathologizing characterizations of young mothers from agendas to improve reproductive health outcomes through family planning efforts. This is because the teenage mother is made to embody the exigence that family planning organizations are funded to solve. Furthermore, the teenage mother functions as a powerful common ground between differently positioned people and groups. For example, David Calhoun writes in his closing personal essay to the AGI's *11 Million Teenagers* that "whatever the other value judgments one may come to about the information assembled here, I doubt that anyone would want to say that it is a good thing that teenagers get pregnant. On that much, agreement can be assumed" (57). In other words, even if readers of the booklet disagree that the US government should provide teenagers with comprehensive information about sex or better access to contraceptive services, everyone can agree that a pregnant teenager is "not a good thing." President Obama more recently relied on the ability of a "teen mother" to foster agreement among people of different beliefs by using "teenage pregnancy prevention" as the primary motivation for revamping federally funded sex-education programs in 2010 from abstinence-focused to evidenced-based comprehensive sex education initiatives. In doing do so, he (re)identified pregnancy as one of *the* most detrimental life-determining obstacles the government should help young women to avoid.[12] The conundrum is this: people are brought together to discuss how to proactively

[12] For more about the connections between President Obama's prevention rhetorics and the stigmatization and lack of support for young mothers see Miriam Zoila Perez's recent article in the online news source *Colorlines*, "Teen Moms Look for Support but Only Find Shame."

address teenagers' sexual behavior and improve young people's sexual-health outcomes by the collective disparagement of women who mother before the age of twenty (Kelly 202). Unfortunately, the moment a young woman finds herself pregnant she becomes symbolic of failure, disease (part of an "epidemic"), economic burdens, and even death. Her life is seen as over and the only thing she can contribute is a story and an image: a story of hardship, poverty, neglect, and despair; an image of sin, dirt, abjection, and rejection.

Further supporting the pathologized depiction of young mothering women is the circulation of the dominant narrative of the teenage mother as its own preventative measure. In the 1972 Commission on Population Growth's report, the discussions of 1975 National School-Age Mother and Child Health Act, and the 1976 *11 Million Teenagers* booklet, the story of teenage motherhood functioned as a means of persuading politicians to improve teenagers' access to sexual and reproductive health resources. Often, the story also served as evidence of the need for legal and policy changes that would provide more social support and educational opportunities for young mothers. Now, however, telling the tragic tale of young pregnancy is seen as a primary method of prevention in-and-of-itself. Popular reality television shows about the struggles and successes of young mothers such as *Teen Mom* and *16 & Pregnant* are framed by public service announcements that aim to persuade young people to look at pregnancy and motherhood as the worst outcome for teenagers. The teen mother is constructed as a preventative subject—someone who gains recognition only as a lesson or moral for

others who should take preventative measures to avoid her fate. As preventative subjects, young mothers are to be pitied or criticized.

The visibility of young motherhood enacts the pressure to conform to societal norms for pregnancy and trains women to discipline their bodies—it is a disciplinary discourse (Foucault 184). The dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy encourages the nation, including teens, to keep a careful eye on the conduct of young women. Encouraging what Foucault calls a "gaze" helps to produce self-surveilling normative subjects. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, Susan Bordo builds from Foucault's notion of the evolution of power from "physical restraint and coercion" to "individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms" to argue that normative subjectivity is often maintained through a politics of appearance (27). The evolution of public response to the issue of women's sexual and maternal deviance has indeed evolved from "physical restraint and coercion" to a more subtle, but still debilitating, social stigmatization of the teen mother's body.[13] Bordo uses the

[13] For example, G.R. Quaife writes that in 17th century England unwed pregnant women were passed from town to town, much like a game of musical chairs, until they gave birth in order to see which town would have to endure the "economic burden" of her existence (102). Moreover, in America, during the 1920s when the idea of the "unadjusted girl" surfaced, these "at risk" women were placed in "preventative detention" in order to circumscribe any sexual deviance (Luker 36); finally, Luker points out that "as a category of 'unfitness' became a staple of public discourse, there was considerable confusion about whether people in this category [including those determined to be "feebleminded"—by a problematic test, created by Alfred Binet, in 1930s—imbeciles, lunatics, and idiots] were inherently incapable of making the right choice when it came to having children, or were merely unwilling to do so" (33) which led to forced sterilization of many "unfit" women. These are all examples of explicit physical means of preventing or dealing with the problem of maternal/sexual deviance. Although I build on Bordo and Foucault to suggest the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy is evidence of the evolution from physical constraint and coercion to the disciplinary mechanism of the gaze, I do acknowledge that physical constraint and coercion are still very much disciplining mechanisms in the lives of teenagers, particularly female teenagers. As Rebecca Richards writes, "In order to be recognized by the system of the nation-state, women's difference, generally understood through reproductive biology, must be regulated and controlled either through legislation, endogamy, or violence" (36).

Foucauldian concept of the gaze to examine the ways in which women regulate their bodies (or feel the need to) according to the beauty norms circulated by mainstream media. The disciplinary mechanism of the gaze helps to explain how the teenage pregnancy narrative now functions. The rhetoric of teenage pregnancy prevention campaigns is a kind of "system of surveillance" that "involves very little expense" (Foucault, "Eye of Power" 155). As Luker points out, "making the United States the kind of country in which—as in most European countries—early childbearing is rare would entail profound changes in public policy and perhaps even American society as a whole" because it would require major structural changes to improve conditions of poverty (192). Comparatively, the circulation of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy is easier and seemingly cheaper. Thus, the motivation behind the circulation of the teenage pregnancy narrative appears, in part, to be a cost-effective strategy of making young women skeptical of their sexual desires and fearful of scrutiny of their bodies and sexual/reproductive choices.

Although discourses of teenage pregnancy have become pervasive, told by many over and over again, the leading institutional bases of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy are currently the Candies Foundation and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Parenthood (hereafter, the National Campaign). Both organizations circulate the message that women should regulate their sexual behavior according to societal norms or be doomed to face a life of inequality. Supporting this argument are gendered constructions of sexuality and motherhood. In the following section I analyze examples of public service announcements to show how representations of young

mothers are used as rhetorical strategies to persuade other teens not to have unprotected sex. I argue that these depictions continue to pathologize young mothers as preventative subjects and reify troubling tropes about women and motherhood.

1.6 Scaring Teenagers: The Life of the Teen Mother

In 2001, Neil Cole, the head of the Candies fashion brand (which, ironically, advertises women's retail items with highly sexualized ads featuring young women), created The Candies Foundation in a stated effort to prevent teenage pregnancy. The foundation's primary strategy includes constructing print ads, broadcast public service announcements, and online messages that "shape the way [teens] think about teenage pregnancy" and "expose them to the realities of teen parenthood" (Candies "About"). The foundation uses celebrities, such as R&B stars Beyoncé and Usher, as the spokespersons of their campaign messages. A brief analysis of one of the broadcast public service announcements will serve as an illustration of how the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy continues to functions as a disciplinary discourse that incites young women to enact self-surveillance and reifies terrible inequities in the process.

One broadcast public service announcement, which originally aired in 2008, depicts two teens sitting in the back of a car that is parked in a quintessential "make-out" spot—a cliff overlooking city lights. The young white girl in the backseat says, "I love you so much Mike." The young white man at her side responds, "Are we going to do this?" The girl nods and the boy leans in to kiss her. Suddenly comedienne/actress (and Candies sexual icon) Jenny McCarthy swings open the car door and leans in, sternly asking, "What are you doing?" The young man angrily retorts, "What does it look like we

are doing?" McCarthy responds, "Obviously not thinking about the consequences." The girl emphasizes, "There is nothing to worry about." McCarthy disagrees, picking up a large, crying white baby and placing it in the boy's arms. The boy quickly hands the baby to the girl and gets out of the car. McCarthy smirks and says to the girl, "Welcome to reality." The public service announcement ends with a close up of the girl's face, looking defeated as she holds the weeping baby. The "reality of teenage parenthood" constructed in this announcement is as follows:

1) Young women have sex because they love boys while boys are motivated by a sexual urge to "do this." Audiences are prompted to see the young girl as naïve to acquiesce to *his* sexual urge based on *her* feelings of love.
2) Teens do not think about the fact that sex can lead to pregnancy. Audiences are prompted to think that they are just not smart enough to use protection.
3) Boys do not help young women to raise their babies. Audiences are prompted to think that girls are naïve to think they would.

Gendered constructions of sexual desire, youth irresponsibility, and inequalities in childrearing work are (re)affirmed as the "consequences" of teenage pregnancy—the reality that *girls* should avoid by saying "no" to young men's advances. The announcement ends with the young woman holding the crying baby, symbolizing the end of her happy life and the sobering "reality" of young motherhood: a lonely and burdensome life for a young woman.

Another startling example of gendered depictions of sexuality and motherhood is the National Campaign's "Sex Has Consequences" series that debuted the same year that

the Candies Foundation was established. The National Campaign is an non-profit organization funded by private donations and the US Department of Health and Human Services "to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation" ("About Us: Mission").[14] The "Sex Has Consequences" campaign featured six photographs of young parents—including four differently racialized young women and two white men—each set against a plain white background.[15] The substantial use of white space connotes a modern, honest approach to addressing teenage pregnancy (Pracejus, Olsen, and O'Guinn 82, 85); the campaign appears to be letting the image of the teen parent speak for itself. However, the parents are labeled with shocking terms: the young Latina is "Cheap;" the African-American young woman is a "Reject;" the Asian-American young women is "Dirty;" the white young woman is "Nobody;" and the white young men are a "Prick" and "Useless." Each derogatory label is contextualized in barely visible sentences

[14] The organization began in 1996 as the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, but recently changed their name in to include "Unplanned Pregnancy" as well. At the time of the "Sex Has consequences" series, the Campaign was focused solely on the pregnancy and birthrates of teenagers. Although it now seeks to prevent "unplanned" pregnancies (in addition to all teenaged ones), the organization focuses more on "young adults in their twenties" still supporting the assumption that younger childbearing is irresponsible ("About Us: What We Do").

[15] Senior manager of the National Campaign's Communications Department explained to me the origin of this series: "That program was started as a contest between The National Campaign and *Teen People* magazine (now defunct) where teens were invited to submit their best renditions of the phrase "Sex Has Consequences." The posters and postcards are winning entries in the contest" (Sheets). There is much more to be said about the National Campaign's strategy of involving teenagers in the process of preventing teenage pregnancy. On the one hand, this seems to be a type of participatory youth-based approach, bringing in young people to solve a problem with adult allies. On the other hand, this tactic (like the end result of the images) promotes horizontal hostility among teenagers by encouraging them to see pregnant or parenting peers not as people but as "consequences."

running vertically up the side of the image, suggesting that the words are not *really* judgments of the teen parents.

The National Campaign uses sexist language, which originated to compel women to conform to gender norms, to convince teenagers to surveil their bodies. After all, what woman wants to be known as "Cheap," "Dirty," or a "Reject," especially during the often emotionally intense experience of high school? The purpose of the visual rhetoric is to get teens to gaze upon the bodies of these pregnant teens as cheap and dirty (helped by the fact that their pregnancy is signified *only* by the negative text on their bodies) and then reflect that gaze upon themselves. By continuing a language of promiscuity and abjection, these images suggest that a women's power over her self-representation comes through disciplining her sexual desires and reproductive capacities so as not to deviate from the "appropriate" time to conceive.

A brief analysis of one of the images from the series demonstrates the gendered and racialized ideologies structuring all of the images in this campaign.[16] One photograph features a Latina teenager, an important racial representation as the teen birth rate is reported as highest for Latinas.[17] As with all the shots in this series, the dominant factor of the image is the large red lettering across her midsection—"CHEAP." Since our eyes focus there, we are led to examine the woman behind the text in the context of her "cheap" body. She faces the camera squarely, her eyes accentuated with smeared dark

[16] This image can be found along with the other images in this series at the following website: http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2013/04/12/teens-as-objects-of-control/

[17] The AGI reports that "the teenage pregnancy rate among those who ever had intercourse declined 28% between 1990 and 2002" (3). As with most research on this issue, AGI then breaks down the results by race, finding that teen birthrates rates fell 40% for black women, 24% for white women, and 19% for Hispanic ("who may be of any race") women. It is made evident that while "Hispanic" birthrates are falling, they are not as significant as African American and white declines in rates (see Kaiser and CDC).

mascara. Has she been crying? Is she returning from a night of partying? Large hoop earrings dangle from her ears, clearly visible because her hair is swept back, not up to connote an elegance or energy, but back, hanging down off her shoulders—careless wisps escaping the hair tie. The top buttons of her white polo shirt are unbuttoned and her right hand rests at the top of the opening—as if she is quickly covering up or about to further expose her chest. The shirt is tied up to show her stomach squeezed into her form-fitting black jeans. Her other hand hooks in the right pocket. Her outfit, stance, and slightly disheveled appearance all imply a defiant sexuality, perhaps even promiscuity, which is enhanced by the urgent red text across her midsection. The word choice, "cheap," suggests that the young woman's economic value is now hindered because of her sexuality and lack of responsible effort to prevent a pregnancy. In *The Laugh of Medusa*, Hélène Cixous writes that pregnant women double their "market value" in a patriarchal culture (1534). And Gloria Anzaldúa highlights the idealization of motherhood as a role of value in Mexican American culture. Anzaldúa writes, "Women are made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children" (39). Here, the National Campaign taps into the cultural discourse of the market/cultural value of a pregnant woman, but it suggests that the woman has sold herself short. By failing to delay the fruits of her fertility, she has become a "cheap" commodity. Since she is not yet visibly pregnant, we are encouraged to think of her sex act, not about the baby in her womb. Of course, the label also intersects with widespread discourse about Mexican migrants who are often depicted as both cheap labor and undesirable citizens.

The young woman's gaze becomes integral to the interpretation of the image and the language which constrains it. She is obviously not happy—she looks tired and worn out—but nevertheless stares right back at the camera capturing her. Had she averted her eyes one could easily come to the conclusion that she has been taken advantage of, raped, or that her unintended pregnancy is a product of poverty and/or another circumstance that is out of her control. Furthermore, she is a minoritized figure, an "other" of American culture who may often face racism in the everyday. Any of these signifiers could easily incite a more complex reading of her "situation." The photo could work to illustrate, as Luker argues again and again in *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy*, that "preexisting poverty, failure in school, a dearth of opportunities for personal and professional fulfillment, persistent divisions between the races, and traditional gender-role expectations all lead both to early pregnancy and to impoverished lives" (41). Yet the organization of the photo (all eyes on her—her body), the gaze of the subject, and the text across her body all suggest that the National Campaign does not want to explain her actions and pregnancy beyond her stated mistake of not purchasing a condom. The young woman stares directly at us, stone faced, confessing through the text along the side of the photograph, "Condoms are cheap. If we'd used one I wouldn't have had to tell my parents that I'm pregnant." The text suggests that she accepts the fault for this problem, not noting any difficulty in actually buying the contraceptive device, any cultural beliefs that interfere with using contraceptives, or any ignorance that she needed one to prevent pregnancy. Finally, although there is a "we" written in this image,

suggesting that there was a partner in crime, it is only her moment to confess. The blame is put, literally, on the exposed body of the pregnant young woman.

Although the rhetoric of teenage pregnancy shifts its connotations as it is represented with differently racialized bodies in this series (an idea I explore further in chapter three), together, the four visual representations of young women's personal experiences argue that teenage motherhood is the end all of a sense of self-worth, sexual attraction, friendships, and happiness. One photo includes a young mother lamenting, "I want to be out with my friends. Instead I am changing DIRTY diapers at home." In this statement, motherhood involves the bleak prospect of changing diapers which contrasts sharply to what she desires—social companionship. Who wants to hang out with a DIRTY mother? Continuing the trope of isolation brought on by motherhood, another image suggests, "Now that I am home with a baby NOBODY calls me anymore." That is, young motherhood brings on the loss of friendships. Together, these photos encourage acceptance of the fact that, for women, motherhood means remaining at home doing childrearing work and struggling to connect with the public sphere.[18] In much the same

[18] The isolation felt by many mothers is produced by their cultural context. Feminist writer Adrienne Rich explains how white mothers' isolation in the home stemmed from profound changes in family life brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Rich maintains that motherhood has always been hard (often oppressive) work for women who have almost always had to work in other capacities along with the undervalued and often monotonous work of raising children. Rich historicizes motherhood from the time of the North American colonies to the present, showing how the "home" transitioned from a workplace in which women, men, and children did all sorts of work to sustain the home wherein childrearing, nursing, and producing were communal work (47). The industrial revolution of the nineteenth century changed the family dynamic. Initially, women were hired to work in the factories as cheaper labor than men—still coming home to do domestic chores. Men's exclusion from the factory and children's sordid conditions without their mothers incited a social reform that led some white mothers into the home where it was idealized that they had a "sacred calling" to care for children, absorb the anger of their husbands, and be happy (49). Women did not become powerless in the move from the factory (where they were also exploited) to the home, but instead isolated. At the same time, enslaved black women were not thought of as "mothers" by white people or isolated in their own homes. Instead, black women were constructed as

way, the final woman in the series mourns her loss of social companionship: "I had sex so that my boyfriend would not reject me. Now, I have a baby and no boyfriends." The unstated premises in this statement are that men leave their pregnant teenage girlfriends and that pregnant or mothering single women are undesirable sexual/love companions. The image suggests that young women should be spending their time with *boyfriends* (plural) not *babies*, because—as the photo of the sad girl clearly shows—their happiness depends upon it. The love of a mother for her child is subordinated to the desire of a man for a woman. Rhetorician Barbara Dickson argues that women are called to "constantly surveil themselves to exercise some control over how they will be treated by men. They develop an internal male monitor that allows them some agency in their relationships with men" (300). This photo certainly encourages a self-acceptance based on the feedback of men, a male gaze. The problem for this teen mother is that she has lost the recognition that comes with being an attractive, childless young woman. The image suggests that the National Campaign hopes other young women will develop an "internal male monitor" that gets them to judge any decision they make in terms of how it will affect their relationships with men.

In this series, the argument that teenage pregnancy is always and only a horrible experience functions on the personal appeal of young mothers' ruined bodies. The young women are portrayed as critical of their own actions and we, the public who receive their image, are encouraged to critique them, their bodies, and their reflections. Bordo writes that images serve a normalizing function "that is, they function as models against which

---

breeders who were made to carry fetuses to term for the slave market and/or care for white children while enduring terrible material conditions (Roberts 10).

the self continually measures, judges, 'disciplines,' and 'corrects' itself" (25). The use of teenage mother's bodies as rhetorical appeals to prevent deviant sexual acts has led to a context in which visibly young pregnant or mothering women's bodies are seen as just that—bodies. The image of the ruined teenage mother—Kelly Rowland's Mary or the women of the National Campaign and Candies ads—has become an accepted image in our culture. We must recognize the relationship between bodies and discourse, especially in the case of pregnant teens, because the widespread circulation of dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy persuades us to pity and condemn these women, treating them as dehumanized rhetorical exigencies instead of people.

1.7 Absence of Men in the Dominant Narrative of Teenage Pregnancy

While the Candies Foundation and the National Campaign employ some images of men, the social anxiety over teenage pregnancy is primarily focused on the bodies of women, the desires of women, and the irresponsibility of women. For example, only two of the six images from the "Sex Has Consequences" campaign focus on (white) men. The first young man is labeled "USELESS." He is posed with a hand under his chin, as if he is pondering the statement that runs along the side of the image: "My scholarship is USELESS. Now I need a job to support my baby." What is at stake for this young father is not social acceptance, future relationships, the mundane life of caring for a child, nor the anguish of confessing one's sexual activity to their parents, but rather a waste of *his* economic, academic, and intellectual potential. The next young man is a "PRICK" — slang for both male genitalia and a mean person. He laments, "All it took was one PRICK to get my girlfriend pregnant. At least that is what her friends say." This young man

struggles with a bad high school reputation, brought on by what he has done to the girlfriend who is now, presumably, ruined. We are encouraged to think of his girlfriend's body and the one "prick" it took to get her pregnant. The ratio of representation of women to men and the "consequences" attributed to men (both of which have little to do with their bodies, the labor of their bodies, or their future sexuality) suggest the problem is really with the bodies of women.

The Candies Foundation communicates this gendered message by using only the testimonies of young women to persuade teens to postpone pregnancy. Ten teen females share their answers to the Candies Foundations generic questions about teenage pregnancy in their "Real Stories" link. Nine of the young women kept their children (and are pictured with them) and one young woman testifies to placing her child with an adoptive family. Together, these narratives—with the graphics—solidify that teenage pregnancy is a young woman's problem. From the stories we learn that girls fail to use contraception or foolishly think that having a child is a good idea. The sexual behaviors, contraceptive decisions, and reproductive urges of men are not discussed or critiqued. As Luker remarks, even years "after the most recent round of feminist activism, most people focus on teenage mothers instead of young parents" (2).

The rhetorical strategies deployed by these campaigns against teen pregnancy are devastating as the pejorative terms and inequitable realities feminists have contested are now *used* to get young women to regulate themselves. In fact, these images work to reify such harmful discourses, masking the patriarchal construction of the terms to subordinate women and presenting the inequitable burden of parenthood as the natural "consequence"

of becoming pregnant. Bordo might attribute such rhetorical practices to a "culture of mystification—a culture which continually pulls us away from systematic understanding and inclines us toward constructions that emphasize individual freedom, choice, power, ability" a point illustrated by the phrase located on the bottom of each of these ads: "sex has consequences" or in the case of the Candies Foundation, "pause before you play." These campaigns suggest that these women had a choice. The young Latina could have bought "cheap" condoms and thereby saved herself from her doomed fate as a scrutinized, cheap woman/mother. The young white girl in the Candies PSA could have said "no" to the boy in the car and avoided the terrible fate of deserted, single motherhood. Such rhetoric masks the systematic structures that objectify women and construct the material realities of involuntary single parenthood.

1.8 Preventative Subjects

The circulation of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy as a disciplinary mechanism means that any attempt to challenge the depiction of teenage motherhood as a life of failure can be seen as potentially thwarting efforts of teenage pregnancy prevention. For example, I often draw on my experiential and academic knowledges of young motherhood to critique the pathologization of teenage mothers. During several presentations I have been asked about the repercussions of changing the dominant narrative of teenage motherhood. When I first critiqued this pathologizing discourse as an undergraduate, a peer in my creative writing workshop wrote the following comment on my paper: "Perhaps by telling your own daughter the difficulties and drawbacks to teenage pregnancy rather than its praises, you can avoid having to raise her child while

she finishes high school herself, or worse yet, drops out entirely."[19] A more recent example happened after a conference presentation during which I presented an analysis of "girl-moms" narratives that challenge the dominant view of young mothers (see chapter four). A media studies scholar approached me to say, "I loved your presentation, but . . . I don't know how to say this . . . I worry that . . . well, what happens if we portray young mothers more positively? Won't this encourage girls to get pregnant?" Questions and comments such as these testify to the persuasiveness of dominant discourses of teenage pregnancy and the gender ideologies that produce them. Many people believe that to challenge the narrative of young motherhood is to encourage (female) teenagers to have sex for the purpose of procreation. Positive images of women are seen as "risky" representations that could threaten the lives of non-pregnant/parenting teens. If young girls do not gaze upon teenage mothers with disgust, how will they know to discipline and control their own bodies and actions?

The tension between the demand for respectful treatment of mothering young women and the discourses of sex and pregnancy prevention recently played out very publically with Gaby Rodriguez's senior-research-project-turned-memoir called *The Pregnancy Project.* In 2011, a media frenzy erupted when journalists learned that Rodriguez faked a pregnancy for her senior research project that she called "Stereotypes,

[19] In this creative writing class, I wrote a "social witness essay" in which the writer uses personal experience with a social issue to explore the nuances and discourses around it. I wrote about my experience with teenage pregnancy. In my essay, I described finishing my education and caring for my daughter with the help of my family. Far from "singing its praises," I pointed out how people assumed I would fail and treated me like a promiscuous woman once I became pregnant. Note how the peer interprets my experience of young motherhood through the lens of the dominant discourse: my daughter is at risk to drop out of school (although I did not) and become pregnant, leaving me to raise her child (a travesty in a middle-class paradigm of parenthood as the sole obligation of the parenting person—not the shared work of the family) .

Rumors, and Statistics." At the time, Rodriguez was a student at Toppenish High School, situated in a low-income community with a high rate of teenage pregnancies. As a Mexican-American daughter and sibling of teenage parents, Rodriguez grew up frustrated that many people (her family included) thought she would become a teenage mother—after all, that is what the statistics tell us.[20] In her memoir, Rodriguez writes that she wanted to help fellow students at Toppenish defy stereotypes and avoid the struggles her mother and siblings experienced by practicing pregnancy prevention. At the same time, Rodriguez wondered how stereotypes and statistics about young mothers might encourage them to fail. So, she decided to fake a pregnancy in order to learn more about the experience of being a pregnant student in high school.

Not surprisingly, Rodriguez had an extremely stressful "pregnancy." She writes that she felt like a "nonperson" when her family and some of her former friends would not look at her or speak to her (116). With the help of a friend and a cousin who were aware of the fake pregnancy, Rodriguez recorded what family and peers said about her such as, "She ruined everything," "Now she won't go to college," "Oh well, it was bound to happen," "Her life is over," and "I wonder if she'll even graduate" (110). Rodriguez writes, "*If I were really pregnant, how would I take these messages?*" (110, emphasis in original). She prompts her readers to consider "how many of the grim statistics about teen moms are unavoidable, and how many are the result of the limits other people project on them" (111).Throughout the book, she argues for better treatment of young mothers.

[20] Ironically, the discussion guide for the made-for-T.V. *Lifetime* movie of *The Pregnancy Project* reiterates facts such as, "In the U.S., 52 percent of Latinas will get pregnant at least once as teenagers. Latinas have the highest teen pregnancy and birth rates of any group in the U.S." and "Children of teen mothers are more likely to become teen parents themselves."

Rodriguez even modifies the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy to include the ways in which young parents are discouraged by others' scrutiny and actions:

> A teen gets pregnant. People treat her like a pariah, so she becomes depressed. Her boyfriend is scared off because society tells him he's in for a terrible life. She drops out of school and can't find a good job, so she ends up on welfare. She's not emotionally or financially prepared to be a parent and doesn't have a lot of support, so she's not the best mom she can be, and the baby grows up without a steady father figure. The child is 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade than his or her peers, and performs worse on standardized tests. If he's a boy, he's more likely to go to prison, and if she's a girl, she's likely to become a teen mom herself and start the cycle over again. (169).

Rodriguez reauthorizes the story of the failed teen mother but brings attention to the terrible treatment (and its productive function) of young women as part of this doomed life. At the end of her project, Rodriguez presented her research findings at a school-wide assembly. She read the statements that people said about her aloud to her peers to show them how people changed the way they thought about her just because of her pregnancy. Then, she explained the importance of "fighting stereotypes" like the way she fights the assumptions that she will get pregnant at an early age. She took off her fake belly and the audience gave her a standing ovation.

Rodriguez's ultimate message is a little unclear because of the powerful constraints of preventative discourses of teenage pregnancy. Some saw her as challenging

the stigmatization of young motherhood and suggesting that being a teen mom isn't the end of the road (Seacrest; Pérez). Others saw her as spreading the message of teenage pregnancy prevention by showing that the life of a teen mom is not glamorous and young women should avoid that life path at all costs like she did.[21] Indeed, I would point out that much of her *ethos* comes from the fact that Rodriguez is *not* pregnant (hence, the standing ovation when she takes the fake stomach off). Rodriguez's memoir is full of conflicting messages that demonstrate the way teenage motherhood is intertwined with the project of pregnancy prevention. On the one hand, she advocates "a few words of encouragement" for the pregnant teens we see in the everyday (213). On the other hand, she asserts, "there's nothing acceptable about having a baby before you have your own life together" inspiring disrespect or scrutiny of young women's decisions to carry the fetus to term and keep the baby (212). She explains, "It would be unrealistic to expect everyone to say 'Congratulations!' and cheer about it—and that would probably be harmful to others, because other teens might see the positive attention and want some of it for themselves. . . leading to more teen pregnancies" (125). The importance of preventing pregnancy comes at the expense of respect for women who carry pregnancies and raise children before the age of twenty. We cannot congratulate them, or celebrate their hard work to carry pregnancies or raise children, because this may "tempt" teens to

[21] In her memoir, Rodriguez tells readers that Senator Jim Honeyford sent her a letter expressing his admiration of her project. He wrote, "In witnessing your supposed unwed pregnant state and the complications surrounding your efforts to continue your education, other students may have seriously contemplated the consequences as well as made some wise decisions which could lead to fewer teen pregnancies" (189).

get pregnant.[22] The value is placed on the bodies of teens who abstain from pregnancy at the expense of the bodies of those who do not.

When I was fifteen, I used to love borrowing my nephew and strolling through the mall with him. People would throw me the nastiest stares, mumbling things under their breath as they walked by because he had red hair and blue eyes like me. I had loved it then, basking in the glory of being able to piss people off just by pushing a baby in a stroller. Yet, after I became pregnant and decided to keep the baby, I was nervous. I didn't know if I could face all of that anger, those horrible stereotypes, and audacious judgments on top of trying to be a competent mother.

1.9 Implications of the Dominant Narrative

What does it matter that nonprofit organizations happen to use representations of young mothers to convince young women to postpone pregnancy? What is the problem with perpetuating a discourse of failure for teenage mothers? After all, the Candies Foundation boasts, "Research has shown that teen girls who have been exposed to the foundation and its messages are more likely to view teen pregnancy and parenthood as stressful and negative" (Candies "About"). This means it is working, right? Put simply, the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy is not okay because it continues a focus on women's bodies as a site for disciplinary control, naturalizes gender inequalities,

[22] As I will discuss in chapter two, even researchers who contest the negative discourses of teenage motherhood worry about the effects of positive representations of young motherhood even though statistics suggest that the majority of teen pregnancies (again, the majority of which are fathered by older adult men) are unintended pregnancies that correlate with impoverished communities where women of all ages experience, comparatively, higher rates of unintended pregnancies.

encourages institutions and others to mistreat or punish young mothers, and prompts young pregnant or mothering women to think badly about themselves.

Approaching the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy from a feminist perspective, looking specifically for the kind of gaze it encourages on women's bodies, we see that the discourse reifies an ideology of domination, supporting harmful stereotypes about women and naturalizing inequitable, gendered realities of motherhood. Pregnant and mothering teenaged women may very well struggle in the everyday but dehumanizing them and packaging this struggle as a rhetorical strategy to prevent other teenagers from having sex is problematic at best. The "stress" and "negativity" of parenthood that teen girls are being sold by these organizations are the inequalities women face when they become mothers: they are more likely to have to do the work of child rearing (married or not; teen or non-teen); they face more struggles to complete schooling whether they are finishing secondary or higher educational pursuits; they are less likely to earn as much as men and non-mothering women; and, if they are single, heterosexual women, they will often have to struggle to attain child support from an absent father. Feminist scholars of motherhood have critiqued the discourses and material conditions women are made to face as they bear and raise children (Rich; Davis; Solinger; O'Reilly; Chase). In fact, Weedon uses the example of the feelings of the "new mother" to draw attention to the embodied, experiential impact of ideology and language. She writes, "The inadequacies widely felt by the new mother, for example, who is inserted in a discourse of motherhood in which she is exposed to childcare demands structured by the social relations of the patriarchal nuclear family, may leave her feeling

an unnatural or bad parent" (33). Feminist advocates should be concerned that the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy (re)constructs discourses that naturalize gendered constructions of parenting.

Moreover, if we consider the repercussions of associating teenage motherhood with failure for institutions and adults who are charged with caring for young people, we find a rationale for them to refuse assistance to pregnant or mothering young women and/or a reason for them to actively complicate pathways for pregnant or mothering teens' success. After all, many construct young mothers as doomed to failure and/or deserving of punishment for their mistake of getting pregnant (see chapter four). Feminist scholar Vivyan Adair explains the impact of representations of "bad" women with a circuit metaphor: "bodies are represented and understood in ways that reflect the dominant ideology . . . That ideology in turn determines, shapes, and reinforces public policy; and public policy leaves its marks on the bodies of poor single mothers of all ages, races, sexualities, and nationalities" (2). Adair uses the example of the 1996 welfare reforms that punished the bodies of many poor, single mothers (who were represented in congressional hearings as unmotivated, unqualified, or undeserving of higher education) by forcing them out of higher education and into the minimum wage workforce (see also Silver 9). Young mothers are represented as failed women, reflecting patriarchal ideologies that only value mothers when they are part of a male-headed, middle-class marriage. This representation leads to policies that produce failure for some young mothers. A recent example of this was Louisiana's Dehli Charter School's approach to solving the problem of teenage pregnancy (represented as the source of educational

failure and a terrible life). Their school policy was to require female students who are suspected of being pregnant to take a pregnancy test to determine whether they should be expelled from school.[23] In other words, the policy marked the bodies of young mothers as dropouts in order to push them out of the school. The structural implications of this narrative are not to be overlooked, as schools may continue to justify push-outs and lack of childcare opportunities for their students so long as discourses remain steeped in misrepresentation and misguided conclusions about the less deserving, the doomed, the "cheap," and the "reject(ed)" young mother.[24]

Most importantly, the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy may encourage young women who *are* pregnant to hide their pregnancies or fail to see how to succeed as a girl and mother (Vinson and Stevens 17; Crews "When I Was Garbage"). As Rodriguez points out in her book, the narrative of failure, disease, and death that permeates media images of teenage pregnancy encourages young mothers to see themselves as part of that discourse and discourages any deviance from it. Weedon explains, "To be effective, [discourses] require activation through the agency of the individual whom they constitute and govern in particular ways as embodied subjects. The discursive constitution of

[23] News of this longstanding practice at the school broke in early August 2012 when the ACLU sent a letter to the school demanding that they revise the policy which violates Title IX and other constitutional rights (Orstein). Administrators at the school quickly changed the policy, explaining that they did not know this was illegal or unethical. In other words, it seemed common sense to surveil the bodies of their female students and punish those who behave badly by getting pregnant before they graduate. Again, we should consider the impact of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy.

[24] As another example of the relationship between the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy and materials structures affecting mothering women, feminist anthropologist Cheryl Rodriguez points to the resources offered by youth programs. Rodriguez draws on her ethnographic research on young mothers in Louisiana and Florida, to support her observation that youth programs fail to meet the needs of young mothering women and "basically communicated prevailing notions about low-income teenage mothers which is that since the damage has been done, they—the mothers—should be silent, invisible, compliant consumers of whatever resources are offered" (21).

subjectivity addresses and constitutes the individual's mind, body, and emotions" (109). Young mothers are encouraged, by these discourses, to identify with characterizations of young motherhood and to see their life circumstances as determined by their "decision" to become pregnant, carry the fetus to term, and keep the child.

Ms. Reilly, the effervescent psychology teacher freshly graduated from the local state university, has asked us to get into groups of four and share something about our summer vacation. I eye my four peers—I have known each of them since Jr. High. We are not "friends" friends, but I think I will let them know. Break the ice so to speak. After all, who can avoid noticing my basketball-shaped 6-month pregnant stomach? It is my turn to share and somehow Ms. Reilly has (intentionally?) timed her casual facilitation of small group discussions around to room to appear at our group when I begin to speak. "Well, I spent my summer growing a baby!" My peers smile, seemingly appreciative of getting a chance to ask more about it: "When are you due? What are you having? Is Billy excited too? Can we touch it!" We chit chat about my baby-to-be until the bell rings. As I head out the door, Ms. Reilly pulls me aside, her voice dropping into a low, serious octave: "Jenna, I am here to help you. There has been some buzz about public schools' obligations to support pregnant students. But I want to let you know that it is illegal for them to deny you support. Have you told the administration?" I shake my head no. I say I didn't think I had to tell them. "You don't. I will advocate for you okay? Just let me know if they give you any trouble."

1.10 Counter-Rhetorics: Resistance to Dominant Discourses

Yet, even as I write about the implications of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy I know that subjectivity is more complicated than this. My own knee-jerk reaction to an unexpected pregnancy at 17 years old was guided by preventative discourses of teenage pregnancy. It seemed common sense that I would need to relieve myself of the fetus or child in order to finish my education and become a self-supporting individual. In that moment of discovering my pregnancy, I was an embodied subject of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy. I *felt* the "consequence" of bad decisions written on my body—I was a problem that I needed to solve. But I began to question that line of thinking because of conflicting discourses around me. As one example, my mother and sisters had children "too young," "unmarried," and "too poor," according to social norms and they were—collective gasp—happy (or to be more accurate, enjoyed moments of happiness in similar rates as I assume people who "wait" for nuclear family constructions or accrued wealth). I eventually wondered, "Why can't I finish school and raise a child?" Moreover, the privilege of an emotionally supportive family (including my mother who did not berate me or toss me out of my home for being pregnant) and compassionate teachers offered me the materially safe position to resist the discourses that would write me as a failure.

So as much as I critique the dominant discourses of teenage pregnancy, I also recognize that subjectivity is not determined by those discourses. Drawing on Teresa de Lauretis' theories of discourse, experience, and subjectivity, philosopher Linda Alcoff writes, "all women can (and do) think about, criticize, and alter discourse and, thus, that

subjectivity can be reconstructed through the process of reflective practice" (425). Furthermore, discourses—even hegemonic discourses—make available means of resistance. Foucault explains the irony this way, "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (101). That is, if power is (re)constructed through discursive constructions of meaning, then discourse is also a means of challenging particular power relations.

If particular dominant discourses construct abject or aberrant subjects—like "teen mothers"—in order to maintain social norms and produce self-disciplining subjects, then the possibility that "teen mothers" use that subject position as a means of resistance is also constructed. Cultural studies scholar Chela Sandoval explains that subject positions, "once self-consciously recognized by their inhabitants can become transfigured into effective sites of resistance to an oppressive ordering of power relations" (55). In her analysis of queer movements, Judith Butler uses the term "disidentificiation" or "the resignification of identities for political agency to claim cultural intelligibility" (4; 21-22). Butler draws attention to the way people can at once use an identity marker—like "queer"—to argue for political rights, while "disidentifying" with the identity marker's original function (to classify some as "other" than normal).

In other words, discourse is slippery and always includes contradictions and conflicting meanings that create *kairotic* opportunities for rhetorical resistance and social change. Hence the title of this dissertation: "Teenage Mothers as Rhetors and Rhetoric." The dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy constructs "young" or "teenage" mothers as

preventative subjects in order to discipline the bodies of young women. As such, the pregnant or mothering teenage body is both an exigency to be solved and an appeal for systematic measures of disciplinary control of women and youth. Yet, at the same time, "teenage mothers" can use this subject position as a means of "cultural intelligibility" and speak, write, or otherwise perform as rhetors. Teenage mother rhetors may reflect on their subject position, disidentify with its negative function, and use their own rhetorical appeals to claim their rights to personhood, respect, or assistance. Throughout this dissertation I call the ways in which rhetors challenge the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy "counter-hegemonic rhetoric" or "oppositional discourse" not to dichotomize the discourses as simply pro/con but rather to point to the ways these rhetorical strategies seek to challenge an institutionalized status quo.

Bordo reminds us that "the fact that cultural resistance is continual does not mean it is on an equal footing with forms that are culturally entrenched" (29). Weedon agrees, describing the relative power of some discourses over others as based on "the social power and authority which comes from a secure institutional location" (107). As I have shown in this opening chapter, the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy has a secure institutional location in well-funded family planning campaigns. By focusing on rhetorical efforts to challenge the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy, I am focusing on marginalized counterhegemonic discourses that do not currently enjoy a position of power. Considering this, and also considering the embodied ways in which I engage the dominant discourses as a mothering woman and feminist rhetorician, I see this dissertation as a feminist rhetorical intervention in the dominant narrative of teenage

pregnancy. It is worth quoting De Lauretis thoughts on resistance at length here to explain my point:

> Strategies of writing *and* of reading are forms of cultural resistance. Not only can they work to turn dominant discourses inside out (and show that it can be done), to undercut their enunciation and address, to unearth the archaeological stratifications on which they are built; but in affirming the historical existence of irreducible contradictions for women in discourse, they also challenge theory in its own terms, the terms of a semiotic space constructed in language, its power based on social validation and well-established modes of enunciation and address. (7)

1.11 Chapter Overviews

Since "teenage pregnancy" began as a discursive construct meant to secure public funding for public health and family planning initiatives, researchers have been questioning its validity in describing the experiences and outcomes of teenage women. Exploring how published research—across disciplines—has questioned and critiqued dominant perceptions of teenage pregnancy and parenthood in the US, brings to light a variety of counter-rhetorical strategies used to challenge the premises and conclusions of preventative rhetorics of teenage pregnancy. In chapter two, I review and (re)visibilize this body of literature as I am unaware of any other transdisciplinary literature review that looks selectively at rhetorics in opposition to preventative rhetorics of teenage pregnancy. Chapter two also illustrates that many of the counter-points made by researchers are dismissed by institutions that have a stake in producing "teenage pregnancy" as a social

problem to solve (and be funded for solving). I argue that although literature that challenges dominant assumptions about teenage pregnancy is valuable for debunking myths and misperceptions, many scholars fail to challenge the discursive practices that nonetheless continue to pathologize young mothers and position women's bodies as a site of disciplinary intervention. I illustrate that feminist poststructuralist analysis of young motherhood identifies and intervenes in the mechanisms producing such discourses and connects the focus on "teenage pregnancy" to ideologies of class, gender, race, and colonialism. Yet, in turning attention away from pregnant and mothering teens to the discourse that constructs them as abject, these theorists miss the opportunity to study how subjects maneuver within, against, or beyond this discourse to live their lives, claim their rights, or initiate change in perspectives and policies. I identify a need for research that approaches pregnant and mothering teens as rhetors who act within these discursive constraints and possibilities.

In chapter three, I look at how visual representations of pregnant and mothering teenagers are used to (re)construct a focus on individual women as the source of the United States' problem with teenage pregnancy, even in light of the early revisionist research I outline in chapter two. I argue that there is a historical precedent of using white female bodies in cover stories to portray teenage pregnancy as a universal problem that stems from women's seemingly irresponsible timing of pregnancy. In pointing out this visual rhetorical strategy, I further the claim initiated by feminist analysts of racialized teenage-pregnancy discourse, that such rhetoric obscures the United States' problematic history of condemning the reproductive decisions of poor women and women of color.

To support my argument I conduct a visual rhetorical analysis of photographs of women in US magazine cover stories and news articles from the 1970s and ’80s—when the phrase “teenage pregnancy” began circulating as a cause for national concern. I identify visual and verbal rhetoric used to idealize adolescence and (re)construct concerns about the reproductive decisions of minoritized women. In the end, I suggest that visual rhetorical analysis, the method I employ in this chapter, can help to foster a critical gaze and new ways of looking at representations of pregnant and mothering teens today.

In chapter four, I rhetorically analyze first-person accounts from teen mothers who contest popular (mis)conceptions of the social consequences of teenage motherhood in two edited collections—*Breeders* and *You Look Too Young to Be a Mom*—and one online social network called *Girl-Mom.* Drawing on theories of counternarratives and resistance, I analyze the rhetorical frameworks of these texts and the narrative strategies used in young mothers’ first-person stories. By illustrating their counter-rhetorical tactics, I document young mothers’ intervention in the dominant discourses of teenage pregnancy and identify possibilities for intervention in discourses that marginalize mothering women. In doing so, I join the efforts of feminist rhetoricians who analyze women’s rhetorics to change and broaden the understanding of rhetoric in what has often been a very white, male, heterosexual rhetorical tradition (Glenn; Campbell; Foss 155).

Finally, in chapter five I illustrate the everyday effects of preventative rhetoric about teenage pregnancy that construct a context in which young mothers embody an urgent and much-debated social issue. Drawing on 27 local young pregnant and mothering women’s stories told during nine focus groups, I illustrate how this cultural

context leads to situations in which some young mothers are publically confronted by strangers because of the problems their bodies seem to represent. I offer the rhetorical concept of "embodied exigence" as a way to understand how discursive and material realities of the body may construct rhetorical situations and how the body may function as a site of agency. Building from rhetorical theories of agency and exigence, poststructuralist understandings of identity formation, and feminist work on the visibility of motherhood, I argue that in moments of embodied exigence, marginalized young mothers may seize the opportunity to speak to what their bodies represent. Specifically, I describe four tactics that youthful-looking pregnant and mothering women use to interrupt moments of embodied exigence and challenge dominant perspectives on teenage pregnancy and young parenthood. I conclude by explaining that young mothers and other subjects who embody exigencies need the critical tools and social support to rhetorically engage these often unpredictable and potentially hostile encounters.

