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Positive Turning Points?

Young Women's Experiences of Teenage Pregnancy,

Motherhood and Education

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Kay Brown, BA (Hons)

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## **Abstract**

This is a qualitative interpretive phenomenological study grounded in a feminist research ethic that draws on the narratives of fourteen young women, aged fifteen to eighteen. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the young women's experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and education. The aim of this thesis is to examine how the young women believed becoming pregnant in their teenage years shaped and influenced their lives, with a particular focus on their education. The dichotomous constructions of teenage pregnancy in public, political and academic discourses as either highly problematic or as a positive and remarkable turning point are critically considered. Attention is paid to the value judgements that underlie these constructions of teenage pregnancy, problematising the kinds of agency that are positioned as appropriate for young women.

The young women who participated in this research framed their pregnancy as an opportunity to change and improve their lives through education. They defined success through traditional definitions of citizenship and inclusion and viewed themselves as either socially included or socially excluded on the premise of whether they obtained paid employment. It is argued their narratives are shaped by feelings of stigma and shame and by recognition of their frequent positioning as 'problems' to be fixed. It is asserted that both constructions of teenage pregnancy as either 'negative' or as a 'positive' turning are invariably problematic as both overtly value and uncritically privilege education and employment. It is argued that both constructions position young women as projects to be worked on and to be transformed and improved, providing a limited and limiting definition of a successful and positive life.

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## Textual conventions

Following the advice of Youdell (2006) I have sought to minimise the use of single inverted commas when writing in order to indicate the problematisation of a term or concept. When such problematisation seems necessary, single inverted commas are used on the first occasion the word or concept appears in the chapter.

Double inverted commas and italics are used when drawing upon the young women's narratives within the body of text, whether that be short extracts from their interviews, or key words or concepts. The use of double inverted commas and italics helps to clearly delineate between my words and the words of the young women involved in this study. When longer interview extracts have been used the young women's narratives are indented and in italics.

Textual convention	Meaning
...	Signifies a long pause in the young women's narrative.
[...]	Illustrates when two sections of narrative have been joined together to create a more concise account.
[laughs]	Indicates when the young women laughed in their narrative.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **The research context**

In the United Kingdom teenage motherhood has typically been depicted in the media and government policy as a devastating event for individual young women and their children and as a severe problem for society that must be tackled (Duncan, 2007). In the highly influential Teenage Pregnancy Report issued by the Social Exclusion Unit in 1999, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair stated ‘our failure to tackle this *problem* has cost the teenagers, their children and the country dear’ and that ‘as a country, we can’t afford to continue to ignore this *shameful* record’ (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 5, emphasis added). This view of teenage pregnancy and motherhood largely stems from a belief that the negative outcomes typically experienced by teenage mothers are a direct result of their early motherhood status. For example, statistical research suggests teenage mothers are at an increased risk of poverty, low educational attainment, lower rates of economic activity and a dependency on state benefits, in comparison to women who give birth over the age of twenty-four (Aspinall and Hashem, 2010).

However, studies analysing the effects of teenage motherhood using quantitative methods have come under close scrutiny in recent years. For example Duncan *et al.*, (2010) argue that this body of research represents an overly deterministic account of teenage motherhood. Quantitative studies have tended to conceptualise teenage motherhood in largely negative and sometimes fatalistic terms, in which teenage motherhood results in a series of risks, problems and negative orientations (Yates and Payne, 2006). From this

perspective, it can be argued teenage mothers have been vilified because they are seen to be actively choosing an alternative lifestyle to their middle class peers, a lifestyle that does not comply with contemporary societal norms and expectations (Wilson and Huntington, 2005). This critique of quantitative research has led to attempts to provide a counter analysis of teenage motherhood in order to challenge both the traditional view of teenage pregnancy as a devastating event as well as class based notions of success and participation in British society.

This critique has led to a surge in qualitative studies that focus on the views of pregnant and mothering young women in order to understand how they conceptualise their experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. Focusing on individual experience, rather than statistical data, expresses a commitment to examining how people make sense of their own life experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Exploring and privileging individual experience has helped expose an alternative discourse of teenage motherhood, as the meanings young women give to teenage pregnancy and motherhood are found to be different in key dimensions from the dominant discourse of teenage pregnancy and motherhood.