Figure 1: Photograph of Author Nursing her Daughter, 2002

Following Cixous' assertion that "[w]oman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement," I move myself into the center of the discourse on teenage pregnancy (1524). For "when we bring our marginalized aspects of our identities (racial, gendered, ethnic, sexual) into the central arenas of culture they are themselves transformed, and *transforming*" (Bordo 42). I offer my image as an image of motherhood, sexuality, academic success, and

my happiness of embodying all three (and more) in this moment. In figure one, I sit at a picnic table after receiving my high school diploma. The baby that nurses from me signifies my motherhood, not any imposed text on my body. My skin does show but this is not dirty or wrong. I am not a reject or cheap, although I am alone. While the photograph challenges characterizations of "teenage mothers" as rhetorical appeals, the picture does not lead to a simple conclusion about "teenage pregnancy." My success as a mother is a product of many factors—race and class included. I come from a supportive family that eventually figured itself above the poverty line. I was well on my way to finishing school with a strong GPA before I conceived my daughter. I did not have to battle racial stereotypes that assumed I would become pregnant and ruin my life. The list goes on. As a young, single, school-attending, working, living woman and mother, I have also faced struggles not evident in this smiling photograph. Nevertheless, I bring myself into the center of this discourse in order to refuse the position of a disempowered, disembodied, disciplined subject and to critique the discourses that write us as such.

CHAPTER 2: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP THAT COUNTERS DOMINANT DISCOURSE ON TEENAGE PREGNANCY

As described in chapter one, teenage pregnancy has captured the attention of scholars, health and social service professionals, political figures, the mass media, and concerned citizens since the 1970s. At the same time that some researchers constructed teenage pregnancy as a social problem to be solved, a conversation emerged among scholars in history, health, sociology, education, law, and media studies who questioned both the context for national concern over an "epidemic of teenage pregnancy" and the societal ills that continue to be associated with pregnant and parenting teens. These conversations include scientific research efforts to prove, empirically, that young women who have babies *do not* negatively impact the economy, their own health/future, their children's health/future, or the sexual behaviors/outcomes of other young women. This body of literature also points to potential benefits to reproducing before the age of twenty for women in contexts of poverty. In addition, recent scholarship draws on theories of feminism and poststructuralism to trace teenage pregnancy as a discursive construct and analyze its ideological implications. The goals of this diverse body of research are varied but primarily political. Researchers seek to 1) change public policies regarding the medical, economic, and educational services provided to teen mothers; 2) shift public scrutiny of individual "choices" to public support for efforts to improve conditions of poverty; 3) disrupt the social stigma attached to teen mothers' bodies; and 4) illustrate the racist and sexist ideologies hidden within what social scientists William R. Arney and Bernard J. Bergen call the "scientifically neutralized" term "teenage pregnancy" (11).

In this chapter, I identify strategies these researchers use to counter dominant discourse(s) about teenage pregnancy. I argue that much of the literature that challenges assumptions about negative outcomes of teenage pregnancy fails to challenge pathologizing discursive practices. To support this claim, I highlight two rhetorical tactics—positioning young motherhood as a symptom of poverty and "hedging"—that help to maintain the cultural belief that teenagers should not have children. These moves sustain dichotomies between "good" and "bad" reproductive decisions and (re)position women's bodies as sites for disciplinary intervention. Then, I illustrate that feminist poststructuralist analysis of young motherhood identifies and intervenes in the mechanisms producing the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy, including the groups and institutions that benefit from constructing pregnant and parenting teens as a problem. This scholarship often connects the focus on "teenage pregnancy" to ideologies of class, gender, race, and colonialism. However, I emphasize that in turning attention away from pregnant and mothering teens to the discourse that constructs them as abject, many scholars miss the opportunity to study how subjects maneuver within, against, or beyond this discourse. I identify a need for research that approaches pregnant and mothering teens as rhetors who act within these discursive constraints and possibilities. In the end, I make a case for my dissertation research. I build on feminist poststructuralist scholarship to identify and analyze the particular rhetorical practices producing this discourse (i.e., chapters one and three) and the counterhegemonic rhetorical practices of teen mothers who use their subject position to contest popular beliefs (i.e., chapter four and five).

2.1 "Revisionists": Contesting Initial Concerns about an "Epidemic" of Teenage Pregnancy

Local policies and feature articles addressed "school-age mothers" in the 1960s. However, as I discussed in chapter one, many scholars agree that "teenage pregnancy" did not officially become a public social issue until congress debated the ultimately unsuccessful National School-Age Mother Act in 1975 and the more successful Adolescent Health Act of 1978. These political acts were inspired, in part, by the AGI's research (Luker 67, Moran 201, Vinovskis). During this time, Luker explains that liberal birth control advocates who "had argued that older women lacked access to contraception and abortion because they were poor . . . now claimed that teenagers were poor *because they lacked access to contraception and abortion*" (67, emphasis in original; see also Nathanson 55-6, and Geronimus "Teenage Childbearing and Personal Responsibility" 428). The argument that preventing teen pregnancies would ensure healthier and more prosperous teens helped to ensure minors' access to contraception without parental consent (Moran 200-1); yet, this narrative has since been reiterated and reified in a way that makes "common sense" a consistently debated and highly problematic claim about the women's reproductive decisions.

Most scholars who critique attention to teenage pregnancy as a "social problem" point out the odd timing of public concern about *teen* reproductive outcomes. Maris Vinovskis, a historian, public policy scholar, and participant-observer in congressional debates about adolescent pregnancy, was the first to publically question and critique the "epidemic" nature of teen sexuality and pregnancy. His rhetorical moves have been

replicated in many publications that challenge assumptions about teenage pregnancy; therefore, a close reading of his highly influential 1981 article, "An 'Epidemic' of Adolescent Pregnancy? Some Historical Considerations," sheds light on strategies scholars use to point out contradictions in initiatives to prevent teenage pregnancy.

In this oft-cited article, Vinovskis expresses his frustration about the "misleading tone" and exaggerated claims used to pass the "hasty," under-informed, and what he sees as the expensively ineffective Adolescent Health Act in 1978.[25] He argues that the implications of this legislation—which provided roughly $60 million dollars to fund programs and policies for, primarily, already pregnant and parenting teens—would be disastrous, legitimating public "anger and frustration" at wasteful government funding (219). Vinovskis states that witnesses of the congressional debate never questioned the validity of the AGI's claims that there was an "epidemic" of adolescent childbearing (214). Emphasizing the inappropriateness of policy-makers' ready acceptance of these claims, he uses information from the National Center for Health Statistics to illustrate that the rates of teenage fertility and childbearing were declining for twenty years since "a peak of 97.3 births per 1000 women ages 15-19 in 1957" (208).[26] Through deductive reasoning, he attributes this decline to the documented increase in adolescents' use of contraceptives and family planning clinics; thus, Vinovskis is baffled by the lack of discussion about funding contraceptives and family planning clinics (217-18). He then suggests some empirically-validated concerns policy-makers should consider, including

[25] It is important to note that Vinovskis admits that most "social legislation" passed during the Carter Administration is done in a hasty manner (218).

[26] The numbers of actual births to teens, Vinovskis asserts, remained the relatively consistent throughout the years only because the number of female adolescents increased significantly (208; see also Nathanson 26).

the significant rise in births out-of-wedlock, the decrease in likelihood that adolescents will give up their children for adoption, the increase in absence of fathers, and the overall impact of these changes on national spending through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (210-12).

Vinovskis concludes that congressional participants accepted birth control advocate's claims about adolescent childbearing because they lacked a historical and informed perspective. In response, he calls for a book-length study of the history of adolescent pregnancy (which he provides in 1988), closer analysis of the role interest groups play in producing this rhetoric of epidemic (222), better quantitative studies of population shifts and sexuality behaviors and outcomes (223), new policy-oriented social science research (224), and finally improved research into the multiple factors that contribute to adolescent life trajectories (224).

Vinovskis' three key strategies to counter the attention to adolescent childbearing included: 1) providing demographic information that shows the epidemic does not exist; 2) employing cause/effect reasoning to argue that the proposed policy/funding will not serve the purpose it is stated to serve; and 3) redirecting attention from universal concern over adolescent childbearing to more specific problems that may underlie concerns about pregnant young women. Over the years, many scholars responded to Vinovskis' call for concrete and nuanced research on adolescent pregnancy and utilized similar rhetorical moves. Initially, this body of research was pejoratively labeled "revisionist" by critics who feared that such findings would lead to the end of funding for teenage pregnancy prevention initiatives and might possibly suggest that reproduction was a positive

outcome for teenagers. The revisionist label has been broadly applied to anyone who puts a positive spin on young motherhood (Hulbert 21-3) and more specifically to "serious researchers" who present findings which refute the societal ills labeled as outcomes of teenage pregnancy (Furstenberg "As the Pendulum Swings" 127; Macleod 57-8). Public health and population studies scholar Arline T. Geronimus—the primary scholar who is described as promoting "revisionist views" on teenage motherhood—does see a real need for the "revision or development of useful policy to address social problems" in light of her research findings and what she sees as the middle-class bias in scientific research. But Geronimus also brings attention to Frank Furstenberg's pejorative use of the term to describe her work ("Teenage Childbearing and Social and Reproductive Disadvantage" 468). Furthermore, she makes sure to distinguish her research on social and health outcomes of young mothers and their children from academic publications which trace the politics of teenage pregnancy discourse (e.g., the work of Luker, Nathanson, Ann Phoenix, and Vinovskis).

Indeed, revisionism can be a derogatory term used to describe what seems to be an ill-supported, meaningless, or self-interested attempt to revise a conventional history, theory, or fact. For instance, former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin was called "revisionist" by the popular press for suggesting that North American revolutionary soldier Paul Revere warned the British soldiers that the North American militia would win the war. Moreover, Holocaust deniers are known to call themselves revisionist in refuting historical evidence of World War II (Lipstadt 25). And the term revisionism has

been used by orthodox Marxists to label theorists aiming to revise key Marxist principles (OED).

However, the term revisionist also reflects feminism's value of revision as a practice that opens up possibilities for social change and respect for marginalized or silenced objects of history.[27] Indeed, the Oxford English Dictionary defines "revisionist" as people or projects which advocate or support revision, especially a historian who "promotes revision of an accepted or established version of historical phenomena and events" (OED). In the field of rhetoric and composition, laudable projects such as Cheryl Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Rhetorical Tradition* and William Covino's *The Art of Wondering: A Revisionist Return to the History of Rhetoric* are revisionist in their attempts to re-tell the history of rhetoric with more sensitivity to the contribution of women (Glenn) or the ambiguity of rhetorical figures (Covino). In reviewing "revisionist" scholarship on teenage pregnancy and motherhood, I do not mean to dismiss the implications of this work; instead, I mean to highlight that the primary objective of this scholarship is to confront now conventional wisdom about teenage pregnancy. I do acknowledge that the label "revisionist" may frustrate the scholars I review, as one of their primary objectives is to show that the widely-circulated beliefs about teenage pregnancy and parenthood were never concretely established by empirical evidence in the first place. In the following section, I describe quantitative studies which address Vinovskis' concerns about the numbers and correlates of adolescent pregnancy. I also

[27] In her essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," Adrienne Rich writes, "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (35).

evaluate why these studies have done little to change the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy.

2.2 Quantitative Studies of Teenage Pregnancy: Disassociating Age from Effects of Poverty[28]

In addition to Vinovskis' work, Geronimus' publications have played a major role in shaping how and why scholars contest popular (mis)perceptions of teenage pregnancy and parenthood. Beginning with her Harvard dissertation in 1984, Geronimus has critiqued studies that ignore "environmental factors" to suggest there are health and societal risks inherent in teenage childbearing ("On Teenage Childbearing" 245). Specifically, Geronimus refutes the argument that preventing early childbearing will decrease infant mortality rates because it is difficult to control for "true age effects" in contexts of disadvantage. Instead, she suggests that other factors such as "infection, malnutrition, stress, smoking, and inadequate medical services" are more likely to contribute to infant mortality rates (253). Geronimus complicates claims about adverse effects of *teen* childbearing made in published research reports of the late 1970s and early 1980s (such as the AGI's *11 Million Teenagers*) by showing that these studies do not take into account racial, cultural, social, and economic factors that actually shape the outcomes of the mother and child at any age. As nursing scholar Lee SmithBattle later

[28] It is important to point out that the majority of research I will review in this section attempts to debunk popular myths about teens who give birth. Nathanson points out that although the discourse circulating in the 1970s (and today) decries "teenage pregnancy" as a social problem to be concerned about, the societal ills associated with it—including poor infant outcomes, welfare-use, and negative changes in life trajectory—typically refer to teenage childbirth and motherhood. This, Nathanson argues, is because teenage mothers and their children are common ground that both pro-life and pro-choice camps can agree to address as legitimate concerns without getting into the morally complicated issue of abortion (50; see also Geronimus "Teenage Childbearing and Personal Responsibility" 405, footnote 3).

points out, many early researchers studied girls from disadvantaged communities—that is, low-income communities facing a lack of quality healthcare, educational opportunities, jobs, or housing—and generalized "problems with teenage pregnancy" by comparing their life outcomes with the outcomes of women who did not become pregnant as teens. SmithBattle maintains that the young women who did not reproduce as teens came from different socioeconomic contexts (410; see also Nathanson 38).

Beyond questioning the validity of research studies that fail to control for environmental factors affecting teenage pregnancy outcomes, Geronimus counters dominant assumptions by suggesting that there may be identifiable benefits to reproducing earlier in life. For example, she draws on many biology-based medical publications which illustrate benefits of early childbearing ("On Teenage Childbearing" 248). In addition, Geronimus references ethnographic studies such as Carol Stack's *All Our Kin* and Joyce Ladner's *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman* to suggest young childbearing may be a smart adaptive strategy in contexts of poverty (256). Finally, Geronimus addresses fears about the long-term consequences of early childbearing by pointing to longitudinal studies that suggest that young mothers end up with educational achievements and incomes similar to peers who postponed their pregnancies (258).[29] In fact, Geronimus' research on the health of young women and their children suggests identifiable benefits to early childbearing for low-income African American women who may enjoy more time, social support, and good health as young mothers and who may face increased health risks should they postpone their childbearing (261).

[29] For example, she references sociologists Frank F. Furstenberg, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and Stephen P. Morgan's 17-year follow up on *Adolescent Mothers Later in Life.*

Like Vinovskis, Geronimus is concerned that popular discourse about the supposed epidemic, as well as stereotypes of adolescence, are affecting scientific analysis of the "reproductive efficiency" of teen childbirth. Geronimus, too, is concerned about the policy implications of research which attributes poor infant outcomes to maternal age; she is adamant that programs designed to prevent adolescent childbearing will not improve adverse outcomes for mothers and children in contexts of poverty ("On Teenage Childbearing" 247). Thus, in her early work, Geronimus called for discontinuing "teenage pregnancy" as a concept. She also called for more multivariate, cross-sectional, and long-term research studies that intertwine social science research with biomedical evidence when studying outcomes of women and children ("On Teenage Childbearing" 248). Both Vinovskis and Geronimus seem confident that careful research and longitudinal studies can lead to effective public policy that improves national social problems.

Few have taken up Geronimus' call to cease using the differentiating (and primarily pathologizing) social construct of "teenage pregnancy." However, scholars in a variety of health, population, and social science fields did continue to conduct multivariate, cross-sectional, and long-term studies on pregnant and mothering teenagers, finding new and creative ways to control for important factors like poverty. These findings complicate common assumptions about adolescent pregnancy and motherhood by disassociating poor outcomes with the age of the mother and by highlighting positives of young childbearing. For instance, some research studies control for family background and community context to conclude that the children of teenage mothers do just as well

(if not better) in terms of health, education, and future socioeconomic status than children born in similar contexts to older mothers (Geronimus "On Teen Childbearing"; Geronimus & Koreman; McCarthy & Hardy; Rozenweig & Wolipn). In fact, Geronimus' research has shown that, especially in poor African American communities, young women are *less* likely to have infants with health problems than older mothers in these communities. Furthermore, Geronimus and her colleagues Sanders Koreman and Marianne Hillemeier report higher primary school achievement in the children of teen mothers in their article "Does Maternal Age Adversely Affect Child Development?"

Studies have also tried to counter the assumption that age at first birth determines the educational or economic outcomes of the mother. Public health and sociology scholars Dawn M. Upchurch and James McCarthy caused a stir in the 1990s for comparing graduation rates of teenagers who did and did not reproduce, finding that school-age mothers graduate from high school with the same rate as their non-parenting peers (224; see also Hotz et. al).[30] Many scholars agree that the initial claims about the negative effects of teenage pregnancy and childbearing are, at best, overstated (see Lawson & Rhodes page 5 for a review). In fact, there are some studies that suggest teen mothers fare better economically and educationally than their counterparts who postpone pregnancy (Hotz et al; Furstenberg et al; Werners & Smith). Moreover, some suggest that teen pregnancy may be a better long term investment for women in poor communities which experience income, educational, and health disparities (Luker 192; Males 22; Lawson & Rhodes 5). For example, having children young potentially maximizes

[30] Upchurch and McCarthy find, also, that childbirth among teen females who have dropped out of school eventually graduate at rates similar to non-parenting teens who drop out of high school (224; 228).

grandparents' and older relatives' assistance with childcare before health problems associated with aging or poverty set in (Males 66, see also Geronimus "On Teenage Childbearing" 258 and Lawson & Rhodes 5). Finally, some studies point to the potentially positive influence a child can have on a young woman's life. For example, adolescent studies scholars Stephen Russell and Fay Lee suggest young motherhood may be a positive turning point in Latina women's life trajectories. To support this claim, Russell and Lee highlight young mothers' statements about their motivation for educational achievement (see also Pillow 119) and improved family/partner relationships. Moreover, social ecologist and youth advocate Mike Males describes a 1990 Washington University and Harvard University study of 2100 teenage women that found that teens with children had fewer symptoms of conduct disorder, alcohol of drug abuse or dependence, and depression as well as suicidal thoughts then their peers who did not have children (66-67). By emphasizing positive factors that correlate with early pregnancy and childbearing, these scholars challenge the idea that "teenage" pregnancies are always and only a bad thing for mother and child.

Perhaps one of the most taken-up points made by Geronimus is that teenage motherhood may be an adaptive response to conditions of poverty, not a cause of poverty. Sociologists continue to point out that many teenage mothers are poor to begin with. Considering this, it is difficult to support liberal birth-control advocates' argument that ill-timed teenage pregnancy leads to life-long poverty (Luker; Nathanson; SmithBattle; Males). Most of the studies which refute negative "consequences" of teenage pregnancy and childbearing point to the fact that teenage pregnancy rates correlate with

communities that experience income disparities and racism (Furstenberg; Geronimus; Males; see also Singh, Darroch, and Frost for an international comparison). As SmithBattle reports from her 5-wave longitudinal study of 16 families begun by teenage mothers in 1988-1989 and tracked until 2005, the surest predictor of any teenager's life trajectory, is the economic, familial, community, educational, and/or health advantages or disadvantages the teen inherited as a child (417). Such findings suggest that the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy perpetuates a blame-the-victim paradigm that distracts from the oppressive conditions of inequality and poverty.

After reviewing many quantitative studies that track pregnant and mothering teens and control variables to isolate the age-effect on reproduction, it is apparent that there is a sentiment among revisionist scholars that if researchers can just control variables enough, they can get truer results that will promote more effective public policy measures. Scholars in this body of literature are commended for creatively and carefully controlled research designs looking at the outcomes of sisters (Geronimus and Korenman; Grogger and Bronars; Holmlund), peers (Furstenberg et al.), or peers who miscarried (Hotz et al.). But will this body of research have an impact on national discourse about teenage pregnancy and the supposed tolls it takes on women's lives and the national budget?

In his latest book, *Teenage Sex and Pregnancy: Modern Myths, Unsexy Realities*, Males suggests that there is more to the negative representation of teenage pregnancy then hasty public policy decisions or sloppy research. He points to powerful silencing measures used by interest groups—such as the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancies—to bury research findings which compromise the dominant

narrative on teenage pregnancy. Actions such as these suggest that some organizations have much at stake in the pathologizing of young mothers and women who fail to "plan" according to middle-class norms. For example, Males highlights that in May of 1997, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story that questioned why economist and social policy scholar Joseph Hotz was not invited to the press release and celebratory launch of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Hotz had been commissioned by the Robin Hood Foundation to do a study on the economic costs of teenage pregnancy.[31] Hotz and his colleagues completed a long-term comparative study of women who became pregnant in their teens—including women who gave birth and women who experienced a miscarriage. This approach served as a control for the non-random sample of women who become mothers as teens. Hotz and his colleagues found that these mothers "worked harder and longer and earned more money" than the women who miscarried and had children later (Cooper). They also paid more in taxes, ended up with similar amounts of education as non-teen mothers, and showed no evidence of increased problems with drug or alcohol abuse (Cooper). Therefore, journalist Richard T. Cooper hypothesizes that Hotz was not invited to the campaign kick-off because his research is like "selling sour apples to Betty Crocker" (Cooper). That is, the Clinton administration and liberal and conservative politicians had invested time, marketing, and public funding into preventing "teenage pregnancy" as a way to decrease welfare use and improve other societal ills; thus, these officials may not have welcomed evidence that the age of first birth does not determine the socioeconomic outcome of mother and child. Cooper interviewed Hotz

[31] The Robin Hood Foundation is a non-profit which "targets poverty" in New York City by identifying and addressing the roots of poverty (Robin Hood Foundation).

about his research and Hotz responded, “I understand that this is not what everyone wants to hear . . . but sooner or later we’ve got to own up to the fact that some things are not likely to work” (Hotz qtd. in Cooper). Males notes that the Robin Hood Foundation, which had commissioned Hotz’s study, did present Hotz’s findings in their executive summary report, but focused only on costs the young mothers incurred during the initial years after birth—“which only reflects the start-up costs of raising an infant” (Males 62). This example illustrates that interest groups, such as the Robin Hood Foundation and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, can shape the knowledge the public receives about teenage pregnancy and parenthood.

2.3 Problems with Contesting with Statistics

Like Vinovskis and other revisionists, Males does believe that sounder research methods and careful statistical evaluation can change popular perceptions about teenage childbearing. For instance, Males argues for ceasing what he calls a “make it up” trend of scholarship and media coverage of teen behaviors (98). To illustrate this trend, he regenerates statistical data to show that teen behaviors and outcomes parallel the adult behaviors and outcomes in their community (36). Looking at responses to revisionist scholarship, however, it becomes apparent that quantifiable results that contest common claims about the outcomes of teenage motherhood are rather easily dismissed by those who are invested in the construction of teenage pregnancy as a social problem. For example, in response to the Hotz conflict, Kristen Moore, a board member of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, draws attention to the fact that the United States has higher rates of teenage pregnancies than most industrialized nations

(Cooper)—sidestepping the debate about teenage pregnancy all together by (re)constructing pregnant and mothering teens as an embarrassing national markers (see also Hofferth 247). In another example, Saul D. Hoffman, an economic scholar who worked with the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, contested the implications of revisionist research in a 1998 article for *Family Planning and Perspective*, "Teenage Childbearing Is Not So Bad After All: Or Is It?: A Review of the New Literature." Although he commends Geronimus and Hotz repeatedly for "clever and important" findings (237), he dismisses each critique by pointing to factors that "bias the results" such as small sample sizes, co-residing subjects, and subjects who had children too far in the past—when things were too different to be relevant for current policy decisions. Hoffman maintains that "the evidence is simply not solid enough. The 'experiments' are not good enough, and almost all of the biases would tend to make the estimates too small" (243). He concludes his review by asserting that there is still not enough research to say that teenage pregnancy does not block "the pathways out of poverty" (243). Hoffman claims that "*everyone knows* that teenage mothers are much worse off" (236, emphasis added). Hoffman is willing to contend that claims about the outcomes of teenage childbearing have been exaggerated over the years, but he is unwilling to cease rhetorical practices that pathologize young pregnant and mothering women as problems to prevent.

In a more recent review of revisionist literature published in the 2010 *Journal of the Association of Research on Mothering's* special edition on "Young Mothers," Canadian policy-makers Gemma Briggs, Marni Brownell, and Noralou Roos express

similar sentiments. These authors argue that the controversy over whether it is poverty or the age of first birth that determines adverse outcomes is a simple case of the "chicken and the egg debate" that should not impede or alter current policy measures that target women's reproductive bodies as sites for social policy. The task of "tackling poverty" is situated in a list of important "to-do" items reviewed by the authors alongside the task of reforming the behaviors and attitudes of young women. Although their opening literature review signals problems with a dearth of welfare benefits and educational opportunities for poor people, these issues do not reappear in their list of things to reform at the end. Drawing on Hoffman's article, they write, "The strategy that seems to have the most merit is to prevent young girls from becoming pregnant in the first place" (68). Women's bodies, specifically their ability to reproduce, are (re)constructed as the most seemingly common sense and practical solution to complicated problems with the economy, educational structures, and the criminal justice system. It seems no amount of number crunching can impact the practicability of disciplining women's reproduction.

Although, as Vinovskis laments, it did not take sound research designs and solid numbers to convince the nation that adolescent childbearing is worthy of government attention and intervention, Hoffman and Briggs et al. suggest it will take extraordinarily solid numbers and research design to convince economists and their birth control advocate sponsors to stop pathologizing young motherhood in prevention campaigns that blame economic outcomes on the timing of women's births. The burden of proof is situated on researchers who must not only challenge the societal ills attributed to teenage pregnancy and childbirth but also question the normative expectations of middle-class,

neoliberal life trajectories. The continuing dismissal of revisionist research on the grounds of biased and unconvincing research design keeps money, national attention, and scholarly time spent on designing studies, publishing results, and counter-arguing poor public policy that centers on preventing young women's sexuality/reproduction—thus, ironically, revisionist research also sustains national attention on young women.

As a final example of the ongoing nature of this debate, I turn to Furstenberg's paper presented at 2008 Council on Contemporary Families. This argument follows almost point-by-point the moves made by Vinovskis more than twenty years ago. Furstenberg reports (what, by this point should not be) "groundbreaking" insights from his 30-year study of 300 Baltimore women who gave birth as teens during the 1960s. He argues to policy-makers that teenage childbearing is not to blame for the United States having the highest poverty rates of all the advanced Western countries (other than the Soviet Union); instead, poverty is to blame for the fact that low-income teen mothers struggle. He attributes the steady decline of teenage childbearing from 1991 to 2005 to contraceptive use, but points out that these changes did nothing to ameliorate "the prospects of disadvantaged youth as they entered adulthood" (1). He illustrates that after 30 years, the teen mothers in his study "did better than most observers would have predicted in continuing their education, and did not fare substantially worse than their counterparts who postponed parenthood until their twenties" (2). In the end, he argues that teenage pregnancy "is not the silver bullet for reducing poverty or strengthening the family" in the United States and he points to future research that may show that investing in policies to reduce poverty may actually help decrease teenage pregnancy and

childbearing. Yet, it is fairly easy to predict that Furstenberg's study, like those of his predecessors will do little to change the national concern over teenage pregnancy and motherhood.

2.4 Situating Teenage Pregnancy as the Symptom *Not* the Cause with Poverty

Most studies which contest the negative consequences associated with teenage childbearing point to the fact that high rates of teenage pregnancy correlate with communities that experience severe problems with poverty and racism (Geronimus, Lawson & Rhodes; Luker, Males). Some scholars, like Furstenberg, refocus attention on national problems with poverty by shifting young motherhood from a reason for poverty to a symptom of poverty. In defending her work from the charge that it advocates young childbearing among the poor, Geronimus writes, "I am deeply troubled that lack of access to health care, child care, education, and employment opportunities makes teen childbearing a tolerable choice in some poor communities" ("Baby Talk" 42; see also Solinger 243). Indeed, in her widely-cited book, *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy*, Luker emphasizes this claim; this text has since shaped the scholarship of many sociologists, anthropologists, and public health officials studying teenage pregnancy. Thus, an in-depth review of how this claim is constructed and extended (to problematic ends) is needed.

In her book, aimed at a popular audience of bipartisan adults, Luker traces public concern over "teenage pregnancy," showing how this discourse derives from colonial beliefs about "fallen" women, Puritan notions of "fitness" for parenthood, and eugenic theories about poverty and reproduction—which each responded to historically specific

North American notions of gender and class conditions. Luker highlights the continued political appeal of "teenage pregnancy" for both liberals and conservatives alike; rather than embark on the huge project of overhauling social and economic structures to ameliorate poverty in the United States, politicians and policy-makers can focus on controlling the reproductive behaviors of individual women (specifically poor teenagers). She suggests, also, that current condemnation of teenage mothers stems from a middle-class privileged worldview that fails to see how poor communities have not similarly benefited from advancements in educational access and job distribution. Thus, Luker points out that postponing childbearing to finish education, establish a career, find a (heterosexual) full-time working partner, and maintain a home is not an option that is equally available to everyone. In the end, Luker maintains that "teenage mothers" function as personifications of numerous complex social problems and national anxieties including fears about rising rates of single motherhood, poverty, and divorce as well as population changes related to immigration and minority reproduction rates. Focusing on teenage pregnancy simplifies solutions to these national concerns because, statistically, the women who become teen mothers are unmarried, low-income, and non-white (85). Thus, "they" appear to embody social problems and disciplining individuals is much simpler than the large scale changes needed to end poverty. Furthermore, Luker hypothesizes that a national campaign to stop single motherhood among older white women (the fastest growing demographic of single mothers) or to castigate divorced fathers (only 70% of whom pay some kind of child support, 168) would be hotly contested as judgmental or infringing on personal matters.

Luker's history of the complicated politics shaping "teenage pregnancy" as a relatively recent national concern is a concrete way of busting common myths about teenage pregnancy—especially during a period when President Bill Clinton was claiming that teenage pregnancy was *the* most important issue facing the nation (*USA Today*). Yet, several moves in Luker's book illustrate a problematic assumption that stems from scholars' efforts to shift young mothers from a cause to a symptom of poverty.

Luker reasons that since 80% of teenage mothers are poor before they get pregnant, one cannot logically claim that teenage pregnancy leads to poverty (39). She draws on the research of Geronimus and other revisionists to argue that most of the negative consequences attributed to teen motherhood—such as economic problems, health issues, and educational failure—are actually consequences of poverty. But then Luker extends her thinking to suggest that teens get pregnant because they see no other options of value in their life. Although one could easily point out that not all poor teens become parents, Luker uses enthymematic reasoning to support her argument: there are a dearth of pathways out of poverty because of the "hollowing out" of the economy (a shrinking middle-class), a lack of educational opportunities, and few jobs in low-income communities; thus, young women may see no reason to wait to have children.[32] She

[32] See also Michelle Fine's much-cited article "Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire." Fine writes, "In the absence of enhanced life options, low-income young women are likely to default to early and repeat motherhood as a source of perceived competence, significance, and pleasure" (48). Fine's choice of the term "default" relates to Furstenberg's claim that poor young women "drift" into motherhood; however, Furstenberg attributes this drift to lack of access to contraceptives as well as the failure of families to take measures to prevent their daughter's pregnancies ("As the Pendulum" 136). "Default" and "drift" both emphasize that teen motherhood is not a "rational" or intentional choice made by young mothers and, thus, troubling for these researchers who evaluate parenthood through a cost/profit paradigm. It is important to note that Furstenberg's emphasis on drift is a direct response to Geronimus' hypothesis that young motherhood is an adaptive response to conditions of poverty which circumvent the health of men, women, and their children ("Teenage Childbearing and Social and

argues that young women become mothers as a result of pessimism about economic or educational success and a lack of self-esteem. Although she notes that 87% of teenage pregnancies are unintended (171), she dedicates a chapter of her book to investigating "Why Do They Do It?"[33] In questioning reasons for "doing" pregnancy and motherhood, Luker implies an inherent deviance in the act. That is, the question presumes that there is an appropriate and rational period of time for people to reproduce. Furthermore, the unstated premise in this line of reasoning is that motherhood is incompatible with economic or educational success; it is a desperate woman's attempt for self-esteem.[34]

Luker critiques the way that US discourses about teenage pregnancy implicitly communicate that poor people should not reproduce; yet, she sustains public scrutiny of young mothers' reproductive decisions by suggesting motherhood is a last resort for disenfranchised women. She compares young women's "decision" to have babies to purchasing a lottery ticket and hoping for the best (182). She notes that while in a few cases mothers gain motivation to finish their education, find a husband, or experience improved self-esteem, the results are generally unpredictable. Not only does this

---

Reproductive Disadvantage" 466). Like Geronimus, Annette Lawson and Deborah Rhodes identify cultural logics that may influence rates of adolescent pregnancy such as the constructions of femininity as sexy but not sexual (leading to young women thinking that they should be passive and unprepared for sex) or, constructions of masculinity that emphasize sexual conquests. Lawson and Rhodes encourage their readers to consider contesting these gender constructions as a way to decrease rates of adolescent pregnancy (8).

[33] This is the title of one of her closing chapters in which she draws on statements from young mothers quoted in others' research to answer whether teenage motherhood is a good or bad thing (reifying a binary) and speculate about why teens would voluntarily give birth to a child as a single poor teenager.

[34] This constructs/confirms that being a mother should be a self-less act from a done-growing woman instead of a site for intellectual, physical, and emotional achievement. See Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* and the work of Andrea O'Reilly for a critique of this worldview. Of course, many feminist studies illustrate that motherhood is *not* compatible with the paid workforce and/or higher education. Childbearing takes a significant toll on women's life no matter when the age of first birth. Yet, these studies do not use this evidence to forward the claim that women should not have children, but instead, that social structures (relationships, schools, workplaces, communities, etc) should change so that childbearing does not unfairly burden women.

argument rest on the invisibility of the adult/teen fathers of these babies who escape the charge that they engage in unprotected sexual relations to gain something out of life, it also feeds directly into policy-makers' and economists' concerns that teenage childbearing just further blocks "pathways out of poverty" (Hoffman 243).[35] While many scholars hope that shifting pregnant and mothering teens from positions of blame to positions of sympathy will end unfair hostility toward young mothers, the motherhood-as-result-of-lack-of-opportunity move continues to center national attention to taking measures to ensure poor (now seemingly desperate or disenfranchised) women do not reproduce.

2.5 Humanizing "The Problem": Qualitative Studies of Teenage Mothers

In encouraging her audience to shift from thinking about teenage pregnancy as a cause of poverty to thinking about teenage pregnancy as a symptom of poverty, Luker uses emotional appeals to help cultivate a sense of injustice against young parents in the US. For example, she opens and concludes her book with a sympathetic narrative about Michelle Brown—a high school student and mother—and her boyfriend who struggles to earn enough money at McDonald's (1). In much the same way, scholars from the fields of sociology and anthropology sought to address the pathologizing discourse of teenage pregnancy by publishing books about teenage mothers' lived experiences. Sociologist Elaine Bell Kaplan's *Not Our Kind of Girl: Unraveling the Myths of Black Teen*

[35] I say "adult/teen" fathers because the majority of the fathers of teen pregnancies (about 6 out of 10) are adult men—typically at least 5 years older than the mothers (21). Males has brought attention to this statistic in his publications. He points out that "approximately 450,000 of the 750,000 pregnancies among teenage females every year involve men age 20 and older" (24).

Motherhood, anthropologist Pamela Erickson's *Latina Adolescent Childbearing in East Los Angeles*, and Sharon Thompson's *Going All the Way: Teenage Girls' Tales of Sex, Romance, and Pregnancy*, are three examples of texts which aim to bring young mothers' voices into the debate about appropriate public policy. Qualitative studies of young mothers' lives complicate both dominant discourse(s) about teenage pregnancy as well as revisionist literature that points to positives in the decision to bear children young by illustrating the multiple challenges facing the communities where young mothers live.

For example, Kaplan's book refutes what she calls the "economic determinist" claims that young poor women become pregnant because of a lack of opportunity as well as ethnographer Carol Stack's claim that kin networks support younger parents in lower-income African American communities. Kaplan spent time with 32 teen mothers (focusing her research intently on 7 participants) in the communities of East Oakland and Richmond, California in 1986. She observed mothers and their families in their homes, schools, and the local Alternative Center that served young mothers. She contests the myth that poor black communities have "underclass" social values and do not work toward the American Dream by showing that the communities she researched value the middle-class social script. She shows that the community, at large, believes that social uplift comes with hard work, educational achievement, and marriage but the people in these areas struggle to attain those things. In fact, Kaplan shows that teenage mothers are stigmatized by family and neighbors who are persuaded by dominant discourses to see young mothers as the cause of poverty in the black community. She confronts many myths of black teen motherhood and maintains that the poor treatment of teen mothers in

these communities only makes existing problems worse—problems such as a dearth of positive relationships caused by the constraints of poverty (a lack of housing, jobs, and steady welfare benefits in conjunction with widespread drug trafficking), education (dangerous, uninspiring, and sexist schools), health problems, and gender inequality. Kaplan understands "positive relationships" to be relationships which are not abusive but, instead, provide a stable sense of emotional support and guidance for community members. Thus, Kaplan's study suggests that public policy should address the lack of positive relationships in contexts of poverty—which affect both parenting and non-parenting teens alike.

Anthropologist Pamela Erickson similarly uses close observations of Latina young mothers' lives to complicate public programs and policies regarding young mothers. She reports results from her research as a participant observer on the Teen Project at the East Los Angeles hospital that was conducting a second pregnancy prevention effort with young mothers. She argues that cultural and contextual issues contribute to early childbearing in East L.A. in ways that current teenage pregnancy prevention programs (which assume middle-class life trajectories, values, norms, and opportunities) are not addressing. In her final chapter, "Implications for America's War on Teenage Pregnancy," Erickson articulates her argument for why "medicalized" and individualized clinical efforts to stop adolescent childbearing will not work. She generalizes from her research to narrate composite characters of four types of Latina adolescent mothers: "The Housewife-Mother," "The Ambivalent Mother," "The High-Risk Mother," and "The Victim-Mother." She illustrates that each type of mother would

need very different "intervention" programs to have an effect on their life trajectories (149-51). Furthermore, she questions if these women are really served by programs that define success as prevention of a second pregnancy. She maintains that "until changes in the opportunity structure can be effected, we might better evaluate the success of such programs in terms of the teens' own goals and improvements in their life circumstances" (152). For instance, she offers examples of a "success" in specific cases of the three characterizations: an ambivalent mother who ended up completing school, finding a job, and having two children with her husband; a victim mother who ended up asking for help leaving an abusive rapist/husband; and a housewife mother who is happy with her life choices and is currently using contraceptives to time pregnancies for health purposes (152-53). Optimistic about these outcomes, Erickson writes, "program success might be defined differently, perhaps by how the [program] was able to help young mothers achieve *their* goals or attain empowerment/self-esteem" (153, emphasis in original). Yet, she also recognizes the problem with focusing programs on individual behaviors: "As long as we treat teen pregnancy and motherhood as an individual problem that can be 'fixed' by a program or by 'right-thinking,' we will fail to impact young women's lives" (160). Instead, Erickson urges readers to work on the larger issues that shape the outcomes of individuals.[36]

[36] Erickson also draws a parallel between "young" mothers and "older" mothers, who both must deal with economic constraints that encourage timing their pregnancies in this way—potentially putting their life trajectories or bodies at risk. She argues, "Social policy that makes children the personal economic responsibility of their mothers fosters childbearing at the polar ends of the childbearing years where most risk is incurred" and so she suggests thinking about changing structures to avoid the "polarized pattern" (162).

In a final example, journalist Sharon Thompson interviewed over 400 girls (aged 13-17) from 1978-1986 for their stories of sex, romance, and pregnancy, putting these narratives in the context of the political and social histories that they reflect. In chapter four, "Having My Baby from Sex to Motherhood," she shares stories of girls who became mothers before the age of twenty. Thompson analyzes the narratives for what they tell outsiders/adults about the experience of becoming and being a teenage mother. Intertwining historical information about teenage pregnancy as a discourse and highlighting common misperceptions, Thompson guides readers in their reading of the girls' stories, identifying key patterns along the way. She writes, "The tragic scenario repeated most often in the press—the story about children having children—was not the one I heard from teenage mothers" (112). Instead, she finds "talk in terms of transformation rather than tragedy" (112). She shares stories of mothers who had hard lives before becoming pregnant and stories from girls who planned the pregnancies. Thompson highlights the mothers' focus on the future as opposed to narratives decrying a loss of innocence or good times past.

2.6 Problems with Contesting with Stories: The Hedge

Turning to lived experiences of young mothers through the qualitative methods of interviews, participant-observations, and ethnographic inquiries has yielded important findings in terms of the variety of obstacles many low-income teen mothers face in their lives—few of which stem from the fact that they reproduced earlier than prescribed by social norms. These researchers offer more complicated, but potentially more helpful, ideas for public policies that extend beyond the "issue" of adolescent childbearing to

assist in improving the conditions of people in poverty. Perhaps even more important, these published accounts of young mothers' experiences illustrate the devastating impact of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy. Kaplan's study shows how young mothers are evicted from their homes because their parents feel their daughters should live out the consequences of their mistake; in addition, Erickson's observations show how unfair it is to label young women as bad choice makers when they have been kidnapped and raped or manipulated and abandoned.

Even as these authors sympathize with their informants, and passionately contest popular (mis)perceptions about young mothers, the authors continue to question and critique teenagers' "choices" to become young mothers. For example, although Thompson uses research to trouble common assumptions about teenage pregnancy and motherhood, she ends the chapter emphasizing what "we" need to do to prevent girls reproducing too early. She also qualifies the positive tone in teen mothers' narratives writing, "As encouraging as these few happy endings are, they aren't the norm. Rather, their narrators represent a very small percentage of the girls who set out to realize the dream of finding true love . . . marriage, and motherhood" (136). She adds, "There's reason to believe that some of the optimism may be short lived" (136). The transformational potential of more nuanced and complicated narratives of young mothering women's lives is impeded by Thompson's own skepticism. Young pregnant and mothering women are (re)constructed as preventative subjects—rhetorical exigencies that should prompt "us" to do something to intervene in the reproductive capacity of young women's bodies.

In much the same way, Erickson uses literally the last lines of her book to addresses a question "many people have asked me" which is, essentially, whether early childbearing, even if a valued aspect of a cultural worldview, should be stopped (163). Erickson draws on reproductive rights advocate Bettina Flore's critique of traditional roles for Latina women to say that "teenage childbearing makes perpetual poverty more likely" (164). While Erickson commends Latina/o culture for being "vibrant and alive" she suggests, "All these [cultural aspects] can be preserved without teenage motherhood" (164). Her statement refutes most of the critical points she makes throughout her book, most glaringly her point that poverty is not caused by age of first birth.

Finally, even though Kaplan contextualizes black teen motherhood and shows how the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy distracts from political movements against social structures which sustain poverty and racism, her main argument is that young black females become pregnant *because* they lack positive relationships. Having a baby, she argues, is these young women's pitiful way of trying to find someone to love them. This claim is troubling because it perpetuates gendered constructions of sexual desire, procreation, and the need for love and nurturing.[37] Furthermore, the claim that young women conceive and keep children to fill their need for love is unsupported by the data she includes in her book. For example, she shows that most young women in these

[37] Kaplan maintains that it is the young women in these communities who have children in response to a dearth of positive relationships, (re)establishing dominant beliefs that women have sex for love while men have sex because of sexual desire. Kaplan believes that the teenage fathers have sex with the women to conform to notions of masculinity in the community. They are just trying to prove that they are "men," and are encouraged by their male peers to accuse the pregnant girlfriend of sleeping around and falsely accusing them of fatherhood. Kaplan's claims about fathers seem to me more nuanced in terms of the fact that these young men are conforming to gendered constructions, not biologically inherent traits as *men*. However, it is interesting to think about why Kaplan would not extend her thesis about the need for love and positive relationships to adolescent men.

communities became pregnant unintentionally, either because of a lack of sexual health knowledge or because their male partners (often adult men) knew how to play the "game" of telling young women they will marry them in order to have sex with them. While Kaplan can easily draw on empirical and quantitative data to show that a dearth of positive social supports in these communities are straining family and neighborly relationships, she struggles to support her claim that teen females become pregnant because of these things. For example, in a section called "Baby's Love" she asks a teen mother about why she got pregnant:

> *Why do you think you got pregnant?* Teen Response: "Well, it was not planned"
>
> *Did he want you to have a baby before you got pregnant?* Teen Response: "It was unexpected"
>
> *Did you want to have your baby?* Teen Response: "Yeah." (44, emphasis in original)

Kaplan explains that she asked teen mothers these questions "several times, in different ways," until the teen mother "came to grips with their feelings about their pregnancies" (44). "Coming to grips" appears to be a euphemism for answering in the way that confirms Kaplan's hypothesis. For example, she explains that Susan finally confessed that "I didn't want an abortion. I wanted a baby" (45). Kaplan asks, "*Perhaps you want something from the baby that you didn't get growing up?,*" to which Susan "quickly" answers, "Oh, love. She makes me happy. It's fun watching her grow up" (45). Kaplan is finally able to use this teen mother's claim that her baby brings her joy to make the

connection between a lack of love and attention from Susan's busy single mother and the need for love that supposedly led to Susan's pregnancy. This line of reasoning continues the main focus on the desires and actions of women—the single working mother who could not provide enough love and attention to her daughter and the teen mother who "wanted" a baby and needs love.