Based on the findings of many qualitative studies it is now argued by a growing number of academics that teenage motherhood can actually help instigate positive change in young women's lives, rather than engendering a pathway to disadvantage and social exclusion. This body of literature conceptualises teenage motherhood as a positive influence as it has been found that becoming pregnant can cause young women to re-evaluate their life goals, which often includes a renewed sense of motivation for education (Pillow, 2004; Kendall *et al.*, 2005; SmithBattle, 2007). This change in aspiration and attitude towards education is seen as a significant change in behaviour as previous research demonstrates that young

women who become mothers as teenagers tend to be disengaged from education prior to pregnancy, have a history of low attendance and low academic achievement (Dawson, 1997; Dawson and Meadows, 2001; Selman *et al*, 2001; Wiggins *et al.*, 2005; Arai, 2003a; Cater and Coleman, 2006).

This renewed sense of motivation for education has led some researchers to conclude that teenage motherhood represents a 'remarkable turning point' (Barn and Mantovani, 2007: 239), is 'positively transforming' and that having a baby can be a 'stabilizing influence' (Clemmens, 2003: 93). It was proposed by Seamark and Lings (2004: 817) that far from a catastrophe, teenage pregnancy was more 'the turning point to maturity and developing a career' where 'it was almost as if having a child had saved them from themselves'. Teenage pregnancy is thus positioned as a process of redemption, in which troubled and problematic young women are transformed into educable subjects.

Teenage pregnancy, then, is constructed in dichotomous terms. It is constructed as either highly problematic or as a positive and remarkable turning point. On the one hand, pregnant and mothering young women are positioned as problematic individuals who have made the decision to continue with their pregnancy. As will be evidenced throughout this thesis teenage pregnancy is seen to be highly problematic due to the raft of negative life outcomes and risks associated with becoming a mother at a young age. Often these negative outcomes are attributed to or associated with a lack of qualifications or engagement in education and employment. On the other hand, pregnancy is positioned as a positive and transformative experience that can lead young women to reengage in education. Young women, through their own making, become the ideal neoliberal subject. Teenage pregnancy and young women's agency is thus positioned in celebratory terms as young women 'save themselves'

through the 'wake up call' of becoming pregnant. The participants in this research are shown to resist traditional definitions of success prior to pregnancy, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. However, once pregnant they seek to align themselves with traditional notions of success and participation, in particular engagement in education and employment. Teenage pregnancy is therefore seen as a positive turning point wherein young women can enact agency, be empowered in order to 'save themselves.' They are no longer positioned as problems or to be experiencing problems, instead they are constructed in celebratory terms as productive, educable subjects who have taken responsibility for bringing about change in their lives. I argue in this thesis that both the 'negative' and 'positive' discourses of teenage pregnancy construct the subject primarily in terms of their participation in education and employment. It is argued that both constructions position young women as projects to be worked on, to be transformed and improved. In doing so, both discourses provide a limited and limiting definition of a successful and positive life.

This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge by critically exploring the concept of teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point in order to provide a more nuanced understanding. It is argued that positioning teenage pregnancy as a 'positive' and 'remarkable' turning point suggests the lives of young mothers are in some way negative, problematic or deficient prior to pregnancy and that they are in need of redemption. In drawing attention to and celebrating the agency of pregnant and mothering young women, there can be a 'temptation to exaggerate the exotic, the heroic, or the tragic aspects of the lives of people with little power. The danger lies in romanticizing Others and in using our representation of them to delineate "our" vision of the Good Life' (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1996: 13). Focusing on the transformation of pregnant and mothering young women is therefore inevitably linked with normative judgements surrounding what is deemed correct,

positive and aspirational. Youdell (2006) explains that 'normal' as a term is open to interrogation and full of contradiction. It is 'provisional, and dependent on the "abnormal" which it is posited as not being' (Youdell, 2006: 40). Consequently, what is classified as normal and positive needs to be critically explored and examined in relation to teenage pregnancy and motherhood in order to reveal the assumptions and normative value judgements on which both the 'negative' and 'positive' discourses rely.