Kaplan, too, asks teen mothers, "*If you could live your life over again, what would you do to change it?*" (184), which teen mothers—in a context of a living room interview with a scholar they know is researching black teenage motherhood—answer "I would not get pregnant." Not only does this line of questioning continue to focus the effects of poverty on young mothers' decisions, Kaplan's eagerness to interpret the teen mother's comments seems to prevent attention to the potentially radical things her participants say. When the teenage mothers in her interviews make comments that deviate from the script of terrible teen motherhood, she calls it "denial." To answer her questions incorrectly ("I didn't really lack love growing up"), to not answer at all ("I don't want to talk about the father"), or to not answer in a way that confesses all information (one mother fails to mention that she struggles with school work) is seen as "denial." She interprets the teen's responses by suggesting they are untrue, misleading, or naïve. For example, she counters a teen's claim that her boyfriend did not pressure her into sex by citing outside research on social contexts which condone boy's sexual harassment of girls (40). Kaplan suspects that some of her informants' statements stem from their desire to be seen as good mothers (59). Thus, she supports speculation that, contrary to what she observed, these teen mothers probably do go out and do "teenage" things. Throughout the book Kaplan judges

their mothering practices and suggests their seemingly neglectful behaviors stem from the fact that they are children themselves (124, 126).

What this review of qualitative studies shows is that even sympathetic scholars who contest the stigma attached to teen motherhood help to circulate assumptions about young mothers that sustain their "other" status. In focusing their studies on the reasons why some teenagers become young mothers, these authors approach young women as a coherent category of "others" to question and critique. Even though each might spend time contextualizing mothers' experiences, bringing to light positive aspects of the mothers' lives that get little air time in the media, and drawing on empirical research which debunks popular myths, the end result is to continue to focus public policy on preventing teenage births. Claims that young motherhood is a consequence of young mothers' desperate need for love or self-esteem are unsupported by the data presented. Constructing young women in this way perpetuates traditional gender roles that infantilize women as needing more love than men. While I believe that women would benefit from a world that is more loving and supportive of them as worthy human beings, the rhetorical and material implications of constructing childbirth as the result of *women's* need for love and esteem promotes—more often than not—national anxiety and interventions focused on *women's* bodies (see chapters three and five). Men's sexual behaviors and reproductive (in)decisions remain invisible. The young-motherhood-as-lack-of-opportunity argument also encourages a patronizing outlook on young women who are doing hard (intellectual, physical, and emotional) work to raise a child and

support themselves.[38] Finally, the unstated premise of this argument is that any post-teenaged middle-class woman who decides to become a mother is a rational decision-maker; this prevents a hard look at the many ways in which having a child at any age within a strained economy and education/career structures designed for able-bodied non-caretaking men is irrational.

It is important to note that the pattern of qualifying revisionist arguments by re-asserting the need to prevent teen pregnancy happens in quantitative studies as well. For example, even as Vinovskis furiously critiqued the unwarranted national focus on *teen* pregnancies and births, he did not question that adolescent pregnancy and motherhood was a problem. Although he admitted his claims were rather unsupported, he maintained that adolescent pregnancy and childbearing is unhealthy (citing a few research studies done in the mid-70s), most likely costly for the nation, and worthy of increased measures to promote marriage and contraceptive use among teens. Moreover, Furstenberg repeats three times that limiting teenage birth rates is an "important," "worthy," and "desirable goal for many reasons"—reasons which he fails to articulate or support ("No Silver Bullet").[39]

I call this gesture the hedge—a rhetorical move that sustains a dominant cultural belief in response to research findings that challenge that belief. As mentioned in chapter

[38] Feminist sociologists Deborah Rhodes and Annette Lawson (9; 11), performance scholar Peggy Phelan (135), feminist philosopher of motherhood Sarah Ruddick, and critical studies scholar/activist Angela Davis (217) make similar claims about young hopeless women becoming mothers for a lack of self-esteem. That is, it seems to be a trope traversing diverse literatures, even those which aim to revolutionize visibility politics, social structures, and dominant assumptions about reproduction and motherhood.

[39] In her response to Furstenberg's critique of her work, Geronimus suggests Furstenberg applies a "double-standard" to evaluating research on teenage motherhood ("Teenage Childbearing and Social Disadvantage" 244). That is, he does not provide empirical evidence for those theoretical constructs that are seemingly (to middle-class white people) common sense, such as the idea that young people are ill-equipped to be parents or that extended family find extra children to be burdensome.

one, the teen-motherhood-as-life-failure storyline is a powerful common ground between differently positioned groups including abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education advocates, conservative economists, liberal birth control advocates, and some pro-choice feminists, to name a few. The hedge may function to build *ethos* for the scholar who may otherwise be seen by audiences as proposing something too radical; this suggests that the revisionist arguments are aimed at financially-stable adults who are far removed from the material conditions and lived perspective of marginalized motherhood. The hedge may also suggest that, perhaps, the writer is conflicted about the implications of his/her own research in troubling norms for reproduction. As also discussed in chapter one, the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy is often seen as a preventative strategy in-and-of-itself. To challenge it can be seen as promoting sexual behavior as well as pregnancy and motherhood among young females.

2.7 Shifting the Subject of Critique: Deconstructing Teenage Pregnancy as Discourse

Revisionist scholarship focuses on continuing long-term, well-controlled research studies on "teenage mothers" in the aim of creating better public policy. However, other scholars question whether this approach will amount to anything since, after years of producing studies that debunk common myths about teen pregnancy and motherhood, little has changed in terms of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy. In her 2003 article, "Damned If You Do: Culture, Identity, Privilege, and Teenage Childbearing in the United States," Geronimus appears fed-up with the lack of change produced by her studies. She turns to a cultural analysis approach to figure out what kind of ideological

work this seemingly misguided and unsupported story about teenage pregnancy does. She argues that the dominant group's recent efforts to prevent teen pregnancy and welfare-dependence are actually further marginalizing black Americans and thwarting their strategies to adapt to their community's conditions through non-marriage kin formations and young motherhood.[40] Her argument is directed to demographers, social scientists, and politicians who are ignorant of their class/race privileges and, thus, believe that having a child limits seemingly equal pathways to success. To prove her point she still presents an overview of published empirical evidence complicating all claims about teenage pregnancy as a social issue, but then goes on to show how continuing to focus on "teenage pregnancy" helps dominant groups retain superiority by not having to change anything for others who are oppressed by the current social structure.[41] Understanding the relationship between knowledge and power Geronimus writes, "Whether knowledge is accepted as correct may have less to do with its 'truth value' than with the power relations that support it" (884).

Although Geronimus does not draw explicitly on the work of Foucault in her article, her statement about the relationship between power relations and knowledge

---

[40] See also her 1997 article "Teenage Childbearing and Personal Responsibility: An Alternative View," published in the *Political Science Quarterly*, that castigates the then-recent Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Geronimus illustrates that the act is based on the presumption that poverty is caused by the irresponsibility of poor people—including teenage mothers. The consequences of this welfare reform (renewed in 2004) were devastating in terms of preventing kin-formation in poor communities and blocking paths to higher education for single mothers (see also Adair 2008).

[41] Illustrating this point, Males points out that the methods used to determine the social costs of teenage childbearing (e.g., measuring use of AFDC and time spent in jail) overlook the social costs incurred by middle- or upper-class families (57). Males writes, "The crude biases dominating social-cost studies of teen motherhood involve selecting measures that emphasize only those costs attributable to the targeted group while ignoring their benefits; ignoring costs imposed by more favored groups in society [such as cost of corporate crime, tax bailouts, and climate change incurred by wealthier children and families]; and blaming personal choices while ignoring external conditions" (57).

production reflects the principles of Foucauldian and poststructuralist analysis taken up by many scholars of teenage pregnancy. Indeed, Foucault's understanding of discourse and power seem fundamental to understanding why the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy emerged and continues to circulate as a discourse. Through a Foucauldian lens, in which meaning is constructed and deconstructed through discourse, the "hedges" made by revisionist scholars become indications of a challenged worldview.[42] Truths are partial, and always sites of political struggle. As Foucault explains, "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (101). If teenage pregnancy only has meaning through discourse, then it is possible to expose it, render it fragile, and potentially thwart its pathologizing and oppressive implications by tracing it as a discourse with a history, contradictions, and institutional legacies. Indeed, in his *History of Sexuality: Part 1*, Foucault demonstrates the utility of treating seeming "natural" and "common sense" subjects—such as sexuality—as constructions of discourse. He traces "sexuality" as a proliferation of Western discourses from the 16th to 19th centuries, illustrating how discourses of and around sexuality produced mechanisms and transfer points for specific power relations. Weedon touts Foucault's theory of discourse—"a structuring principle of

[42] In fact, some of the scholars I will now review do "hedge" or qualify their arguments about teenage pregnancy but for a different purpose. That is, many of the scholars who trace teenage pregnancy as a discourse, as a social construction, or as a symbolic-interaction, fear that they might imply that women who are identified as teen mothers do not actually struggle. For example, Macleod writes, "Readers should note that I am not implying that early pregnancy is not a problem for certain young people" (62). However, she makes sure to connect young people's struggle with early pregnancy to the wider social context—in which many women experience unwanted pregnancies. Specifically, she compares rates of abortion: "12 percent of women in Africa aborting are teens (Department of Health [South Africa] 2006b) and 17 percent in United States (Guttmacher 2008) but that means 88 and 83 percent of women over 20 in each respective region are aborting" (62). In much the same way, Nathanson makes sure to pause in her discursive analysis to explain that teen mothers' challenges are not trivial. But she attributes this struggle to their experience's social construction as a problem (18).

society"—as essential for feminist poststructuralist theory which aims to understand "the mechanisms of power in our society and the possibilities for change" (10). In this mode of analysis, teenage pregnancy is approached as language that exists in historically specific discourses and political struggle (Weedon 23).

Indeed, a growing body of scholarship shifts the subject of critique from teenage mothers to the language, policies, actions, and reactions that construct the idea of "teenage mothers" as a coherent category of problem people.[43] In short, these publications question the emergence and function of "teenage pregnancy" as a discourse, much like I did in chapter one. These scholars wonder: 1) When did this discourse begin? 2) Who produces this rhetoric? 3) What was happening at the time to encourage a focus on *teenage* sexuality and reproduction? and 4) Whose interests does it serve to talk about things in this way? While these studies continue to draw on empirical evidence that disassociates teenage pregnancy from adverse life outcomes, the authors explain the continuing appeal of the dominant narrative with poststructuralist theories of knowledge production. In this section, I will show how authors use poststructuralist methods to trace and critique discourses of teenage pregnancy.

---

[43] The following texts trace and trouble the history of "teenage pregnancy" as a discourse: Deirdre Kelly's *Pregnant With Meaning: The Politics of Inclusive Schooling*, Annette Lawson and Debora L. Rhodes' *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy*, Nancy Lesko's work, Luker's *Dubious Conceptions*, Catriona Macleod's *"Adolescence," Pregnancy, and Abortion: Constructing a Threat of Degeneration*, Mike Males' *Teenage Sex and Pregnancy: Sexy Myths and Unsexy Realities*, and Wanda Pillow's *Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and the Teen Mother*. Teenage pregnancy is also analyzed as a gendered and racialized discourse in larger studies of reproductive justice (i.e., Elena Gutierrez's *Fertile Matters: The Politics of Mexican-Origin Women's Reproduction*, the work of historian Rickie Solinger, and Dorothy Roberts *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*) and motherhood (i.e., Susan E. Chase and Mary F. Rogers *Mothers and Children: Feminist Analyses and Personal Narratives*).

Social scientists Arney and Bergen first used Foucault's theory about the transition from moral to scientific discourses in their 1984 publication, "Power and Visibility: The Invention of Teenage Pregnancy." In this article, Arney and Bergen claim that the shift from using terms such as "unwed mothers" and "illegitimate children" to discussions of "teenage pregnancy" reflects a change in treating young mothers as a moral problem (by ostracizing and excluding them) to objectifying them as scientific problems (to be included, analyzed, and solved). To support their claim, Arney and Bergen present analysis of historical representations of "teenage pregnancy" in popular periodicals and scholarly journals from 1940 to 1980. They find that prior to 1960, images of pregnant teenagers never appeared in publications and the language used to describe the problem of young, single pregnancy was highly moralistic—communicating that these problem girls should be excluded; after 1960, individual pregnant and mothering teens were shown in articles about teenage pregnancy alongside commentary that described the need to monitor and intervene in teenagers' behavior. Arney and Bergen suggest that the new technical focus on "teenage pregnancy" renders teen mothers visible in a way that they were not before and creates never ending "expert" analysis and interpretation of their identities and its meaning for society (11). By analyzing both academic research articles and mainstream magazine stories, Arney and Bergen suggest that "expert" scientific research is closely related to discourses in more public mediums.[44] Thus, the authors approach this "social problem" from a poststructuralist perspective,

[44] This methodology is later used by sociologist and educational scholar Deirdre Kelly as she reviews popular publications and analyzes their discourse of teenage pregnancy, categorizing them and making an argument about what these discourses *do* in terms of power relations. Macleod similarly compares popular media depictions of teenage pregnancy (online and on television) to the language used by academics in the fields of pediatrics, adolescent studies, and family planning.

tracing discourse and how it is productive of specific power relations—specifically the authorization of scientific experts to determine what "natural" or healthy adolescent behavior is. While the authors imply that teenage pregnancy is an arbitrary social construct, they do not explicitly critique its social and political implications as a discourse. Indeed, the authors fail to address gender, class, and race issues permeating the texts they discuss.

The gendered power relations transferred through teenage pregnancy discourse are taken up more clearly by Nathanson in her award-winning book, *Dangerous Passage*: *The Social Control of Sexuality in Women's Adolescence.* Nathanson makes clear that her book is not about teen mothers or what she calls the "actors" of the so-called problem, but instead "the audiences and their reactions" (5); this is a strategy she hopes will complicate the seemingly natural or common sense public reaction to teenage pregnancy. Nathanson warns that programs for the prevention of adolescent pregnancy are really projects of social control of women's sexuality and, thus, not good national policy. To support this claim she draws on Foucault's theory of discourse and Stanley Cohen's work on moral panics to historicize the "problem" of teenage pregnancy. She argues that a moral panic and/or social problem requires the 1) visibility of norm violations and 2) the support of powerful groups of people who can promote the idea of the problem via their claim to a solution (16). Pregnant teenagers, as young people who have visibly violated heteronormative middle-class norms for family, education, and workplace, can easily be taken up by powerful groups as problems that they can solve. Nathanson avoids grand claims about "society" constructing repressive discourses by focusing on "identifiable

groups and individuals" (16), or what she later calls "entrepreneurial groups" (219), who construct apparatuses of social control, whether intentional or not (70). She agrees with many scholars that adolescent pregnancy is a means of attributing large-scale socioeconomic problems to individual behaviors, but she adds that this discourse is also a means for a variety of groups—like "[married, adult, middle-class] women, physicians, politicians, and a variety of lay social and moral reformers" (219)—to gain "organizational and political capital" (219-20). Thus, Nathanson suggests "teenage pregnancy" will have continued appeal because of "its protean quality—its adaptability to a variety of constructions depending on individual and organizational needs and the political requirements of the moment" (70). Histories, such as Nathanson's, illustrate that teenage pregnancy discourse has functioned as a mechanism of power constraining/constructing female adolescents' sexuality and (re)producing fear about increasing rates of unwed motherhood and the reproductive rates of poor minoritized women.

Educational scholar Wanda Pillow also uses a poststructural framework, attentive to Foucault's theory of biopolitics and incitement to discourse, in her book, *Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and the Teen Mother*. Pillow explains how her ethnographic research at an Ohio school for young mothers turned into a poststructural analysis of the power of discourse to render the teen mother an "unfit subject" for education (47). Her awareness of the overrepresentation of teen mothers and the problems associated with representing them as a coherent category of people to analyze, led her to "widen her scope" and focus on the relationship between public discourse and school policies instead

(3).[45] Much like Nathanson, Pillow feels that focusing on the dominant discourse may have more potential for resistance than re-producing the teen mother as a subject. Building on established histories of teenage pregnancy (including the work of Luker and Nathanson), Pillow offers a "feminist genealogy" of teenage pregnancy discourses since 1972.[46] Pillow draws attention to the power relations and social constructions of motherhood that make possible the uncontested and unequal treatment of school-aged mothers after Title IX. Pillow's argument makes clear the need for political action and further research regarding the implementation of Title IX in schools with young mothers.

Canadian scholar and educational ethnographer Deirdre Kelly similarly considers the impact of teenage pregnancy discourse on educational contexts in her book *Pregnant With Meaning: The Politics of Inclusive Schooling.* In her chapter "Stigma Stories: Four Discourses About Teen Mothers, Welfare, and Poverty" Kelly reviews publications on teenage pregnancy and categorizes them into four discourses that explain the cause of "the problem." These include the "bureaucratic experts" discourse used to stigmatize pregnant teenagers (74); the "reprivatization groups" discourse used to blame economically disadvantaged family structures (76); the "oppositional movements" discourse used to critique the socio-political structure of the society which oppresses people and then blames them for their oppressed existence (79); and the "teen mothers' self-interpretations" or "the stigma-is-wrong frame" used to counter the dominant construction of teen mothers (81). She argues that the oppositional movements'

[45] Pillow laments that each time she presented her ethnographic research on teenage mothers' diverse life experiences, audiences would interpret them in familiar, gendered, and reductive scripts—the good girl gone bad, the victim of circumstance, the bad girl in need of a reality check, etc.

[46] This is when Title IX passed. This act "guaranteed the right of pregnant/mothering teens to an education equal to her peers" and deems "practices of separation and exclusion illegal" (5).

discourses have little effect on the mass media and finds that teen mothers' stories are rarely included. In the end, her research highlights power relations in the dissemination of information about teenage pregnancy and connects these discourse(s) to material effects on teen mothers.

While each of these authors pay some attention to the differences between the reproductive experiences of differently racialized women,[47] it is only with the publication of historian Rickie Solinger's work, particularly her well-cited study of reproductive politics in the post-World-War-II-era entitled *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy Before Roe V. Wade*, that scholars really began to pay attention to the racialized politics of teenage pregnancy. In this book Solinger "explores the relationship between race and unwed motherhood in order to demonstrate that gender subordination is not a single phenomenon that depends on the biological characteristics and capacities of females" (18). Instead, Solinger finds that the race of the woman often determined both how her parents (and society at large) would respond to her pregnancy as well as the options available to her in terms of adoption, abortion, maternity care, and social support. For example, white young pregnant women were often sent away to maternity homes for the duration of their pregnancies and—while there—they were pressured to relinquish their babies to a developing adoption market. White women who placed their children with adoptive families could return to their communities as marriageable women. In contrast, black young pregnant women were more likely to be accommodated by family and school systems while also being condemned by (white) society for being poor, single,

[47] See also Ann Phoenix's "The Social Construction of Teenage Motherhood: A Black and White Issue" for discussion of differential treatment of black and white teen motherhood .

mothers. Solinger notes that we must understand these accommodations are part of a historical context in which there were few maternity homes that would accept black young women, no market for the adoption of black babies, and no public funding/sanction for abortion. To support her claims, Solinger presents her audience with case studies of young mother's experiences; interviews with mothers, social workers, and maternity home staff and administration; and texts from court/legislative proceedings in order to show how "female sexuality and fertility and the unwed mother herself have been used. . . as proving grounds for theories of race, gender, motherhood, and social stability" (231). Solinger's work has attuned scholars to the racialized dynamics at play in the treatment of mothers.

Indeed, social psychologist Catriona Macleod furthers Solinger's claim that racial politics are often cloaked by the concept of unwed or teenage motherhood. Specifically, she sheds light on the ways in which social understandings of "adolescence" support racialized colonial practices. In her recent book, *"Adolescence," Pregnancy, and Abortion: Constructing a Threat of Degeneration* she, too, makes explicit her decision to avoid focusing on "the pregnant teenager herself" and instead deconstructs "public representations of 'teenage pregnancy'" and abortion (2). Macleod argues that public discussions of teenage pregnancy and abortion "construct a threat of degeneration, in which young women are positioned as contributing, through their sexual and reproductive status, to social decline" (5). She builds on Geronimus' critique of the power relations that sustain scrutiny of teen pregnancy. But in applying this perspective to the South African context, she is able to identify another obstacle to revisionist scholars' critiques:

the social construction of adolescence (71). She writes, "Although there are debates around race in the literature on 'teenage pregnancy' in many countries, it is virtually forgotten that colonialism forms a palimpsest of the notion of 'adolescence' in the many contexts in which it is deployed on a daily basis" (10). Macleod contends that adolescence presumes a transition between childhood and adulthood that reflects/intersects with colonialist understandings of primitive races and the evolution to civilization (5). "Adolescence" constructs an imaginary wall between young people and adults and suggests that transitions to adulthood (including specific cognitive, behavioral, and emotional developments) are part of individualized processes that do not relate to social conditions and/or relations (6). In the end, Macleod critiques multivariate research on teenage pregnancy because it continues a narrow focus on individuals and teenagers—social constructions which will continue to disassociate inequality from social structures and teenage realities from those of adults (141). Instead of continued research on teens, she calls for the disposal of teenage pregnancy as a discursive construction (131). Macleod offers "unwanted pregnancy" as a way to demand attention to gender- and context-specific inequalities around reproduction and to break down the wall between adult and young women's experiences of pregnancy—opening new research questions and practices. Macleod illustrates the potentials of this new line of inquiry by examining primary and tertiary prevention through this lens, highlighting issues with sexual coercion for women who reproduce and a need for interventions in education, childcare, and work contexts to assist mothering women of all ages.

As Nathanson, Pillow, Kelly, Solinger, Macleod and many others illustrate, pregnant and mothering teens remain useful as exigencies a variety of interest groups can respond to and potentially "solve." In claiming to "solve" the problem of teenage sexuality and reproduction, these organizations can claim federal and state funding. The highly visible bodies of teenage mothers also help to deflect attention from structural issues which oppress people and maintain focus on the bodies of women as sites for discipline and control. In her recent book, *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America*, Solinger illustrates that the teen mother is one of the many "shifting targets" of blame (identifiable throughout discourses in US history) which is useful and distracting for the public who empathizes with children as a metaphor for innocence and the future. Solinger shows readers, compellingly, that pregnancy is "a social and political event" (21). Indeed, Solinger essentially embarks on a rhetorical analysis, examining how men far removed from women's everyday experiences (lawmakers, politicians, judges, social workers) drummed up national attention for their own purposes and/or for simple fixes to huge national problems by using claims about women's fertility.

This scholarship suggests that teenage pregnancy, and the ingrained image of the failed teenage mother, is a rhetorical commonplace available to any rhetorician seeking to move an audience to *do* something—whether it is approve welfare reforms, explain continuing contexts of disadvantage and unequal opportunity, or construct minoritized

populations as unfit citizens.[48] Often the actions and policies inspired by the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy do not improve the material conditions of youth or their families. Furthermore, Macleod stresses that these discourses and the practices have "implications in terms of the personal lives of young women who conceive," affecting their personal reactions to pregnancy, subsequent life decisions, and interactions with others (130). In fact, she fears that young women may see themselves as "children having children" because they are part of a culture that universalizes adolescence as a key transition. Hence, young mothers may see themselves as disrupting their individual progress (131). The rhetorical function and problematic outcomes of this discourse encourage ongoing scrutiny of each and every moment in which "teenage pregnancy" is highlighted as a point of concern.

2.8 Deconstructing the Discourse: Where are the Pregnant and Parenting Women?

However, part of the utility of a poststructuralist perspective is that it provides a means for understanding how and why individuals are interpellated into specific subject positions. While shifting attention from the hyper-visibilized teen mother is an important and critical move, I wonder why a feminist poststructuralist lens cannot be focused on the rhetorical choices pregnant and mothering young women make to engage, deflect, or counter the stigmas associated with their "choice" to be pregnant and/or parenting.

---

[48] In her article, "Impregnating Images: Visions of Race, Sex, and Citizenship in California's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Campaigns," Ruby Tapia argues teenage pregnancy prevention public service announcements—such as the ones constructed by California Department of Health Services Partnership for Responsible Parenting Campaign –may forward racialized nation-building efforts to keep minoritized populations out. She argues that teenage pregnancy prevention media was circulated during moments of anti-immigration legislation (i.e., Propositions 187 and 200) that sought to construct racialized minorities as a burden to the nation state.

Feminists have been wary of focusing on young mothers because it is hard to write about "teen mothers" without further reifying them as a coherent category of people (Nathanson, Pillow, and Macleod). The qualitative studies which collect and interpret the life experiences of young mothers in the aim of nuancing or countering claims about them, often end up further marginalizing them for their pitiful choices (Erickson, Luker, Kaplan).[49] Yet, scholars should be careful not to conclude—as Nathanson does—that "sexually unorthodox women . . . have played little conscious role in the creation of their own identity as a sexual category" (5).

In this dissertation, I complicate Nathanson's claim that young mothers have not played a "conscious role" in their identities as "teen moms" by showing how young women *use* the exigence of this category to publish counternarratives that upset (mis)conceptions about "teenage pregnancy" or to respond to strangers comments in the everyday. Macleod points to the importance of such a line of inquiry in her conclusion; she writes, "The entrenchment of the 'adolescence as transition' discourse in our discussions of young people and reproduction will have a number of implications for young people. Teasing out what these implications are, and how young women and those

[49] Social psychologist Wendy Luttrell recently used a feminist Foucauldian framework to study high school student mothers. Using mixed-method research tactics including interviews, analysis of school documents, teen journal writing, and 3 carefully crafted activities that prompted teens' self-representations (self-portraits, collages, and impromptu "freeze" skits about pregnancy stories), Luttrell takes a "listening centered" mode of analysis to find out more about the social, psychological experience of being a "problem." Luttrell distinguishes her study from most that voice an opinion on "teenage pregnancy" by explaining, "This book examines the experience of being a pregnant teenager as a struggle *between* a girl and her word, not simply *within* an individual girl. This distinction is ever so important if we are to avoid pathologizing and stigmatizing the life choices and trajectories of poor and working-class girls" (3, emphasis in original). While Luttrell seeks to illustrate the experience (subjective, psychological, social) of *being* a "problem," I want to better understand the rhetorical strategies available to teens in this position. I want to examine their statements not as illustrations of sexuality, motherhood, and/or discursive negotiations of gender relations, but instead as rhetorical means of representing themselves, countering others, or getting something they need.

around them take up or resist such public representations, is not the brief of this book, however, and will have to wait for further work" (131). I contend that a focus on young women's rhetorical practices may get us past the victim/choice-maker dichotomy by showing how "teen" mothers move within, and beyond these competing discourses.

2.9 Conclusion

Since the congressional hearings that legitimized "teenage pregnancy" as a social problem worthy of federal funding and national concern, policy-makers and scholars have been contesting claims made about the age of first birth. Sparked by Vinovskis' fury over the approval of federal funding to combat an "epidemic" that did not exist, revisionist scholars, such as Geronimus, SmithBattle, Furstenberg, and Males, have produced well-controlled research to counter claims made about the age of first birth. These scholars insist that it is the context in which mothers give birth that determines their outcomes, not the age of conception. Qualitative researchers have built on this assumption-challenging quantitative research to guide their interviews and case studies of teenage mothers. These studies show how we can better serve the needs of young mothers through programs that address what they and their communities actually lack—positive relationships, education and employment opportunities, safe and affordable housing, and healthy and affordable childcare. Revisionist publications appear in medical, health, political, and social science journals, hoping to have an impact on policies and programs serving communities.

Yet, as I have illustrated, much of this literature fails to confront the power relations and rhetorical practices that sustain a focus on women's reproductive bodies,

practices, and outcomes. A close review of how this research has been silenced and/or refuted shows that more is at stake than numbers and nuanced stories about young mothers. Furthermore, researchers who draw on the correlation between communities experiencing poverty and high rates of teenage pregnancy to claim that young motherhood is a symptom of poverty risk constructing pregnant and mothering teens as poor women just making matters worse. Indeed, there is a pattern among revisionist publications of "hedging" that even though there may be positives to early childbearing—or larger forces at work in making it a struggle—it is still not a good idea for teens to have children. This legitimates continued initiatives to prevent "teenage" pregnancy through pathologizing discourse and continues the divide between the issues facing adolescent mothers and the issues facing non-adolescent mothers. Without a feminist perspective cognizant of the historical pattern of structuring society through the control of women's bodies, this literature glosses over the colonial, racial, and gendered ideological work accomplished by the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy.

Feminist poststructuralist theorists attempt to counter teenage pregnancy discourse by shifting attention from pregnant and mothering teens to the terms, policies, institutions, and actors who construct "them" as an abject category of people. In doing so, they highlight that teenage pregnancy is a social construction which originated in a specific time and place for specific socio-political reasons. Drawing on the methods and theories of Foucault, these scholars suggest that teenage pregnancy is a way of knowing about sexuality, reproduction, and adolescence that facilitates power for white upper-class adults. Yet, in turning the lens away from pregnant and mothering teens to the

discourse that constructs them as abject, these theorists miss the opportunity to study how subjects maneuver within, against, or beyond this discourse to live their lives, claim their rights, and/or initiate change in perspectives and/or policies.

Before examining the counterhegemonic potential of the teen-mother subject position, I next build on the work of Luker, Geronimus, Nathanson, Macleod, Males, Pillow, and Solinger to identify and analyze the visual rhetorical practices that prompted the public to accept the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy. I will show how racialized visual representations of young pregnant and mothering women helped to solidify the nation's anxiety over and attention to the age women at the time of pregnancy and motherhood at a time when revisionist scholars contested research on teenage pregnancy.

CHAPTER 3: COVERING NATIONAL CONCERNS ABOUT TEENAGE PREGNANCY: A VISUAL RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF IMAGES OF PREGNANT AND MOTHERING WOMEN[50]

Shortly after Governor Sarah Palin accepted Senator John McCain's invitation to join him on the 2008 Republican presidential ticket, the media broke the story that Bristol Palin—Sarah's 17-year-old daughter—was pregnant. Although McCain and Senator Barack Obama refused to discuss Bristol's pregnancy during the campaign, the media coverage of her pregnancy continued long after her mother ceased to be a vice presidential candidate. In June 2009, a year after the story broke, *People* magazine featured Bristol's high school graduation. The cover page displayed an image of Bristol in cap and gown, smiling at the camera and holding her chubby, blue-eyed infant. However, an intriguing contradiction is posed by the quote beneath the seemingly happy mother and child: "If girls realized the consequences of sex, nobody would be having sex . . . Trust me. *Nobody*" (Bristol Palin qtd. in Westfall, emphasis in original).

Bristol's experience complicates the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy. She is a young mother supported by her middle-class family with no impending "failure" in sight, such as poverty or lack of education. In other words, Bristol's teen pregnancy could potentially bring to light that the "real" teenage mother is a myth—that there is indeed no group of inherently neglectful, emotionally immature, welfare-loving mothers ruining their lives, and the nation, because of the timing of their pregnancies. Yet, the visual-textual rhetoric of the *People* magazine cover and its companion article work to sustain a negative

 A version of this chapter first appeared as an article in *Feminist Formations* 24.2, Summer, 2012, pages 140-162.

portrait of teenage motherhood. Viewers' interpretations of the many happy images of Bristol are shaped by the large text placed on the photographs, highlighting Bristol's ominous statements about motherhood: "My Life Comes Second Now" (59) and "This is hard . . . I don't think anyone realizes that it really can happen to you" (Bristol Palin qtd. in Westfall 58). Contributing author Bill Hewitt stresses that "[e]ven with the unusual advantages of a well-off family, Bristol Palin is, in some respects, a perfect example of the new trend in teenage pregnancy" (Hewitt qtd. in Westfall 63). Readers of this story are asked, explicitly by Hewitt and implicitly by visual representations of Bristol's body and experiences, to see Bristol as the exemplar of "the problem." In May 2009, Bristol capitalized on her role as the embodiment of teenage pregnancy by becoming an ambassador for the Candies Foundation.[51]

People magazine is not alone in prompting viewers to understand teenage pregnancy through the experience of an individual white woman like Bristol. In this chapter, I build on the feminist poststructuralist scholarship reviewed in chapter two to identify and analyze the particular rhetorical practices producing the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy. I argue that there is an historical precedent of using white female bodies in cover stories to persuade viewers to see teenage pregnancy as a homogenous, non-racialized social issue stemming from women's seemingly irresponsible sexual behavior and reproductive decisions. I conduct a visual rhetorical analysis of two magazine cover stories and three newspaper articles depicting differently racialized teenage mothers from the 1970s and '80s—the periods when teenage pregnancy was first argued

[51] See chapter one for further discussion of the Candies Foundation.

to be a contributory factor to poverty and a cause for national concern (Nathanson 23, 32; see also Arney and Bergen; Luker; Vinovskis). Turning to these images, I identify the visual cues used to focus attention on the age of pregnant and mothering women, and illustrate how young mothers came to be understood as a specific category (Gilman 204). Furthermore, I compare images of white, young pregnant women with visual representations of young mothers of color to illustrate the shifting rhetorical function of teenage pregnancy across race and class.

In the following pages, I first explain my contribution to feminist scholarship on racialized teenage pregnancy discourses, outlining the extent of my research and the analytical lenses I employ. Next, I focus on the visual rhetorical strategies used to produce and envision a new category of "high school pregnancy" through the individual bodies of white women and groups of anonymous black women in the 1970s. Building on these racialized differentiations, I turn to the context of the 1980s and explain how teenage pregnancy worked within colorblind rhetorics of the time—that is, racial ideologies that sought to explain racial inequality in the United States in ways that denied that these inequalities had anything to do with race (Bonilla-Silva 2). Attentive to significations of race, class, and gender, I show how cover-page images of white "children having children," in conjunction with images of African American and Native American women with multiple children, attempt to justify marginalized women's unequal position in society in terms of their supposedly careless sexual behavior and hyper-fertility. My analysis shows that visual representations of teenage pregnancy have been a way to associate differently racialized women under the same banner, while continuing to differentiate women on the

bases of race and class. I argue that representations of white, pregnant teenage bodies work rhetorically to maintain the existence of an age-based teenage-pregnancy problem and obscure the United States' problematic history of condemning the reproductive decisions of poor women and women of color. In the end, this chapter provides a model of a visual rhetorical analysis that should foster a critical gaze on representations of pregnant and mothering teen bodies today.

3.1 Rhetorical Analysis of Visually Represented Bodies: Methods and Lenses

As discussed in chapter two, scholars from many disciplines have traced teenage pregnancy as a social construct and theorized the ideologies, national anxieties, and power interests producing and produced by this social issue (Arney and Bergen; Lesko *Act Your Age!*; Luker; Luttrell; Macleod; Males; Nathanson; Pillow). Researchers have identified tropes—such as "children having children"—and metaphors—such as "epidemic of teenage pregnancy"—used to represent young mothers and therein construct what pregnant and mothering teens mean for the United States (Fields; Luker; Luttrell). Moreover, feminist research has revealed how discourses about, and representations of, young, single mothers are problematic, particularly for the ways in which they are racialized (Nathanson; Pillow; Solinger *Wake Up*). For instance, Solinger analyzes historical documents to show how young, "unwed" pregnancy was explained and treated differently, dependent on the race of the pregnant woman (*Wake Up* 1-2; see also Kelly *Pregnant* 42-5). Wanda Pillow extends Solinger's analysis to consider how representations of white teen mothers were used to gain public sympathy for, and federal responses to, the problem of young pregnancy in the 1970s (33). Drawing on documents produced by the

Florence Crittenden Maternity Homes, reports from the Allan Guttmacher Institute, and coverage of unwed motherhood in popular magazines, Pillow identifies discursive attempts to mark the unwed teen mother as "one of us" (29-33; see also Solinger 65-76). By demonstrating that discourse about sympathetic all American, middle-class, unwed, "our girls" making mistakes (different from low-income, minoritized "other girls") was circulating at the same time that public policy which guaranteed rights to unwed young mothers was introduced, she suggests the white teen mother was essential to gaining sympathy and rights for some young mothers. For example Title IX, passed in 1972, helped to cease the routine practice of expelling pregnant or mothering students from school by stipulating that pregnant and parenting school-age students should receive education equal to that of their non-pregnant or parenting peers. However, Pillow also emphasizes that racialized representations impacted the schooling conditions for young mothers after Title IX. She uses sociologists Dawn Upchurch and James McCarthy's findings on high school completion to suggest that this "our girl"/"other girl" ideology had negative effects: "After the passage of Title IX, immediate access to schooling for school-age mothers increased dramatically between 1975 and 1986 for white teen mothers, while *decreasing* for black teen mothers" (32).

In deconstructing mainstream (mis)perceptions of teenage pregnancy and childbearing, these scholars reference certain visual representations—in media outlets, family-planning pamphlets, and public-service announcements—as reflective of the discourses that construct teenage pregnancy as a national social problem. Yet, it is not always clear how visuals work within broader discourses, or how images of pregnant or mothering

teens persuade audiences to see teenage mothers as a coherent category of problem women *and* (re)construct racialized stereotypes. In this chapter, I highlight that images of young mothers' bodies are persuasive texts, and that visual representations of young women have always been central to "proving" that there is a teenage-pregnancy problem.[52] Visual representations used in print media do not simply amplify the message of the article because, sometimes, the article acknowledges the contextual complexities that make it difficult to attribute societal ills to the age when a young woman gives birth. Instead, visuals prompt viewers to look at the problem in a specific way. Furthermore, I emphasize the possibilities for seeing the ironies and contradictions in teenage pregnancy discourses by using the lens of visual rhetorical analysis to explore the relationships between verbal text and images.

Scholars of visual rhetoric approach images as deliberate compositions that communicate culturally specific meanings to viewers (Peterson 27; see also Foss; Ohmann). Even when visuals are accompanied by verbal text—such as image captions or magazine articles—images can function as arguments that do not necessarily parallel the words of the text (Kress and Van Leeuwen; Lemke 72-77; McCloud; Odell and McGrane 212). Rhetorician Barbara Dickson maintains that representations of "corporal entities," such as mothers' bodies, are "objects that signify not through language but through their spatial organization, mobility, mass, utility, orality, and tactility" (297).

Drawing on rhetorical theory, I ask the following questions of these images:

---

[52] Here, I draw on feminist media scholar Ruby C. Tapia's theory that an image of a pregnant or parenting teenager can serve as "ocular proof" of race-based deviance and help to forward a racialized ideology or political agenda (16). Specifically, she argues that images used in a teenage-pregnancy-prevention campaign fueled sentiments against immigration during California campaigns for propositions 187 and 200.

1. What do we see? Who or what is emphasized and how?
2. What don't we see? Who or what is invisible and why?
3. What is the relationship between the verbal and visual rhetoric of the article?
4. And finally, how do the visual components of the image persuade an audience to *see* the problem in a particular way?

Specifically, I look at how teenage mothers are represented through clothing, facial expressions, spatial organization, perceived racial and class identity, and association with other elements in the frame. I examine how the meaning of these visual cues "are contained and constrained by language practices" (Dickson 298). In the case of magazine representations of teenage pregnancy, "language practices" include the language around the image—the captions and content of the article—and the specific socio-historical context of the magazine itself.

In order to better understand the historical context for the images I analyze, I draw from primary research on visual representations. I looked at online archived editions of the *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Newsweek, The Nation,* and *Washington Post*, reviewing 110 articles about teen- age pregnancy or teenage mothers from 1970 to 1989.[53] Of these, fifty articles included images of some kind—for example, photographs, sketches, graphs, or charts—and over half of the images included

[53] I chose these publications because they are widely read in the United States and collectively archived in central online-library databases. I used the Pro-Quest Historical Newspapers and LexisNexis's "Major World Publications" search engines, using the search terms "teen*" and "pregnancy." I looked selectively at articles published during the years 1970-89. To expand my research, I used terms like "school-age mother*" and "adolescent pregnancy." Then I examined the results for images (or, in the case of LexisNexis, descriptions for any "GRAPHIC") included in the articles. For any articles that indicated a "graphic" that was not visible online, I scanned the article from the print edition to code the image. In order to gain a better understanding of cover-page images, I looked at issues of *Ebony*, *Life*, and *Time.* For the purposes of this article, I focus on photographs of women's bodies, although images of babies, doctors, nurses, and administrators are also visual staples in articles about the so-called problem of teenage pregnancies.

representations of women's bodies. I use recurrent patterns in the framing and construction of these visuals to inform my visual rhetorical analysis.

3.2 The Rhetorical Challenge of Seeing Teenage Pregnancy

National concerns about the reproductive practices of poor women, along with historically entrenched racism, rendered women of color as the emblems of family-planning challenges in the 1960s (Roberts 110; Solinger *Pregnancy and Power* 173). However, in the 1970s, political debates about funding contraceptives for minors shifted national attention to the age—as opposed to the socioeconomic status—of single pregnant women. Luker writes that, during these debates, family-planning advocates inverted the generally accepted claim that women lacked access to contraception because they were poor, to claim that teenagers were poor because they lacked access to contraception and thus could not protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies (67). Although illogical, this rhetorical move both secured minors' access to contraceptives and introduced the age of a woman's first pregnancy as a point of national intervention. Luker also attributes the focus on young pregnant and mothering women to the efforts of liberal and feminist advocacy groups (62-4). For example, that fact that pregnant students were commonly expelled from school—without legal recourse until 1972—seemed incongruent with movements for sexual freedom and equal rights for women (Solinger *Wake Up* 4).

Although concern for adolescents' rights to contraception and education played a part in the categorization of young mothers, the focus on reproductive decisions of teenagers also helped to continue conversations about controlling women's fertility, while potentially deflecting attention from reproductive injustices. For example, reports of rising

inner-city poverty and discourses of a War on Poverty contributed to a climate of racially and economically distinct experiences of reproductive injustice for women in the 1960s and '70s.[54] While white women had to confront panels of male physicians and endure psychiatric evaluations for approval of sterilization procedures, poor women of color were coerced into unnecessary hysterectomies or sterilizations in order to receive medical assistance and welfare benefits (Enoch 5-6; Luker 35; Roberts 97, 135; Solinger *Beggars and Choosers* 10-1). Thus, at the time that young mothers were becoming a category to pay attention to, several rights movements leveled scrutiny and legal action against unfair treatment of poor, single mothers (Solinger *Wake Up* 236; see also Nathanson 56). In their separate works Nathanson and Pillow suggest that the media focused their attention on the experiences of white middle-class "school-age" mothers to distinguish concern over *young* pregnancy from racist and sexist reproductive injustices. Representations of white middle-class young women helped to construct a sympathetic though problematic pregnant-teen subject in the public imagination—a subject who needed access to contraception and education (Nathanson 47, 55-6; Pillow 31).

Indeed, during my research I found numerous visual representations of white school-age mothers constructed as sympathetic women deserving of accommodations. Yet, I found an equal number of photographs of women of color representing school-age mothers as well.[55] In the following section, I show how the composition of these images

[54] The War on Poverty included legislation and programs enacted by the federal government's Office of Economic Opportunity beginning in 1964 (Luker 57-8). Family-planning advocates secured funding by arguing that providing contraceptive services for the nation's poor would decrease both the number of single unwed mothers having to take advantage of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the number of low-income children without medical care (59).

[55] Due to financial constraints, I am unable to secure permissions to reproduce the images I analyze in this chapter. While I advocate visual rhetorical analysis as a methodology that fosters a critical gaze on representations of women, it takes

and the assumptions about the continued education of school-age mothers varied with the apparent race of the mother. These differences establish a precedent for seeing teenage pregnancy through the lens of the white female body, while (re)constructing anxieties about minoritized populations' birth rates.

3.3 Seeing School-Age Mothers: Bodies in Balance

In 1971, *Life* magazine featured one of the first cover stories on young pregnancy. The article, "High School Pregnancy," describes Citrus High School's initiative to keep pregnant students in school, as opposed to expelling them. The author, Richard Woodbury, calls the scene captured on the cover "an everyday event at Citrus High . . . and elsewhere around the country where educators are taking a radical new approach to an old and painful problem" (35). The cover image depicts a pregnant student, Judy Fay, presenting a book report to her English class. Fay's body makes implicit the institutional and gendered tensions in high school pregnancy and establishes sympathy for a universal category of abnormally young mothers. First, the visual compositions construct an argument that young women were a problem; that is, by associating a pregnant body with a seemingly traditional classroom, viewers are invited to accept that the "old and painful problem" of accommodating pregnant bodies is fitting *them* into the school context. The composition of multiple bodies—including a male teacher and non pregnant students, centered by a unity of gazes *on* Fay—encourages attention to Fay's difference and discourages attention to the broader high school structure that fails to serve, or refuses to acknowledge,

---

considerable time, numerous negotiations, and substantial costs to publish the images analyzed. Readers can rather easily find the 1971 *Life* cover and the 1985 *Time* cover I discuss later in the chapter by searching "High School Pregnancy" and "Children Having Children" on the Internet. The other print-media photographs not reproduced in this article can be found through the search engines cited in note 2.

adolescents as potentially reproductive or caretaking bodies. Furthermore, the absence of fathers centers "High School Pregnancy" on women's bodies and women's experiences; men are pictured later in the cover story as admirable onlookers or sources of help for these women's problems, but not as contributors to the phenomenon.

Second, the juxtaposition of Fay's body with the centered subtitle "High School Pregnancy" invites viewers to read Fay's body—her stomach emphasized by her profile stance and her short plaid maternity dress—as the representative of a broader category of young mothers. In her analysis of media representations of teenage mothers, Deirdre M. Kelly notes that the emphasis on one young mother is not inherently unusual. Magazines will often choose one mother to interview, photo, and therein suggest a representation of *all* teenage mothers (85-6). Furthermore, those familiar with the cover-story genre note that one goal is to establish human interest—most often done by displaying a picture of one or two cover models (Held 179). However, the choice of cover model determines the impact and understanding of the topic of the feature article—not only for subscribers or readers of the magazine, but also for those who just happen to see the magazine's cover. *Life*'s choice of an individual white woman aims to persuade viewers to accept that there is a problem with women's timing of their pregnancies by accepting Fay as representative of all young women, thus smoothing over the racialized distinctions that I will discuss later in the chapter. It is important to note that I did not find a cover story or first-page article that used a pregnant teen from a minoritized race as representative of an age-based problem.

Despite the cognitive dissonance established between pregnancy and the middle-class school setting, the photo encourages a positive view of the scene; the space between

the bodies of the non-pregnant students and Fay creates symmetry, or visual balance. The first page of the feature article inside the magazine replicates this scene, again highlighting that students and teacher look approvingly at Fay. Prompting an empathetic response, another page sandwiches a large quote between two photographs of other white pregnant and mothering students: "I FEEL LIKE A PERSON AGAIN" (Woodbury 38, emphasis in original). Mothers are shown taking mandatory childcare classes, nurturing children, focusing on studies, and happily socializing with non-parenting boys who, Woodbury explains, "cleaned up their language, courteously hold open doors, and even push strollers" (40). The article is a positive affirmation of young mothers' rights to remain in their original school, supported by visuals of young mothers actively engaging in the school context and non-pregnant students who can function seemingly well alongside these women. Highlighted claims about humanity (the feeling of personhood) and the future of baby and mother suggest (white middle- class) *teen* mothers deserve education, because they are "people" with potentially productive futures.

That same year, the *New York Times* also reported on school experiences of pregnant young women. Judy Klemesrud's "On Bulletin Board, Pictures of Pupils' Babies" focuses on a special inner-city school for young mothers called "Center for Continued Education" (50). Similar to *Life*'s report on Citrus High, the article suggests that young mothers felt more welcome at schools where they are not stigmatized for their pregnancies. However, the visual rhetoric of the article reflects and constructs issues relating to minoritized women's reproductive decisions by centering on young black women receiving instruction from teachers. In one of the article's photographs, a male teacher leans against a wall, talking

to a visibly pregnant student in a hallway. Viewers can clearly see the face of the teacher, who is referred to by name in the caption. Yet, the student is left anonymous, her face turned away from the camera. There is no rhetorical appeal to empathize with this pregnant teen, as neither the caption nor the article offers background information about her. Instead, the focus of the photo is on the interaction between teacher and student, with the male teacher centered in the frame. The teacher's arm cuts sharply across the girl's body and his face appears stern. The interaction seems wrought with tension, although the caption describes the moment as a "chat." The photograph encourages viewers to see this school-age mother as safely confined in her school, under the watchful eye of her instructor.

In another photo from this article, a principal instructs a group of four anonymous female students on "good mothering" and how to prevent future pregnancies. Again, the image emphasizes the instruction and guidance of the women, because the visual is unified by the women's shared focus on the teacher. Pregnant and parenting female bodies, in these visual representations, are closely associated with adult figures of authority. In both of the article's images, the students face away from the camera—anonymous members of the general demographic of mothering teens at the school. The article itself uses racialized physical descriptions in conjunction with fear-provoking illustrations that these girls are "bitter" and feel comfortable in challenging the traditional (white middle-class) family structure. For example, the article includes quotes from a "bitter black girl of 14," a "15-year-old in an Afro hairdo," and one "strapping 13 year-old who is on 'The Pill'" (50). The latter young woman is quoted as saying, "maybe marriage was the proper way to raise a

baby in the olden days . . . but as long as I am young, I still want to party" (ibid.). The photographs in the article, in conjunction with the verbal text, prompt viewers to support education for (black, low-income) *teen* mothers based on the visual premise that the schools instruct groups of black young women how to behave.

A 1971 *New York Times* article titled "Illegitimacy: Teenagers Largely Account for Startling Increase" by Jane E. Brody clearly represented young black motherhood as a threat to the nation.[56] As with *Life*'s use of "High School Pregnancy," the title suggests a race- and gender-neutral report on teenagers' contributions to a shift in national reproduction rates. The article includes a graph depicting rising rates of "illegitimate" births during the period 1940-68. Adjacent to the graph was a photo of a class of "unwed mothers-to-be" learning about "conception and contraception" (E7). The article suggest that the best way to slow down the increasing number of children born out of wedlock is to educate young people—presumably girls and boys, teenagers of all classes— about reproduction and contraception. Furthermore, the article debunks myths about welfare and the assumption that the demise of the traditional family is leading to the increase in young single parenthood.

Yet, readers of Brody's 1971 article see the issue with "teenagers" being solved by educating a group of young black women. The image reflects and constructs the belief that black communities were uncivilized, inherently sexually deviant, and in need of reproductive control (Lawson 194). Indeed, the image is balanced by the parallel drawn between the women and the chart, suggests that the "real" problem is with certain

[56] It is important to note that the race of pregnant and mothering students featured in the photographs stems, in part, from the demographics of the regions these publications cover.

communities. The *New York Times*' articles center "teenage pregnancy on the bodies of women much like the *Life* cover story; fathers are still missing, as well as contexts like poverty, inequality, and so on. However, the use of visual strategies—such as including multiple bodies in a frame, and associating those bodies with instruction and supervision—provides a completely different rationale for supporting the education of school-age mothers.

The visual rhetoric used to bring attention to school-age motherhood in national media like *Life* and the *New York Times* situates generalized claims about teenage women's fertility in (familiar) racialized categories: sympathetic white girls deserved humane treatment, and unthinking black girls needed discipline. However, it is important to note that these images circulated as arguments for the public to *see* young mothers as a coherent category of problem-people based on the age at which they first gave birth. Visually balancing young women in their school context, focusing on their bodies as illustrations of the phenomenon, and labeling women with seemingly race-neutral phrases like "teenage mother" helped to both initiate public attention to the age of the mother and to establish a norm of appropriate timing for pregnancy.

3.4 Teenage Pregnancy as Code Words for Racialized Concerns

The rhetorical effectiveness of using generalized terms like "teenage motherhood" became more fully realized in the 1980s, when a new political administration sought to reverse the effects of feminist and other social movements, including public funding of contraceptive services. In *Racial Formation in the United States*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant suggest that the New Right made efforts to frame racist politics as race-

neutral during what many scholars call the "conservative backlash" of the 1980s (Bonilla-Silva; Collins; Faludi). Building on the Reagan administration's emphasis on establishing a "color-blind society," Omi and Winant argue that during this period, the political gains of racial minorities were "rearticulated" through the use of racially neutral rhetoric, or "code words" (118). In this way, "the centrality of race in shaping American politics and culture" became hidden beneath policies supported by liberal democratic ideologies (5).

Indeed, during this time, teenage pregnancy functioned as a code for race- and class-based concerns. Luker argues that discourses of teenage pregnancy "permitted people to talk about African Americans and poor women (categories that often overlapped) without mentioning race or class" (86; see also Hendrixson 250; Lesko "Curriculum Differentiation" 121-2). The Reagan administration addressed teenage pregnancy as a problem that threatened "family values." Patricia Hill Collins illustrates how the ideal of the traditional family works as both "an ideological construction and as a fundamental principle of social organization" (63). The heteronormative, biologically-tied traditional family structure constructs, maintains, and naturalizes hierarchal relations based on age, gender, race, and nation. Thus, visualizing a pregnant teenager as a disruption of the idealized family structure creates the appearance of a threat to the "fundamental principle of social organization" in the United States and promotes measures to (re)construct ideal hierarchal family relations. In this case, a national agenda to end public funding for contraceptives encouraged more family control over daughters (Luker 76).

The focus on teenage pregnancy and family values also coded anxiety over

demographic information that challenged cultural discourses about racialized differences in female sexuality and reproduction. For instance, reports at the time suggested that young white women were engaging in non-marital sexual activity at similar rates as young black women (91). However, Pillow emphasizes that rising black birthrates and declining white birthrates also fueled the "epidemic" and "crisis" language used in descriptions of teenage pregnancy (31).

In the following section, I show how gender and race are constructed in visual representations of teenage pregnancy. I note the strategies used: 1.) to code racialized anxieties with the bodies of adolescent white women; 2.) to persuade audiences to see a difference between white and minoritized populations by strategically posing elements in a frame; and 3.) to (re)focus attention on the bodies of women as the source of, and solution to, societal ills when challenged by research illustrating that multiple factors, such as preexisting poverty, racism, and sexism, construct reproductive and life outcomes.

3.5 From a Solitary White Pregnant Body to Multiple Mothers of Color: Seeing Teen Pregnancy as Racialized

In December 1985, *Time* magazine published an in-depth feature story by Claudia Wallis titled "Children Having Children: Teen Pregnancy in America." The cover of the magazine features a very youthful-looking, visibly pregnant white girl standing sideways but staring directly at the camera, her blonde hair swept away from her face. Set against a blank background, her profile stance encourages viewers to gaze directly at her fully pregnant form. As educational scholar Nancy Lesko notes, this pose highlights the juxtaposition of "the face of a child and the mature, sexual body" ("Curriculum

Differentiation"115).[57] Dressed in a loose-fitting pink smock and dark denim jeans, she appears as an image of contradiction, a feeling emphasized by the article's title "Children Having Children," which her body is posed against. This young girl's pregnancy complicates her position within the ideal nuclear family, and thus, in the United States as well. She is a child, emphasized by her doll-like image, and hence, subject to the authority of her parents—she is their obligation. Yet, she is also a mother-to-be with her own obligations. Further complicating her image is the fact that she stands alone; there is no male partner. This absence emphasizes that teenage pregnancy disrupts two potentially functional families. Viewers are prompted to view this child from the perspective of a concerned adult, and to question how this child can mother in her subject-position as a single daughter.

Time's decision to use an image of a white unwed "child," in a socio-historical context that most readily imagined black unwed mothers as detrimental to national progress, is a rhetorical choice that encourages viewers to look at teenage pregnancy as something different than issues like racism or poverty. Just as in *Life*'s cover story on "High School Pregnancy," a white body appears useful in universalizing the problem. In 1987, two years after *Time*'s "Children Having Children," *Newsweek* also came out with a cover article on the issue. This time, the image was of a young white couple embracing under the title "Kids and Contraceptives: A Moral Dilemma: How to Prevent Teenage Pregnancy—And

[57] In her chapter "Curriculum Differentiation as Social Redemption: The Case of School-Aged Mothers," Lesko analyzes this *Time* cover, identifying how it shapes stereotypical views of young mothers. She points to the article's emphasis on three themes of teenage-pregnancy discourses: that pregnant teens are sexually irresponsible; that pregnant teens are likely to be bad mothers; and that pregnant teens are emotionally disabled (116-7). In this chapter, I contribute a focus on the significations of race. I also look at the relationship between the cover and the in-text images, as this highlights relationships between racialized bodies.

AIDS"—two issues most often attributed to black populations. The couple appears to be traditionally wholesome, the young man sporting a varsity letterman jacket. They are just "kids," potential victims of a teenage- pregnancy epidemic. The *Newsweek* and *Time* covers suggest that white cover models were useful for conveying teens' potential. The intensity of the *Time* model's straight-on gaze suggests that she was acknowledging the problem and that there may be an opportunity to save her. She was fully pregnant, but not yet envisioned as a single mother. The young couple on *Newsweek*'s cover might still have a chance, as they are centered in a loving embrace and not yet visibly afflicted with either epidemic.

The country's concern about teenage pregnancy is rooted in national anxieties concerning race, class, and gender. By whitening the emblematic bodies of teenage pregnancy—that is, the teens who made the cover of national magazines in the 1980s—the magazines covered the racial aspects of the nation's concerns over the sexual conduct and reproductive decisions of young women. The cover images invoked national attention and promoted magazine readership by relying on whiteness to focus on the phenomenon of age and reproduction. There are two reasons why a white body may assist in focusing on age. First, whiteness has a history of not being seen as a color or a race, because it functions as a powerful cultural norm visible only in its relation to people constructed as not-white (Morrison; Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe 367; Nayak 157). For example, African Americans and Native Americans are often seen as having race, while white Americans are often viewed as race-less. Thus, an individual white "child" on a cover helped to suggest that "teenage pregnancy" was not about race, but rather age.

Second, the concept of age, and specifically the idea of a developmental, age-based stage of adolescence, is inextricably intertwined with the production of whiteness. In her book *Act Your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*, Lesko describes adolescence as "a technology of whiteness," or a construct that produces and reflects the colonialist idea of whiteness as civilized (11). "Adolescence" developed in the early twentieth century in conversation with recapitulation theory, theorizing the development of the individual (middle-class white male) as parallel with the development of civilization, from tribal culture to monarchal urban society. White children were seen to age in development as individuals, while other races were constructed as being consistently culturally deficient. A white pregnant body on a national cover may prompt action and intervention in this important life-stage, while a nonwhite pregnant body on a cover could potentially reveal taboo national anxieties—that is, the national concern about poor women on welfare reproducing.

While I did find visual representations of teens of color in the 1980s, these photos were not cover images and the women were not presented in the same childlike way. For example, *Time*'s 1985 feature article included images of mothers representing different racial groups. Article-author Wallis emphasizes that the mothers she presents "are of different races, but their tales and laments have a haunting sameness" (79). However, while the young white girl is described as a "prototypical adolescent" flipping her "blond curls" and wishing she would have thought more about how hard having a baby would be, the mothers who are not white are presented as less "typical." One of the clearest distinctions among *Time*'s images of women is that the white young women are presented as child-like, pensive, and

still-pregnant; they are not yet visualized as outcast mothers. Viewers can imagine that there is still the potential that something better may come for these pregnant children.[58] In contrast, the images depicting women of color show them with their children, most often more than one. For example, one of the *Time* feature article photographs depicts Native American young mother, Stephanie Charette, described as one of ten children and a mother of two children herself. She was photographed with her brothers, sisters, mother, and children in front of a deteriorating white house. The pose of the family, with children peeking out from the home's three windows and doorway and some seated in the front yard, suggests that the house is overflowing with children. Indeed, the image constructs the idea of an excess fertility in Native American mothers. The abundance of children suggests that Charette and her mother irresponsibly reproduced too many children. Moreover, the meaning of this image is constrained by the text of the article. Wallis writes that in studying teenage pregnancy we see "disadvantage creating disadvantage," and thus, "it is no wonder that teen pregnancy is widely viewed as the very hub of the U.S. poverty cycle" (79). Yet, returning to the composition of the image of the white woman on the cover, one could argue that America is not persuaded to view white young mothers as disadvantaged women reproducing disadvantaged children; instead, the white mothers are used to engage audience interest by prompting fears for the potential degeneration of this

[58] Social anthropologist Ghassan Hage explains that the "causality attributed to the racialized and fetishized identity is . . . conceived in terms of potential"; that is, the potential "to be what the idealized best of the community are" (203). White teen mothers are envisioned as having the potential to escape the outcomes of teen- age pregnancy, perhaps because of their whiteness, and to become "good" mothers. Solinger (*Wake Up*) shows the material consequences of this line of thinking: during the post-World War II era, young and single pregnant white women were often sent to maternity homes and coerced into giving up their babies so that they could return to live potentially successful lives as wives and mothers when they were older. She suggests that this option was motivated both by a belief in the possibility for redemption of white women and a thriving adoption market for white babies. In contrast, young and single pregnant black women—who had few maternity homes available to them and no prospects of giving up their babies for adoption—often kept their babies and were considered inherently bad choice-makers.

individual girl-gone-wrong.[59]

African American mother Desiree Bell is also pictured in *Time* as having many children, and she is associated with discourses of bad mothering. The photograph shows Bell pushing her two sons in a grocery cart in Brooklyn. She is quoted as saying, "I was resentful of my unborn son. I used to punch myself in the stomach. Poor Eddie . . . the first year I wouldn't play with him" (87). The quote encourages readers to pity the young boy who has a black teenager for a mother, instead of questioning what exactly Bell is resentful about. Readers do not read the narratives of resentment in conjunction with photos of white young mothers. Indeed, in her work Solinger draws on historical research to argue that poor, minoritized women are often labeled as bad choice-makers and inherently bad mothers (*Wake Up* 7). Through the rhetorical work of these textualized images, a rationale still appears for preventing these women from making such unsound choices—a rationale that legitimized the sterilization of poor, immigrant, and racially minoritized women in previous decades (Collins 76; Solinger *Pregnancy and Power*).

However, it is important to note the tension created by setting Bell and her sons against the background of Brooklyn. The visually blurry though textually identified low-income community setting could potentially lead to an understanding of Bell's motherhood as implicated in a larger context of poverty. She is shown doing caretaking work—taking her two children to purchase food—and thus readers could interpret her as a hardworking

[59] Macleod illustrates that colonialists' construction of the developmental stage of "adolescence" hinged on the "threat of degeneration" (5)—that is, popular understandings of adolescence are premised on the belief that if things go wrong, the degeneration of the individual (and the nation) could result. Explicitly racialized subjects (like black young women) help to convey this threat, because they are often constructed as already degenerate, while white young women are made to reflect the potential of progressing as an individual (31). The chronology of *Time*'s cover-story images suggested that teenage pregnancy led to racialized degeneration: beginning with images of childlike pregnant white women, the article moved on to images of poor black and Native American women with multiple children.

mother of circumstance. But the text of the article, specifically the decision to highlight Bell's own statement about neglecting her child, works to foster the reading of Bell's experience as negligent behavior.

Although the article quotes Alan Guttmacher Institute president Jeannie Rosoff, who insisted that "this is not a black problem" (80), the images clearly support speculation that the national consequences of this problem have to do with the behavior of poor women. For example, Wallis reports from her interview with Joy Dryfoos, a researcher for the Rockefeller Foundation, that "[m]iddle-class girls tend not to have babies, [Dryfoos] says, 'because Mother would kill them if they did.' For the lower socioeconomic groups, she says, 'it's the big shoulder shrug. They don't get abortions. They don't use contraception. It's just not that important; they don't have a sense of the future,'" to which Wallis adds: "No wonder teenage pregnancies have reached epidemic proportions in some ghetto areas" (86). Dryfoos and Wallis gloss over the history of poor women struggling to access contraceptive services and abortions and attribute poverty to poor women's sexual behavior, ignorance, and carelessness.[60]

Further constructing a view of teenage pregnancy as the consequence of immature and unthinking women, large colored boxes are interspersed throughout the article and include young women's seemingly immature or superficial comments highlighted in a large font: for instance, "I was going to have an abortion but I spent the money on clothes instead" (79); and "I had birth control pills in my drawer, I just didn't take them" (87). The visual rhetoric in the article, including photos of young women and the

[60] Consider the Hyde Amendment of 1976, which stipulated that the government "will not pay for a $200 or $300 abortion procedure for a poor woman on Medicaid. But it will pay for a $2,000 to $3,000 sterilization procedure for the same poor woman" (abortion-provider Brenda Joyner, qtd. in Solinger *Beggars and Choosers* 16).

highlighted quotes, focus the problem on *women's* behavior and downplay cultural constraints like poverty, racism, sexism, and unequal access to education and contraception—even though these issues are mentioned in the article.

Articles from the 1980s often explored multiple and contradictive aspects to the so-called problems of young motherhood, such as limited access to contraceptives, limited federal funding for abortions, and a lack of support systems available to mothers in specific communities. Indeed, it is difficult to disassociate women's reproductive decisions and outcomes from these contexts. Yet, I maintain that visual rhetoric trains the public to focus on women as the problem, even in a context that acknowledges multiple factors at hand. The visuals amplified easier explanations, such as that poor people did not try hard enough or did not care, that women were failing to control their fertility in responsible ways, or that teenagers were careless, oblivious, and self-centered. These explanations were assumptions within a culture fixated with colorblind racial ideologies and an emphasis on individualism and bootstraps mentality.

For example, in that same year of 1985, the *Chicago Tribune* included a front-page article by Bonita Brodt and Jerry Thornton on teenage pregnancy. The exposé features a close-up picture of a happy, young black mother named Iris Moore. However, the image and title create a startling irony: namely, Moore stands in the nursery, smiling at an equally happy onlooker, and holding her swaddled newborn, yet the headline decries "Cycle of Poverty, Despair Born Again in Delivery Room." Through this juxtaposition, Moore's fertility is associated with the root of poverty in America. The authors of the article explain that "[a]t 17 Iris is the oldest of five children in her family. Her mother is on

welfare and her father is unemployed" (1). Like the *Time*'s article, the *Chicago Tribune* portrays women of color as excessively fertile. Furthermore, the image of Moore and the descriptions of her "chewing bubble gum and singing along with a song on the radio" (ibid.) present her as oblivious or undisturbed by the seriousness of her reproductive decision. Indeed, the authors maintain that Moore "seems unaware of any of the complications the baby may face later. Iris has not bought her baby any clothes, and she said it will not have a crib" (10). While the ominous phrase about "complications" may refer partly to the fact that "it"—the baby—was born premature, the statement more clearly refers to that fact that "there is good reason to believe that [the baby] will be condemned to repeat the same vicious cycle that took hold of her mother, her grandmother and her great-grandmother, by having a baby during—or perhaps even before—her teens" (1). The authors explain that "once the cycle takes hold and a young girl has a child, her ability to improve her economic or social condition and pull herself out into a more productive segment of society is limited" (10). Hence women are assigned the responsibility of pulling themselves up by their bootstraps as it were, and when they fail to do so, they are labeled as careless perpetuators of poverty.

Although they are not explicitly stated in racial terms, these statements and Moore's image demonstrate what critical race scholar Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls "blaming the victim," an integral part of racialized ideology "that [suggests that] minorities' standing is a product of their lack of effort, loose family organization, and inappropriate values" (40). In the *Chicago Tribune* article, Moore is described as a member of a deviant family that does not try to escape the poverty cycle. Although the article mentions major structural issues in

her community, such as segregation and a lack of jobs and housing, these are not proposed as the main sources of the problem of poverty. Moore's image enacts the rhetorical effects of the supposed welfare queen, "the lazy mother on public assistance who deliberately breeds children at the expense of taxpayers" (Roberts 17).

Images of so-called welfare queens divert attention from the social and economic forces that have created hardships like poverty. What viewers *see* is a smiling Moore and, in a subsequent photo, a close-up of her small baby breathing with the help of a ventilator. The article ends by quoting Ruth Rothstein, the president of the hospital where Moore gave birth. She states these women are "the price we are paying for unresolved social problems. They are the effects of substandard housing, poverty, and ignorance" (Rothstein, qtd. in Brodt and Thornton 10). Yet, the visual rhetoric of the image of Moore brushed over the implications of her living conditions and poverty and explained her situation through her supposed ignorance.

3.6 Implications of Images of Teenage Pregnancy

bell hooks asserts that "[t]here is power in looking" (94). Visual representations provide opportunities for a critical gaze—a gaze that may intervene in pathologizing discourses about teenage pregnancy. By breaking down the visual rhetoric used to prompt public concern about pregnant teenagers, I aimed to destabilize common readings of the teen-mom as simply a problematic or stigmatized figure in society. She is, when composed just right, a useful rhetorical construct that helps to circulate idealizations of adolescence and traditional (white) family structures and to (re)construct concerns about the reproductive decisions of minoritized women.

Future work may consider whether the visual rhetorical strategies identified in this article are at play in representations of teen mothers today. For example, news media and interest groups often illustrate the nation's so-called problem with teenage pregnancy with visual representations of white, young celebrity pregnancies, such as Bristol Palin, Jamie Lynn Spears, and MTV's *Teen Mom* cast, as well as fictive films and television series featuring white, young pregnant or parenting women, such as *Juno*, *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, and *The Pregnancy Pact*.[61] The visual emphasis remains on the bodies of women, and white young mothers still appear to be key in covering the issue.

This analysis shows that magazine covers representing teenage pregnancy during the 1970s and '80s used individual white young women situated under generalized banners like "school-age mothers" and "teenage pregnancy" to focus viewers' attention on the timing of women's reproductive decisions as the source of national problems. This suggests that print media relied on white bodies as race-neutral entities to focus attention on an age-based social problem, universalizing the societal concern over reproductive decisions beyond race and class. However, images from this period continued to reflect and construct anxiety over the reproductive decisions of minoritized women by depicting groups of unidentifiable black young women alongside demographic graphs and other women of color with multiple children.

[61] As a specific example, the National Campaign to Prevent Teenage and Unplanned Pregnancy tracks and posts popular media representations of teenage motherhood on its "entertainment media" link for the stated purpose of prompting discussion about teenage pregnancy and how to prevent it. This list does not include depictions of explicitly low-income mothers or pregnant/parenting teens from minoritized populations, such as in the critically acclaimed film *Precious* directed by Lee Daniels. Perhaps this is because such depictions may prompt conversations about complicated issues of race and poverty. The continuing use of white teen mothers in print and popular media encourages conversations about a generalized problem of teenage pregnancy, ignoring problems faced by poor and racialized youth, while implicitly (re)constructing classed and racialized anxieties about who is reproducing and what effect this has for the nation.

In the end, this chapter illustrates that young pregnant and mothering women are simultaneously present and absent from the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy. Visual representations of their bodies and sound-bites from their experiences (e.g., "This is hard"; "I had birth control pills in my drawer, I just didn't take them") are integral to reproducing belief in teenage pregnancy as a social problem. At the same time, the full perspectives of pregnant and mothering young women—as whole people immersed in communities and social structures with varied experiences and perspectives—are absent. Even though visual representations of young pregnant and mothering women are used to focus the nation's attention on *them* as a key cause of poverty and other societal ills, young mothers' perspectives are missing from both media representations of teenage pregnancy (chapter three) and scholarship that counters mainstream discourses of teenage pregnancy (chapter two). This certainly does not mean that pregnant and mothering teens have not engaged in rhetorical constructions that challenge, change, or intervene in the dominant constructions of who they are. But it does mean that young mothers' narratives that challenge dominant discourses of "teenage pregnancy" are not often heard. In the next chapter, I analyze published first-person accounts from teen mothers who contest popular (mis)conceptions of the social consequences of teenage motherhood—testimonies that I see as counter-stories to the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy.

CHAPTER 4: EXPERTS, STATISTICS, AND TEEN MOTHERS: COUNTERNARRATIVES AS RHETORICS OF RESISTANCE

"In resistance, the exploited, the oppressed, work to expose the false reality—to reclaim and recover ourselves" –bell hooks, 3.

"The constitution of specific sexual subjects also creates the conditions for reverse discourse, enabling 'deviant' and powerless groups to speak on their own behalf, to demand recognition and an acceptance of their naturalness"—Michel Foucault, 118.

As I write this chapter, the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy—the grand narrative of irresponsible, careless, and/or victimized young white women and irresponsible, careless, and/or manipulative young women of color—is alive and well, calling for audiences to recognize these characters, to mourn the loss of such women's life ambitions, or to publically condemn their reproductive decisions as detrimental to the national economy and the American way of life. This gendered and racialized grand narrative also prompts young women to see the first signs of their pregnancy as the tragic downfall of their lives. So-called expert commentary about teen pregnancy from presidents, doctors, scholars, and other authorized officials invites little skepticism from those who are brought up to trust authoritative expert opinions whose narratives are often reiterated by family and culture. Thus, to identify (or to be identified) as a teen mother is to recognize oneself (or to be recognized as) a character in this tragic narrative.

I know that I felt this way when I was seventeen and discovered that I was pregnant. Later, as a creative writing undergraduate frustrated with my peers and professors being so damned surprised that a real, living teen mother was sitting with them at a university, I wrote a creative non-fiction story about my experiences as a mothering

student. I was invited to read this narrative at a public literary event. When I arrived, I was certain that the audience would berate me for publically embracing my role as a young mother and for using my experiences as a stigmatized woman to critique the rhetoric of teenage pregnancy. Instead, the audience applauded. One audience member actually approached me after I spoke to thank me for opening her eyes to the ways in which she had unfairly scrutinized young mothers. The potential of sharing a counter-story—that is, a story that confronts the taken-for-granted assumptions of a particular world view—became clear to me. In this chapter, I analyze the potential for some young mothers' personal narratives, or counter-stories, to resist hegemonic discourses that are meant to silence, discipline, and contain marginalized subjects.

In a culture that deems teen motherhood abject, young pregnant and parenting women must reckon with how their experience aligns with popularized assumptions. As Foucault's statement that I open this chapter with illustrates, the social construction of "deviant" or what Butler would call "abject" subjects also constructs opportunities (however constrained) for those deviant subjects to resist—that is, to utilize the identification as other-than-normal for the purpose of speaking back to or "reversing" the discourses that construct and constrain them (Foucault 118; Butler 15). Drawing on feminist poststructuralist theory, Weedon argues that "as individuals we are not the mere objects of language but the sites of discursive struggle" (102). Therefore, pregnant and parenting young women "may resist particular interpellations or produce new versions of meaning from the conflicts and contradictions between existing discourses" (102). Weedon's point suggests that the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy can be

resisted, revised, or subverted by new ways of speaking. So while Nathanson may be right that the origin and broad circulation of teenage pregnancy discourses illustrates that "sexually unorthodox women . . . have played little conscious role in the creation of their own identity as a sexual category," I emphasize that "sexually unorthodox" young mothers have most certainly been active in deconstructing and/or resisting those identities (5).[62]

In this chapter, I focus on the stories young mothers tell to intervene in discourses that construct them as examples of a teenage pregnancy problem. I rhetorically analyze first-person accounts from teen mothers who contest popular (mis)conceptions of the social consequences of teenage motherhood—testimonies that I see as counter-stories to the dominant narrative.[63] Drawing on theories of counternarrative and resistance, I analyze common rhetorical strategies the authors use to speak against exclusionary practices toward and (mis)conceptions about teenage mothers. Specifically, this analysis highlights a variety of counter-rhetorical strategies including young mothers' efforts to

[62] During the course of my research, I found evidence of many forms of young women's resistance to negative constructions of young pregnancy and the policies and attitudes that relate to these discourses. For example, Luker shares the story of Fay Ordway, a white pregnant honors student who sued for her right to stay in school in 1971. Ordway explicitly resisted the social pressure to go to a maternity home and/or have an assigned social worker. In the end, Ordway won her right to stay in school, but she was denied her honors position and college scholarship. Luker shares that Ordway later placed her child for adoption, implicitly suggesting that these injustices made it difficult for Ordway to mother while also continuing her education and career ambitions (*Dubious* 98). Kelly brings attention to a more recent example of such resistance, when she describes Amanda Lemon's fight against her high school's decision to deny her a position in the National Honor Society because her "character" was compromised by the fact that she had a child (*Pregnant* 1). Finally, in 1993, a *New York Times* article brought attention to pregnant cheerleaders' successful efforts to repeal their school's decision to kick them off the cheerleading squad (Verhovek; see also Luker *When Sex* 66).

[63] It is important to note that resistance to negative perspectives on young single motherhood is also an agenda of anti-abortion advocates who see the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy as potentially persuading young women to opt for abortion. In this chapter, I look selectively at the rhetoric(s) of writers who resist the pathologization of young parenthood and, often, advocate for other feminist perspectives as well. Future work could consider the intersecting rhetorical objectives of scholars, activists, and mothering women who contest the dominant narrative from different positions on the political spectrum.

- render uncommon the commonplaces about teenage pregnancy and motherhood,
- characterize experts and others who construct/circulate such commonplaces,
- re-embody "teenage pregnancy" with life experiences by talking back to "the statistics" which define them,
- tell success stories that defy the statistics,
- complicate the reception/function of their success stories,
- and, finally, speak to the structures which construct experiences for young, mothering women in an effort to change them.

By illustrating these counter-rhetorical tactics, I intend to document young mothers' intervention in the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy and identify the available means of countering rhetorics that marginalize mothering women. In addition, I join scholarly conversations about rhetorical frameworks for personal testimonies and counternarratives by considering the role that book editors play in facilitating the oppositional agenda of counter-stories.

When conducting my rhetorical analysis, I drew from three published collections. The first is *Hip Mama* zine editor Ariel Gore and *Hip Mama* managing director Bee Lavender's 2001 book *Breeder: Real-Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers. Breeder* is a collection of creative non-fiction narratives written by mothering writers who challenge assumptions about motherhood. Other than Gore's introduction to the text (which briefly mentions that she and co-editor Lavender were teen mothers), three narratives function as counternarratives to the dominant discourses of teenage pregnancy and motherhood: Allison Crews' "When I was Garbage," Lavender's "Bread and Roses,"

and Jennifer Savage's "Learning to Surf." Second, I analyzed 35 narratives published in the 2004 collection, *You Look Too Young to be a Mom: Teen Mothers Speak Out on Love, Learning, and Success*, edited by Deborah Davis. Davis is a doula (childbirth assistant) with experience facilitating writing workshops for pregnant and parenting teenagers. The final set of teen mother counternarratives that I analyzed came from *Girl-Mom*, a website that provides "support, community, and education for young mamas" but also forwards the oppositional purpose of "changing the face of young parenthood." Most of the activity on *Girl-Mom* includes exchanges in the discussion forum. However, I focused my analysis on the twelve personal narratives posted in 2003 to the "features" section.[64] Although the topics of *Girl-Mom* feature articles vary considerably, I chose narratives that were structured around what it was like to become or be a "teen mother" (i.e., the experience of finding out, telling parents, going to the hospital) as these stories could serve as a point of comparison for *Breeder* and *You Look Too Young to be a Mom*.[65]

---

[64] I am not an active member of *Girl-Mom*. I am a rhetorician interested in how marginalized mothers attempt to persuade others to reject the worldview that positions teenage pregnancy and motherhood as a burden or a signification of failure. Thus, I do not focus my analysis on the conversations exchanged in the discussion forums. I feel that these forums are for the discursive exchange between *Girl-Mom*s and their allies and this chapter does not focus on those communicative patterns. I feel comfortable highlighting the strategies the authors use in the articles, because they are posted within a "featured" publicly accessible section of the site. These narratives support *Girl-Mom*'s rhetorical purpose of changing "the face of teen parenthood."

[65] Although I draw from these three collections as sites for researching young mothers' counternarrative tactics and the editorial practices that frame them, it is important to foreground that edited book collections and websites are very different types of media that affect how the text is constructed, circulated, and read. For example, the book publication process relies heavily on the efforts of editors and the reception/input of publishing companies. The process is long and includes multiple opportunities for editing, revising, and re-shaping the narratives and the book framework prior to publication. Calls for contributions to published collections are broadly circulated, but reach only select writers who must prepare and send in texts that meet guidelines by a deadline. Due, in part, to this publication process, print-based edited collections carry a different *ethos* for readers. In contrast, stories can be posted to a website much more quickly—in the case of *Girl-Mom* requiring only a review by the website editor or moderator before posting in the "feature"

While the focus of this chapter is primarily on the rhetorical strategies deployed by teenage mothers as rhetors, it is important to note that the publication forum affects the audience and impact of counternarratives. As edited collections, the editors play a large role in the selection, construction, interpretation, and ultimate effect of the stories I analyze. Thus, I first discuss the complications and potentials of editors as "experts" who facilitate the oppositional effect of teen mother counternarratives.

4.1 "Experts" and Frameworks for Counter-Stories

Often, when and if we do hear from women about their experiences with young motherhood, their stories are framed as sensational dramas or sobering lessons for others. Educational ethnographer Deirdre Kelly's research on print media coverage of "teenage pregnancy" from 1980-1992 illustrates that teen mothers' testimonies are often "selected and edited in ways that make them feel that their main message has been distorted" ("Stigma" 438). For instance, young mothers' perspectives are often followed by statements from official figures like psychologists or credentialed researchers who tell audiences what the young women's stories *really* mean. Furthermore, teen mother "success" stories—which could, arguably be considered a counternarrative to dominant assumptions that teen mothers are educational, familial, or financial failures—are often framed as exceptional cases, sustaining the belief that *most* teenage mothers do not make

---

section. The framework for the online narrative is more likely to shift and change as website designs and structure need to be changed. Moreover, Web content can also be more easily engaged in a non-linear fashion, constructing a different experience for the reader. In future work considering Web- and print-based publications, I will extend my consideration of the frame and function of the publication medium for counter-rhetorical texts.

good parents, students, or citizens.[66] Finally, teen mothers' stories are often used as strategies to prevent other teenagers from having unprotected sex or babies.[67]

In this discursive context, the conditions and constraints of the rhetorical opportunities offered to young mothering women shape the outcome of sharing their personal stories. Drawing on Foucault's theory of discourse, Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray write that "the structures of speech acts mediate our subjectivity and experiences" (264). Alcoff and Gray illustrate that in many contexts where people publically share personal testimonies—such as talk shows, psychology sessions, and journalistic articles—"some participants are accorded the authoritative status of interpreters and others are constructed as 'naïve transmitters of raw experience'" (264). That is, the framework of the testimony determines whether the audience is encouraged to find truth value in the speaker's words or whether the audience is encouraged to hear the speaker only as an example of something that an expert authority will later explain or turn into truth value.

Considering the rhetorical situation of young mothers' stories is especially important considering the imperative to make teen mothers preventative examples for others. For example, Kelly observed such a rhetorical situation when conducting ethnographic research at a school that asked mothering students to produce a play about their experiences. During the play-building experience, Kelly observed tension between the young mothers' stated objective in writing and performing the play (to disrupt

[66] I discuss young mothers' critiques of this move later the chapter.
[67] For example, the *National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy* has a history of using teen mothers' testimony to forward the agenda of teen pregnancy prevention. For a critique of using teen mothers' experiences in sex education contexts see Cathy Chabot , Jean A. Shoveller, Joy L. Johnson and Ken Prkachin's "Morally Problematic: Young Mothers' Lives as Parables About the Dangers of Sex."

stereotypes about teen mothers and encourage people at the school to be more accepting of them) and the teachers' goals (to warn non-pregnant and parenting students at the school of the dire consequences of teenage pregnancy) (169). In the end, the performers were not happy with the play and the way that their experiences were interpreted by the audience; the young mothers chose not to do a play the following year. From her ethnographic observations Kelly concludes, "I believe the main explanation was that many of the teen mothers did not feel comfortable having their life experiences reduced by other adults to a mere warning" (183). [68] This example shows that competing interests in the use value of young mothers' stories, and adults' efforts to shape the interpretation of those stories, constrain what Alcoff and Gray call the transgressive potential a personal narrative—that is, the ability of that narrative to intervene in dominant discourses.

The importance of power relations constructing and constructed by the discursive forum for counternarratives guided my selection of texts for analysis. First, I selected publications that allowed young mothers to create and structure their narratives before submitting them for publication. Second, I chose edited forums in which both editors and contributing authors appeared to share the rhetorical purpose of *using* the stigma and exigence of "teenage pregnancy" for transgressive ends. That is, these publications frame

[68] As another example, Nancy Lesko's chapter, "Curriculum Differentiation as Social Redemption: The Case of School-Aged Mothers," describes public panels hosted by the "award-winning alternative high school for teenage mothers" called the Bright Prospects School. During these events, pregnant and parenting students from the school were offered the opportunity to speak to the community. Lesko notes that girls would typically "confess" their past "sins" and wild behavior and explain how pregnancy (and the experiences offered by the school) helped them to mature and become domesticated achievers. Lesko suggests that these panel narratives "redeem" the girls by suggesting that they are no longer deviant. The testimonies also boost the *ethos* of the school and perpetuate upward mobility myths that "obscure[s] real social impediments for successful single mothers' lives" (136). Thus, although teen mothers' make themselves visible to a community that would otherwise consider them "failures," the ultimate effect of the panels was to rewrite the women into normative scripts through the disciplining functions of the alternative school.

teen mothers' counternarratives as acts of resistance—not as sex education lessons for others. As young mother Julie Cushing writes, "My life doesn't suck, and no amount of guilt or 'concern for the public good' will make me say it does" (173). In the next section, I consider how editorial practices may help to intervene in the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy.

4.2 Editor as Expert Facilitator of Counternarrative

As Alcoff and Gray argue, the framework for a personal testimony mediates the potential of that personal narrative to challenge dominant discourses (see also Naples 1157). Regarding counternarratives published in an anthology or on a website, the editor and the structure of the publication forum function as the mediating force. Editors collect, select, shape, and present narratives included on websites and in print-based collections; in doing so, editors consciously construct a framework for the personal stories they choose to publish. In a way, editors function as the authorized "experts" of the collections. Alcoff and Gray are skeptical of any speaking situation in which an "expert" interprets or shapes the marginalized rhetor's narrative; they warn,

> We must . . . struggle to maintain autonomy over the conditions of our speaking out if we are to develop its subversive potential. And an important aspect of this autonomy is the disenfranchisement of outside expert authority over our discourse, obstructing the ability of 'experts' to 'police our statements,' to put us in a defensive posture, or to determine the focus and framework of our discourse. (284)

However, in her work, Nancy Naples points out that feminist "experts" may "participate in creating resistance strategies and oppositional politics" by forwarding movements for social change in specialized circles and by helping to blur the boundaries between experiential knowledges and institutionalized expert knowledges (1177).

In collections which feature young mothers' narratives, I see evidence for Alcoff and Gray's concern about expert mediation, as well as evidence of the potential of "experts" as suggested by Naples. Each framework determines the kinds of stories that get to represent "young" or "teen" mother experiences either through the editors' choice of texts or through the privileged medium of the framework. For instance, it takes literacy, time, and materials to submit a story to an editor of a book collection. It similarly takes writing and computer literacy, time, and access to technology to submit a story to a website editor. The complications of the editor's framework is worthy of attention. [69] However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on two potentials I see for an editor's framework to facilitate the oppositional effect of young mothers' counternarratives. First, I discuss how editors help to define an oppositional framework for counternarratives. Second, I consider how editors foster an opportunity for readers to see new connections and conflicts between diverse experiences of motherhood.

Defining an Oppositional Framework

Editors of counternarrative collections develop frameworks that orient audiences to the oppositional agendas of the included texts. By using the phrase "oppositional

[69] For a critique of two of the collections I look at see feminist critic Mary Thompson's "Third Wave Feminist and the Politics of Motherhood."

agenda," I do not mean to construct or reify a simple dichotomy between discourses. Instead, I am trying to describe the way that the authors and editors explicitly resist dominant understandings of motherhood and position their narratives as interventions in women's experiences of motherhood. For example, *Breeder*'s packaging emphasizes its rhetorical purpose as a counternarrative. The cover of the collection features a pregnant white woman in a white tee-shirt with a "Breeder" logo across her chest. The image is cropped so that only the woman's mid-section is visible, her shirt arranged to expose her pregnant belly. Situated under the cover model's bellybutton are statements that engage readers with the edgy *ethos* of the contributors: "From the editors of *Hip Mama*" and "Foreword by Dan Savage." Calling out to readers who are familiar with Gore and Lavender's zine *Hip Mama* and Dan Savage's nationally syndicated sex column, the collection is packaged as a raw and edgy take on motherhood—one that will most certainly be political, sexual, and frank. Adding to the rebel feel of the book are chapter break pages illustrated by tattoo artist Johnny Thief. If a book is judged by its cover (and its image content), then *Breeder* is positioned to attract readers who are interested in challenging normative notions of motherhood.