The argument in this thesis moves beyond current debates about whether and how teenage mothers' agency is acknowledged, to an analysis of the kinds of agency that are deemed appropriate for this group of young women. Fundamental questions surrounding the forms of behaviour and participation that are deemed positive for teenage mothers will be critically examined. This thesis is therefore situated in political, social and moral debates surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood and different forms of social participation and their associated values. These concerns provide the grounding for this thesis and are rooted in a commitment to understanding inequalities within society and the education system. Attention is therefore given in this thesis to the social inequalities that shape the range, quality, meaning of and conditions under which choices are made.

It is argued the notion of agency has become inherently linked with individual responsibility both to oneself and wider society, and reflects, perhaps despite previous researchers' best intentions, neo-liberal values. Asad (2000), in relation to the study of pain, explains that agency is commonly ascribed towards what researchers consider positive moral goals, in which individuals strive towards self-empowerment, responsibility and constructive action. In relation to teenage pregnancy, these positive moral goals are usually linked to the autonomous and responsible individual, who strives to improve their life

chances through engaging in education, employment and training, thus transforming individual agency into 'responsible agency' (Bordonaro and Payne, 2012). Young women's lives are therefore commonly viewed and analysed through this neoliberal lens. Young women are expected to demonstrate self-empowerment, responsibility and constructive action, and are praised and celebrated when they do so. Critical to this discussion are the types of actions that are praised and valued when displayed by young women. It is argued in this thesis that tensions and concerns about the kinds of agency deemed appropriate for young women are centred in the discourses of education and employment, wherein it is the educable subject who is celebrated and it is the uneducated welfare dependent teenage mother who is castigated.

Young mothers' lack of engagement in education and employment is commonly at the centre of discussions surrounding teenage pregnancy. Education is positioned as a site of change, vital for the achievement of social and economic success for both the individual and society. Definitions and value judgements surrounding what is deemed a positive and successful life are entwined and constrained by engagement and success in education. Consequently, a strong focus is placed on education in this thesis. I have sought to explore how education is linked to definitions of success and what implications this has for the ways in which pregnant and mothering young women shape and construct their narratives of change. In analysing their narratives and engaging with the discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and education I seek to challenge the notion that engagement in education is the only form of success available for young women, arguing that this represents a highly limited and limiting definition of success.

## Defining agency

The concept of agency is central to this thesis. The term agency is used to refer to human action or the capacity and ability to act (Hinterberger, 2013). Agency has been associated with 'notions of freedom, free will, action, creativity, originality and the very possibility of change through the actions of free agents' (Barker, 2012: 240). This construction of agency is rooted in Enlightenment understandings of the individual. Enlightenment thinkers construct the individual as a free agent whose actions and thoughts are based on rational choices. The agentic subject is seen as autonomous, possessing the ability and capacity to influence and change their own circumstances free from constraints (Hinterberger, 2013). From this perspective, the self is unified, fixed, rational and coherent. This construction of agency is highly pervasive in social and political discourses, in which the individual is seen as free to choose. The 'freely choosing individual' is able to assess their options, evaluating and rationalising the different courses of action and are capable of enacting their decisions in the pursuit of their own self-interest. The discourse of the 'freely choosing individual' is embedded in Western culture. Rose (1996: 17, original emphasis) argues:

the forms of freedom we inhabit today are intrinsically bound to a regime of subjectification in which subjects are not merely 'free to choose', but *obliged to be free*, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice under conditions that systematically limit the capacities of so many to shape their own destiny.

The notion of the 'freely choosing individual' places significant emphasis on the agentic individual, an individual who is able to shape and transform their own destiny. Individual responsibility is critical to this agentic self and has become central to the construction of agency (Evans, 2013). Individual responsibility and the ability and capacity to take control of one's life has commonly been invoked, endorsed and celebrated in political and

academic spheres (Asad, 2000). However, concerns have been raised regarding the overemphasis of agency in some social research as the privileging and celebration of agency means structural factors are often overlooked (Hemmings, 2013).