Moreover, the decision to title the collection with the pejorative term "breeder" conveys a direct engagement with judgmental attitudes toward women who reproduce. This title makes explicit that these "real-life experiences" will speak back to assumptions about mothering women. Dan Savage's forward partially explains the title when he writes about the first time he heard the term as a 16-year-old. Savage explains that his older lover had used the word to refer to "straight people. Breeders make babies, [his

boyfriend] explained, they breed. We don't. Gay people don't have to worry about birth control or children or expectations" (ix). By sharing a story about his first experience with the term, Savage aligns "breeder" with negative attitudes toward straight people who reproduce and as a way to distinguish the gay community from *those* issues.[70] Editor Ariel Gore, who writes the introduction of the collection, further clarifies the choice of expression when she tells a story of her experiences with the word "breeder." She explains that whenever a pregnant woman walked by the punk rock crowd she hung out with in high school, one of the people in the group would yell out "Breeder!" as a way to express their revulsion at the idea of bringing children into a messed up world (ix). Thus, the three teen mothers' narratives positioned within *Breeder* benefit from a framework that encourages audiences to read for challenges to traditional beliefs about women who reproduce.

In much the same way, the visual-verbal rhetoric of *You Look Too Young to be a Mom: Teen Mothers Speak Out on Love, Learning, and Success*'s book cover helps to orient readers to the oppositional purpose of the text. Under the title, readers can see a blurred photograph of a tattooed mother holding a child; the mother and child are both turned away from the camera's gaze. The photograph puts the viewer in a spectator's position. The label above mother and child ("You Look Too Young to be a Mom") helps to (re)create a moment of viewing a young mother from afar and labeling her based on assumptions about teenagers and teenage pregnancy. In her introduction to the collection, Davis explains the purpose of the book as changing readers' worldview so that they

[70] Later, Savage explains that he "went and bred. Sort of" when he and his boyfriend adopted; yet, he still recognizes that *Breeder* is focused on the different ways women enact motherhood (ix).

accept teenage mothers as people who do not deserve "insensitive" comments and discrimination. Davis begins her introduction by writing, "'Teen Mom.' What image comes to mind when you hear this?" The opening prompts someone who is not a teenage mother and/or not familiar with a close, living example of a teenage mother, to instinctively respond with commonplaces about teenage motherhood. Davis explains she hopes to challenge those commonplaces and get readers to see teenage mothers differently. Davis shares a story of witnessing a young couple treated poorly by the registration clerk at a hospital. Reflecting on this moment she writes, "I wanted to offer them [young mothers] a forum for sharing their voices and experiences so that others' eyes might be opened and their prejudices and preconceived ideas questioned" (4). Thus, this book is packaged as a means for initiating a paradigm-shift for those who believe commonplaces about young motherhood.

To encourage outsiders of the teenage motherhood experience to prepare themselves for a paradigm shift, Davis uses herself as an example of someone who assumed teenage mothers were failures. She writes, "I didn't always view young mothers in the positive light I now see them" (1). With some stated trepidation, Davis tells of an interaction she had with a young pregnant woman while directing a community service program for abused teenagers. She admits that when "Julie"—a victim of family abuse who was living with a friend at the time—became pregnant Davis was "stunned" (2). It complicated Davis' idealizations of Julie as the innocent, abused young woman Davis was trying to help. Davis admits she was "disappointed. She was to be one of my success stories, but she'd gone and ruined her life—and, consequently, a portion of mine" (2). By

opening the collection with a memory of Davis' past unthinking acceptance of the dominant narrative that frames teen mothers as failures who cannot (or should not) be helped, Davis encourages readers to rethink their assumptions of teenage mothers. Her *ethos* as an ally for teenage mothers is built upon her willingness to share how she was complicit in the dominant narrative as well as her efforts to solicit and publish young mothers' stories. Although Davis appears committed to handing over the status of "expert" on teenage motherhood to the young women who contribute to the collection, she also appears to recognize her role as a liaison between young mothers and those who look down on them. She builds her *ethos* as an expert on teenage motherhood who can testify for teens' worthiness as parents and people 1) by referencing her experiences with pregnant and parenting teens (as a doula, community service director, and writing instructor) and 2) by illustrating her status as a middle-class white adult who accepted the dominant narrative of teenage motherhood and postponed her pregnancy until she was 35—with two published books under her belt (2). If Davis can change her mind and think that young parents have potential as parents and people, then why can't everyone else?

As a final example, *Girl-Mom* is a website structured as an oppositional framework that shifts who gets to tell the story of teenage motherhood. The website was created in 1999 by Bee Lavender, a young single mother and publisher of an online zine called *Hip Mama*. After observing a surprisingly hostile backlash to a discussion forum she created for "Girl-Moms" on *Hip Mama*, Lavender decided to create a separate "feminist, pro-choice advocacy website by and for young mothers." The "About" section helps to position the website as an oppositional framework that intervenes in dominant

discourses of "teenage pregnancy." It features a mission statement, disclaimer, and/or manifesto of sorts which states, very clearly, the content and purpose of the website.

> Teenage pregnancy is not a "crisis" or "epidemic," like so many people would like us to believe. The only true epidemic associated with teen pregnancy is the overwhelming and universal lack of support available to young mothers. The only true crisis is the denial of the fact that teenage girls can be, are, and always have been, both sexual and maternal beings, with the capacity to love, procreate, and nurture. We love our children fiercely. We protect and care for them like any mother, of any age, would. Through Girl-Mom, we hope to slowly show that to the world. (*Girl-Mom*, About)

The statement articulates the political mission of the website, encouraging visitors to align with the mission or get out! In the third paragraph, the *Girl-Mom* website editors also strive to preempt typical critiques as discussed in chapter one. They write, "Girl-Mom in no way encourages teen pregnancy, as some critics have implied. Girl-Mom encourages mothers." In the fourth paragraph they make clear, "We do not encourage childless teens to follow our path; face it, it's a tough path. But we encourage all teens that wake to the call of 'mama!' before dawn breaks, to do all that they can to empower themselves and nurture their children." By carefully framing their site as a space for empowering young mothers, the editors of the site attempt to deflect judgmental posts in the discussion boards and encourage members to accept the terms and values of their space.

By defining an oppositional framework, the texts invite readers who are open to challenging dominant discourses and orient audiences to the rhetorical purposes of the creative narratives within. This is especially important for young mothers' narratives which are often read or circulated as exceptional success stories or lessons to share with young people.

The Importance of Connections and Conflicts between Narratives

The second potential I find of edited print and web collections of counternarratives relates to the connections and conflicts established between stories. Editors may situate teenage mother counternarratives alongside other critical reflections on motherhood in order to further trouble normative constructions of reproduction and parenthood. In her analysis of zines, (b)orderlands scholar Adela C. Licona calls such articulations (b)orderlands rhetorics, or third space tactics of resistance. Licona explains that making connections between previously unconnected experiences can prove "discursively disobedient" in a way that makes clear that "our lived experiences [are] partial, real, and imagined, and always in the process of becoming" (106). Specifically, by situating teen mothers' narratives alongside other women's narrative experiences of motherhood, the editors help to create new understandings about obstacles mothers face across lines of difference. *Breeder*'s collection of stories from women of different ages disarticulates problems attributed to teenage motherhood—such as difficulty finishing school, physical and mental stress, and lack of friends or support systems—from the deviance of a time period ("adolescence"). Readers learn that many mothers struggle with these issues.

For instance, some noticeable patterns in narratives in *Breeder* disrupt middle-class norms of motherhood. Lavender's counternarrative in *Breeder* presents her reflections, as a thirty-year-old woman, remembering the experience of parenting in her teens and twenties. Lavender is positioned to speak to how age affects the ability to parent. For example, she writes, "As a teenager it had been easy to put out zines, organize protests, work in nonprofits, study, have fun, even have a baby. But adding a real job on top of all the other commitments tipped the balance" (118). Lavender makes the rarely publicized claim that teen years may be the more manageable time for finding resources to support multiple life projects at once (motherhood included). Lavender's narrated struggle to finish graduate school, figure out the working world, and find love function as proof that motherhood in her mid-twenties is different, but not necessarily any easier.

Other stories in *Breeder* similarly confront the often unstated premise in dominant discourse(s) of teenage pregnancy and motherhood—that parenting is easier and more successful if done when you have passed the threshold of your twenties and have finished your education. For example, the section "Working Girl," documents working mothers' concerns and experiences, such as breastfeeding in the workplace and losing out on opportunities to pursue a career change because of childcare issues. By positioning narratives alongside each other in specific sections, the editors of *Breeder* encourage readers to find new connections among struggles and successes of mothering experiences and the social and institutional structures that shape those experiences.

As another example, 15-year-old mother Allison Crews' "When I Was Garbage" is situated in the first section of *Breeder* called "Rites of Passage." This section includes

narratives about the process or aftermath of becoming a parent and (often) struggling to achieve norms of "real" or "good" mothering. Reading these narratives in sequence may prompt audiences to notice patterns such as women's feelings of disbelief, fear, disappointment, and anger around the time that they try to conceive or they discover a pregnancy. It also brings to light the power of institutions structuring the experiences of motherhood—medicalized care, adoption processes, and parenting norms—as well as people who judge and disrespect prospective mothers—such as strangers, pharmacists, and boyfriends. Thus, for instance, Crews' stated feelings of disbelief and fear following her realization that she is pregnant at 15 years old are echoed by a short introductory excerpt from "Pricilla" (2), by twenty-three-year-old Liesl Schwabe in"Motherhood and the Indian Post Office," and by married lawyer-turned-professional writer Min Jin Lee in "Will."

Not only can the counternarrative frameworks constructed by editors help to further oppositional intents by creating connections between mothers' experiences, the editors' presentation of the personal narratives can highlight important conflicts or tensions between narratives. For example, some teen mother counternarratives deploy idealizations of pregnancy, childbirth, mothering tasks, and children as a strategy to persuade audiences that teens can be good mothers. Following such narratives with a story from a mother whose narrative challenges those idealizations, helps to complicate and diversify "motherhood." This facilitates a more inclusive intervention in traditional discourses of motherhood.

The positioning of Crews' narrative in *Breeder* illustrates this potential. Responding to cultural assumptions that teens are unfit parents, Crews uses traditional markers of a "good mother" to build her *ethos* as a young mother. Crews makes use of idealizations of the birthing process as well as the biological capacities of women's maternal bodies to suggest that she is perfectly fit to bear and raise her child. She expresses her decision to keep her child by writing, "I did not want them [the adopting couple] to be the parents of my son. I wanted my boyfriend and I to be his parents. We *were* his parents" (33, emphasis in original). The premise of Crews' line of reasoning is that those who physically conceive of children are the most natural parents of that child. After giving birth to her child, Crews writes, "I had an abundance of precious golden milk that only a mother could make. *I was a mother*" (36, emphasis in original). Again, Crews' status as a sympathetic mother is premised by the cultural logic that "real" or "true" mothers are those who can conceive babies, bring them to term, and naturally produce the materials needed for their survival (i.e., breast milk).

Crews uses cultural markers of a happy and healthy child to end her narrative by providing a skeptical audience with proof that teen mothers can be "good" mothers and successful people. Crews begins the final paragraph describing her child: "Cade Mackenzie is now a happy 24-pound, 8-month old. He sleeps in my bed and is happiest when he is nursing, watching Teletubbies or listening to Bob Marley" (3). Emphasizing Cade's healthiness ("24-pounds," "nursing"), happiness, and typical middle-class baby-like activities (watching kid friendly television, listening to music on a sound system, and sleeping near/with the mother) helps Crews show that she is a normal and successful

mother. She assures audiences that she is continuing her education and "graduating a semester early" (37). Building from these markers of success, she argues that "contrary to what fear-based sex education classes, lovely couples and wonderful counselors had led me to believe in the past. . . . I am not garbage . . .I am an excellent mother" (4). These idealizations suggest that one way of countering the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy is to highlight personal experiences that demonstrate traditional norms of successful parents and adolescents. If a teen is eager to do the domestic and physical work of childbearing, able to perform middle-class practices of motherhood, and competent enough to continue/prioritize secondary education on top of that, then what is wrong with teenage motherhood?

Many scholars and activists well-versed in second and third wave feminist critiques of motherhood and the social mechanisms which make women inequitably oppressed by childbearing may cringe at the implications of accepting the premises of Crews' narrative argument. What about women who cannot produce golden milk? What about the teens who are unable to find a "wonderful homeschool program" that allows them to raise their child and finish high school (Crews 37)? Interestingly, the editors position Crews' narrative before Sara Manns' testimony of the struggle to become a parent as a lesbian, titled "Real Moms." Manns begins by describing the "childhood script" that her experience of parenthood challenges—that "kids are supposed to happen to you" (38) and that "Real parents have kids that look like them" (39), kids that are biologically produced by their parents. Using sarcastic humor (e.g., "In our situation, the claim [forwarded by promotional adoption videos] that no one will know I'm not the real

daddy was hard to believe. The breasts give it away every time" 40) and scenes of her and her partner's struggle to conceive and adopt, Manns challenges one of the cultural logics Crews employed: that heterosexual couples who biologically conceive children are the most natural and fit parents. Therefore, though an editor is certainly mediating the message of Crews' narrative by strategically positioning a narrative that questions the an accepted cultural premise in her story, it may actually facilitate the oppositional intention of Crews' story—a story which, ultimately, seeks to deflect judgment and question normative scripts for motherhood. Again, Licona's emphasis on the potential of (b)orderlands' rhetorics is useful here, as the editors' efforts to cultivate a text that opposes dichotomous thinking about good/bad motherhood relies on surfacing contradictions between experiences of motherhood. Licona writes, "(b)orderlands' rhetorics move beyond binary borders to a named third space of ambiguity and even contradiction" (105). *Breeder* blurs the understanding of who counts as a "mom," exposing contradictions between the ways in which differently positioned women experience and practice motherhood. In such an ambiguous, contradictory "third space," it becomes difficult (or perhaps nonsensical) to respond to such narratives with dualisms like Crews is a real mom while Manns is not—or that Manns is a "good" mom because she waited until her older adult years to adopt a child while Crews mistakenly conceived at age 15.

Editorial practices may facilitate the rhetorical purpose of counternarratives by constructing oppositional frameworks through book or website titles, image content, dedications, prefaces, forewords, and introductions. *Girl-Mom,* for example, is a website

explicitly dedicated to "young mamas" and this dedication is visible in the URL and search engine links to the site. *You Look Too Young* is dedicated to Davis' mother and "mothers of all ages everywhere." Both dedications further the aim of supporting (not stigmatizing) mothering women in a cultural context that often frames young mothers as a problem. Conscious choices made by editors and their teams can also invite readers to see important connections among differently positioned subjects. Editorial practices may also reveal contradictions and contrasts between minoritized experiences, helping to resist tendencies to homogenize "others" (Kelly 205). Connective themes and contradictory tensions can occur implicitly through the editors' juxtaposition of selected stories as I described, or explicitly through chapter section or node titles and editorial interludes. Few scholars have fully considered the importance of the editorial function in publishing counter-narrative work. There is much more to be said about the editor function and it is important to reiterate that there are drawbacks and contradictions in the editorial frameworks that I analyzed. However, the rest of the chapter explores the strategies young mothers use to intervene in dominant discourses with stories about their personal experiences. First, I outline the theoretical lenses that inform my understanding of teenage mothers' narratives as rhetorical texts. Then, I review theories of counternarrative before identifying common narrative strategies young mothers use in their counter-stories.

4.3 Theoretical Foundations: Feminist Rhetorical Approach to Counternarrative Analysis

Analysis of Experience(s) as Rhetorical Narrative(s)

As chapter two illustrates, feminist and poststructuralist analyses of discursive constructions of teenage pregnancy shift attention from the choices, behaviors, and outcomes of "deviant" young women to the specific power relations and interests served by sustaining an outlook on young mothers as non-normative subjects. These analyses identify specific ideologies (patriarchy, colonialism, race/gender/heteronormativity) and interest groups (Planned Parenthood, medical institutions, and political candidates) that benefit from the construction of teenage pregnancy as a problem. Feminist poststructuralist theorists have been wary of analyzing young mothers' experiences or testimonies because such an approach seems to serve the very mechanisms of visibility (as illustrated in chapter three) that sustain the popular conception that "teenage pregnancy" is a universal problem that calls for the constant scrutiny of individual young women.

Past approaches to "teenage pregnancy" and "teenage mothers" do not help us to understand how young women engage discourses that construct them as "deviant." In my analysis of teen mothers' texts I do not theorize *why* the authors became pregnant at a certain age nor do I try to determine whether their decision to parent children within a specific context is "good." Instead, I approach these texts from a feminist poststructuralist rhetorical perspective. Personal narratives and the experiences reflected through them are as always partial, reflective of political struggle, and constructed for an audience/purpose.

My aim in this chapter is not to identify the "truth" of an experience, but rather to identify and analyze the rhetorical strategies that some young mothers use to engage, deflect, and counter dominant narratives and the stigmas associated with teenage pregnancy and parenthood. I do this by focusing on *how* young mothers tell their stories and by thinking through the effects these strategies may have on normative constructions of motherhood.

Counter-Stories

In her analysis of rhetorics of belief, rhetorician Sharon Crowley writes that "story is, perhaps, the most efficient means of garnering attention" (197). Stories help to sustain particular worldviews by persuading groups of people to look at things in a particular way. For example, the teen mother saga helps to sustain a worldview that suggests reproduction should only occur when planned within the context of heterosexual marriage, situated within an economically self-sustaining household, and in accordance with a lifestyle that allows for the parents to keep the upbringing of the child private (i.e., separate from work, school, and other institutional obligations). Since many teen mothers' experiences stray from these conventions, circulating stories about teen mothers' hectic or troubled lives (in reality television series, talk shows, news specials, congressional hearings and academic scholarship) functions to reproduce heteronormative middle-class conditions of adolescence and parenthood.

Feminist, critical race, and Latina/o critical scholars, activists, and rhetors have long recognized the potential of stories to captivate and move audiences to change perspectives and take action. Narrative forms of expression have been of particular use to marginalized groups who are denied voice in the public sphere or whose personal and

collective experiences of oppression are silenced, ignored, or explained away. In fact, Sandoval defines resistance as "the ability to tell another story, a differing vision" (130). Sandoval finds that language—and specifically language used to construct compelling stories—can be a means for changing perspectives, beliefs, and eventually building a coalitional movement for social change. Educational researchers Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso might call Sandoval's "differing vision" a counter-story—"a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (32). Solórzano and Yosso, along other critical race and Latina/o-Critical theorists, are particularly interested in counter-story as a "tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solórzano & Yosso 32; Fernandez 46; Jackson 28). In *Talking Back,* bell hooks theorizes autobiographical narratives as potential acts of resistance that can highlight oppression(s) that occur in daily life (2; see also Delgado Bernal 107). Critical race theorists Richard Delgado and Jean Stefanic add that more than just telling stories that have not yet been told and exposing oppressions in the everyday, effective counternarratives may confront "embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity" (42; Delgado 2413). Thus, counternarratives are stories that challenge and resist the status quo, bring to light injustice, highlight alternative ways of being, and/or assert cultural strengths unacknowledged by the dominant culture. Such stories can be traced throughout history.[71]

[71] A relevant example of the important and far-reaching effects of counternarrative in our field is Cheryl Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold* in which she re-tells the history of classical rhetoric, this time including women's journals and diaries as part of the rhetorical tradition. Including previously unacknowledged texts as "rhetoric" counters the systems of power which render women's work invisible or undervalued. Richard Delgado points to slave narratives, Native American stories, and Mexican ballads as indicative of the longstanding use narrative as a means of otherwise marginalized cultural communication. Perhaps most

According to feminist and critical race theorists, counternarratives or counter-stories potentially serve many functions for both the storyteller and for diverse audiences. Delgado, hooks, and others suggest that the act of telling a counter-story can serve a "psychic-function" for the author because it helps to resist inclinations to "self-blame" for their life circumstances and lived oppressions. That is, the telling of the counter-story may serve as a catalyst for self-growth (Delgado 2436-7; hooks 3, 159; Delgado & Stefanic 43; Alcoff & Gray 283). Furthermore, publishing and circulating counter-stories may assist with coalition-building as audiences who have similar experiences with injustice may feel inspired to share their own counter-story or build an oppositional movement (De Lauretis 185). Related to this function, a third possible outcome of counter-stories is the formation of a "counter-reality" when counter-stories are shared and circulated within a group or community and assist in building consensus for a particular worldview (Delgado 2412).

Building from this literature, I agree that teen mothers' counternarratives can function as catalysts for self-growth and coalitional-building. My personal experience writing and sharing my counter-story with a public audience brought feelings of self-satisfaction and influenced my future decisions to align myself with feminist movements. In past work, I have explored the potential of counternarratives that circulate among communities of young mothers to culminate in an oppositional worldview (Vinson). Other scholars of teenage pregnancy discourse have similarly suggested that getting

---

obvious is feminisms' uses of the personal as political in critical consciousness groups in the 1970s. Recent challenges to "objective" academic writing through standpoint theory (Collins, Haraway, Harding), embodied writing (Fleckenstein, Hindman), and critical race theory are further examples of personal/community experiences challenging mainstream knowledge-making.

young mothers to share narratives and construct representations of their experiences can help to build their self-esteem and awareness of social justice issues (Kelly "Warning Labels" & "Young Mothers"; Luttrell).

However, in this chapter, I am particularly interested in the ways in which counter-stories can function to intervene in the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy by telling the story of young motherhood differently. Delgado argues that in order for counternarratives to oppose widely accepted beliefs, the story must strategically destroy the "mindset" or the presuppositions of the dominant group (Delgado 2413). As Crowley makes clear, challenging beliefs—beliefs circulated within narratives structured by hegemonic ideologies—takes rhetorical skill (195; see also Delgado 2413). Narratives must at once engage with common ways of thinking about the world that are already in circulation and then use strategies (such as irony, satire, strategic-but-subtle organization of narrative events, and details that trigger emotional responses) to counter the oppressive or problematic implications of that line of thinking. Delgado and Stefanic suggest counternarratives must bridge the worldviews of differently positioned people (41). Crowley would suggest this "bridge" may include the commonplace beliefs already in circulation (70). In the following section, I look carefully for the ways in which young mothers narrated their experiences with pregnancy and motherhood to engage with, question, and confront dominant discourses.

4.4 Rhetorical Strategies in Teen Mother Counternarratives

In this section, I identify rhetorical strategies teen mother's use to engage with and/or counter the dominant discourses of teenage pregnancy and motherhood. I

identified these strategies by close reading narratives in *You Look Too Young to be a Mom*, *Breeder*, and *Girl-Mom* and taking notes on common themes across narrative including characters, settings, phrases, events, and the organization of plot lines.

Rendering Uncommon the Commonplace

One recurring rhetorical strategy I found in teenage mother counternarratives is what I call rendering uncommon the commonplace. Commonplaces are statements that help to maintain ideologies and are circulated as commonsense adages. Rhetoricians Crowley and Debra Hawhee point out that "[c]ommonplaces are, literally, 'taken for granted'—they are statements that everyone assumes already to be satisfactorily proven. So no one bothers to discuss them" (131).[72] The idea of a "teen mother" is a commonplace in American rhetoric. While "teen mothers" are often discussed, the categorization is rarely questioned—that is, people do not often question why we qualify particular people's caretaking responsibilities as "teenage" while others are just "mothers." The broad circulation of the term "teenage mother" helps to persuade many North Americans that it has been proven that the (young) age of a mother affects her ability to carry a fetus to term and to raise the child. People do not often think about the fact that "teenage" is an adjective placed next to "mother" by an individual writer making a rhetorical choice.

[72]Rhetors often use commonplaces as stated or unstated premises of enthymematic reasoning or to simplify a complicated situation. For example, the idea that teenage motherhood causes poverty and increases the likelihood of males to be imprisoned simplifies structural mechanisms perpetuating an unequal distribution of wealth and the practices and power relations that determine who goes to prison. For more about the interests served by teenage pregnancy commonplaces, see review of poststructuralist literatures in chapter two.

In the counternarratives that I analyzed, many "teenage" mothers drew attention to the arbitrary connection between their age and their identity as a mother by incorporating commonly circulated commonplaces into their narratives. Drawing from her analysis of patterns in zinesters' tactics of resistance, Licona coins the terms "reverso" to refer to texts in which "the penetrative power of the gaze [is] reversed and returned on (dominant) society in complex ways that move beyond simple inversions" (119). That is, reversing the gaze from on the bodies and experiences of teen mothers as the "problem" to the commonplace statements that construct young mothers as the "problem" does not just make teen moms "good" or society "bad." Coming from the perspectives of women who are already mothering teens (or older women reflecting on their teenage years), the often-circulated commonplaces about teenage pregnancy may appear mean-hearted and inaccurate, calling into question what Licona called "authorized knowledges" (119). For example, Ariel Gore writes in the foreword of *You Look Too Young to be a Mom*, "When my tits swelled and I started throwing up outside the soup kitchen I knew I'd be a mother, but I didn't know about all the prefixes that would be used to describe my motherhood" (Gore xiii). Gore sets up her narrative to suggest that since she was in Europe at the time of conception, she was unaware of the negative discourses of "teenage pregnancy" (as part of the late 1990s US media and political discourses about welfare reform). It was only later, when she returned to the United States that she heard about

> The *single* mothers, the *unwed* mothers, the *teen* mothers, the *welfare* mothers—bloodsucking leeches, all. Irresponsible. Promiscuous. Lazy.

> Their chaotic homes were breeding ground for criminals and drug addicts. As one columnist put it in *Newsweek*, "Every threat to the fabric of this country—from poverty to crime to homelessness—is connected to out-of-wedlock teen pregnancy." Every threat to the fabric of this country? Who were these women? Did they live anywhere near us? Would they hurt my baby? (xiv, emphasis in original)

Creating playful irony with a scene of an eighteen-year-old mother fearing for the safety of her child at the hands of single, unwed, teen mothers on welfare, Gore mocks the attribution of societal ills to women who mother. Contrasting the biological signs of her pregnancy (swollen breasts and vomiting) with her uncertainty about "pre-fixes" attached to her motherhood, Gore questions the underlying (il)logic of public discourses about teenage pregnancy. In much the same way, Jessica Allan Lavarnway uses her story of helping to raise (and eventually adopting) her boyfriend's child when she was seventeen, to question the thinking behind assumptions that childrearing is incompatible with the teenage years. She writes about her college friends' encouragement to leave the relationship to avoid being tied down. Lavarnway hyperbolizes the underlining logic of these well-intentioned suggestions: "Children are anathema, and if I help raise a child who loves me and whom I love, my life is over. I'll be condemned to a life of scrubbing carpets and cashiering at super-markets" (Lavarnway 267; see also Lanni 122). As a (seemingly) middle-class student in college, Lavarnway uses her experience as a teenage mother to question the commonplace cause/effect reasoning of teenage pregnancy—that

is, that young mothers are destined to be poor—and—more implicitly that only poor women would choose motherhood before the completion of school and marriage.

While Gore and Lavarnway convey their astonishment at statements about teenage motherhood by repeating those statements in hyperbolized or ironic ways, other authors situate the commonplaces of teenage pregnancy as the central conflict of the narrative. Communication scholar Robert Rowland writes, in "The Narrative Perspective," that an effective rhetorical narrative must construct a plot structure that "keep[s] the attention of the audience and reinforce[s] the theme or message of the story" (135). Since the theme or message of teen mother counternarratives is often that teen pregnancy discourses are inaccurate, offensive, and discriminatory towards women, it is a critical rhetorical move to incorporate these discourses as the antagonizing force in the plot. Readers are at once shown the negative effects of such discourse and encouraged to sympathize with the main characters who must overcome the material effects of these statements in order to have a happy ending. For example, Crews uses a flashback to the moment she discovered she was pregnant as an opportunity to explicitly reflect on what she thought it would mean to be "a pregnant teenage girl":

> I remembered facts I had learned as a freshman in 'sex-education' about teenage pregnancy. Teenage mothers are a burden to society. The children of teenage mothers inevitably become crack-addicted gang members. Teenage mothers never successfully complete high school, let alone attend college. There weren't just statistics, I was led to believe, but invariable truths. I had become garbage. (32)

The story line Crews learned in her sex education class functions as an obstacle in her narrative that, "led her to believe" she could not, in good conscience, keep the baby and still accomplish school and other life ambitions. Her stated recognition that she is "garbage" is strategically positioned *after* her summary of the stereotypical teen mom story line. The placement of the metaphor suggests that her feelings of unworthiness stem from the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy. This meta-narrative moment conveys the rhetorical purpose of the story—to counter this kind of discourse. After a series of conflicts the narrative ends with Crews' strong statement, "Contrary to what fear-based sex education classes, lovely couples and wonderful counselors had led me to believe in the past. . . . I am not garbage . . .I am an excellent mother" (4). Crews rewrites the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy which would suggest that a teenage mothers' life obstacles include her child, her education, her financial circumstances, and her male partner by suggesting, instead, that teenage mothers' major life obstacles are the narratives and characters who accept dominant perspectives on teenage pregnancy and who get in the way of her life decisions.[73]

Bad Characters Circulating Bad Rhetoric

Related to the authors' efforts to render uncommon the commonplaces of dominant teenage pregnancy discourse(s) is the strategy of characterizing the people who (re)produce pathologizing statements about teenage mothers. Many narratives highlight the terrible, antagonizing characters people become when they participate in the dominant

[73] I do not mean to suggest that Crews' narrative does not illustrate struggles with education, finances, or her partner. All three are present as aspects of her story, but they are not the center conflict of the plot.

constructions of teenage pregnancy. In "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative," Delgado suggests that counternarratives "can show us what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel" (2415; Delgado & Stefanic 43). Contributors to the collections I analyzed describe interactions with people who talk disparagingly about young mothers and the writers characterize such people as mean or, at least, narrow-minded. Often this is done by establishing sympathy with the narrator (we typically witness her struggles prior to this interaction) and then capturing a scene between the mother and an insensitive, flat character. For example, adoptive mother Lavarnway reconstructs the day she and her husband terminated her daughter's biological mother's rights in order to take on full guardianship of the child:

> The judge sighed as he signed the papers authorizing Alicia to be returned to our full legal and physical custody, explaining, "This is what happens when children bear children." If the guy had glanced at birth dates, he'd have realized that the child who bore a child was more than a year older than the "child" who was now being given full parental rights. (267)

Lavarnway shows how a judge in a court setting—a setting that readers may associate with tropes like "blind justice"—uses commonplace logic to justify his decision to grant custody to Lavarnway (a teenager). Throughout her story, Lavarnway consistently conveys her astonishment that no one notices the work that she and her boyfriend-turned-husband do to raise their child because of the assumptions about teenage parents. As another example, Crews shares the comment her history teacher makes when he discovers she is pregnant: "You know what this means, don't you? Not that you would

have had much of a chance to begin with, but now you are just finished. I still expect you to show up every day, but I don't know what good it will do you. Girls like you don't graduate anyway" (Crews qtd. in Davis 117). Just as the reiteration of teenage pregnancy commonplaces in these writers' narratives make such statements seem callous, these scenes characterize people who speak such statements as antagonists (e.g., teachers who do not believe in the abilities of their students and judges whose courtroom rulings are guided by prejudice).

As another example, Crews illustrates in "When I Was Garbage" that each time she tells people that she is pregnant, their responses and assumptions work as obstacles to her own decision about her pregnancy. For example, her boyfriend and three friends "assumed I would abort" (32). Later, after her mother takes her for a sonogram, she writes that "it was assumed my son would be given up for adoption" (33). Her mother tells the couple who expresses interest in adopting Crews' baby, "We can call your lawyer and work out the rest of the details this week," and her boyfriend whispers, "I guess we made our decision" (2). And, finally, when she begins meeting with the couple who plans to adopt her child, "'Our Baby' became his name" (34). Crews' narrative shows that a consequence of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy is that adults and peers pressure teens with "assumptions" that they should fix their mistake (see also Landrum 64). By structuring the sequence of plot events by the "assumptions" of others (assumptions that—except for the initial one about abortion—become the actual events of her experience), Crews makes the implied argument that the real struggle of motherhood,

for teens, is figuring out how to speak back to authorities and assumptions in order to make life decisions.

As the previous examples begin to illustrate, counternarratives centering on the experience of teenage pregnancy have the potential to illustrate the fallibility of "experts" or to "create spaces where expert and authorized knowledges can be critically examined" (Licona 119). By including seemingly educated, authority figures as the characters who constrain teen mothers' experiences (making them feel uncomfortable in school or pressured to make certain choices), counternarrative authors subtly disarticulate the expert from the god's eye view on the world. Characterizing the expert as an antagonist is a way to situate often unquestioned experts as people with the potential to silence, oppress, or misunderstand individuals based on cultural prejudices. This is extremely important considering that many "experts" (anthropologists, psychologists, public health specialists, sociologists, politicians, educators, etc.) publish interpretations of what it means for a young woman to become pregnant before the age of twenty.

In her narrative, Nina Packebush explains that for her son's fifteenth birthday she plans on giving him his life story including memories of the trials and tribulations she went through as an eighteen-year-old mother. She states, "I will write about how they assigned me a social worker that tried to talk me into giving him up for adoption. I will write about how they would talk to his grandma and my aunt instead of me." Packebush's experience with young motherhood is narrated as a series of confrontations with "them"—professionals such as doctors and social workers who question her credibility as a mother. Blurring these people together as an ominous and recurring "they" helps to

disarticulate such individuals from the authoritative credentials and educational processes that render them figures of authority and depict such figures as people who make this young mother's life rough.

This is not to say that, together, these counternarratives cast all credentialed experts as antagonists. Although I identify this as a potentially effective move to make considering that teenage pregnancy rhetoric(s) are often constructed and circulated by those with "expert" status, many young mothers' counternarratives explicitly mention school teachers, college faculty, nurses, and midwives along with strippers, neighbors, peers, other teenage mothers, and family members who offer them guidance and support. As I have argued elsewhere, young mothers' counternarratives that call out the implicit assumption that authorized experts are always right may shift the terms and values of readers' worldviews to valorize only those who offer advice based on shared lived experience and the aim for social justice for marginalized women (Vinson; see also Licona 122).

Characterizing the Statistic: Embodying the Numbers

- "Teen mothers are less likely to complete the education necessary to qualify for a well-paying job" ("Linking")
- "Two-thirds of families begun by a young unmarried mother are poor" ("Teenage pregnancy, Poverty")
- "Some 52 percent of all mothers on welfare had their first child as a teenager" ("Teenage Pregnancy, Poverty")
- "The daughters of teen mothers are three times more likely to become teen mothers themselves" (Teenage pregnancy, Poverty)
- "The sons of teenage mothers are two times more likely to end up in prison" ("Teenage Pregnancy, and Overall")

Figure 2: Textbox of Information from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy's "Why It Matters" Factsheets

Much like the narrative rhetorical strategies that position commonplaces and experts as antagonizing forces, the recurring presence of "the statistic" in young mothers' narratives suggests that statistics are potentially flawed figures of authority in US discourses. As I show in the list of statistic-based statements from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, the urgency of dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy stems from aggregates that construct young mothers as a category of people who fail to meet the mark (of education or income) or who harm others (by raising future teen mothers and/or criminals). By centering demographic questions on the "teen mother" (*her* likelihood of education, *her* family's income, *her* existence on welfare, *her* sons and *her* daughters) this well-circulated body of research erases the diversity of people who bear children as well as the structures and material conditions women have to navigate prior to and during pregnancy.[74] Casper and Moore write that statistics can "reduce the understanding of human bodies and experiences to auditing operations. Establishing the rates, odds, ratios, and cost/benefit breakdown of bodies erases personhood and subjectivity in the name of the aggregate" (9). In the case of rhetorics of teenage pregnancy, statistics often construct "teenage motherhood" through costs to the nation and rates of failure. This dehumanizes young mothers and encourages people to perceive them as evidence of larger national problems.

In chapter two, I reviewed "revisionist" literature that questions such research findings based on failure to control for variables such as economic status and community

[74] These statistics also reify assumptions that poverty, lack of a school-based education, welfare-assistance, and prison sentences are markers of individual behavior issues and/or individuals' failures. I will return to this idea later in the chapter.

health patterns. However, it is clear from the counternarratives I analyzed that pregnant and mothering teens also scrutinize the validity and effects of such discourse. Like Casper and Moore, some teen mother counter rhetors bring attention to the ways in which "the statistic" becomes interchangeable with who they are. For example, Rebecca Angel writes that once she shares the news of her pregnancy, "A 'friend' tells me now I'm just a statistic" (47). And Gore realizes, "Now, here I was on the nightly news! A political issue. A statistic maybe, but a *critical* statistic" (Gore xiv). These examples illustrate that teen mothers must reckon with the "statistics" that come to define what the timing of their pregnancies means (to others). Furthermore, references to the fact that they are a "statistic" in their personal narratives is a way to counter the erasure of personhood that Casper and Moore identify as an outcome of such research—these writers construct themselves as *people* pissed off at being quantified. By writing about their life experiences in conversation with "the statistics" that stigmatize them, these young mothers complicate discourses which construct them as a financial burden or social problem.

It is interesting to note that the writers do not necessarily reference specific statistics, but instead refer to the statistic, in general, as a negative identity marker. To be a statistic, it seems, is to be a problem. In Rebecca Trotsky-Sirr's narrative about her experiences as a teenage mother at Stanford, "Scaling the Ivory Tower With a Baby on My Back," she writes of the irony of taking "notes from a Nobel Prize-winning neoclassical economics professor about how welfare distorted the economy" when "right after, I would meet with my welfare caseworker" (273). Reflecting on her college

experience she writes, “Every professor whom I met with my boy in tow now realizes that young mothers aren’t statistics, that we can be honor roll students” (276). Trotsky-Sirr’s narrative emphasizes that people (specifically mothers) are *not* the statistics that are associated with them—using her experiential knowledge to claim a flaw in the numbers. Certainly “honor roll students” could be represented in aggregate form; as young mother Rebecca Angel writes, “We’re all statistics, somehow, someway” (47). Yet Trotsky-Sirr seems to be drawing attention to the fact that “statistics” about teen mothers are typically depressing, associating them with societal ills and branding them as different than other students, mothers, and citizens.[75]

- If a woman gives birth to a daughter, then she is 100% more likely to have a teenage mother for a daughter then if she gave birth to a son.
- Men are 50-100% responsible for teenage pregnancy.
- 100% of teenagers need support
- 100% of parents need support
- 100% of teenagers who become parents need support

Figure 3: Textbox of Author's Fast Facts about Teenage Pregnancy

Beyond highlighting the stigmatizing function of “the statistic,” many young mothers’ counternarratives illustrate that the broad circulation of such numbers makes teenage pregnancy a dooms-day premonition for young women: “these weren’t just statistics . . . but invariable truths” (Crews 32). Many young mothers describe in detail

[75] My “fast facts,” in figure 3, to re-situate statistics, playfully, as a potential counter-rhetorical strategy—that is, a strategy that may call in to question unstated premises in traditional ways of thinking about teenage pregnancy. For example, the first statistic intends to bring attention to the barbarity of counting who produces a future “teenage mother” (which, implicitly builds upon the contested claim that teenage motherhood is a negative outcome) while the second brings to light the fact that men are often left out of the teenage pregnancy debate (Nathanson; Luker, *Dubious* ; Males).

the anxiety they felt in response to rhetoric that generalizes or quantifies outcomes of teenage motherhood. Rosie Allain writes, "I had heard from various people that pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding were especially hard for teenagers, and this made me further doubt myself" (77). Through these scenes of self-doubt, the writers' suggest that the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy persuades young women who become pregnant that they are no longer able to (or entitled to) graduate from high school, attend college, and/or ask for family or government assistance without shame. In Clea Roddick's reflection on her experiences with unplanned pregnancy she writes, "The sharp jabs of others' unspoken expectations and unconscious stereotypes pierce into my brain and heart until we do it to ourselves. I do it. I doubt myself" (145). As with Crews' essay, "When I Was Garbage," these narratives illustrate that teenage pregnancy rhetorics make many young mothers feel bad about themselves and cause them to doubt that they can "succeed" (whatever success means to them in that moment). Readers who see statistics as demographic descriptions of natural life outcomes are now encouraged to see statistics as capable of producing or at least influencing life outcomes. The counternarrative descriptions call into question the ethics of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy—which is often justified as a parable that will increase positive outcomes for young people—by showing how it discourages young pregnant and mothering women.

Many counternarratives testify to the physical strain and self-blame produced by dominant discourse. In *You look Too Young To Be a Mom*, one young mother writes that the most difficult challenge for teenage parents is "exhaustion. We're fighting so hard not

to be seen as failures that we can barely let go, even for a moment" (207). Lydia Prentiss adds, "I always felt I had to make it look easy, to prove to the world that the assumptions about me were wrong. When I got older and my friends started having children, it was strange to hear thirty-year-old moms with houses and husbands and cars complaining about how hard it can be to raise a child" (qtd. in Davis 177). Prentiss implies that young mothers cannot complain about their circumstances; young mothers may feel the obligation to grin and bear it in order to avoid comments such as "Well, what did you expect?" or "Welcome to reality." Furthermore, considering the ways in which young mothers' stories are currently circulated in mainstream media—as dramatic tales that punctuate teenage pregnancy prevention efforts—Prentiss' feelings are understandable. A young mothers' struggle with finances, school, family, and baby-daddies are not often taken up as evidence of a problem with the economy, education, family structures, or fatherhood. Instead, such struggles are often packaged as the natural outcome of making the mistake of becoming pregnant as a teen. In fact, fixing these social structures to better the lives of mothering women (say, by offering childcare on a high school campus) can be dismissed as encouraging bad behavior (see Mellon; Associated Press; Pillow 151). Thus, complaints about the undue burdens of pregnancy and child-rearing become the privileged discourse of women who adhere to middle-class reproductive norms. The descriptions of pressures to perform and moments of self-doubt are a potentially savvy way of talking back to the effects of teenage pregnancy rhetoric(s), if readers are encouraged to see that dominant discourses unfairly position women's life outcomes on

their individual behaviors and decisions—leaving out the constraints and contexts in which they live.

Building from this stated burden of proving the "statistics," experts, and antagonists wrong are young mothers' tales of doing just that. Some young mothers explicitly reflect on how the statistics, antagonists, and teen mom stereotypes motivate them to work harder to achieve traditional markers of cultural success. For example, Allain writes that she, "heard that the number of teenage moms who nurse is very low, and I was afraid I would join those statistics, proving how inadequate teenage mothers are" (77). Transitioning from this moment of fear, Allain describes her efforts to educate herself, her boyfriend, and other young mothers about the benefits of breastfeeding, detailing her strategies to counter-act popular misconceptions and the nurses who discouraged mothers not to breastfeed, and reflecting on the trials and triumphs of breastfeeding her child for two and a half years. Publishing her narrative is a way to extend Allain's efforts to educate the public (young mothers and non-parenting people alike) about the benefits of breastfeeding. Readers may admire her advocacy efforts and the fact that a high-school student spoke back to seemingly ignorant nurses, doctors, and friends to assert her right to breastfeed her child. Many of the narratives in *Breeder*, *You Look Too Young to Be a Mom,* and *Girl-mom* startle audiences' assumptions that young mothers cannot be well-rounded individuals who balance school, work, family, and children.