Postmodernists have challenged this notion of the autonomous, freely choosing individual. It is argued this construction of agency is voluntarist, viewing the individual as able to act and think independently of social structures and their ideologies (Jones, 1997). As a researcher, I align with this critique. Desires and actions do not necessarily represent choices that are rational, deliberate and in the pursuit of narrow self-interest. I recognise that agency and choice do not convey the complexity of causes of action. Hindess (2015: 112) explains that 'what could be employed by an actor at any given time is never entirely a matter of choice, and where there is an element of choice that will be structured by the forms of thought available to that actor'. Furthermore, Rose (1999: 1) asserts 'thoughts, feelings and actions may appear as the very fabric and constitution of the intimate self, but they are socially organized and managed in minute particulars'. Consequently, this thesis seeks to identify in the young women's narratives why they desired to change their lives, but rather than positioning their choices as entirely free, the factors that shaped and influenced their choices are also considered.

The relationship between structure and agency remains at the forefront of debates in social science and social theory (Fuchs, 2001). There is significant debate over the extent to which individuals are seen to be able to think and act independently from the constraints placed on them by structural factors (Hinterberger, 2013). Questions regarding to what extent individuals are able to choose are central to debates surrounding structure and agency.

Giddens (1979) argues that subjects are determined, caused and produced by social forces that lie outside of themselves as individuals. Furthermore, Fuchs (2001: 24) asserts 'actors do act, but they do so under circumstances not of their own choosing. Actors do define, and redefine, situations, but there are structural limits on what can be accomplished and changed in this way'. The belief that individuals are free to choose is therefore a simplistic understanding of human action. Davies (1991: 46, original emphasis) argues:

choices are understood as more akin to 'forced choices', since the subject's positioning within particular discourses makes the 'chosen' line of action the only possible action, not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively constituted through one's placement within that discourse to *want* that line of action.

In this thesis I explore and analyse agency in relation to what choices and decisions pregnant and mothering young women express, desire and believe possible. I am also interested in the discourses that frame their narratives and how they shape and influence what the young women valued and desired. Sayer (2011: 140) explains that 'on its own, the concept of human agency implies the ability to choose to do things, but gives no indication of why we would want to'. Simply acknowledging how the lives of pregnant and mothering young women have changed does not take into account the factors that shape and influence their thoughts, decisions and actions. Exploring and analysing people's motivations for change is therefore imperative in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of their experience.

## **Defining discourse**

In this thesis I engage with and deconstruct the discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy, motherhood and education. In using the term 'discourse' I am referring to the ways in which language constructs meaning, both in the young women's narratives and in the wider cultural and political discourses of teenage pregnancy, motherhood and education.

Recognising the negative discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood is paramount as they are part of the context from which the young women's accounts of education and motivations for change emerge. Foucault (1972) refers to discourses as systems of thought composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subject. Discourse therefore 'governs, through the production of categories of knowledge and assemblages of texts, what it is possible to talk about and what is not' (Vincent and Thomson, 2013: 7). Discourses function in regulatory ways to define, categorise and exclude pregnant and mothering young women (Rudoe, 2014). However, Foucault (1990) insists that while particular discourses prevail in some contexts and endure no discourse is guaranteed and there is the potential for the meanings of discourses to shift and be unsettled.

Pregnant and mothering young women can be seen to be positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices. These discourses shape and influence how young women are positioned in society and how they position themselves. Analysing the young women's narratives in relation to discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood helps illuminate the cultural attitudes that shape, influence and construct their lives. As Foucault (1977) explains discourse defines subjects, framing and positioning in terms of who it is possible to be and what it is possible to do. Acknowledging discourse is essential as

constructions of the 'good mother' and 'good citizen' cannot be understood outside the discursive practices that construct their parameters and norms.

### **Overview of the research approach**

This thesis is interdisciplinary in nature. It draws upon multiple disciplines to explore, analyse and theorise the lives and experiences of pregnant and mothering young women. The perspectives, concepts and theories of education, sociology and philosophy have been employed to help guide and shape this study. This thesis seeks to explore the educational experiences of the young women with a specific focus on the ways in which they construct their educational identities and how they view the role and purpose of education. Their experiences and understandings of education are placed in wider sociological perspectives associated with the interplay between structure and agency. In particular there is an examination of how the young women are constructed as, and construct themselves as agentic subjects to be worked on and improved. This is accompanied by an analysis of the structural factors that shape the range, quality, meaning of and conditions under which choices are made. This leads on to philosophical debates concerning the values, beliefs and judgements that are made regarding what is deemed a 'successful' and 'positive' life. Through employed an interdisciplinary approach it has allowed a nuanced understanding of the data, one that is not confined or restricted by the parameters of a set or narrow disciplinary context.

In order to provide a critical analysis of teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point, this thesis draws on the narratives of fourteen young women, aged fifteen to eighteen, to illustrate how they believe pregnancy and motherhood affected their lives, with a particular focus on their education. There is an emphasis on the individual views and experiences of

the young women, alongside an examination of how the young women experienced and navigated the broader social structures of power and inequality. In considering agency against a backdrop of inequality, this thesis aims to shift the focus from the single acts that young women carry out as markers of agency, towards the structural and discursive relations of inequality that various modes of agency uphold and reflect.

When examining the lives of young women who experience inequality and disadvantage, researchers can either condone, reinforce or exacerbate the pre-existing inequalities experienced, or they can highlight and challenge such oppressive forces (Thompson, 2003). The latter is the intention of this thesis and a feminist research ethic is adopted, which will be discussed in the methodology chapter. The voices of the young women involved are prioritised to enable them to share their experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and education. The importance and value of focusing on young women's voices is emphasised by Crozier and Anstiss (1995: 31) who assert that:

there is much to be learned from hearing what girls have to say for themselves. Teachers' and theorists' views do not reflect the complexity, the detail, the level of insight, the vigour and the feelings that girls express when they talk about their experiences [...] Reflecting on and talking to girls about girls should not be seen as a luxury item. They deserve an equal place in the spotlight.

This thesis therefore represents an attempt to hear, interpret and produce an analytical account of young women's experiences of education, whilst retaining the complexity, detail, level of insight and vigour that are apparent in their narratives.

## **Rationale**

This thesis focuses on the educational experiences of teenage mothers, as opposed to the experiences of teenage fathers or a more encompassing focus on teenage parents. I decided to omit teenage fathers from this study because while government policy frequently refers to ‘teenage parents’, for example, to help get ‘more teenage parents into education, training or employment’ (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 8), in practice policies and initiatives are commonly directed solely at teenage mothers. In addition, teenage mothers, in comparison to teenage fathers, are more likely to experience disruption to their education due to pregnancy and subsequent mothering responsibilities (Dawson and Hosie, 2005). This illustrates the highly gendered experience of parenting as women continue to be primarily responsible for the day-to-day care of their children (Gillies, 2007). Mothering responsibilities can therefore have adverse effects on young women’s abilities to attend or achieve in education, placing them at a greater risk of educational failure and school exclusion. For these reasons, teenage fathers were considered beyond the remit of this study.

Researchers often conduct research based on their personal interests and issues that either trouble or intrigue them (Hertz, 1997). This was the position adopted in this thesis, as the decision to focus on the educational experiences of teenage mothers was influenced by my professional background working in the field of education and sexual health. The key message that was reinforced during my time working in sexual health for the National Health Service (NHS) and various charities was that teenage pregnancy was problematic and that conception rates had to be reduced. Much of our work was centred on this premise. This led me to question why teenage pregnancy was seen as highly problematic in the United Kingdom and as something which required ‘tackling’ (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999).

On further investigation, I came across a body of research that contradicted the dominant discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and, as discussed earlier, described how teenage pregnancy could in fact be viewed as a positive turning point for individual young women. However, this raised more questions for me personally regarding how positive behaviours and attitudes are defined and classified for young mothers and what forms of success and participation are privileged. I decided to focus on young women's experiences and attitudes towards education in this thesis as engagement and achievement in formal education is arguably the most significant measure by which a life is deemed successful, positive and meaningful in contemporary Britain. I wanted to explore how pregnant and mothering young women position themselves within discourses of education. Through undertaking this research I sought to critically consider the ways in which young women's lives and experiences are judged and assessed, how positive and negative life choices are defined and by whose definition. My aim is to question and challenge the expected trajectories and life choices available to and expected of pregnant and mothering young women in the UK.