However, Allain's narrative also highlights another pattern across some young mothers' personal narratives—the subtle (or not so subtle) hint of danger of becoming

what the statistic associates with young mothers. Allain's narrative suggests that she corrects negative stereotypes about "inadequate" young mothers who do not breastfeed by actively breastfeeding while encouraging other mothers to do the same. The unstated challenge seems to be: if young mothers can illustrate that they do not experience the outcomes described by published research on teenage pregnancy, they can counter the stigma and encourage a more positive outlook on teenage motherhood. For instance, Jacki Lanni writes that upon learning of her pregnancy, "I know right away I must graduate high school to avoid becoming negative stereotype" (122). And Katie Huber passionately asserts that her abusive father and other naysayers, "were wrong. I could do it. I was strong. So I did it. Even though people expected me to drop out. Even though, as soon as I had a tiny little baby belly, strangers were asking me if I was still in school. It pissed me off! These people assumed that, because I was pregnant, my brain had suddenly disappeared" (142). A persuasive counter-argument to a claim like "young mothers drop out of school" is to show that young mothers do *not* drop out of school. Considering that these narratives are published in collections *for* mothers (e.g., *You Look too Young* is categorized as "parenting/teen" and *Girl-Mom* has the stated purpose of helping other young mothers) telling stories of young mothers defying the odds and achieving (or demanding) what they want or need can inspire other young mothers to do the same. Single mother activist Katherine Arnoldi illustrates the importance of role models when she describes how young mothers responded to her willingness to share college resources. She writes, "I shockingly realized that these single moms felt that they, too, had made their bed and had to lie in it, that they had made a 'mistake' that in turn

made them ineligible to participate in the world. . . I could discern on their faces the same feeling that I had as a teen mom, the feeling that I had ruined my life" ("How I Became"). Stories that show that young motherhood is not the end of your life and that you have the right to demand help and resources can be inspirational.

Troubling Success Stories

Inspiring other members of the *Girl-Mom* online community, Yvonne Fide writes, "I know we [teenage mothers] can beat the statistics." Yet, surely, not every young mother can avoid what the statistics and stereotypes prescribe. For Sarah Tavis, the moment she realized she was pregnant, "All of the crap I'd been fed about teen moms reverberated in my panic ridden head: *welfare*, *food stamps*, *shame*. Forget about school, girl. Might as well get a job at the nearest fast-food joint, frying various animal parts for minimum wage" (227, emphasis in original). Tavis' stated fear of ending up on welfare and working for minimum wage means, of course, that Tavis did not experience such things before her pregnancy. Sustaining the fear that welfare or a minimum wage job would mean the end of a happy and productive life may work against efforts to remove the stigma from young motherhood because many mothers—young and old—struggle with conditions of poverty and must navigate welfare programs.[76]As Luker and Males both illustrate, most pregnant teens are part of families who are at or below the poverty

[76] Tavis later illustrates that she uses public assistance programs to support herself and her child; throughout the narrative she reflects on the shame she feels about this and her consistent awareness that she bears the mark of "failure." She is embarrassed when strangers offer to help her because can sense their judgments of her poverty. Thus, her story is a more complicated view of the ideological construction of "welfare" as a handout for people who cannot succeed on their own. See also Rita Naranjo's narrative "From Hopelessness to Inspiration" for another example of explicit references to the devastation and shame young women feel in having to apply for welfare assistance.

line *before* they become pregnant (Luker *Dubious*; Males 21). Mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers may already be "frying various animal parts" in a community where a lack of job opportunities, or a love of cooking, makes such positions valuable.

I have been asked if mothers' personal stories risk propagating a "supermom" vision—one that suggests young mothers deserve respect because they can do it all. Audiences of my work have expressed concern that such a story could pressure other young mothers with a high, perhaps even impossible, standard for success. This is an understandable concern and could be a way that young mothers and other readers interpret such personal stories—young mothers' achievements and happy endings become (along with the statistics and stereotypes that tell them they can't) more pressure to do it all. For women from low-income communities with inequitable access to educational, career, childcare, and health resources, narratives which claim the statistics are wrong might encourage self-blame for conditions beyond their control. For instance, Jackie Lanni writes, "If I wanted to, I could receive welfare benefits and food stamps and drop one of those part-time jobs, but if I do I will be a teenage welfare mother. I feel obligated to do it the hard way, so no one can point a finger at me" (124). Lanni situates welfare as a choice (the implied easy way) she could make, instead of a resource she needs to support herself, her mothering work, and schooling. On the one hand, Lanni's description of her choice illustrates the profound pressure young mothers feel to do mothering work without assistance—in order to prove judgmental people wrong. On the other hand, Lanni's statement brings to light the impact of ideological constructions of public assistance as a "hand-out" for people who fail to achieve. Some young mothers

may use the fact that they finished school or raised their child without welfare assistance as a premise in their argument for respect. In "Navy Mama," Shannon Minydzak demands respect based on normative roles that defy stereotypes of teenage motherhood: "I pay taxes, I support my son and myself, and I defend your right to free speech and freedom. I am a productive member of society. I am not the exception either" (190). In this case, young mothers' success stories (re)construct ideologies that define valuable citizens by their ability to individually sustain themselves, such as the colorblind ideologies of meritocracy as described in chapter three.

In her short story, "Revelation," Pat Beresford explains why she often chooses *not* to tell others about her experiences with young motherhood. Beresford, a former young mother and current executive director of programs at New York City's Inwood House for pregnant young women in foster care, highlights how such tales of young mothers defying the odds and achieving cultural markers of success may actually serve to sustain negative outlooks on teenage motherhood. Beresford explains that when she shares her own story of terrible struggle, shame, and eventual success, people often hear it "a simple morality tale" that demonstrates the importance of shaming young women: "To them, the shame I'd felt had served as moral fiber to help me overcome my obstacles of ten years of night school, eventual single parenting of two girls, and owning and keeping my own home" (31). In fact, audiences who hear Beresford's story comment that nowadays (as opposed to when Beresford had her first child in 1962) young women lack a sense of "remorse" (31). This example suggests that perhaps some see the dominant narratives of pregnant and parenting teenagers as under-achieving, shameful, burdens on families and

the nation as beneficial in pressuring young women who make the "mistake" to work extra hard to correct it. In this way, stories of teen mothers "beating the statistics" or doing it all only serve to support this line of reasoning.

In order to trouble this logic, some young mothers write stories about the ways in which teenage mothers' stories are taken up to re-assert the status quo. Gore writes that people often dismiss her experiences as a young mother: "I was an exception, they told me. . . [my mothering friends and I] were going back to school. We were good mothers. We were 'pulling us up by our bootstraps.' Unlike . . . those *others*" (xv). Gore points out that the teen mother-as-successful-student-citizen-or-mother story can be dismissed as "exceptional" and actually sustain negative outlooks on the assumed "most" who do not deserve respect. As another example, Crews publishes "I Was a Teen Mom Success Story" in *You Look Too Young To Be A Mom*, a few years after her story "I Was Garbage" was published in *Breeder*. Through her more recent narrative, Crews illustrates the pressure teen mothers feel to publically perform "success" in order to prove that teen mothers deserve respect and support. She shares how every visible "success" of her son (such as his ability to articulate his thoughts at a young age) that was recognized by someone allowed her to comment about the positive things she does as a mother: "I could smile, demurely smug. 'Well, we read a lot. . . and he is breastfeeding still, of course'" and she would think "One point: teen moms!" (103). She uses the narrative to explore the contradictions of wanting to prove common assumptions about teenage mothers wrong and the implausibility of that task: "My son and I could exist forever, I thought, as walking contradictions to the stereotypes used to define us" (103). Yet, she stresses, "But

sometimes I know that I am failing," especially when her four-year-old throws angry fits that put her at her wit's end (104). Crews constructs "When I Was A Teen Mom Success Story" to explicitly confront the pressures women feel to perform "good mother," leading herself (and hopefully her audience) to conclude, "Maybe in my attempts to buck the societal scripts for teen mothers, I let those same scripts define my happiness" (107). By reflecting on the effects of the normative gaze on her experiences as a mother, Crews encourages readers to critique the ways in which dominant society encourages mothers (young and old) to be consistently aware of their every behavior in terms of raising their children.

As another example of challenging the imperative to be "successful," J. Anderson Coats, a professional writer and teen mother, uses her narrative "The Story Behind the Story" to reflect on what a teen mother counternarrative would do in a popular publication. Coats shares how flattered she was that "an editor from a well-known magazine," which she calls RPM, solicited her to write "a feature article . . . about being a successful teen mom." At first she is eager to share the struggles of her experience and easily writes a first draft about graduating from an Ivy League college, raising a happy child, and altogether proving her parents wrong. But then Coats wonders what her success story would do in a publication designed for middle- to upper-class women—women who have the time, leisure, and money for reading magazines about mothering. She imagines an audience of "SUV-driving suburban moms with fifty dollar manicures" responding to her story: "Oh yes, she's successful, went to a top-drawer school, has a master's degree, happily married, has a well-adjusted kid. She's not like those other teen

moms" (2). Coats recognizes that, outside of the framework of *Girl-Mom,* her narrative would only work to maintain binaries between successful women (women able to achieve middle-class cultural capital) and teen mothers. Furthermore, Coats wonders, "What the hell right do I have to tell a fifteen-year-old girl . . . that she won't be successful unless she is just like me? What the hell right did I have to hold myself up as 'successful' merely because I've manage [sic] to gain the socially accepted trappings of success?"

Considering Kelly's study of media representations of teen motherhood, Coats' decision publish her story in a different framework was a smart move. Kelly finds that "both *Jet* and *People* magazines . . . have carried stories about teen mothers who get straight As and become valedictorians" (443). Kelly argues that "such supermom storytelling, while compelling and even de-stigmatizing, plays down structural constraints and the benefits of institutional supports like day care and school services, sending instead a signal that young women, given enough individual mettle can do it all" (Kelly 443; see also Pillow 69-70 & footnote 56). In other words, the success story does not encourage the power structures and hegemonic systems to shift and may even further-stigmatize young mothers who are not capable of negotiating the many obstacles society sets up for mothers. The story *about* the disciplining function of the "success story," however, is a practice of reverso that creates a space beyond the duality of success/failures of motherhood (Licona 106).

Success, But Not By Your Standards

So, in answer to the critiques and concerns I have received about the move some young mother counter-rhetors use to jar stereotypes and statistics about teenage mothers,

I want to emphasize that, first of all, such a concern may be a result of the limits of my methodology. Singling out rhetorical strategies across narratives may actually lead to generalizations about "teen mothers'" narratives—as if there is a coherent category of women that write in the same way about their experiences. As I hope I show, there are a lot of other moves going on. Secondly, not *all* young mothers' narratives make the implicit argument that traditional notions of "success" make them good moms. Not only do some young mothers explicitly call out how young mothers' stories are made to function in the status quo (Beresford; Gore; Crews; Coats), but other mothers tell narratives which challenge what counts as success. For example, Lisa's "Resistance is Not Futile" is the story of a college dropout, single mother on welfare—fully aware that she is considered a "statistic"—who finds empowerment in her position as such and explains her decisions to remain "dependent" via a critique of the welfare state. In much the same way, Judy Moses acknowledges the aspects of her experience that confirm dominant discourses of teenage pregnancy: "It's true that I am not in school and that I don't have as much money or get as much sleep as I might were I childless" (134). But Moses contests the unstated premises which suggest authorized forms of higher education and money are indicators of success or life happiness. She writes, "if this is the life of a ruined college dropout, so be it" (136). Furthermore, some narratives in *Breeder* and on *Girl-Mom* also describe complicated and confident experiences with miscarriages and abortions challenging notions that a woman (young or old) must bear a child to have a happy life or enter into critical discussions about pregnancy or motherhood (Pruden; Lee 21-30). The point, for me, is that these collections feature counternarratives which

embody women who may otherwise be seen as flat statistical representations of a "problem" with complicated first-person narrators who struggle to achieve, fail to achieve, and explicitly question what counts as "good" or "successful" motherhood.

Speaking to Structures: Taking the Personal Narrative beyond the Individual

Some individual teenage mother "success stories" may risk obscuring structural constraints because they illustrate that mothers-with-merit can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and navigate secondary and higher education, careers, and carework (Kelly "Warning Labels" 443). Therefore, personal narratives which explicitly illustrate problems with social structures are crucial to intervening in dominant discourses which obscure the material conditions and social relations that construct young women's experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. The final recurring narrative strategy I identify is a rhetorical move in some young mothers' counter-stories that I call speaking to structures. Some authors use settings and character dialogue to illustrate *how* negative outcomes of "teenage motherhood" are produced by specific systems of power. I draw attention to this strategy to begin a conversation about how young mothers' narratives may begin to work beyond intervention in dominant constructions of teenage pregnancy and motherhood to challenge specific social structures which homogenize people and produce inequitable circumstances.[77]

Feminist theorists of "the personal" draw attention to the challenges of using stories as acts of resistance; it is a struggle to illustrate—through one's first-person narrative—the ways in which this individual experience is implicated in broader power

[77] I do not mean to suggest that intervening in dominant discourses is not resistance enough.

relations and social structures that need to be changed to improve life experiences for diversely marginalized subjects. bell hooks, reflecting on the second wave feminist focus on "the personal as political," argues that not enough attention has been paid to how the personal becomes politicized: "Politicization necessarily combines this process (the naming of one's experience) with critical understanding of the concrete material reality that lays the groundwork for that personal experience" (108 & 32; see also Naples 1157). I draw attention to young mothers' efforts to talk back to "the concrete material reality" or structures that "lay the groundwork" for their experiences with struggle and oppression. I have already illustrated how young mothers reflect on specific issues structuring their experiences, including authorized experts who offend or belittle young women and statistics and commonplaces that continually construct young women as "the problem." But some counternarratives also call out specific structures such as adoption agencies, mandated counseling (Crews "When I Was Garbage"; Lunsford), and schools. For the purposes of this chapter, and because it was a structure many of the narratives addressed, I only analyze the ways in which some young mothers draw attention to schools as material groundwork for their pathologized experiences.

In Karen Landrum's "A Leap of Faith," she describes her decision to leave school just months before she would have graduated in 1981. Landrum describes the "choices" she was offered by the principal when he discovered she was pregnant. "In order to finish high school, he informed me, I need to withdraw from my regular classes, come to school through the back doors after school hours, and complete the year by correspondence course. He strictly forbade me to communicate with other classmates; talking to them

would be cause to terminate the course and I would not get my diploma" (63). While describing the scene, Landrum continually emphasizes the injustice of these comments, putting her "choices" in quotation marks and drawing attention to the fact that her boyfriend, also a student at the school and the father of her child, did not receive any ultimatum from the principal and graduated as a normal student (64). Landrum writes, "I hated [the principal]—his authoritarianism—as well as the rigid school structure" (64). So she decides to leave school, ultimately completing her high school degree at a local maternity home. Landrum's story moves on to describe her struggle to decide whether to keep her child, amidst a community of people telling her she should place the baby for adoption. While Landrum's story briefly critiques the "rigid school structure" that encourages her to leave prior to graduation, other writers spend more time illustrating the implications of educational contexts for young mothers.

For instance, Katherine Arnoldi, author of the award-winning graphic novel *The Amazing 'True' Story of a Teenage Single Mom,* writes about her battle against oppressive and uninviting educational structures in "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Education." Arnoldi emphasizes, "If a teen mom drops out of high school or is coerced to leave, she misses out on guidance counseling, which would inform her about financial aid and the process of applying to college. Even if she overcomes the isolation and discovers the way to a GED program, usually no one there tells her about the process of applying to college" (260). Arnoldi argues that teen mothers' chance for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" is based on making pathways to education more accessible (259). Arnoldi illustrates this problem with her own experiences as a young mother in a small factory

town. She did not know how to find, apply to, or get funding for college. Arnoldi writes, "No one I asked told me I'd even be able to get there. Instead they told me I had 'ruined my life'" (258-9).[78] Arnoldi highlights the implications of statistics, commonplaces, and antagonistic people who construct young mothers as "failures"—these rhetorics serve a reciprocal relationship with educational structures that are not accessible for young mothers. Thankfully, Arnoldi explains, she met a single mother who explained how to get financial aid and apply for college. In a paragraph with a series of sentences began by "suddenly," Arnoldi emphasizes how much her life changed once she started attending college. She went from grappling for guidance in a life of struggle to critically thinking about gendered power relations in the context of college. Arnoldi explains that she now dedicates herself to emulating the single mother who mentored her into college. She describes her work with "the New York Civil Liberties Union in a class action lawsuit again the New York City Board of Education for coercing teen moms to leave high schools" (261). And she is now working on a book about the inaccessibility of college campuses for young mothers (261).

In much the same way, Trotzky-Sirr explains her work to address the inaccessibility of college structure as a student at Stanford. By narrating her experiences there, she highlights why higher education is such an unfathomable achievement for low-income, mothering women. She cites lack of support for the "Little Things, like finding a way to get to the library to cram" and the "Big Things, like finding quality and affordable

[78] See also Jennifer Lind's "The Letter." Lind writes, "My school counselor had told me just to forget about college because I wouldn't get admitted" (182).

child care while living in Silicon Valley" or balancing jobs and school (271). After the birth of her son, Trotsky-Sirr sought out other single mothers at Stanford and initiated change in Stanford's financial aid packages to make the school a bit more manageable for single, undergraduate parents (276). Trotsky-Sirr, like Arnoldi, now dedicates time to mentoring high school student mothers in how to apply for financial aid and college.

By emphasizing a specific structural issue and describing efforts to change unjust educational circumstances, Arnoldi and Tortsky-Sirr potentially persuade readers to join such efforts. Furthermore, such stories intervene in constructions of teenage mothers as "dropouts" by showing how schools pressure young mothers to leave and fail to support efforts to attend college. Perhaps future counternarrative collections could be structured around a specific structure—such as a school—in order to initiate a specific policy or legal change at that school.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I emphasize that the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy encourages many to see pregnancy as the climactic moment of downfall in a young woman's life. Furthermore, commonplaces of teenage pregnancy, including the statistics which render it an urgent social issue, invite people to see young mothers as indicators of problems, not as people who deserve respect and rights. In *Talking Back*, hooks writes of a need for marginalized people to reclaim and recover themselves by contesting, with authority, the structures and ways of speaking which objectify them. Foucault and Butler have pointed to the subversive potential for groups who have been objectified as perverse or abject to use such identification as a platform for speaking back to the norms that they

supposedly violate. Drawing on poststructuralist theory of language and subjectivity, I have shown that some young mothers use their subject-position as "teenage mothers," to publish stories which counter popular ways of thinking about teenage pregnancy and motherhood. By providing analysis of young women's first-person narratives about pregnancy and motherhood as *rhetorical*, I provide a new way of thinking about the statements from young mothers—as statements constructed for a specific rhetorical purpose. Again, in conversation with poststructuralist theoretical principles, I illustrate that young women are active in the discursive construction of what it means to be a "young" mother.

Focusing on edited collections and a website that resist the imperative to sensationalize young mothers' stories to prevent future teen pregnancies, I examined how young mothers tell counter-stories in order to intervene in popular constructions of who they are as women, students, and mothers. Describing specific strategies employed in counter-stories helps to identify the narrative elements and discursive tactics available to those who want to resist dominant discourses. In order to contest the commonplaces of teenage pregnancy discourses, many young mothers render uncommon the commonplace by re-iterating well-known statements about teenage pregnancy in ironic or satiric ways, questioning the fact that their motherhood is somehow "teenaged" or that their pregnancies determine their economic or educational success. Using narrative characterization, many young mothers also situate people who would construct or repeat such commonplaces as short-sighted or mean. These scenes invite readers to see those statements as barbaric and, as some mothers illustrate, as potentially pressuring teens to

make choices they would not otherwise make (such as placing their child for adoption or not applying to college). Considering the current cultural context in which authorized experts—such as scholars, politicians, and medical officials—actively construct teenage pregnancy as a social problem, I highlight that many of these antagonizing characters in young mothers' narratives *are* "experts." This tactic may persuade readers to see the expert as fallible. Along with the expert production of "teenage motherhood" are the statistics which collectively brand young mothers as a problem. Young mother counter-rhetors reference "the statistic" as a source of conflict in their life experiences. "The statistic" typically demeans women, causes people to react to young mothers as numerical problems, and incites young women's fear and feelings of pressure to not become what the statistic prescribes.

Some young mothers find a source of inspiration in "beating the statistics" and use their achievements as premises for an argument to respect them as people who care for children and work hard in life. While this move certainly counters predominant assumptions that teen mothers will not achieve the same life outcomes that non-mothering women do, it does not attack the mindset behind such demographic questions (Delgado 2413). Readers may admire *them* while still scrutinizing *other* young mothers who fail to achieve those things, sustaining ideologies of individualism and meritocracy. Yet, as I have shown, each counternarrative collective includes stories from young mothers who question and trouble the "success story" as a form of counter-discourse. Finally, drawing on feminist critique of the limits of personal story to politicize or confront structural issues, I identified how young mothers speak to structures—

specifically educational structures—and I theorized the possibilities of a collection of narratives confronting a specific structure that affects/constructs young women's life experiences.

These counter-stories, and the editors who publish them, position young mothers as the everyday experts on pregnancy and motherhood in their own lives. In contrast to the discursive forums which ask young mothers to "confess" their stories within an experts' framework (that is, authoritative adults who will alter and explain their stories for the audience), *Breeder, You Look Too Young to be a Mom,* and *Girl-Mom* value the knowledge of those who have experienced the subjects they write about. Yet, as Alcoff and Gray, and Naples have shown, the role of the "expert" in mediating women's personal testimonies is complicated and, often, determines how the testimony is heard or acted upon. I have paid attention to the role of the editor as a facilitator of the counternarrative, identifying two ways that the editor may help young mothers intervene in dominant constructions of teenage pregnancy and motherhood. Editors help to define an oppositional framework for the counternarrative by packaging the collection with verbal-visual rhetoric that orients readers to the political intent of the text and by including forewords and introductions that explicitly articulate the rhetorical purpose of the collection. Further, editors can help to choose and arrange counternarratives in ways that create important and new connections between experiences of oppression and/or important conflicts between counter-rhetors who may rely on problematic commonplaces of "good" motherhood in their personal stories. Editors, then, may help to create a broader understanding of motherhood and the challenges mothering women face.

Yet, in the end, how important are these stories in challenging predominant views on teenage pregnancy and parenthood? If there are structures in place which construct, valorize, and act upon only the sanctioned discourses of authorized experts and demographic studies, how important are individual young mothers' stories? I believe De Lauretis's reflection on subjectivity and experience may point to what I see as the importance of these counter-stories. She writes:

> For each person . . . subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction—which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world." (159)

Through this discursive-subjective lens, narrative interventions in the dominant discourses of teenage pregnancy are a way to encourage a change in the significance of events like pregnancy and motherhood for both the young women who experience them and—since they are published—for the broader public who reads them.

CHAPTER 5:
EMBODIED EXIGENCE: TEENAGE PREGNANCY AS *KAIROTIC* FOR RHETORICAL EXCHANGE

". . . being a girl, by yourself, in public space, has enormous consequences, especially when factoring other embodied differences."
--Nedra Reynolds *Geographies of Writing*, 151.

It is my first day back to school. I walk onto campus hesitant, nervous, and vulnerable. I am wearing a teal blue dress I purchased at a discount department store—hoping to purchase an air of confidence, beauty, and sex appeal for my first day of senior year. The dress highlights my large round stomach, a healthy sixth month maternal figure under a junior-department size dress. My body is not supposed to fit into this dress, but I make it work. My body, in this form, is not supposed to traverse a high school campus, but I plan to make that work too.

I have a surprisingly good day back. Students and teachers notice my pregnant form, surprised that over the summer I have changed from the outspoken but scholastically complacent white girl to this Other, this Other thing that is so visibly marked, so out of place. Everyone noticed my pregnancy, some asked happily about it, but no confrontations, no hurt feelings. At noon, I waddle happily to my car in the back school parking lot, thinking that this school year just might work, especially since I am "ahead of the game" in school progress and earned, in my senior year, half days of classes. In the midst of this daydream, I am hailed by our school security guard. He asks to check my school ID for the tiny gold star that authorizes me to leave before 2:30 in the afternoon. Yet, instead of looking at my identification, his dark brown eyes survey my pregnant form for what seems like a full minute. I have trouble watching his eyes watch me.

With a cynical sneer he grunts, "Huh! Do you know who the father is?" My face crumbles and my heart begins to pump its way up to my throat, urging me to confront him. I am only able to manage a dirty look before stomping off to my car. Later, I remember that I answered his question. I told him the father's name. He hailed a teenage mother, and I spoke from that position.

The pregnant teenage body is constructed as an exigence that calls for real teen mothers to explain their pregnancies to peers, family, teachers, school administrators, and even strangers. Often, teen mothers are asked to speak or write about their experiences in order to prove how hard this life path is and how wrong they were to deviate from prescribed norms. Yet, this invitation to speak as a "teenage mother" can also be a

moment of constrained agency in which young mothers may challenge dominant perspectives. As rhetoricians Carl G. Herndl and Adela C. Licona maintain, agency is not something an individual can "have" or "lose," but instead a rhetorical performance dependent upon a *kairotic* moment—a moment when a subject has the opportunity to perform as a rhetor. As the previous chapter illustrated, many young mothers take advantage of the fact that they are seen as *different* kinds of mothers to write and publish counternarratives that speak back to the stigmas associated with them and their pregnancies.

In this chapter, I maintain that the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy constructs a context in which young mothers embody an urgent and much-debated social issue. Drawing from stories exchanged during nine focus groups with pregnant and mothering teens, I theorize that this cultural context leads to situations in which young mothers are publically confronted because of the problems their bodies seem to represent. I offer the rhetorical concept of "embodied exigence" as a way to understand how discursive and material realities of the body may construct everyday rhetorical situations during which the body may function as a site of agency. Building from Herndl and Licona's theory of constrained agency, rhetorical theories of exigence, poststructuralist understandings of identity formation, and feminist work on motherhood, I argue that in moments of embodied exigence, marginalized young mothers may seize the opportunity to speak to what their bodies represent. I describe four tactics that youthful-looking pregnant and mothering women use to interrupt moments of embodied exigence and challenge dominant perspectives on teenage pregnancy and young parenthood: walking

away, talking back to invasions of privacy, employing humor, and educating the stranger on counter-points. I conclude by explaining that young mothers and other subjects who embody exigencies need the critical tools and social support to rhetorically engage these often unpredictable and potentially hostile encounters.

5.1 Confronting the Pregnant or Mothering Teenage Body

Young women who become pregnant before the age of twenty (or without the sanctioned institution of heterosexual marriage or economic independence) are most often constructed as abject bodies to discipline and control. The public is not to respect, provide for, or value these pregnant/mothering bodies that are made highly visible through media coverage and institutional measures that monitor them. This social construction intersects with ideological beliefs about poor/racialized bodies as well as the public/governmental surveillance of pregnant bodies in general. In such a cultural context, visibly youthful pregnant and mothering bodies often prompt antagonistic responses. During her ethnographic research at a school for pregnant and parenting teens, Wendy Luttrell observed that teachers became increasingly uncomfortable and angry with students as they began to "show," or grow into a visibly pregnant form. Luttrell found that teachers were more likely to criticize the students' conduct—including their clothing, physical movements, and attitudes deemed in/appropriate for women in "their condition"—and this led to "recurring conflict[s]" (18). In much the same way, during her ethnographic research of young mothers and their families in Oakland and Richmond, California, Kaplan found that the pregnant body is a source of conflict in young women's homes and public spaces. Kaplan observes mothers who become increasingly intolerant

of their pregnant daughters' presence in the home as they grow more visibly pregnant (53; 76). One young mother is recognized by her round mid-section and asked to confess her sins in front of a church (79). Kaplan explains that for these communities struggling with poverty and all that it entails (e.g., drug abuse, poor education, and a lack of positive relationships for youth) a pregnant teenager signals the end of the American Dream as well as an easy explanation for why the community struggles (83). Chishamiso T. Rowley suggests, "The stigmatization of young mothers gives people an opportunity to show and sometimes act on their feelings of condemnation, disapproval and outrage" (168). Indeed, preventative discourses of "teenage pregnancy" encourage everyday US citizens to notice and even comment on the walking representations of deviant sexuality and economic burdens before them. In short, the ongoing surveillance and scrutiny of the pregnant teenage body prompts people to address pregnant teenagers.

During a research study called the "My Pregnancy Story Project," I collaborated with the executive director of the Southwest Institute for Research of Women, Dr. Sally Stevens, to conduct focus groups with twenty seven pregnant and mothering females aged fifteen to nineteen years old in Tucson, Marana, and Phoenix, Arizona.[79] Situated in a state well-known for its comparatively high rates of teenage pregnancy, the project aimed to learn more about the experience of pregnancy and motherhood from young mothers;[80] we were specifically interested in learning about the support systems available

[79] This project was supported by the Ford Foundation's Crossroads Collaborative grant and has been approved by the University of Arizona's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

[80] I state that Arizona is well known for high rates of teenage pregnancy not to pathologize this "fact" but to draw attention to its pathologizing effect on young mothers. In 2005, Arizona had the third highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the nation (See Kost, Henshaw, and Carlin's Guttmacher Institute report *U.S Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions: National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity*). The

to young mothers in our community in order to potentially improve those systems or identify gaps where we could develop more support for young parents.

Ultimately, we conducted nine focus groups at four sites that served or housed pregnant and mothering young women. Two of these sites were public high schools that had teenage-parent programs (hereafter TAPP). One of the high schools is located on Tucson's south side, situated in a neighborhood near the Tucson International Airport. The students attending this school are predominantly Mexican American (93%). The other high school is situated in Marana, a small rural town on the outskirts of Tucson's northwest side where the majority of the student body is white (67%) (National Center for Education Statistics). We chose these two schools because of the diversity in location, the demographics of the student bodies, and the fact that they were the only two schools in Tucson with comprehensive TAPP programs that could provide opportunities for us to talk to pregnant and mothering students. The TAPP program offers pregnancy and parenting-related services for students in the school district, including on-campus daycare. The third site where we spoke to young pregnant and mothering women was one of the Arizona Department of Juvenile Correction's "safe schools." This correctional

---

Arizona Health Vitals and Statistics Department reported that the teenage pregnancy rate for 2010 was 24.7/1000 "based on 10,980 pregnancies occurring among 443,971 females aged 10-19 years," which—while still comparatively high in the nation—marked the lowest rate of teenage pregnancies in Arizona since 1984 (2). On April 10, 2012, the director of the Arizona Department of Health Services, Will Humble, blogged that such reports of continual declines in the state's teen pregnancy rates were cause for celebration as he holds teenage pregnancy to be a "key public health indicator." However, he cautions, "The bottom line is that the trend toward lower teen pregnancy rates in AZ and the US is encouraging- but we need to do even better by using tried and true evidence-based practices to keep up the pressure on this important health indicator." The reproductive capacity of Arizonan women's bodies is constructed as a state "health indicator" to discipline. In placing pressure on women to time their pregnancies just right, Humble (along with other state officials) suggest that they can ensure a healthier state for all. The contextual, material factors that construct healthy and unhealthy environments for Arizonan women and children are not mentioned, just teenagers' (specifically teenage women's) ability to reproduce.

facility offers rehabilitative services such as counseling, substance abuse recovery, and education for male and female offenders under the age of 18. Located at this site was a Head Start program—a state-funded program that helps low-income families and their children (under the age of three) prepare for school. In this case, Head Start provided parenting education, assistance, and support for a few pregnant and mothering inmates and their children who were staying with other family or guardians. Finally, the last research site was a non-profit organization that provides health resources, social support, and material resources for pregnant and parenting people aged 21 and under in the Tucson community who are primarily referred to the organization by local schools and OB/GYNs. The majority of the "clients" served by this organization are 18 years old and primarily white and Mexican American (Friedman).

During each of the 1-1½ hour focus group sessions at these four sites, Stevens and I asked pregnant and mothering young women about their feelings about their pregnancies, the people who did and did not support them, and their experiences with institutions such as medical centers and schools. The analysis in this chapter focuses primarily on participants' responses to the final series of questions we posed. Interested in learning if other young mothers' experienced confrontations with strangers, we asked participants, "Have you received comments from strangers relating to your pregnancy or motherhood? If so, can you give examples? How did you respond? Were you happy with your response?" The answers to these questions help to illustrate that young mothers are embodied exigencies for communities that are well-versed in state and national discussions of the "problem" of teenage pregnancy—exigencies so urgent that youthful

pregnant and mothering women in the state become embodied examples to rhetorically address.

The question about strangers' comments was always asked near the end of the discussion, the 8th of the 9 questions we posed to participants. By this time, young mothers had already drawn attention to rude comments from family members, boyfriends, and medical staff while answering questions about who was or was not supportive of their pregnancies. However, this question asked them to reflect specifically on comments from people they did not know. Some participants began by reflecting on the general comments they assumed all pregnant women and mothers receive—questions about the timing of their due date and remarks about the cuteness of their child. The participants also drew attention to irritating boundary issues when people they did not know touched their stomachs or their children without asking. A couple of young mothers who looked a bit older than their teenage years explained that they never received comments relating to their age. Thus, although I use the adjective "young" throughout the chapter to describe the participants and other pregnant/mothering women who are addressed as teenage mothers, I mean to refer to youthful-looking women—that is, women who look like teenagers to the people who address them.

Most of the participants in this study explained that they had received comments from strangers relating to their pregnancies and their status as mothers. When describing school peers' responses to her pregnancy, Molly made a distinction between the supportive treatment of students who knew her and just wanted to ask how she was doing and the negative comments from peers who did not know her and "give you the worst

looks ever and they're just like, 'You slut!'"[81] Most of the time, confrontations related to their visible pregnancy or motherhood occurred while pregnant and mothering women were out shopping at grocery stores, malls, or Wal-Mart.[82] Other encounters occurred while walking across open spaces such as school or detention center campuses. For example, Miranda explained, "I was, like, walking over [across the school campus] to the daycare with my son and some freshman little boy was like, 'Well, shoulda wore a condom.'"[83] Interpreting the mothering young woman only as an example of a teen's failure to practice safe sex (an image often circulated by "safe sex" and teenage pregnancy prevention campaigns), the male student responds with the sex education cautionary tale punch line. Another student, Belinda, was approached on her first day on campus by an inquisitive peer:

> Like somebody asked me "You're pregnant?" and I was like, "Yeah, this is my second one." It was like, "You're serious? How old are you?" It's

[81] The "My Pregnancy Story Project" culminated in a community report distributed to all of the research sites in the aim of improving understanding of and services for young pregnant and parenting women at that location. Thus, the participants needed to remain anonymous. We had planned to assign each participant a letter and ask the participants to refer to each other as that letter. However, all the participants preferred to use their first names. So as we transcribed the discussions we deleted their names, replacing them with a letter/number combination, to ensure absolute anonymity during the research process and report circulation. For the purposes of this chapter, I have chosen to use pseudonyms to represent the women's identities and avoid the disembodied feel of characterizing them as letters and numbers. Ideally, these pseudonyms would have been chosen by the participants themselves but in this case, now months removed from the conversations, I have chosen the pseudonyms. Choosing names for research participants is ethically complicated, at best, and in future work I will be more mindful of the importance of thinking through the representation of qualitative research participants.

[82] Future work could consider how grocery stores function as rhetorical spaces. Most of the mothers in this study, many of the counternarrative authors I previously reviewed, and women interviewed in Rowley's and Fessler's separate works each comment about interactions which happen within this sphere. Feminist geographers like Cindi Katz, in her chapter "Power, Space, and Terror: Social Reproduction and the Public Environment" have thought through the social relations producing and produced in public spaces.

[83] In representing the participants' statements, I have tried to accurately represent how they spoke the words. I did not change grammar or style, although I did add words in at times to help readers understand the meaning of the sentence. Any additions to the participants' statements are bracketed. Ellipses indicate a pause, a trailing off, or an interruption by another participant. Finally, I also marked, in parentheses, any place where laughter occurred.

> like, what do you care? You know? I was like, "Uh, 17." And he was like, "Dang, how old did you have with your first one?" I was like, "14." He was like, "Damn, you're young, that's crazy."

While young mothers described many comments from unknown peers, they also told stories about being approached by older adults in public spaces. Beatrice explains, "Yeah, when I first was with my baby and I went to a store and he was only 1 month and [someone asked] 'Is this your baby?' and I was like, 'Yeah.' She's like, 'How old are you?' 'I am 16' 'Oh you're so young'." As these young women explain, strangers approached them at school or the store to inquire about their age, perhaps to verbally verify that visual evidence they are too young by cultural standards, and then offer judgments about the timing of their pregnancies. Other participants drew attention to strangers who ask young mothers what they are going to *do* about their pregnancies:

> Megan: I think older people look down on me. They're like, "What are you gonna do?"
>
> Mia: Yeah, I hate it when they ask, "What are you going to do?"
>
> Jenna: Ok, so, where do you get those comments?
>
> Megan: Well one of them was yesterday when I was taking the bus home.
>
> Jenna: So you were taking the bus home and someone. . .
>
> Megan: It was on the bus here. They were asking all these weird questions, like, "it must be hard for you," and all this kind of stuff and I am like, "yeah it's hard, but I'm like I'm still going to school."

Other participants also reflected on experiences when strangers conferred with them about the problem of their pregnancy and what was going to be done about it. Thus, in addition to prompting antagonistic responses about the inappropriateness of young pregnant and mothering women's life decisions, dominant discourses of teenage pregnancy appear to also generate emotional and often dramatically stated concerns for the well-being of the young women and child. If teenage pregnancy is constructed as a dire consequence of unprotected sex or rape, a consequence that impedes the success of young women and their children, then it can be alarming, shocking even, to see the victims or suffers of this issue in the flesh.[84] This leads to comments, made in public spaces to visibly mothering or pregnant young women, about what can be "done" to help the seemingly horrible situation:

> Salma: That happens to me a lot.
>
> Sara: At the store.
>
> Salma: Like, "What are you doing? Like, why do you have a baby when you so young?" and, like, I just . . . god just . . ."
>
> [. . .]
>
> Sara: They would always just say, "Oh you're so young!" It's like, yeah I know, it happens, like get over it.
>
> Salma: It's not like your words could stop it. [She laughs]

[84] For example, feminist filmmakers Gillian Aldrich and Jennifer Baumgardnerin used the personal stories of, primarily, would-be-teen-mothers in their 2005 documentary *I Had an Abortion*. In this documentary, support for women's right to have an abortion is often premised on the construction of teenage pregnancy and motherhood as a terrible fate for young women.

Jenna: What is the function of you telling me that right now? [Group is laughing]

Sara: It's not gonna help out.

Adela: It's like when people tell me I'm short, "Yeah, so?!"

Salma: "You could of told me that when I was younger."

Jenna: "Maybe I could of drank some milk and grew." [Group laughter]

We had a good time laughing at the absurdity of strangers' comments to young mothers which seemed to stem from their efforts to "solve" a pregnancy that was already decided on—that was already happening and being carried to term. Young mothers discussed the reasons behind such comments as nosiness, rudeness, and part of an effort to make young mothers feel bad about themselves. And, indeed, some participants admitted that such encounters caused anxiety. Belinda explains, "I was like, 'Oh, yeah. You're right. What am I going to do?'" Participants at another focus group agreed. Sara explained that after receiving many negative comments about her pregnancy "it kind of gets to you." Another mother in the group, Salma, chimed in: "[It] kind of makes you have like a second thought." Sara agreed: "Makes you have a lot." These stories were especially alarming for a newly pregnant participant, Mia, who had not received any comments relating to the intersection of her youth and pregnancy. After hearing a fellow student describe an incident in which male students yelled "MILF" (an abbreviation for "Mom I'd Like to Fuck") at her as she strolled her son to daycare, Mia exclaimed, "I can't take that. My heart's beating really fast right now and it didn't even happen [to me]!" As anxiety-producing moments that shock, shame, and/or potentially infuriate young women who

carry pregnancies or raise children, and as moments that seem to be unfairly centered on women's bodies, it is important to theorize these encounters and better understand how young mothers and their allies can rhetorically respond.[85]

5.2 Theorizing Embodied Exigence

These instances of pregnant and mothering young women being approached, in part, because of the political, economic, and social problems they seem to represent illustrate what I call "embodied exigence." Rhetorical theorist Lloyd Bitzer first defined exigence in his influential article, "The Rhetorical Situation." Bitzer suggests that rhetorical situations are "natural context[s] of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance" (5). Thus, it is situations which both prompt and shape rhetorical responses and Bitzer identifies "exigence" as the factor that impels a rhetor to speak. Exigence is "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (6).

Questioning Bitzer's claim that it is a natural exigence that "invites utterance" (4), Richard Vatz argues that it is the *rhetor* who interprets (and possibly creates) the exigence to which she or he responds. Vatz argues that "no theory of the relationship between situations and rhetoric can neglect to take account of the initial linguistic

[85] Although I claim that these moments reflect a gendered bias that renders pregnant and mothering women more susceptible to public judgment than men or others who are less visible reproductive bodies/parents, it is important to note that I have not conducted qualitative research on fathers of teen pregnancies. The advocacy organization California Latinas for Reproductive Justice is currently conducting research with young families, with a particular interest in speaking to young fathers about their experiences. Perhaps youthful-looking fathers also receive comments fueled by the rhetorical efforts of prevention campaigns, but for the purposes of this chapter, I focus on young women, guided by feminist research that has documented the ways in which women's bodies are more readily disciplined for their reproductive capacities. I will discuss this research further in a later section of the chapter.

depiction of the situation" (228).[86] Since Bitzer's essay was first published in 1968, rhetoricians have debated the role of exigence and the situation in rhetoric. In her article, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of *Différance*," Barbara Biesecker explains that in these debates "either speaker or situation is posited as logically and temporally prior, one or the other is taken as origin" (235); eschewing this either/or dichotomy, Biesecker contends that "neither the text's immediate rhetorical situation nor its author can be taken as simple origin or generative agent since both are underwritten by a series of historically produced displacements" (239). Drawing on poststructuralist theorist Jacques Derrida's theory of *différance*, Biesecker depicts the rhetorical situation as an articulation between "symbolic action (the text) and the subject (the audience)" (233), both of which are socially constructed and constantly shifting.

While acknowledging that "at the center of action is a process of interpretation" (as opposed to the "material causes" or the objectively identifiable exigencies emphasized by Bitzer), Carolyn Miller still finds Bitzer's "demand-response" approach to rhetorical situations useful in explaining how exigencies seem to recur—prompting similar responses each time (156). Miller explains that exigence "is a form of social knowledge—a *mutual construing* of objects, events, interests, and purposes that not only links them but also *makes them what they are*: an objectified social need" (157, emphasis mine). Thus, an exigence is a shared construction of an urgent discursive and material need that "provides the rhetor with a socially recognizable way" to act (157).

[86] Arthur Miller, too, is concerned with bringing attention to the complicity of a rhetor in creating meaning of events. Miller writes, "the ultimate character of an exigence is a conclusion in the mind of its perceiver" (112). That is, what any event comes to mean depends on how the rhetor constructs it. Miller illustrates this point with examples of rhetors responding differently to the same exigence.

Many organizations, institutions, and people construct pregnant or mothering teenagers as "things that are other than it should be" (Bitzer 6), and many young mothers report being talked about or talked to as if they were a defect that *must* be addressed in the everyday—they embody the exigence of "teenage pregnancy." Pregnant teenagers are often brought to public attention as "problems" when an organization, institution, or rhetor wants to discuss social changes packaged as solutions. For example, in chapter one, I discussed the historical emergence of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy and the ways in which the AGI brought attention to pregnant and parenting teens in order to discuss the importance of approving sex education and contraceptives for minors in the 1970s. Pregnant and mothering teenagers are addressed as examples of what *not* to do or as examples of failing social structures.[87] They can be both exigencies to address in-and-of themselves (with comments like "shoulda worn a condom" or "you are too young!") or pathetic rhetorical appeals for action to change other social inequalities (like poor education, lack of access to contraception, or failing family structures). Because public discourses of teenage pregnancy prevention construct a negative view of "young" parenthood (regardless of the age of the father), people who experience these discourses—in school, the media, or politics—are prompted to respond to the exigence of a pregnant teen body. Anis Bawarshi explains that since "we recognize a recurring situation as requiring a certain immediate attention or remedy (in short, an exigence)," our responses to exigencies are "also socially defined" (356). In this way, "exigence

[87] Or, in the case of the young mothers who publish accounts of "succeeding" in some way or another, pregnant or mothering teens are sensationalized as exceptions to the rule—as shining examples of individuals that pulled themselves up by their bootstraps as it were. See chapter four for further discussion of this.

becomes part of the way we conceptualize and experience a situation, and, as a result, how we respond to and maintain it" (356). How rhetors respond to exigencies is determined, in part, by how they are supposed to respond—that is, how they have been socialized to respond (Miller 158; Bawarshi 341). Rhetorician Krista Ratcliffe explains that "just as radiation fields permeate bodies and (un)consciously affect our cell functions, so too do cultural discourses permeate our bodies and (un)consciously socialize our attitudes and actions" (619). We are socialized to act with certain attitudes and actions toward young mothers.