### **Clarification of terms**

Once it was decided this study would focus exclusively on the educational experiences of teenage mothers, a key decision that had to be made was how to refer to those involved. Previous research has drawn upon a wide range of terms from teenage mothers, young mothers, or girls to more methodological terminology such as participants, informants or research subjects. I felt it was important to carefully consider the terminology used in this thesis as these terms often carry important inferences (Jeffs and Smith, 1996).

Those involved in this research study have been referred to as 'young women' or 'participants' throughout this thesis. While those involved in the study were between fifteen

and eighteen years of age I rejected the use of the word 'girl' as I felt it would position those involved as children, thus implying irresponsibility and a lack of maturity. I also believed that using the term girl would possibly risk transmitting and reinforcing the popularised idea of 'children having children'. The use of the term 'young women' is supported by the work of Vincent (2012) who also employed this term to acknowledge the adult responsibilities they had as a result of motherhood. The use of the term participant is employed to reflect feminist principles of research (Birch and Miller, 2012). I regard the young women as participants as they have contributed to the research process by consenting to their involvement and in helping to build a more nuanced understanding of the discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and their own experiences.

### **Research questions**

This introductory chapter has highlighted some of the key contentions in the literature surrounding the construction of teenage pregnancy as highly problematic and the opposing view that it in fact represents a positive turning point in young women's lives. In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point the following research question was used to underpin and direct this thesis:

*To what extent does teenage pregnancy represent a positive turning point for young women's lives?*

In addition, a series of sub questions were asked:

- What are the meanings young women give to their experiences of education?
- To what extent does becoming a mother shape young women's life plans and aspirations for education?
- If change does occur, what are the young women's motivations for change?

This thesis therefore considers the meanings young women give to their experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and education.

### **Thesis outline**

In order to address the research questions stated above this thesis adopts the following structure. The literature review constitutes the next chapter and provides a detailed interpretation and synthesis of published research in order to illustrate the changing perspectives towards teenage pregnancy and motherhood. This helps to contextualise the literature surrounding teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point and highlights key contentions. The methodology for this study is then outlined in Chapter Three. This chapter describes and justifies the epistemological perspective adopted and the process of data collection, evaluating key strengths and limitations. The chapter discusses how access was established with the young women and the process of conducting the research. The chapter is accompanied by my personal reflections and the voices of the young women to help demonstrate some of the key methodological and ethical issues that arose and how they were addressed. Finally, the chapter describes the method of analysis using an interpretative phenomenological framework. A reflexive approach to the thesis is therefore adopted in which I carefully consider my role and influence as a researcher and illuminate the key decisions I have made throughout the research process.

Four data analysis chapters constitute the next section of the thesis. These chapters chart the educational experiences of the young women prior to, during and after pregnancy. Chapter Four provides insight into the lives and experiences of the young women prior to pregnancy in order to help understand the changes they perceived to have occurred as a result of pregnancy. This chapter highlights how the young women were commonly positioned as

problems or to be experiencing problems in the education system prior to pregnancy. This chapter helps set the scene for Chapter Five which identifies the specific ways in which the young women felt becoming pregnant affected their lives, with a particular focus on their education. Chapter Six then focuses on the young women's motivations for change in order to understand why they felt a need to alter their behaviour and actions. This chapter critically engages with political and moral debates about the value of motherhood, and what is defined as participation and success in British society. Chapter Seven then provides an analysis of the structural factors that shape, influence and constrain the young women's educational decisions and opportunities. Finally, Chapter Eight consolidates the discussions presented in the previous chapters and highlights the key findings of the study in relation to the wider literature to illustrate the pre-existing views that have been challenged and my contribution to knowledge.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Teenage pregnancy, motherhood and education**

##### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a synthesis of published research in order to illustrate the changing perspectives towards teenage pregnancy and motherhood in the UK, with a particular emphasis on education and employment. The literature presented in this chapter focuses on the educational implications of teenage pregnancy and motherhood and the perceived role of education in transforming and improving the lives and experiences of young women.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the perceived consequences and effects of teenage pregnancy and how this has contributed to the construction of teenage pregnancy as highly problematic for young women, their children and society. The next section examines how teenage pregnancy is linked to the notion of social exclusion. The positioning of teenage mother's as socially excluded members of society are explored alongside a consideration of the ways in which young mothers inclusion within society is envisaged and promoted. This part of the chapter critically considers the forms of participation that are associated with social inclusion and exclusion. This is accompanied by a consideration of what is deemed positive and appropriate for pregnant and mothering young women and the value judgements that underpin how social inclusion is defined and understood. The third section of this chapter revisits the construction of teenage pregnancy as highly problematic and a uniformly negative experience from a critical perspective. Evidence is presented that suggests the outcomes for teenage mothers and their children may not be as

negative as is sometimes claimed. The assertion that teenage pregnancy leads to poor outcomes is therefore challenged and critiqued. Conversely, it is illustrated how a growing body of literature suggests that teenage pregnancy can in fact be a positive and transforming process for young women. Through synthesising the literature surrounding teenage pregnancy, motherhood and education this chapter helps to situate this research study and provide a justification for its focus and rationale.

### **The construction of teenage pregnancy as a problem**

Teenage pregnancy is conceptualised as inherently problematic in the media and government policy (Duncan, 2007). Being a young mother is commonly associated with negative outcomes for both mother and child. It is asserted young mothers are:

more likely to drop out of school, to have no or low qualifications, to be unemployed or low-paid, to live in poor housing conditions, to suffer from depression, and to live on welfare. Similarly, the child of a teenage mother is more likely to live in poverty, grow up without a father, to become a victim of neglect or abuse, to do less well at school, to become involved in crime, to abuse drugs and alcohol, and eventually become a teenage parent and begin the cycle all over again (UNICEF, 2001: 3).

Teenage pregnancy is therefore associated with a raft of risks, problems and negative orientations and is linked with intergenerational poverty and disadvantage. There is a strong emphasis placed on the perceived decline in morality and family life, with concerns surrounding single mothers and their capability to raise their children to be law abiding and productive citizens (Gillies, 2007). Young mothers' lack of engagement in education and employment is commonly at the centre of discussions surrounding teenage pregnancy. These young women are seen as having rejected educational opportunities, and hence, are

defined as an 'at risk' group and as excluded members of society (McDermott and Graham, 2005). Young women's lack of engagement in the labour market means they are commonly dependent on welfare and state housing (Selman, 2001). Consequently, young mothers are frequently depicted as not engaging in any meaningful activity, which is to the detriment of their children and society, in particular the taxpayer (Pillow, 2004). Teenage motherhood is therefore depicted as a highly negative experience and as something that should be prevented and minimised.

In 1999 the Social Exclusion Unit released a report which identified the UK as having one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancies, with 30 per 1000 in 1998, compared with 10 or less in Germany, France, Scandinavia and the Netherlands (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999).

In light of these findings a ten-year Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (1999 - 2010) was launched to help tackle this comparative failure. The strategy had two main goals: providing 'better prevention' in order to reduce the number of teenage conceptions and births and 'better support' to help get 'more teenage parents into education, training or employment to reduce their risk of long term social exclusion' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 8).

Participation in education, employment and training beyond the compulsory school leaving age has traditionally been low for teenage mothers. At the launch of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy around 23% of teenage mothers, aged sixteen to nineteen, were in some form of education, employment or training, compared to 90% for all sixteen to nineteen year olds (Department for Work and Pensions, 2008). This illustrates that a disproportionate 77% of teenage mothers were not participating in education, employment or training. The government perceived this to be a significant problem, asserting low prior educational

attainment coupled with low post-16 participation means teenage mothers, by the age of thirty, are more likely to live in poverty, have no qualifications, be unemployed and live without a partner in comparison to women who give birth over the age of 24 (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007).

In light of this apparent increased risk of poverty and disadvantage, New Labour set a target of increasing the participation of teenage mothers in education, employment and training to 60% by 2010. The target was presented as an instrumental part of reducing the long term social exclusion associated with teenage motherhood, as it is advocated that participating in post-16 education and/or training will open up more opportunities for paid work in the future (Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy, 2004). Obtaining paid employment is the government's preferred ladder out of poverty and was the explicit aim of the strategy. The strategy stated that 'the aim of improving the support for teenage mothers is that they will not need to claim means tested benefits in the long term as they will have the means to support themselves' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007: 56). This emphasises how the strategy on the one hand says that it is about supporting the individual mother to engage in education to avoid poor outcomes, but it also highlights the individual taking responsibility for themselves to lessen the burden on the state.