In thinking about rhetoric as embodied and in thinking through the ways in which speakers function as embodied subjects, I draw on and respond to recent work on the body in rhetoric and composition. Collections such as Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley's *Rhetorical Bodies* explore how "bodies are marked in ways that carry a great deal of cultural freight" (Crowley 316). Rhetoric and composition scholars such as Kristie Fleckenstein, Jane Hindman, and William Banks each use "embodied discourse" or "embodied rhetoric" to refer to writing practices which speak back to Cartesian mind/body dualisms and disembodied scholarly conventions by privileging materiality as a basis for inquiry. The Oxford English Dictionary also defines embodied as something that is "expressed or exhibited in material or concrete form." I use this latter meaning when I theorize that the body—as it appears pregnant or in proximity to children or as it has experienced a physical endeavor such as gestation and labor—represents or exemplifies a current, urgent issue or debate. I believe that Bitzer's understanding of "exigence," as re-read through Biesecker, Miller, and Bawarshi, is useful for describing

everyday situations in which a young women's socially recognizable pregnancy or motherhood impels strangers to speak with her. Of course, it is not just the physically observable body that prompts speech, but the recognition of that body as a problem demanding a response—a recognition that comes with the repeated representation of "teenage pregnancy" in organizational and media campaigns that forward the disciplinary discourses of the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy.

Thus, I define embodied exigence as a moment in which subjects, like teenage mothers, are addressed as (or perhaps address others as representative of) an urgent issue or social problem within a specific cultural context.[88] The embodied exigence of a pregnant or mothering teenager often demands an antagonistic or sympathetic response that reaffirms she is an objectified social problem. However, I posit that a subject who embodies exigence may also seize the opportunity to act as a rhetor in her own right, shifting a moment of personal confrontation into a rhetorical situation that better suits her own rhetorical purpose.

[88] In theorizing these everyday situations as rhetorical situations, I depart a bit from Bitzer's original understanding of a rhetorical situation. He writes, "A situation is rhetorical insofar as it needs and invites discourse capable of participating with situation and thereby altering its reality. . .discourse is rhetorical insofar as it functions (or seeks to function) as a fitting response to a situation which needs and invites it" (6). In an everyday situation between a young pregnant or mothering woman and a stranger, it is difficult to determine what alters "reality" and what is a "fitting response." As one committee member rightly pointed out, the comments made by strangers do not really seem "rhetorical" in the sense of participating in a situation that they (as strangers) can alter—in fact, the responses appear to typically be one or two-line comments. However, I agree with Biesecker, Miller, Bawarshi, and other rhetoricians influenced by the theories of poststructuralism, that situations which (re)produce social identities, relations, or beliefs are always already rhetorical. So in considering moments between strangers and young mothers when the strangers position/respond to young women as "young mothers," I see these exchanges as rhetorical situations.

5.3 Acting in Moments of Embodied Exigence: Constrained Agency

In "Shifting Agency: Agency, *Kairos*, and the Possibilities of Social Action," Herndl and Licona put poststructuralist understandings of ideology, subjectivity, discourse, and power into conversation with rhetorical theory in order to respond to "postmodern critique [that] denied us recourse to the enlightenment individual of liberal ideology, yet failed to replace that individual with a potent social actor" (26; see also Reynolds 897). Seeing the potential for agency, defined as "the possibility for action," in the rhetorical concept of *kairos* or "the opportune moment," Herndl and Licona seek to "explain social change or rhetorical action" in a postmodern world (6). Herndl and Licona maintain, "agency is not an attribute of the individual but the conjunction of a set of social and subjective relations that constitute the possibility of action" (1). Agency, then, is not something an individual can have, gain, or lose but instead a rhetorical performance dependent upon a *kairotic* moment—a moment when change or action can take place.

Building from Foucault's notion of the author-function, Herndl and Licona theorize an "agent-function" as the outcome of a relationship between authority and agency, or what they call "constrained agency" (2). That is, particular social constructions and relations lead to spaces of authority that individuals may move in and out of in particular moments. These spaces or moments of authority are constructed by the material and discursive constraints that produce them. Constrained agency acknowledges the material and institutional limits of subjects' potential actions, while also understanding that subjects actively engage in discursive constructions and power

relations. Herndl and Licona urge us to "question not only who has the authority to speak and represent, but also, what are the conditions and opportunities that allow subjects to act and to change or to reproduce social, institutional, and discursive practices" (2). In engaging this line of inquiry Herndl and Licona refuse to conflate the identity of the agent with "agency" and the identity of the author with "authority." They suggest that agency actually precedes the agent and, similarly, authority precedes the author. Agency and authority are now moments in space and time that a subject moves in and out of. Constrained agency prompts us to consider how, when, and why a subject may shift into a space of authority to speak.

Thinking about rhetorical performances of agency—a constrained agency that shifts as a *kairotic* moment in space and time—connects in interesting ways to the temporally embodied experience of pregnancy and motherhood. The maternal body is constantly shifting, inherently temporal, and also constrained by expert discourse, medical treatment, and social norms. Pregnancy is an "opportune moment" to interact with the bodies of women (through medical practices and everyday encounters in public spaces). It is also a period of time when women are often asked to speak about and account for their bodies. Approached by friends and strangers alike, women's pregnant bodies frequently become the center of conversation: "How far along are you?" "Is this your first?" "Are you expecting twins?" In a recent issue of *Qualitative Sociology,* sociologist Jennifer Reich reflects on the ways in which her visibly pregnant form helped to initiate conversations with her research participants who may not have originally opened up to her during interviews.

Yet, public commentary on women's pregnant bodies is not always welcome. Creative writer Aubrey Hirsch reflects in her essay, "On Privacy and Fear and Pregnancy," her anxiety about announcing the news of her pregnancy because it will prompt others to touch and discuss her body on a daily basis. She writes, "In our society, pregnant women are public property." Since Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, feminist scholars have been critically attentive to the ways in which the pregnant or mothering female body is constructed as public domain, inviting attention, touch, discipline, and critique. Bordo calls the pregnant woman's body a "fetal incubator," highlighting the dominant belief that once a woman becomes pregnant she is a *body* first and foremost—a body that is closely watched and held accountable for the fetus within even at the expense of her own constitutional/human rights (80).[89] Furthermore, in "Pregnant Bodies as Public Spaces," philosopher Rebecca Kukla argues that "cultural, technological, and medical practices of prenatal care have constituted the pregnant body as *public space*" (285, emphasis in original). Kukla analyzes how "expectant mothers' own relationship to the insides of their bodies is powerfully mediated by public measures and representations" including sonograms, TV shows, and parenting guides that encourage ongoing monitoring and control of the pregnancy experience (288). Indeed, feminist scholarship aptly illustrates that cultural understandings of the pregnant body render pregnant women as sites of surveillance and control in ways that potentially alienate them

[89] Journalist Ada Calhoun, in her recent *New York Times* article, "The Criminalization of Bad Mothers," reports on state laws that prosecute and imprison mothers who give birth to infants that have any trace of illegal drugs in their system. Calhoun explores the arguments of the movements for Personhood (that is, to define the embryo/fetus as a person deserving of rights) and the arguments of Planned Parenthood, the A.C.L.U., the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the National Advocates for Pregnant Women who see such laws and persecution as denying the constitutional rights (and personhood) of pregnant women (see also the work of Susan Chase and Dorothy Roberts).

from their bodies. For instance, philosopher Iris Young suggests that Western medical discourse constructs pregnancy as a disorder or disease in need of expert treatment and control, thereby alienating women from their bodily experience of pregnancy (45). That is, both pregnant women and the public at large are encouraged to see individual women's pregnancy as a public matter worthy of national surveillance and potentially disciplinary response.

As presumably deviant incubators of innocent (even if culturally undesirable) fetuses, pregnant teenagers are often rhetorically constructed as "a thing that is other than it should be" (Bitzer) or an "objectified social need" (Miller) and are responded to as such. For instance, one focus group participant reflected that when she was sixteen, a teacher looked at her pregnant body and announced to the class, "We're going have a conversation on teen pregnancy today." A class discussion of the reasons why students should practice pregnancy prevention was a socially recognizable way for this teacher to address the "urgent issue" sitting in her room. But teenage pregnancy/motherhood is a temporary and embodied exigence. The abjectness of the teenage pregnant body is a temporally-limited space identifiable only in its visibility. Teenage women soon age and the physical markers of maternity become less explicit. However, during the time that they are visibly pregnant, teenagers are often recognized and confronted for their abject position in society.

Few situations construct a position of "authority" that adolescents or pregnant women can shift into. However, the fact that some pregnant/mothering women are *already* approached in public means those moments may offer the opportunity for

pregnant/mothering young women to speak from a position of constrained agency and actively intervene in discourses about pregnancy and motherhood. Considering situations when teenagers are engaged by strangers because of their pregnancies highlights an important contribution to Herndl and Licona's theory of agent-formation: the materiality of the rhetor/subject's body. Herndl and Licona maintain that "in order to participate in a debate, a speaking subject must first be recognized and able to enter the discussion" (1). In current political and media contexts, the public—including young pregnant and mothering women—are encouraged to recognize and actively respond to pregnant teenagers. While such recognition may function as a disciplining mechanism, encouraging young mothers to see themselves as making a mistake and encouraging others to see young mothers as failed young women, this discursive construction also functions as a means of resistance (Foucault 95). Activist and poet Audre Lorde writes that the "visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength" (42; see also Alcoff 7). In the rest of the chapter, I consider whether the recognition of "teenage mothers" may function not only as a stigmatized subject position but also as a space of authority from which to speak back to socialized norms.

5.4 Teen Mothers as Subjects and Embodied Rhetors

Recognition is a necessary prerequisite to shifting into a position of constrained agency as a rhetor. In his influential essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Louis Althusser discusses recognition, specifically misrecognition, as a powerful source/effect of ideology that helps to sustain the status quo that benefits the ruling class. He explains that in order to construct ideologies that reproduce the relations of ruling class,

individuals are "interpellated" as subjects who enact the practices and rituals of that ideology (160). Althusser defines interpellation as a hailing, recruitment, or transformation of individuals into subjects of ideologies, offering the example of a police officer hailing someone "Hey you!" (161-2). Althusser's theory of interpellation illustrates that moments of recognition are also moments of ideological subject-formation. In answering the hail, in recognizing oneself as subject of the hail, one is misrecognizing oneself as a subject in that ideological construction. Feminist poststructuralist Chris Weedon explains, "It is misrecognition in the sense that the individual, on assuming the position of subject in ideology, assumes that she is the *author* of the ideology which constructs her subjectivity" (30, emphasis in original). When individuals are recognized and hailed with comments such as, "Hey you! How old are you? Is this *your* child? You are too young," they are subjected to the ideological construction of teenage motherhood. When a woman is recognized as a teen mother, whether or not she speaks, she is positioned in a rhetorical situation as an abject subject.

I opened this chapter with a reflection on a moment when I was addressed as a *teen* mother (read: promiscuous, careless woman) and I felt impelled to speak as a subject of that ideological relation. When the adult male security guard asked for the name of the father of my child, I (misrecognizing myself as a "teenager" who must answer the questions of school guards, a "woman" who is subject to scrutiny if sexually active, and a "mother" who is accountable for the legitimacy of her child/family) answered his

question.[90] However, not all moments of recognition as a teenage mother need to or do function this way. Distinguishing Marxist theories of ideology and interpellation from poststructuralist theories of discourse Weedon writes, "For feminist poststructuralism, it is language in the form of conflicting discourses which constitutes us as conscious thinking subjects and enables us to give meaning to the world and act to transform it" (31). The awareness of "conflicting discourses" such as discourses of individuality and the right to personal privacy may lead to a different response in the moment of recognition as a teenage mother. In fact, Butler explains that "the paradox of subjectivation (*assujetissement)* is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms" (15). That is, the process of understanding one is recognized as a teenage mother may be a moment when young women also recognize they are entitled to rights and respect as mothers. Foucault explains, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (*The History* 95). The relations of power that construct moments of confrontation between strangers and young pregnant and mothering women also construct potential for subversive rhetorical exchange.

---

[90] In theorizing genres as social actions, Carolyn Miller considers impelled responses as well. Drawing on Kenneth Burke's understanding of rhetoric as reflective of social motives, Miller theorizes that what seem like rhetors' intentional responses exigencies are actually "products of socialization"—that is, intentions are social. Miller writes, "Exigence is a set of particular social patterns and expectations that provides a socially objectified motive for addressing danger, ignorance, separateness. It is an understanding of social need in which I know how to take an interest, in which one can intend to participate" (158). In the moment with the security guard I knew how to participate. Just like women who are asked such questions about sex partners and fathers by family, clinical staff, doctors, the Department of Economic Services, and even Dr. Drew (a popular television psychiatrist who interviews young mothers on reality television) I was to honestly answer the question.

5.5 Specific Strategies for Coping with Confrontations

As I previously discussed, young mothers are well aware of the issues their bodies represent for other people. Luttrell uses the term "body smarts" to refer to "dual awareness that they and their pregnant bodies are being viewed and scrutinized by others" —an awareness that leads to both grief and critical insights (58). Pregnant and mothering young women develop tactics to cope with the confrontations they experience (see the work of Luttrell, Rowley, Kaplan, Fessler, and Yardley).[91] Before considering how pregnant or parenting teens may take advantage of the *kairotic* moment to shift into a position of constrained agency to speak back to the comments they receive in the everyday, it is important to consider other options available to them in these moments.

In her dissertation, *Reclaiming a Spoiled Maternal Identity: Young Mothers' Experiences and Rejection of Stigma*, psychology scholar Kathryn Bondy Fessler draws from open-ended interviews with thirty four women who gave birth between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, to argue that young mothers deal with the stigma of young motherhood in active and dynamic ways (see also Kaplan and Yardley). Challenging the idea that individuals, like teen mothers, passively absorb social stigmatization, Fessler shows what she calls young mothers' "hypervigilance" in identifying, managing, and avoiding stigmatization. One example Fessler offers is the ways in which young mothers

[91] The same could be said for any abject subject. For instance, in her book *Staring: How We Look* feminist disability scholar Rosmarie Garland-Thomson discusses how people with disabilities or so-called deformed bodies function as experienced "starees"—people who are often stared at. She writes, "Stareable people have a good deal of work to do to assert their own dignity or avoid an uncomfortable scene. People with unusual looks come to understand this and develop relational strategies to ameliorate the damage staring can inflict. Rather than passively wilting under intrusive and discomforting stares, a staree can take charge of a staring situation, using charm, friendliness, humor, formidability, or perspicacity to reduce interpersonal tension and enact a positive self-representation" (84).

avoid places where they are often "stigmatized," a term she uses to describe hostile public confrontations by strangers in places like school or grocery stores (113-4; Berman et al. 46).[92] In much the same way, social psychologist and ethnographer of New York public schools Michelle Fine observed a student who ultimately decided to leave school because of confrontations that made her uncomfortable: "I got to leave [school] 'cause even if they don't say it, them teachers got hate in their eyes when they look at my belly'" (Opal qtd. in Fine 38). For example, a teacher confronted Opal to ask, "Who is going to take care of that baby, you or your mother? You know what it costs to buy diapers and milk and afford child care?" (qtd. in Fine 38). During the MPSP focus groups one participant expressed her inclination to avoid places, like the local Wal-Mart, where she was more likely to be approached by strangers. At least one focus group participant in our study said that she switched schools because "the kids, you would just want to knock them out" because of the rude comments they made at school.

Another way that ethnographic researchers suggest young pregnant or mothering teens manage the hostility they encounter in the everyday is by going places *with* other people. For example, Fessler explains that young mothers in her study "self-protected" by asking others, like friends or family members, to accompany them to places in order to mediate or deflect the mistreatment or confrontations that happened when they were on their own (104-6). Kaplan describes how teen mothers in the low-income communities she studies would take friends or relatives along with them to the welfare office because

[92] Fessler uses this observation to challenge the idea that young mothers passively drop out of school or just ignore the importance of health care (113-4). For other critiques of flat claims that young mothers are "less likely" to finish school or seek health care see the work of Pillow, Luker, Roberts and other feminist researchers attentive to institutional responses to women.

the office workers were notoriously mean and often made the process difficult to understand. More than just offering the comfort of presence, participants in our focus groups recalled instances when supportive family and friends spoke to strangers who made comments. One young mother recalls an incident when shopping with her mother:

> Silvia: I remember one time I was sitting at the store with my mom and I was still pregnant and some old lady comes next to me and was like, "Mi'jita you're so young why would you do this to yourself?" and I was all like [makes a face like she was horrified] and my mom was just looking at her all like, "get away from her."
>
> Jenna: And was that all you guys did was just look at her?
>
> Silvia: No, my mom told her to leave, if she could please leave.
>
> Sally: So your mom really helped you out in that situation?
>
> Silvia: Yeah, I was like, does it look that bad? Like stuff happens. It's not like you can prevent it from happening.
>
> Jenna: And so you were happy that your mom said that. And did she go away?
>
> Silvia: Yeah.

Silvia's mother intercepted the woman's dramatic statements of concern and encouraged the woman to leave her daughter alone. This made Silvia feel supported and effectively stopped the confrontation—the woman walked away. It is clear Silvia was still disturbed and angered by the encounter, not understanding why her motherhood looked *so* bad to others and/or how the woman thought these comments would "prevent it from

happening." The baby was well on the way. In fact, Silvia's statement about prevention could be understood as resistance to the idea that teenage pregnancy can be prevented. After all, "stuff happens."[93] Nonetheless, her mothers' assistance in the moment helped by dissuading the woman from making further comments to Silvia.

5. 6 Strategies for Engaging the Rhetorical Situation: Responding in the Moment

But what about young mothers' actions in moments of confrontation? When exchanging stories about strangers' comments on their pregnancies, focus group participants identified different ways they responded. Fessler categorizes moments when young mothers respond to people's comments or stares as "attitude," and she briefly considers it as one type of individual response to stigma. Yet, drawing on stories exchanged during the focus groups, I illustrate that these are not only moments of being "stigmatized" but also lively rhetorical situations during which young mothers deploy a variety of tactics. This is important because it is in these moments when individual women are (re)constructed as "too young" or "teenage" mothers—an exigence in our current cultural context. "Stigma" implies individuals marked as "other"—it is a static symbol of judgment applied to shame those who have done wrong in the eyes of the community.

---

[93] Silvia's comment about "stuff happens" is particularly interesting considering her cultural context. Arizona recently enacted legislation, called a "Parents' Bill of Rights" that further limits students' access to knowledge about healthy sexuality and sexual health (SB 1309). Arizona already limits sex education provided in public schools to abstinence education. With the parents' bill of rights, students must now seek parental consent to "opt-in" to any classroom discussion in which the topic of sexuality is broached. This, along with recent bans on Mexican-American studies in high school, creates a cultural climate where youth's right to know—about their histories, cultures, sexuality, and health—is limited. For important discussions about this legislation and movements of resistance against these repressive mechanisms, see the work of the Crossroads Collaborative.

However, from a poststructuralist perspective subjectivity is constructed discursively and relationally—that is, subjects are positioned in multiple, conflicting, and shifting ways. "Teenage mothers" are not always "teenage mothers." Moreover, even when young women are positioned as teenage mothers they actively participate in that moment of construction. As one focus group participant put it, "I don't see myself as a teen parent, I am *a* parent and, you know, I'm dealing with it the way any mother would." She admitted that others may see her as a teen parent but she does not feel that way; in fact, she sees many similarities in what she does and what other women who bear and raise children do. Thus, it is in these moments of confrontation when teachers, peers, strangers, and others in public spaces hail the individual as a "teenage mother" that the subjective position of embodied exigence is constructed. As Rachel C. Berman, Susan Silver, and Sue Wilson put it, young mothers "are positioned as 'social problems' *through* acts of open hostility because of their youthful appearance" (44, emphasis added). Although, as my dissertation has shown, confrontations are not the only moment of constructing teenage mother as a rhetorical exigence, it is one moment of abject subject-formation. Individual actions during such confrontations may disrupt this construction, shift the rhetorical situation, and therein intervene in the (re)production of dominant discourses. Rhetorician Nedra Reynold's suggests, "Interruption might become part of a tactical rhetoric for marginalized speakers and writers—those who are often interrupted routinely as well as those who do not speak or write from a single location" ("Interrupting" 898).

Although I contend that individual women's actions within these moments of subject formation can interrupt or challenge the interpellation that would sustain the status quo, it is difficult to assess the outcome or ultimate end of the tactics young pregnant and mothering women use in these moments. I only have access to their stories about what the stranger did in the moment and how the young woman responded. Yet, looking at their responses through a rhetorical lens, as tactics deployed to interrupt everyday situation in which *they* are interrupted by others who seek to address them as exigencies, I further this dissertation's ultimate goal of understanding how young pregnant and mothering women actively participate—as rhetors who act and as rhetorical exigencies that are acted upon—in the discursive materialities that construct them as non-normative. Specifically, I identify and discuss the following resistive tactics I heard young mothers using to rhetorically respond in confrontations: walking away, talking back to invasions of privacy, using humor, and educating the stranger on counter-points.

Walking Away

The first tactic participants described as a way to respond to people's uninvited stares, questions, or comments was to ignore them and walk away. For example, this is how Belinda ultimately responded to the student who questioned her about her pregnancy and her children's father (i.e., "Damn, you're young, that's crazy!"). She explains, "I walked away, I was like, I don't care. It's my responsibility not yours. That's what I said in my head though" [she laughs]. Walking away is one strategy young mothers can use to avoid rhetorical situations where they feel they are just an object or example to judge. While some feminist theorists are understandably wary of silence as a response to

moments of domination (hooks *Teaching* 66; Lorde 41), Belinda suggests ending or ignoring the confrontation is also an embodied way of illustrating that one does not care that the other person thinks they are "crazy" or a "problem." Some participants discussed walking away as ways to deny the rude person the dignity of a response (see also Yardley 679).

Young mothers' decisions to walk away may bring the stranger's impelled response to "teenage pregnancy" to a halt and prompt the asker/comment-maker to reflect on what they are doing. In *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Rhetorical Tradition*, Cheryl Glenn writes that silence "can also be a position—a choice . . . We can use silence to make the other person worry, wait, wonder, work harder. Silence can be used to make the other person worry about filling the gap, making peace, starting up the conversation or the negotiations again" (177). Of course, there are distinctions between choosing to be silent, being/feeling silenced, and remaining quiet as responses to these situations. As a tactical response, many young mothers described a combination of silence and removing themselves from the situation as opposed to remaining silently in the stranger's presence.

Walking away, however, can also be understood as typical "adolescent" behavior and potentially (re)construct the notion that adolescent pregnant or mothering women are deviant. In her book, *Act Your Age: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*, Nancy Lesko points out that teenagers are often understood as moody and hostile to authority (3). Perhaps young mothers who walk away are read as negligent people who just don't know any better. Again, it is difficult to analyze everyday rhetorical situations from one person's perspective. But it seems that young mothers' silence and desertion of the

moment is also way to refuse the position of embodied exigence by disembodying it—literally moving their body away from the moment and the everyday instantiation of being addressed as a problem.

During an informal conversation with the director of a community program for teenage parents, we discussed the fact that walking away from overtly hostile strangers is also a safety protocol. For instance, the director described two incidents when young mothers from her center were approached by strangers on the city bus who berated them and even followed them off the bus in order to continue harassing them. The director explained that during their center's teen parent support group, the group leader recommends that young mothers walk away in order to ensure their safety. Considering the question of personal safety is important in considering what types of agency are available in the moment of embodied exigence. Furthermore, this question of safety prompts us to consider what the dominant narrative of teenage pregnancy encourages in terms of aggression toward women.

Other participants similarly explained that they *had* to walk away from uninvited touches or rude comments because of the constraints of the situation. For example, at the correctional facility where we conducted a focus group, there are rules about prolonged conversation in the courtyard or touching other inmates. Curious peers who felt impelled to ask young mothers about their pregnancies or touch their bellies were actually potentially getting pregnant young women in trouble.

> Jenna: Were you happy with how you responded? Just to walk away and then say that little retort in your head, you know?

> Belinda: Well, if I would have kept talking somebody would have called me. The staff they wouldn't have allowed us to keep talking.

Another student further explained the constraints of the rhetorical situation:

> Brooke: Oh in here? Like a lot of people, they like they just come up to me and just touch my stomach. I am like, "We're gonna get boundaries!" cause you can't touch each other in here.

Since this facility had specific rules about talking in the hallways and touching each other's bodies, responding to peers' persistent line of questions and uninvited touches by walking away is a conscious choice *not* to get in trouble with the staff. In much the same way, students at a local high school with services for pregnant and parenting students mentioned that enrolling in the special program required signing a "Student Agreement" with special code of conduct provisions.[94] Therefore, when students yelled hurtful things at them, such as "shoulda worn a condom!" they felt like all they could do was walk away: "you can't be in fights and you can't be in like altercations and stuff. . . We get kicked out like one fight or anything we get kicked out" of the program and have to find other accommodations for pregnancy/parenting related services and childcare for their

[94] The disciplining mechanisms built in to services for young (and I would add low-income) mothers are startling and would benefit from solid feminist critique. Some examples from one student agreement at a school with a program for young parents are 1) mandates that students walk their children directly to the childcare center, never pausing on any other part of the campus; 2) that students spend their lunch hours in the daycare with their children and agree "to meet my child's nutritional needs before my own;" and 3) as previously mentioned, requires that students "not participate in physical violence of any kind with another person." There is not a requirement about avoiding confrontations or harsh exchanges with other students in this student contract, but it is clear that the participants believed that by responding to rude or insensitive peers' comments they might get in trouble with the center. Student agreements, which ensure them access to free childcare services on high school campuses, seize the opportunity to contain the children (who are the evidence of deviance from norms) in designated areas of the campus and to discipline mothers' bodies into somewhat self-sacrificing child-centered, docile women. In their ethnographic work, both Pillow and Kelly have analyzed the curriculums of special programs and schools for pregnant and mothering students as well as the teachers' attitudes toward them.

children. In her article exploring confrontations with young mothers in the UK, "Teenage Mothers' Experience of Stigma," Yardley classifies "ignoring" the comment as a passive coping mechanism that negates the received criticism (679). This tactic certainly does not directly intervene in the discourses, preconceptions, or attitudes that provoke the confrontation. Yet, considering the constraints of the moment, walking away or responding with silence is a conscious decision not to allow the moment of confrontation to become a situation that gets the pregnant or mothering teen, and the comment-making or body-touching peer, in trouble.

Walking away from a moment of embodied exigence can also get the pregnant or mothering woman in trouble if it challenges the established authority in that situation. For example, Tina, another focus group participant, described a moment at school when a substitute teacher told her during class, "I look down on you because you're pregnant." Tina explained, "I just got up and walked out of the classroom. I just got up and walked out." As a student constrained in a situation that does not allow students the authority of movement outside the classroom without teacher permission, Tina's decision to leave could have led to negative consequences. Recognizing that the principal would support her decision to leave based on students' rights to respectful treatment in the classroom, Tina "went into the principal's office, told the principal what happened and he immediately went into the classroom and he was like [to the substitute] 'you can leave now, I'll sub the class.'" Tina strategized to go to the higher authority of the school for support.

In many ways Tina's story is spectacular. It is important to note that Tina is a white young woman who described herself as well-known and well-liked at the public high school she attended. This may have been a uniquely successful rhetorical strategy for her considering her existing privileges and position in the school. Furthermore, her school did not offer special programs or services to parenting teens but instead accommodated each (if any, Tina explained that she knew of no other pregnant or parenting students at the school) student on a case-by-case basis. Perhaps this strategy would be less successful for minoritized students who already receive unequal or disrespectful treatment at the school and/or students who are not well-known or liked. For this participant, however, leaving the classroom led to the immediate replacement of the substitute teacher and the potential for both the teacher and the students in the classroom who witnessed the exchange to reflect on what is or is not appropriate to say to/about young mothers.

Talking (or Staring) Back To Invasions of Privacy

Other young pregnant or mothering women responded to strangers' comments by interrupting the moment to draw attention to infractions on personal privacy. That is, in moments when strangers make the personal political by debating the pregnant or mothering young woman in a public place, the pregnant or mothering young woman may use the tactic of reminding the strangers that her body should be private/personal business. One participant recommended that mothers who receive scrutinizing stares in public spaces should just stare back. She explained that in starting back, the young mother would make evident that she sees the stare, and "so what?"

> Tatiana: Well think about it. If someone is staring at you and, like, you are at the grocery store and you know they are staring at you and you do that "What? I see you staring at me!" It makes them lose their power of judging you because it's like, "Hey, she doesn't care."

In this way, staring back or asking "so what?" shifts the pregnant or mothering young woman from a position of embodied exigence to someone who—in this moment—questions the exigence. Tatiana's emphasis on making known that "I see you staring at me" highlights another reason that making eye contact with the person staring may interrupt the moment. Staring back may startle the stranger (who may or may not realize that they *are* staring), because the stranger may feel caught in doing something that is culturally frowned upon. In her book *Staring: How We Look*, feminist disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson explores the psychological, biological, and cultural factors that entice us to stare at something that appears unusual, deviant, or at least unique in our visual landscape. Complicating this inclination to stare at the "unusual" is a history of cultural taboos placed on staring (as a classed and gendered marker—good people, and especially good women, do not stare), and the socialization processes that impel people to practice "civil inattention" (Garland-Thomson 117). If a young pregnant or mothering teen wants to stop the stare, and get the stranger to leave her alone, staring back may work if the person staring feels caught in doing something impolite.

Other participants used verbal responses to draw attention to the infraction on personal privacy. For example, when Beatrice was at the store with her infant, she was approached by a woman she did not know who asked her, "How old are you?" When

Beatrice answered, the women commented, “Oh you’re so young!” Beatrice responded by saying, “None of your business.” As Beatrice described the story, she smiled and laughed about it, expressing happiness that this tactic worked because the woman walked away. I asked another participant in this same focus group if anything similar had happened to her. She described an interaction at the store:

> Bella: But I was like shopping. But there’s like a girl saying stuff like that and I am like “Why do you care? I don’t even know you. Why am I going to answer you stuff?” She was asking me questions, even though I didn’t even know her. And I was like “oh, whatever.” Like, why is she gonna ask me things about it? I didn’t even know her. And stop judging me. And I started saying things to her and she walked away. Why is she going to talk to me when I don’t even know her?
>
> Jenna: So you were able to say those things to her right then?
>
> Bella: Well I did because, like, that’s not a good thing to ask.

Bella explains these confrontations as being about people who “say stuff” to you when they have no right. Bella and Beatrice formulated responses that addressed this infraction on personal privacy—you don’t ask someone you don’t know about their life. The trope of personal privacy, supported by the cultural precedent of practicing civil inattention with people you do not know, helps to interrupt the moment and shift the young pregnant and mothering woman from a caricature of a social issue to a person arguing for their rights to personal privacy. But Bella later added that she felt that her response also defended her right to be happy about having a baby.

Sally: Were you happy with your response to her?

Bella: Yeah, because I don't know, I was happy for having a baby.

For Bella, saying something like "What do you care? I don't even know you," interrupts the construction of her as "too young" to mother, by resisting the authority of others (older adults) to judge the appropriateness of her pregnancy. Bella was happy about having a baby and so she challenged the woman by employing the trope of personal privacy in the aim of claiming her right to have—and be happy about having—a baby.

Using Humor to Shift the Tone of the Rhetorical Situation

When participants in our focus groups were struggling to figure out *why* people would approach them to make comments about their pregnancies or motherhood, many could not explain it beyond the fact that such interactions function to make young mothers feel bad. One participant suggested using humor to make young mothers feel better and potentially ward off future harassment.

Michelle: If you hear negative comments, though, I always just make a joke about it. It surprises people and catches them off guard. Did she really just make a joke about that?

Mia: People would tell me when I was pregnant that I waddle. I would be like, "Yeah I am a penguin!"

Michelle: Most of my friends—I know they're joking like they're not serious about it my friend [. . .] was like "do you have a tampon?" and someone was like "we know Michelle doesn't need one." Then I would like pop off and say something back. And then they don't even know how

> to react to it. They are like, "Oh, crap, what do you say? She doesn't even care." Eventually all the comments will stop. Go with it. "Oh, well, obviously it doesn't get to her. So why am I going to even waste my breath on it?"

Michelle implies that if young mothers are supposed to just feel ashamed and quietly receive mean-spirited comments about the fact that they are pregnant (and waddle or no longer need a tampon), then a response like a joke or laughing at one's own expense will alter the rhetorical situation and perhaps startle the person giving the young mother a hard time. Yardley classifies humor as an active coping mechanism for young mothers in these situations because it directly engages "the critic" in an interaction (679). I contend that humor is a tactic that may challenge the power relation between harasser and the harassed because it shifts the moment from harassment to a collegial kind of joking. It is important to note that both participants I quoted—Mia and Michelle—are referring to peers at school; that is, people they will see again and again. Yet, in almost every focus group we discussed how humor might function in interactions with strangers as well.

Exchanging humorous retorts we *could* have made in response to seemingly ridiculous comments was a fun and boisterous point in many of our focus groups. For example, when discussing the fact that many strangers asked young mothers who the baby daddy was—especially if the mom had more than one child—participants at one focus group considered the tactic of "lying." Belinda—who was pregnant with her second child—explained that she could have been honest with a boy who asked her if her children had the same father by saying that "yeah, it's the same dad." This would

challenge the assumption that young mothers are promiscuous. Yet, Belinda decided to tell the boy that she has "two different baby daddies." Hearing this, another participant chimed in, "Tell them you have three different baby daddies!" To which Belinda said, "I tell them I have like four. He'd be like 'Really? Oh my gosh!' . . . I just be lying. I don't want them up in my Kool-Aid, you know? . . . It's better for us to just lie to them." For Belinda, making up information about baby daddies is a way to refuse the questioner the right to her personal information (i.e., "I don't want them up in my Kool-Aid"). Moreover, questions about the fathers of young mothers' children stem from heteronormative constructions of nuclear families held together by one man. Discourses about the consequences (national and familial) of women-headed, "single-mother" households provoke fear about social degeneration wrought at the hands of women who cannot keep a (consistent) man. Considering this discursive context, a funny fabrication of the father situation may shift the moment from a reproduction of the normative construction of family (by having a young woman answer whether she is "normal" and has one father for her children) to a rhetorical situation in which the young woman pokes fun at the fears and assumptions that prompt such questions. Humor changes the dynamic of the rhetorical situation for the young pregnant and mothering teen.

In her book, *The Hip Mama Survival Guide,* Ariel Gore prepares soon-to-be mothers for the comments young single, low-income, no-income, or lesbian parents may get. In a textbox called "Talking Back," Gore illustrates strategies for talking back to specific comments mothers may receive in the everyday. For example, in response to a comment like, "You look too young to have a child," Gore recommends that "you say,

smiling . . . I have *fabulous* plastic surgeon." Concerned questions about "how you do it" are answered "with your tax dollars." And a question many young mothers report getting, "Are you the nanny?" can be answered with "no, I'm the grandma" (144). These retorts are similar to the tactics that participants said showed you "don't care" about the person's concerns about your status as a mother. One young mother, Tatiana, explained that "there is always going to be that one person. You know, the person who believes in, like, abstinence before marriage then all of a sudden you are sixteen, you are having sex and a baby and it's like 'Oh God' you are the devil." Indeed, the confrontations between young mothers and strangers described during our focus groups suggested that strangers see young mothers as either deviants or victims—both of whom need to be addressed with either shame or stated concern. Considering this Tatiana recommends, "the only thing I can think of right now that would actually make people just get over it is to actually, like, wear a shirt that says, 'Yes I'm young, I'm pregnant, Get over it.'" By engaging the person staring or commenting on the young woman's pregnancy/motherhood with confidence instead of shame, and defiance instead of complying with the scripted response of "Yes, I made a mistake," Tatiana sees the potential in jarring the would-be comment maker and getting them to re-consider their position. Such a tee-shirt would complicate the deviant/victim dichotomy by stating the intersection of youth and pregnancy as a fact to "get over." Gore's responses also draw attention, in ironic ways, to the commonplaces and fears underlying such comments—fears about too-young mothers and fears about how tax money is spent on the "undeserving." Humor seems to be a

tactical response that can prompt young or otherwise "deviant" mothers to brainstorm interventions in their construction as problems to solve.[95]

Educating the Stranger on Counter-Points

So far, I have reviewed three ways that I heard pregnant and mothering women responding to confrontations with strangers who would construct them as "teenage mothers" and therein urgent social problems to shame, contain, fix, or control. First, walking away or responding with silence refuses strangers the opportunity, halting the moment of construction as an embodied exigence. Second, staring at the person who stares or calling them out for a breach in manners shifts attention away from whether or not the young woman is bad by drawing attention to the inappropriateness of the confrontational behavior toward women in public. And, third, when young mothers engage the rhetorical situation with humor, it is no longer simply a moment of an outsider addressing an exigence, but a moment when the young mother has a little fun. Yet, as I have argued in this chapter, young mothers may also take advantage of the position of

[95] In their chapter, "'Don't Look Down on Me Because I Have One': Young Mothers Empowered in a Context of Support" Berman, Silver, and Wilson describe how humor came into play during their focus groups with young parents in Toronto. When one young mother describes situations with hostile strangers who ask "*How come you're a baby having a baby?*" she explains, *"It's like, 'No. I am 21, you know.' It's not like I'm eleven years old, walking around with a baby* (everyone laughs)" (Berman et al. 45, emphasis in original). I read this chapter one afternoon while reading for my doctoral comprehensive exams. I had just returned from the gym where a woman waiting with me for an aerobics class noted that I had dropped my two children off at the gym's daycare. She said, "You look too young to have two children." To which I responded "Thank you"—a seemingly positive response available in a cultural context that values youthful looking women. After reading Berman et al.'s chapter about young parents laughing off such comments and thinking of ways to make these people "feel like fools," I wished I had said, "You look too old to survive this aerobics class but look at us, challenging stereotypes eh?" I also considered, "Actually, research has shown that women can bear children after menstruation begins." The point, for me, is that engaging in group discussions about these moments with women who have experienced similar things makes me (and others) feel empowered or motivated to come up with creative retorts to interrupt the moment, make the comment-maker feel like a fool, and potentially drawing attention to problematic social norms.

embodied exigence by speaking back to those who are reproducing social norms and assumptions that construct them as an exigence—a thing that is other than it should be.

One way young pregnant or mothering women may respond to confrontations about their "too young" pregnancies is to intervene with a counter-point—a point that complicates the singular/narrow assumptions that construct young mothers as an exigence. For example, Sasha reflected on a hostile encounter with a substitute teacher at her school. When she requested to go to the nursery during class time (an option available to her because she attends a school with a daycare on campus) the substitute teacher questioned her: "For what? What are you going to do in the nursery?" When she explained that she needed to see her baby, he looked shocked and asked how old she was. During the focus group, participants expressed astonishment that the substitute would question Sasha so judgmentally in front of her entire class. Sasha responded to the teacher by saying that "shit happens" and reminding him that "back in the old days girls used to get pregnant at 13."

As replies to another's concern that she is too young to parent a child, both responses function as counter-points. "Shit happens" draws attention to the wider context of a woman's pregnancy that people often ignore when they imagine or construct teenage mothers by focusing narrowly on an individual woman who "gets" pregnant. Before sharing this story, Sasha said that that though teenagers should not "be getting pregnant,"

> I think that people need to be more educated on the whole [situation] . . . we come from some pretty, [laughs nervously] I don't wanna say, messed up families? . . . We have some issues. I know everybody does but, like, I

> believe that girls that get pregnant at an early age—they have some issues in their family and stuff since we were little, and I um think that they need to be aware of like how we grew up and like stuff like that before they're like, 'oh you just got pregnant.' No, there's a back story to it, you know?

For Sasha, the substitute's astonishment at the fact that she is a mother reflected his ignorance of the wider contextual factors of her unintended pregnancy, family situation, and the socioeconomic context of her motherhood. As reviewed in chapter two, scholarly critics of teenage pregnancy discourses similarly draw attention to these complexities of young mothers' life circumstances to encourage a more positive, nuanced, or at least complicated view of young parenthood. Geronimus finds that teenage pregnancy correlates with poverty, so she maintains that it is the context and consequences of poverty—not the age of the mother—which leads to comparatively complicated maternal/child outcomes. Luker uses this research to suggest that young women become mothers because of a lack of opportunity in terms of education and careers, prompting her readers to support improvements in education and career opportunities instead of campaigns against teenage pregnancy. And Males argues that focus on teenage pregnancy overlooks the fact that older, adult men father most "teenage" pregnancies. Widening the scope beyond the "choices" of individual women shows multiple contextual factors contributing to the societal ills attributed to teenage pregnancy. In Sasha's case, her "shit happens" remark could similarly encourage a broader understanding of the factors that contribute to wanted or unwanted pregnancies, healthy or unhealthy maternal outcomes, and positive or undesirable life outcomes for the mother and child. During our focus

group discussion, Sasha talked about her Catholic family context which did not encourage open conversations about sexuality and birth control, her low-income community context that included issues with drug abuse and jail time for members of her family, and the strained relationship she had with her ex-boyfriend—all elements of the "shit" that happened in the context of her pregnancy and eventual motherhood.

Similarly emphasizing the benefit that a diversity of "back stories" may have in terms of challenging people's judgmental comments to teenage mothers, Tatiana explained, "Um, [people in general should] just understand like, you could be with one person and you make a mistake or you could be using birth control and it fails but you don't believe in abortion so it's kind of like, you're just going to have this baby. But then there could be this girl that sleeps around, she doesn't use condoms, she's not on birth control and maybe she does get pregnant but she had an abortion so no one knows and no one judges her." Contrasting a caricature of a responsible sexually active woman (that is, a woman who uses contraceptives and has minimal sex) with a caricature of an irresponsible sexually active woman (a woman who has lots of unprotected sex with multiple partners and chooses abortion) Tatiana emphasizes that the visibility of a woman's pregnancy renders her more vulnerable to social critique than others. Moreover, as I discussed in chapter three, when people *see* the pregnant teenager they do not often *see*—or look for—the context which led to that pregnancy. Following Tatiana's reasoning, if the public accepted the counter-point that pregnant teens may have made informed decisions with unexpected outcomes (like birth control failing), they may be more understanding.

Furthermore, Sasha's response, "Back in the old days, girls used to get pregnant at 13," is another counter-point because it draws attention to the social construction of "teenage pregnancy" as a historically situated discourse. Implying that people generally accepted or approved of younger women's pregnancies in historical times, this participant highlights the arbitrariness of judging her for being an 18-year-old mother now. When she described this response to the substitute teacher, other focus group participants joined her line of reasoning, adding that young women used to have babies with "way older guys too," "with old men too. And it was perfectly fine," "they were married but still." Historians Luker, Nathanson, and Solinger also use this counter-rhetorical strategy of historicizing social responses to pregnancy and motherhood to emphasize that cultural values and expectations of women shift, usually in response to specific, socially constructed national/economic issues that threaten the hegemony of white, capitalistic patriarchy.

Another example of a student offering a counter-point to educate a stranger and intervene in the limited, misinformed perception of teenage motherhood was Megan who described the types of social support available to her as a young mother. Megan answered a bus driver who asked her, "What are you going to do? It must be so hard! How are you going to do it?" by pointing out that there was a program at the students'/bus driver's school which supports young mothers by offering parenting services and affordable childcare. Thus, in this moment the young mother shifts her position from being an embodiment of a tragedy to a rhetor who informs her audience of the support systems

available to mothers her age, reaffirming the important of community support for parenting people.

Although we heard many stories about encounters with strangers and other hostile people, these were the only examples of young mothers offering counter-points in a public exchange with someone constructing her as a "too young" teenage mother. However, during many focus group conversations, participants brought up counter-points to negative claims about teenage pregnancy, questioning whether it is an exigence to solve and/or pointing out that it is unfair to judge the quality of a mother based on her age. One rather startling example took place at a focus group where participants were adamant that nothing could really be done about the comments made to pregnant and mothering teens in public. Participants explained:

> Mia: Well it's not, I mean, like there's so much focus on teen pregnancy. Which makes it more, like. . .
>
> Miranda: That's just how it is supposed to be.
>
> Mia: We might have not all been like "hey let's not get pregnant," but we *chose* to have a child.
>
> Miranda: We did what we did and put ourselves in that situation.

Since teenage pregnancy is constructed as a terrible social problem that young women are assigned the responsibility to avoid, these participants see such comments as "how it is supposed to be"; that is, hostile or dramatically concerned public commentary in response to their bodies are socialized and expected outcomes of their decision to carry the pregnancies to term and/or keep the children. However, when exchanging stories and

venting frustrations about the kinds of comments they receive in public places, these same participants brought up many counter-points that would interrupt the negative focus on teenage pregnancy:

> Mia [sarcastically]: So, like, it's hard unless you're like 20 and having a kid!
>
> Miranda: Honestly, I don't think it matters what age you are. You still always have the struggles you still always get frustrated; that comes with having a child.
>
> Jenna: Why do they think it's harder when teenager? Why don't they just notice it is hard for everyone?
>
> Miranda: I think it's because we're not stable; we're not, we don't have our lives together. We're not out of school.
>
> Michelle: We don't have money either.
>
> Molly: Some people aren't mature enough.
>
> Michelle: Yeah, and you're not mentally ready or anything.
>
> Megan: They think teens are like crazy animals.
>
> Mia: I think it's different though depending on the person. My sister's like 25 and my entire family is like, "You'll be a better mom than she'll be right now" [laughs]. Because my sister, like, she's got a really good head, like she's going to school and stuff, but she's not ready to have a kid. She couldn't put away everything to like raise a child, and like I can. . . .But many people raise their kids and they're 25 and they like work somewhere

> where teens work and they make same amount of money and they raise *their* kids like. Or even older, 30s, 40s
>
> Maria: People are poor!
>
> Mia: They raise *their* kids completely fine. It's just about the love you are willing to give them and, like, the morals you want to teach them and that's all that matters to raise kids.

Another participant at a different focus group pointed out, "Like I'd be a different kind of parent if I was older. It wouldn't. I may have a job. I may be a little bit less strapped for cash, but at the same time, they're still wearing clothes, they have their shoes . . . [they] eat everyday and they're happy." And recall Bella's insistence that she was happy to have a child, a counter-point to the expectation that young mothers are downtrodden victims of mistakes. Conversations with young pregnant and mothering women demonstrate a keen class consciousness in that they are well aware of the social norms that construct them as "bad mothers": good mothers have money, good mothers are stable, good mothers have completed school, and good mothers are not adolescents who are "immature" and "crazy." Furthermore, participants draw on or complicate these norms to articulate counter-points such as people without money or schooling raise kids. In fact, Mia's comment builds upon the contested but influential social norm that mothers should self-sacrifice for their children; Mia suggests that she is particularly fit for motherhood as a woman at a point in her life where she can set everything aside for her child in contrast to her college-attending older sister. But, I still wonder, why didn't more participants in our

focus groups share counter-points like these with people who approach them as social problems?

5.7 Preparing Young Pregnant/Mothering Women for Future Confrontations

My experience as a young mother and the stories exchanged in the "My Pregnancy Project" focus groups suggest that moments of embodied exigence often do not lead to sustained rhetorical situations. That is, the embodied exigence does not often shift to a rhetor who engages the moment by deploying interventions meant to destabilize assumptions and/or increase awareness. This is, in part, because some pregnant and parenting teens agree that young women should not have children, so they also see "teenage pregnancy" as an exigence for people to speak about and prevent. Also, as unexpected and unpredictable encounters, pregnant and parenting teens may lack the preparation to engage such encounters as rhetorical situations. If constrained agency involves the social and subjective relations that allow an individual to act, young pregnant and mothering women need the skills and tools with which to act as orators in public.

Pregnant and parenting teens could be better prepared to engage these encounters *as* rhetorical situations—moments when they could potentially inform audiences and challenge the dominant perspectives on teenage pregnancy. It is clear that young pregnant and mothering women are already developing tactics to both cope with and interrupt encounters with strangers who approach them as social problems. But it is also clear that they could use support and education that will equip them with more tactics to seize the opportunity of constrained agency that a visibly pregnant or mothering body can offer.

This is especially important because peers, teachers, and strangers are often impelled to address embodied exigencies (like youthful looking mothers) because they are influenced by the stereotypes and misinformation that exists about teenage pregnancy and motherhood.

I am thankful to a reader who pointed out that I tend to have a uniformly negative view on these comment-makers. Throughout this chapter I, admittedly, often describe these encounters as "hostile." But I can also see how these comments can stem from genuine concern for the woman's well-being or from a curiosity about this hyper-visibilized experience. Comments like, "How are you going to do it?" or "mi'jita what have you done?" may be a kneejerk attempt to start a conversation, and/or empathize with "the situation." This is all the more reason to discuss with young pregnant and parenting teens the misinformation that is out there so that these interactions may be seen as not just a rude comment on their personal life decision but also a moment with potential for re-education. Efforts to shift such confrontations to active rhetorical situations have potential for both the stranger and the pregnant or mothering teen. For the young woman, there is the potential in these moments to practice a constrained agency that intervenes in the dominant discourses that would render her an embodied example of a tragedy or deviant behavior. For the stranger, a young pregnant or mothering woman's recognition of their questions or acknowledgement of the impulse to stare can lead to a better understanding of the world, including (young) pregnant and parenting women. While walking away, pointing out infractions on personal privacy, and deploying humor all interrupt a narrow, one-way line of questioning or commenting that would construct

young mothers as an exigence, each of these tactics also shuts down the opportunity to further converse with the stranger. Of course, it is important to halt instances when a stranger is trying to intimidate, harass, or otherwise dominate the teenager, but as Garland-Thomson writes, strangers' staring (and I would add personal questioning or commenting) is not always about domination. Talking about confrontations only as disciplining moments "can foreclose on the complexities of how we look at one another" (44). Perhaps the stranger looks or asks to better understand how to treat or engage with a newly pregnant young woman in their own family. Perhaps Bella's question asker may not have access to the claim or belief that women can affirm their right to have children on their own terms, and be happy about it, and may have benefitted from Bella telling her explicitly, "Actually, I am happy about having this child." Garland-Thomson writes, "An eye-snagging stare of intense attention opens a social relationship between two people" and "individual improvision can take the staring encounter in fruitful directions" (33).

This is not to say that Bella or other young pregnant and parenting women who deploy the first three tactics are wrong. In fact, as a rhetorician I have aimed to illustrate the resourceful ways women who embody "teenage pregnancy" in this current cultural context actively intervene in and respond to their construction as too-young-to-be-good mothers by using diverse tactics. But there may be opportunities in discussing with mothering women (of any age really) the variety of reasons strangers may ask them pointed, personal questions or stare at their round bellies and the valuable knowledges the young pregnant or mothering woman could share with the stranger. Discussions could center on the kinds of comments made and the tactics we can use in different contexts to

change the rhetorical situation into one that suits our own purposes—whether that purpose is affirming a teenagers' right to dignity as a parent, discussing the lack of the support for low-income parents, or just conversing about the strangers' life decisions as well to try to establish a moment of mutual recognition as human beings.

One possibility for supporting young mothers' as rhetors-in-training for the rhetorical situations they will most likely encounter is by using a support group setting. For example, in response to our question "How can people be more supportive of pregnant and parenting teens?" Brooke suggested, "Maybe you can build the confidence. 'Cause you know you can get like, whatever, hurt inside. But like, we should be able to accept the fact because like it's gonna happen." Brooke, like many other participants, expressed a strong belief that young mothers will continue to encounter hostile strangers in the everyday. Yet, in order to "accept the fact" and not just feel "hurt inside" young mothers need help to "build the confidence." She further explains that "everybody just tell like what has been said to them and they could be like 'Oh yeah? Well [this happened to me]' and relate to each other." In exchanging stories about moments of embodied exigence, young mothers may find self-confidence, social support, and strategies with which to face the next encounter and shift the rhetorical situation from a moment of abject subject formation to moment in which they drive the rhetorical situation. This could include correcting misperceptions, interrupting unacceptable behavior toward women, or challenging social norms. This is similar to feminist reasoning behind consciousness-raising groups in which women would share "personal" stories to come to a better understanding of the political and patriarchal forces that construct those personal

struggles (DeLauretis 185; Weedon 82). When we shared this participant's idea with another focus group, Salma agreed: "It would have been helpful to have like prepared yourself, like, to know that, like, 'oh yeah people are going say that about you.' That would have been like easier instead of like, 'Wow, I can't believe they just said that!'"

It would also be helpful for young mothers to understand that others have developed counter-points to dominant assumptions about teenage pregnancy. From my limited experience with the curricula and materials offered at the research sites, I did not see evidence of discussion of counter-discourses on teenage pregnancy. While claims about the negative consequences of teenage motherhood from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy were well represented on program websites and in brochures in the classrooms, there did not seem a space allowed for the broader consideration of the politics and complexities of teenage pregnancy beyond the preventative framework. Pregnant and parenting teens were seemingly unaware of other arguments and research that contests the idea that age determines the successfulness of one's pregnancy, one's parenting, or one's life outcomes. I believe that introducing such literatures—or at least some of the research findings from such literatures—might further enable pregnant and parenting teenagers to develop their own points in response to rhetorical situations with strangers.

For example, participants in one focus group drew attention to the fact that women used to get pregnant by "way older guys"—a point they saw as potentially persuading the comment-maker that they are not abnormal. What if young women had access to Males' recent research that points out that, even now, we don't count or track

teen-fathered pregnancies with women aged 20 years or older as "teenage" pregnancies and that "6 in 10 men who impregnate teenagers are adults" over the age of 20 (21-4)? Could these facts and numbers help pregnant and mothering young women respond to hostile or concerned comments by informing strangers and others of the gender biases that construct and are constructed by a narrow focus on *teen* (females) pregnancies and bodies? These participants also drew attention to the fact that young pregnancies used to be socially acceptable. What if young parents discussed Luker's, Vinovskis', Nathanson's, Male's books that bring attention to the fact that the peak of teenage pregnancies and birth rates was in the 1950s? Could this historical information give more young mothers the confidence to respond to people who construct them as a current exigence with information about how rates and attitudes about teenage pregnancy have shifted throughout time? Could information about the high rates of unintended pregnancy among couples of all ages help young pregnant and mothering women shift comments about their "careless" behavior into fuller discussions of how North Americans plan their pregnancies? Or what if we introduced young pregnant and parenting teens to the rights movements and political efforts of mothers on public assistance, mothers arguing for education/career reforms to accommodate their pregnancies and motherhood, or activists bring attention to issues with fatherhood and the undue burden women face in terms of domestic chores and child rearing, even now?

In her article, "Young Mothers, Agency, and Collective Action: Issues and Challenges," Kelly argues for exposing teen mothers to critical theories of oppression so that they may align themselves with other social movements and work to change the

constructions of their motherhood (which have material effects on their sense of self, schooling, etc). Kelly points out, "Young people do not . . . have equal access to these alternative or counter-discourses" so "programs can invite guest speakers representing various groups, organizations, and movements who might help young mothers locate and think about their lives in the context of wider social issues" (12). I support Kelly's call not only for helping teen mothers to see how their experiences align with other mothering movements, but also to expose them to more counter-claims that they may use in rhetorical situations with strangers.

5.8 Conclusion

I know, they probably looking at my belly.
They aren't looking at me; they're looking at my belly.
--Belinda, "My Pregnancy Story Project"

Embodied exigence refers to a socio-historical moment when a subject or subjects are misrecognized as embodiments of urgent and objectified problems to rhetorically address. The pregnant and mothering teen body stands in for the rhetorics and discourses of teenage pregnancy, providing an everyday example of the statistics, social issues, and behavior patterns that the public is supposed to feel bad or mad about. Indeed, when people stop to stare or comment on the pregnant and mothering bodies of young women they do not know, I suggest that they are not often addressing them as people who they want to engage with or learn from but instead as exigencies they feel impelled to speak to through socially prescribed responses. Furthermore, the social construction of teenage pregnancy as a social problem caused by young women's failure to control their sexuality

or prevent pregnancy, along with strangers' comments, interpellate young women as "teenage mothers" who must answer for their presumed mistakes. In order to actively engage these encounters, either by intervening to halt the moment or by shifting the focus of the exchange, young pregnant and mothering women employ a variety of tactics. I have discussed walking away, staring back, calling out violations of personal privacy, joking along, and counter-educating as tactics that shift the young pregnant and mothering teen from an exigence to talk at, question, shame, or control, to a rhetor making her own point.

In the end, I think maybe a pregnant or mothering pregnant teenager may be at once a rhetor and an exigence. When she speaks, she is further disturbing notions of exigence rooted in a rational world-view where the problems are "out there" for a rhetor to discuss and solve. Exigence that is embodied in the pregnant or mothering form may walk, talk, write and potentially resist dominant constructions of the rhetorical issues she represents. Marginalized subjects can seize the opportunity to speak to (or against) what their bodies represent by engaging *kairotic* moments of public exchange.

WORKS CITED

Adair, Vivyan. "The Missing Story of Ourselves: Poverty and the Promises of Higher Education." *NWSA* 20.1 (Spring 2008): 1-25. *Project Muse.* Web. 31 Jan. 2010.

The Alan Guttmacher Institute. *11 Million Teenagers: What Can Be Done about the Epidemic of Adolescent Pregnancies in the United States.* New York: Planned Parenthood Federation, 1976. Print.

---. *US Teenage Pregnancy Statistics: National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity*. New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2012. Web. 3 Sept. 2012.

Alcoff, Linda. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self.* New York: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.

Alcoff, Linda and Laura Gray. "Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18 (1993): 260-90. *JSTOR.* Web. 31 Jan 2010.

Aldrich, Gillian and Jennifer Baumgardner, dir. *I Had an Abortion.* Women Make Movies, 2005. Film.

Allain, Rosie. "My Amazing Breasts." Davis 76-82.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review P, 1971: 123-73. Print.

Angel, Rebecca. "Gift." Davis 47-53.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera.* 3rd ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007. Print.

Arney, William R. and Bernard J. Bergen. "Power and Visibility: The Invention of Teenage Pregnancy." *Social Science & Medicine* 18.1 (1984):11-9. *JSTOR.* Web. 31 Jan 2010.

Arnoldi, Katherine. "How I Became a Cartoonist by Katherine Arnoldi." *Girl-Mom*

---."Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Education." Davis 257-262.

Associated Press. "School's Pregnancy Spike Stirs Day Care Debate." *MSNBC.com.* Web. 8 July 2008.

Banks, William P. "Written through the Body: Disruptions and 'Personal' Writing." *College English* 66.1 (September 2003): 21-40. *JSTOR.* Web. 3 Mar 2012.

Bawarshi, Anis. "The Genre Function. *College English* 62.3 (January 2000): 335-59. *JSTOR.* Web. 12 Jan 2013.

Beresford, Pat. "Revelation." Davis 30-9.

Berman, Rachel C., Silver, Susan, and Sue Wilson "Don't Look Down on Me Because I Have One': Young Mothers Empowered in a Context of Support." *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 9.1 (2007): 42-52. Print.

Biesecker, Barbara. "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from the Thematic of *Différance*." *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*. Eds. John Louis Lucaites, Celeste Michelle Condit, and Sally Caudill. Guilford P, 1998. 232-46. Print.

Bitzer, Lloyd F. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1.1 (1968): 1-15. *JSTOR.* Web. 31 Jan 2010.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States.* 2nd ed. Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. Print.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body.* Los Angeles: U of California P, 2003. Print.

Breeder: Real Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers. Eds. Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender. Seattle, WA: Seal P, 2001. Print.

Brodt, Bonita and Jerry Thomton. "Cycle of Poverty, Despair Born Again in Delivery Room." *Chicago Tribune*. 1 Oct 1985. 1+.

Brody, Jane E. "Teenagers Largely Account for Startling Increase: Illegitimacy." *New York Times.* 14 Mar 1971. E7.

Buchanan, Lindal. "Regendering Delivery: The Fifth Canon and the Maternal Rhetor." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 32.4 (Autumn 2002): 51-73. *JSTOR.* Web. 5 May 2012.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

California Latinas for Reproductive Justice. "Supporting Latina/o Youth: Strengthening Latina/o Young Families and Communities." *Justice for Young Families* 1 (2012). Print.

The Candies Foundation. "About Us." *The Candies Foundation.* 2011. Web. 3 Sep. 2012.

---.*Jenny McCarthy PSA*. "Videos." *The Candies Foundation.* 2011. Web 3 Sept. 2012.

Casper, Monica J. and Lisa Jean Moore. *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility*. New York: New York University P, 2009. Print.

Chabot, Cathy, Shoveller, Jean A., Johnson, Joy L., and Ken Prkachin. "Morally Problematic: Young Mothers' Lives as Parables About the Dangers of Sex." *Sex Education* 10.2 (2010): 201-15. *JSTOR.* Web. 9 Dec. 2011.

Chase, Susan. *Mothers and Children: Feminist Analyses and Personal Narratives*. Eds. Susan Chase and Mary Rogers. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2001. Print.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of Medusa." Trans. Keith and Paula Cohen. *Rhetorical Traditions: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. 2nd Ed. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston: Bedford, 2001. 1524-36. Print.

Coats, J. Anderson. "The Story Behind the Story." *Girl-Mom.*

Colboth, Jamie. "September 10th, 2001." *Girl-Mom*

Collins, Patricia Hill. "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation." *Hypatia* 13.3(Summer 1998): 62-82. *JSTOR.* Web. 31 Jan 2010.

Cooper, Richard T. "Contrary Message on Teenage Pregnancy: Study by Prof. Joseph Hotz Finds Childbearing by Adolescents is a Symptom of Problems, Not the Cause. His Conclusions Aren't Welcome on the Political Right or Left." *Los Angeles Times.* 24 May 1997. A1.

Covino, William. *The Art of Wondering: A Revisionist Return to the History of Rhetoric*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988. Print.

Crews, Allison. "When I Was Garbage." Gore and Lavender 31-37.

---. "I Was a Teen Mom Success Story." Davis 103-8.

Crowley, Sharon. *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism.* Pittsburg, Penn: U of Pittsburg P, 2006. Print.

---. "Afterward: The Material of Rhetoric." *Rhetorical Bodies.* Eds. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley. Madison, Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 1999: 357-64. Print.

Crowley, Sharon and Debra Hawhee. *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students.* 4th ed. New York: Pearson, 2009. Print.

Cushing, Julie. "Alumni Day." Davis 166-74.

Davis, Angela. "Surrogates and Outcast Mothers: Racism and Reproductive Politics in the Nineties." *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. 210- 21. Print.

De Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984. Print.

Delgado, Richard. "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative."*Michigan Law Review*. 87.8 (1989): 2411-41. *JSTOR.* Web. 9 Dec. 2011.

Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefanic. *Critical Race Theory An Introduction.* New York: New York UP, 2001. Print

Delgado Bernal, Dolores. "Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Theory, and Critical Raced Gendered Epistemologies: Recognizing Students of Color as Holders and Creators of Knowledge." *Qualitative Inquiry.* 8.1 (2002): 105-26. *SAGE.* Web. 9 Dec 2011.

Dickson, Barbara. "Reading Maternity Materially: The Case of Demi Moore." *Rhetorical Bodies.* Eds. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin P, 1999. 297-313. Print.

Downe, Patricia J."Memorializing and Moralizing Young Motherhood in Barbados." *Young Mothers.* Spec. issue of *Journal of the Association for Research on Motherhood* 9.1 (2007): 138-50. Print.

"Embodied| imbodied, adj." *OED Online*. March 2012. Oxford UP. 18 March 2012.

Enoch, Jessica. "Survival Stories: Feminist Historiographic Approaches to Chicana Rhetorics of Sterilization Abuse." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35.3 (Summer 2005): 5-30.*Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 10 Feb 2010.

Erickson, Pamela I. *Latina Adolescent Childbearing in East Los Angeles*. Austin, Texas: U of Texas P, 1998. Print.

Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women.* New York: Double Day, 1991. Print.

Fernandez, Lila. "Telling Stories about School: Using Critical Race and Latino Critical Theories to Document Latina/o Education and Resistance." *Qualitative Inquiry* 8.1 (2002): 45-65. *SAGE.* Web. 9 Dec 2011.

Fessler, Kathryn Bondy. "Reclaiming a Spoiled Maternal Identity: Young Mothers' Experiences and Rejection of Stigma." Diss. U of Michigan., 2008. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.* Web. 17 May 2012.

Fide, Yvonne. "Beat the Statistics." *Girl-Mom: Support, Community, and Education for Young Mamas.* 10 Dec 2003. Web. 11 Sept 2007.

Fields, Jessica. "Children Having Children': Race, Innocence, and Sexuality Education." *Social Problems* 52.4 (2005): 549-71. *JSTOR.* Web. 21 Jan 2011.

Fine, Michelle. "Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire." *Harvard Educational Review* 58.1 (Spring 1988): 29-51.

Foss, Sonja K. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice*, 3d ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2004. Print.

---. "A Rhetorical Schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery." *Communication Studies* 45 (1994): 213-24. *JSTOR.* Web 21 Jan 2011.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* 2nd ed. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.

---. "The Discourse on Language." *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language.* Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972: 215-37. Print.

---."The Eye of Power." *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Interviews 1972- 1977*. Ed. & Trans. Colin Gordon. Sussex: Harvester P, 1980. Print.

---. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction.* Vol 1. New York: Vintage Books, 1990. Print.

Friedman, Heather. "Re: Request for Information about [Your Organization]." Message to author. 27 June 2012. E-mail.

Furstenberg, Frank. "As the Pendulum Swings: Teenage Childbearing and Social Concern." *Family Relations* 40 (1991): 127-38. Web. *JSTOR.* 13 June 2011.

---. "No Silver Bullet: 30-year Study Shows that Preventing Teenage Childbearing Won't Cure Poverty." Presentation to Council on Contemporary Families, U of Illinois. April 25-26th 2008. *Ascribe*. Web. 5 May 2011.

Furstenberg, Frank, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and S. Philip Morgan. *Adolescent Mothers in Later Life.* New York, NY: Cambridge UP, 1987. Print.

Garland-Thomson. Rosemarie. *Staring: How We Look.* New York: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.

Geronimus, Arline T. "Baby Talk." Letter. *The New Republic* 24 Dec 1990. 2, 42. *The New Republic Archive.* Web. 15 June 2011.

---."Damned If You Do: Culture, Identity, Privilege, and Teenage Childbearing in the United States." *Social Science & Medicine* 57 (2003): 881-93. *ScienceDirect.* Web. 31 Jan 2010.

---. "On Teenage Childbearing and Neonatal Mortality in the United States." *Population and Development Review* 13.2 (June 1987): 245-79. *JSTOR.* Web. 31 Jan 2010.

---. "Teenage Childbearing and Personal Responsibility: An Alternative View." *Political Science Quarterly* 112.3 (1997): 405-30. *JSTOR.* Web. 9 May 2011.

---. "Teenage Childbearing and Social and Reproductive Disadvantage: the Evolution of Complex Questions and the Demise of Simple Answers." *Family Relations* 40 (1992): 463-71. Web. *JSTOR.* 13 June 2011.

---. "Teenage Childbearing and Social Disadvantage: Unprotected Discourse." *Family Relations* 40 (1992): 244-48. *JSTOR.* Web. 17 June 2011.

Geronimus, Arline T. and Sanders Korenman. "The Socioeconomic Consequences of Teen Childbearing Reconsidered. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 107.4 (1992): 1187-1214. *JSTOR.* Web. 9 May 2011.

Geronimus, Arline T., Korenman, Sanders, and Marianne M. Hillemeier."Does Young Maternal Age Adversely Affect Child Development? Evidence from Cousin Comparison." *PSC Research Report No. 92-256* (September 1992).

Gilman, Sander. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine, and Literature" *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 204-42. *JSTOR.* Web. 31 Jan 2010.

Girl-Mom: Support, Community, and Education for Young Mamas. 1999. Web. 11 Sept 2007. http://www.girl-mom.com/

Glenn, Cheryl. *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition From Antiquity Through the Renaissance*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1997. Print.

Gore, Ariel. *The Hip Mama's Survival Guide.* New York: Hyperion. 1998. Print.

---.Introduction. Gore and Lavender xi-xiv.

---.Foreword. Davis xii-xvi.

Grogger, Jeff and Stephen G. Bronars. "The Socioeconomic Consequences of Teenage Childbearing: Findings from a Natural Experiment." *Family Planning Perspectives* 25.4 (1993): 156-61 & 174. *JSTOR.* Web. 9 May 2011.

Gutierrez, Elena R. *Fertile Matters: The Politics of Mexican-Origin Women's Reproduction.* Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 2008. Print.

Hage, Ghassan. "White Self-Racialization as Identity Fetishism: Capitalism and the Experience of Colonial Whiteness." *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice*. Eds. Karim Murji and John Solomos. London: Oxford UP, 2005: 185-205. Print.

Held, Gudrun. "Magazine Covers—A Multimodal Pretext-Genre." *Folia Linguistica* 39.1 (2005):173-96. *JSTOR.* Web. 31 Jan 2010.

Hendrixon, Anne. "Superpredator Meets Teenage Mom: Exploding the Myth of the Out-of –Control Youth." *Policing the National Body: Race Gender and Criminalization*. Eds. Jael Silliman and Anannya Bhattacharjee. New York: South End P, 2002. 231-58. Print.

Herndl, Carl G. and Adela Licona. "Shifting Agency: Agency, *Kairos,* and the Possibilities of Social Action." *The Cultural Turn: Perspectives on Communicative Practices in Workplaces and Professions*. Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing, 2007. Print.

Hindman, Jane E. "Writing an Important Body of Scholarship: A Proposal for Embodied Rhetoric of Professional Practice." *JAC* 22.1 (2002): 93-118. *JSTOR* . Web. 3 Mar 2012.

Hirsch, Aubrey. "On Pregnancy and Privacy and Fear." *The Rumpus.* May 2, 2012. Web. 5 May 2012.

Hofferth, Sandra L. "Endemic, but Not Epidemic." Rev. of *An "Epidemic" of Adolescent*

Pregnancy? by Maris Vinovskis. *Family Planning Perspectives*. 20. 5 (Sep- Oct 1988): 247-8. Web. *JSTOR.* 17 June 2011.

Hoffman, Saul D. "Teenage Childbearing Is Not So Bad After All: Or Is It?: A Review of the New Literature." *Family Planning Perspectives* 30.5 (1998): 236-43. *JSTOR.* Web. 31 Jan 2010.

Holmlund, Helena. "Estimating Long-Term Consequences of Teenage Childbearing: An Examination of the Siblings Approach." *The Journal of Human Resources* 40.3 (Summer 2005): 716-43. *JSTOR.* Web. 9 May 2011.

hooks, bell. "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression." *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center.* Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000. 18-25. Print.

---."The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader.* Ed. Amelia Jones. Routledge, 2003: 94-105. Print.

---. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black.* Boston: South End, 1989. Print.

Hotz, Joseph V., Williams McElroy, Susan, and Seth G. Sanders. "Teenage Childbearing and Its Life Cycle Consequences: Exploiting a Natural Experiment." *The Journal of Human Resources.* 40.3 (Summer 2005): 683-715. *JSTOR.* Web. 9 May 2011.

Huber, Katie. "What Matters." Davis 137-44.

Hulbert, Ann. "Poor Conceptions: The Farfetched Case for Teenage Motherhood." *The New Republic.* 1990. 21-3. Web. *The New Republic Archive.* 14 June 2011.

Jackson, Rebecca. "Resisting Institutional Narratives: One Students' Counter-stories of Writing and Learning in the Academy." *The Writing Center Journal* 28.1 (2008): 23-41. *Academic OneFile* Web. 9 Dec. 2011.

Kaiser Family Foundation. *Sexual Health Statistics for Teenagers and Young Adults in the United States.* Washington, D.C: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006. Print.

Kantrowitz, Barabara, Mary Hager, Pat Wingert, Ginny Carroll, George Raine, Monroz Anderson, Deborah Witherspoon, Janet Huck, and Shawn Doherty. "Kids and Contraceptives." *Newsweek* 16 Feb 1987. Lifestyle Section, 54-65.

Kaplan, Elaine Bell. *Not Our Kind of Girl: Unraveling the Myths of Black Teenage Motherhood*. Berkley, CA: U of California P, 1997. Print.

Kelly, Deidre M. *Pregnant with Meaning*: *Teen Mothers and the Politics of Inclusive Schooling*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000. Print.

---."Stigma Stories: Four Discourses About Teen Mothers, Welfare, and Poverty." *Youth and Society* 27.4 (June 1996): 421-49. *JSTOR*. Web. 31 Jan. 2010.

---."Warning Labels: Stigma and the Popularizing of Teen Mothers' Stories." *Curriculum Inquiry* 27.2 (Summer 1997): 165-86. *JSTOR.* Web. 8 Dec. 2011.

---. "Young Mothers, Agency, and Collective Action: Issues and Challenges." *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 9.1 (2007): 7-17. Print.

Kennedy, Tammy M., Middleton, Joyce Irene, and Krista Ratcliffe. "The Matter of Whiteness: Or, Why Whiteness Studies Is Important to Rhetoric and Composition Studies." *Rhetoric Review* (2005) 24.4: 359-73. *JSTOR.* Web. 2 Aug. 2011.

Klemesrud, Judy. 1970. "Bulletin Board, Pictures of Pupils' Babies." *New York Times*, Feb. 18, 50.

Kress, Gunther, and Theo Van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design.* London: Routledge, 1996. Print.

Kukla, Rebecca. "Pregnant Bodies as Public Spaces." *Motherhood and Space: Configurations of the Maternal Through Politics, Home and the Body*. Eds. Sarah Hardy and Caroline Wiedmer. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005: 281-305. Print.

Landrum, Karen. "A Leap of Faith." Davis 63-70.

Lanni, Jackie. "How to Get to Law School." Davis 121-129.

Lavarnway, Jessica Allain. "Things Aren't What They Seem to Be." Davis 263-269.

Lavender, Bee. "Bread and Roses." Gore and Lavender 115-21.

Lawson, Erica. "Black Women's Mothering in a Historical and Contemporary Perspective: Understanding the Past, Forging the Future." *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering*. Ed. Andrea O'Reilly. Toronto, Canada: Women's P, 2004. Print.

Lawson, Annette and Deborah L. Rhode. Eds. *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy*. London: Yale UP, 1993. Print.

Lee, Min Jin. "Will." Gore and Lavender. 11-20.

Lemke, J. L. "Metamedia Literacy: Transforming Meanings and Media." *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World*. Ed Carolyn Handa. Boston: Bedford's, 2004: 71-93. Print.

Lesko, Nancy. *Act Your Age!: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.

---."Curriculum Differentiation as Social Redemption: The Case of School-Aged Mothers." *Curriculum Differentiation: Interpretive Studies in U.S. Secondary Schools*. Eds. Reba Page and Linda Valli. Albany: State U of New York P, 1990: 113-36. Print.

Licona, Adela. "(B)orderlands' Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines." *NWSAJ* 17.2 (Summer 2005): 104-29. *Project Muse*. Web. 31 Jan. 2010.

Lifetime. "The Pregnancy Project: Discussion Guide." *Lifetime: The Pregnancy Project.* 2012. Web. 3 Sept. 2012.

Lipstadt, Deborah E. *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan, 1993. Print.

Lind, Jennifer. "The Letter." Davis 181-7.

Lindsay. "Motherhood as Inspiration." *Girl-Mom*

Lisa. "Resistance is Not Futile." *Girl-Mom*

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Freedom, California: Crossing P, 1984. Print.

Luker, Kristin. *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1996. Print.

---. *When Sex Goes to School: Warring Views on Sex--and Sex Education--Since the Sixties.* New York: Norton, 2006. Print.

Luttrell, Wendy. *Pregnant Bodies, Fertile Minds*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Macleod, Catriona I. *"Adolescence," Pregnancy, and Abortion: Constructing a Threat of Degeneration.* New York: Taylor & Francis, 2010. Print.

Males, Mike. *Teenage Sex and Pregnancy: Modern Myths, Unsexy Realities.* Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2010. Print.

Manns, Sara. “Real Moms.” Gore and Lavender 38-44.

McCarthy, J. and J. Hardy. “Age at First Birth and Birth Outcomes.” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 3.4 (1993): 373-92. *EBSCO Host.* Web. 9 May 2011.

McCloud, Scott. “Show and Tell.” *Understanding Comics*. New York: Kitchen Sink P, 1994. 138-61. Print.

Mellon, Ericka. “Houston schools offer campus help for teen moms.” *Houston Chronicle.* Web. 7 Sept. 2009. http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Houston-schools-offer-campus-help-for-teen-moms-1720712.php#page-2

Miller, Arthur. “Rhetorical Exigence.” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 5.2 (Spring 1972): 111-8. *JSTOR.* Web. 10 Jan. 2013.

Miller, Carolyn R. “Genre as Social Action.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 151-67. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 Jan. 2013.

Mindyzak, Shannon. “Navy Moms.” Davis 188-90.

Moran, Jeffrey P. Moran. *Teaching sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000. Print.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992. Print.

Moses, Judy. “My Independent Study Abroad.” Davis 130-6.

Naples, Nancy. “Deconstructing and Locating Survivor Discourse: Dynamics of Narrative, Empowerment, and Resistance for Child Abuse Survivors.” *Signs* 28.4 (2003): 1151-85. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 Mar. 2010.

Naranjo, Rita. “From Hopelessness to Inspiration.” Davis 242-50.

Nathanson, Constance. *Dangerous Passage*: *The Social Control of Sexuality in Women’s Adolescence.* Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1991. Print.

National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. 2012. Web. 14 June 2012.

---. “Sex Has Consequences.” 2001. Public Service Announcement Ad Campaign.

---. "Linking Teen Pregnancy Prevention to Other Critical Social Issues." *Why It Matters* research brief series. Mar. 2010. Web. 9 Sept. 2011.

---."Teenage Pregnancy, Poverty, and Income Disparity." *Why It Matters* research brief series. Mar. 2010. Web. 9 Sept. 2011.

---."Teenage Pregnancy and Overall Child Well-Being." *Why It Matters* research brief series. Mar. 2010. Web. 9 Sept. 2011.

National Center for Education Statistics. "Marana High School." United States Department of Education and Institute for Education Sciences. 2009-2010. Web. 20 June 2012.

---. "Sunnyside High School." United States Department of Education and Institute for Education Sciences. 2009-2010. Web. 20 June 2012.

The National Women's Law Center. "A Pregnancy Test for Schools: The Impact of Education Laws on Pregnant and Parenting Students." Report. 2012. Web. 3 Sept. 2012.

Nayak, Anoop. "White Lives." *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice*. Eds. Karim Murji and John Solomos, 141-63. Oxford UP, 2005: 141-63. Print.

Odell, Lee, and Karen McGrane. "Bridging the Gap: Integrating Visual and Verbal Rhetoric." *Inventing a Discipline: Rhetoric Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Young*. Ed. Maureen Daly Goggin. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000: 207-36. Print.

Ohmann, Richard. *Selling Culture: Magazine, Markets, and Class at Turn of the Century*. Verso, 1996. Print.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*, 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Omy. "Growing Up With Him." *Girl-Mom*

O'Reilly, Andrea. *Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Feminism, Motherhood and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering*. Toronto: Demeter P, 2006. Print.

---.Ed. *Young Mothers*. Spec. issue of *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 9.1 (2007). Print.

Orenstein, Hannah. "Louisiana Pregnancy Scandal at Dehli Charter School Triggers Debate. *Huffington Post.* 9 Aug. 2012. Web. 3 Sept. 2012.

Packebush, Nina. “Growing Up.” *Girl-Mom*

Perez, Miriam Zoila. “Teen Moms Look for Support, But Find Only Shame.” *Colorlines: News for Action.* 6 May 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2011.

Peterson, Valerie V. “The Rhetorical Criticism of Visual Elements: An Alternative to Foss’s Schema.” *Southern Communication Journal* 67.1 (2001): 19-32. *JSTOR.* Web. 2 Aug. 2011.

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Phoenix, Ann. “The Social Construction of Teenage Motherhood: A Black and White Issue.” *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy*. Eds. Annette Lawson and Deborah L. Rhode. London: Yale UP, 1993. Print.

Pillow, Wanda S. *Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and the Teen Mother.* New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004. Print.

Pracejus, John W., Olsen, G. Douglas, and Thomas C. O’Guinn. “How Nothing Became Something: White Space, Rhetoric, History, and Meaning.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 33 (June 2006): 82-90. Print.

Pruden, Elisabeth. “Choices.” *Girl-Mom*

Quaife, G.R. *Wanton Wenches and Wayward Wives: Peasants and Illicit Sex in Early Seventeenth Century England*. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1979. Print.

Ratcliffe, Krista. “Review: Material Matters: Bodies and Rhetoric.” *College English* 64.5 (May 2002): 613-23. *JSTOR.* Web. 10 Jan. 2013.

Reich, Jennifer. “Pregnant with Possibility: Reflections on Embodiment, Access, and Inclusion in Field Research.” *Qualitative Sociology* 26.3 (Fall 2003): 351-67. *EBSCO.* Web. 17 May 2012.

“Revisionist.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online.* June 2011. Oxford UP. 18 June 2011.

Reynolds, Nedra. “Interrupting Our Way to Agency: Feminist Cultural Studies and Composition.” *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words.* Eds. Susan C. Jarratt and Lynn Worsham. New York : MLA, 1998. 58-73. Print.

---.*Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2004 Print.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.* 10th ed. New York: Norton, 1986. Print.

---. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing As Re-Vision." *On Lies, Secret, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. Norton, 1995: 33–50. Print.

Richards, Rebecca S. "The Council of Women World Leaders, Iron Ladies, and Daughters of Destiny: A Transnational Study of Women's Rhetorical Performances of Power." The University of Arizona, 2011. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.* Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997. Print.

Robin Hood Foundation: Targeting Poverty in New York City. 2010. Web. 9 May 2011.

Rockefeller, John D. "Letter of Transmittal." "Population and the American Future: The Report of the Commission of the Population on Population Growth and the American Future." *The Rockefeller Commission Report.* Washington, D.C. 1972. Web. 3 Sept. 2012.

Roddick, Clea. "Stages." Davis 145-8.

Rodriguez, Cheryl. "Beyond Today and Pass Tomorrow: Self-Efficacy Among African-American Adolescent Mothers." *Voices* 8.1 (Spring 2008): 18-22. *Anthrosource.* Web. 21 Jan. 2013.

Rodriguez, Gaby with Jenna Glazer. *The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012. Print.

Rowland, Kelly. 2002. "Stole." *Simply Deep.* Sony. Music Video.

Rowland, Robert. "The Narrative Perspective." *The Art of Rhetorical Criticism.* Ed. Jim A. Kuypers. New York: Pearson, 2005. 131-61. Print.

Rowley, Chishamiso. "The Maternal Socialization of Black Adolescent Mothers." *Race, Gender, and Class* 9.1 (2002):168-84. *GenderWatch.* Web. 17 May 2012.

Rosenzweig, Mark. R.and Kenneth I. Wolpin. "Sisters, Siblings, and Mothers: The Effect of Teenage Childbearing on Birth Outcomes in a Dynamic Family Context." *Econometrica* 63.2 (March 1995): 303-26. *JSTOR.* Web. 21 Jan. 2013.

Royster, Jacqueline Jones. "A View from a Bridge: Afrafeminist Ideologies and Rhetorical Studies." *Feminism and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook.* Ed. Kirsch, Gesa E. et al. Boston: Bedford, 2003. 206-33. Print.

Ruddick, Sarah. *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. Boston: Beacon P, 1989. Print.

Russell, Stephen and Fay C. H. Lee. "Latina Adolescent Motherhood: A Turning Point?" *Latina Girls: Voices of Adolescent Strength.* Eds. Jill Denner and Bianca L. Guzman. New York: New York UP, 2006: 212-25. Print.

Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota P, 2000. Print.

Savage, Dan. Foreword. Gore and Lavender vii-ix.

Schwabe, Liesl. "Motherhood and the Indian Post Office." Gore and Lavender 3-10.

Scott, Joan W. "The Evidence of Experience." *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. Eds. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Bariale, and David M. Halperin. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Seacrest, Ryan. "Teen Gaby Rodriguez Talks About Faking A Pregnancy for 'Pregnancy Project.'" *RyanSeacrest.com.* 25 Jan. 2012. Web. 3 Sept. 2012.

Singh, Susheela, Darrocj, Jacqueline E., and Jennifer J. Frost. "Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Adolescent Women's Sexual and Reproductive Behavior: The Case of Five Developed Countries." *Family Planning Perspectives* 33.6 (Nov-Dec 2001): 251-58, 289. Web. *JSTOR.* 28 June 2011.

SmithBattle, Lee. "Legacies of Advantage and Disadvantage: The Case of Teen Mothers." *Public Health Nursing* 24.5 (2007): 409-20. *Blackwell-Synergy.* Web. 21 Jan. 2011

Solinger, Rickie. *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States.* New York: Hill and Wang, 2001. Print.

---. *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America.* New York: New York UP, 2005. Print.

---. *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Solórzano, Daniel G. and Tara J. Yosso. "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 8.1 (2002): 23-44. *Sage*. Web. 31 Jan. 2010.

Sunnyside Unified School District. "District Vital Statistics." 5 Oct 2011. Web. 20 June 2012.

Tavis, Sarah. "Grace and Mama in the World." Davis 226-35.

Thompson, Mary. "Third Wave Feminist and the Politics of Motherhood." *Genders* 43 (2006). Web. 10 Apr. 2012.

Trotsky-Sirr, Rebecca. "Scaling the Ivory Tower With a Baby on My Back." Davis 270-8.

Upchurch, Dawn M. and James McCarthy. "The Timing of a First Birth and High School Completion." *American Sociological Review* 55.2 (Apr. 1990): 224-34. Web. *JSTOR.* 17 June 2011.

United States. Cong. Senate. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. *School Age Mother and Health Act, 1975. Hearing*. 4 Nov. 1975. 94th Cong., 1st sess. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1975. Web. 3 Sept. 2012.

United States. Presidential Commission on Population Growth and the American Future. *Population and the American Future*. Washington, D.C: The Commission, 1972. Web. 3 Sept. 2012.

United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. *Teenage Pregnancy: Everybody's Problem.* Rockville, Maryland: US Government Printing Office, 1977. Print.

Tapia, Ruby C. "Impregnating Images: Visions of Race, Sex, and Citizenship in California's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Campaigns." *Feminist Media Studies* 5.1 (2005): 7-22. *JSTOR.* Web. 4 Mar. 2010.

Thompson, Sharon. *Going All the Way: Teenage Girls' Tales of Sex, Romance, and Pregnancy.* Eds. Hill and Wang. New York: 1995. Print.

Vatz, Richard E. "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation." *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*. Eds. John Louis Lucaites, Celeste Michelle Condit, and Sally Caudill. Guilford P, 1998. 226-31. Print.

Verhovek, Sam Howe. "Ban on Pregnant Cheerleaders Lifted" *New York Times.* Nov. 3, 1993, p. B-15. Print.

Vinovskis, Maris. *.An "Epidemic" of Adolescent Pregnancy?: Some Historical and Policy Considerations*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.

---. "An 'Epidemic' of Adolescent Pregnancy?: Some Historical and Policy Considerations." *Journal of Family History* 6.2 (Summer 1981): 205-30.

Vinson, Jenna. "Covering National Concerns about Teenage Pregnancy: A Visual Rhetorical Analysis of Images of the Pregnant Teenage Body." *Feminist Formations* 24.2 (2012): 140-62. Print.

---. "More Than Just a Website for Young Mamas: Girl-Mom Members' Strategies for Countering the Dominant Perception of Teen Motherhood." *Motherhood Online.* Ed. Michelle Moravec. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars P, 2012. 98-116. Print.

Vinson, Jenna and Sally Stevens with the Crossroads Collaborative. My Pregnancy Story Project Report. 6 Dec. 2012.

Weedon, Chris. *Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory.* 2nd Ed. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997. Print.

Wallis, Claudia. "Children Having Children: Teen Pregnancy in America." *Time.* 9 Dec. 1985: 78–90.

Westfall, Sandra Sobieraj. "Bristol Palin." *People*, 1 June 2009, 58.

Werner, Emmy E. and Ruth S. Smith. *Journeys from Childhood to Midlife: Risk, Resilience, and Recover*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 2001. Print.

Woodbury, Richard. "High School Pregnancy." *Life Magazine*, 4 Apr. 1971.

Yardley, Elizabeth. "Teen Mothers' Experiences of Stigma." *Journal of Youth Studies* 11.6 (Dec 2008): 671-84. *Academic Search Complete.* Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

You Look Too Young to be a Mom: Teen Mothers Speak Out on Love, Learning, and Success. Ed. Deborah Davis. New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2004. Print.

Young, Iris Marion. "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation." *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 9.1 (1984): 45-62. *JSTOR.* Web. 31 Jan 2010.