Despite the launch of several policy initiatives to help teenage mothers engage in education, employment and training (for example, Teenage Pregnancy Re-Integration Officers and Connexions) statistics illustrate that the 60% target was not met, as by the end of the strategy almost 33% of teenage mothers were engaged in some form of education, employment and training (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010). This signified a slight rise from the beginning of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, a 7% increase,

but it fell dramatically short of the governments 60% aspiration. The government responded to these statistics stating that 'participation rates for teenage mothers remain *stubbornly low*' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007: 53, emphasis added).

Whilst the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy ended in 2010, teenage pregnancy has remained a key area of policy interest. The Coalition Government included under eighteen conception rates as one of its three sexual health indicators in its Public Health Outcomes Framework (2013 - 2016) and it is one of the national measures of progress in relation to child poverty. Teenage mothers also occupy a pivotal place in current welfare policy, with debates surrounding the level of benefits they receive and questions concerning their obligations as citizens.

In order to effectively prevent and minimise teenage pregnancy rates there has been a concentrated effort to determine why young women become pregnant and continue with their pregnancy. Research has highlighted three main causes, low expectations, ignorance and mixed messages (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Some researchers claim young women's decision making about pregnancy and motherhood is shaped by their expectations for the future and whether they perceive themselves as likely to succeed in education and employment (Camarena *et al.*, 1998; Alldred and David, 2010). It is argued young mothers are more likely to envisage a future which is defined by poverty, limited educational and employment opportunities and a dependency on state benefits (Duncan, 2007). Teenage pregnancy is therefore often associated with a lack of aspiration and low educational achievement (Luker, 1996; Arai, 2003a; Hosie, 2007).

Low aspirations are seen as a key risk factor in becoming pregnant as a teenager, as they are more inclined to view teenage pregnancy as a positive life choice (Unger *et al.*, 2000; Hellerstedt *et al.*, 2001; Bonell *et al.*, 2005). These low aspirations for education and employment are believed to stem from the communities in which these young women live, as they are often characterised by high rates of unemployment and intergenerational traditions of low school success (Lall, 2007). Consequently, it is believed these young women 'see no reason not to get pregnant' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 7) as becoming a young mother would not interfere with their education and employment plans (Pillow, 2004).

It is asserted that low aspirations have created a long-standing culture of teenage pregnancy in some areas of the UK (Department for Education and Skills, 2006). This reflects an assumption that there is an inevitable cycle of teenage pregnancy as these low aspirations towards education and work will continue to be passed on through the generations (McNulty, 2010). This links with theories that assert there is a transmission of values within families, which reinforces poverty and disadvantage, creating an inevitable cycle of disadvantage (Joseph, 1975; Murray, 1990; Dennis and Erdos, 1992). However, some researchers suggest these young women do not have low aspirations. Rather they have realistic aspirations. This position suggests that the decision to become a young mother is influenced more by structural factors, such as the availability of education and employment, rather than inherited cultural values (Diamond *et al.*, 1999; Hobcraft and Kiernan, 2001; Berthoud *et al.*, 2004). This implies that young women are pragmatic about decisions concerning whether to have children, rather than ill informed as suggested by the ignorance and mixed messages explanations.

Teenage pregnancy is also explained by reference to the effects of sexual attitudes and knowledge as it is stated that many teenagers are ignorant when it comes to issues surrounding sex and relationships (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). This is believed to be the result of the mixed messages young people receive from an adult world that surrounds them with sexual messages, but turns away when they need advice and support. Advocates of this explanation often refer to a body of research that suggests British teenagers are deficient in their sexual health knowledge, are poor users of contraception and are shy about sex and wary about accessing sexual health services (Hadley, 1998; Harling, 1999; West, 1999; Blake and Jolly, 2002). Acceptance of this research means that improving sexual health services, promoting the use of contraception and providing better sex and relationships education in schools is seen as pivotal in reducing the number of teenage conceptions in the UK (Arai, 2003b). One solution to teenage pregnancy is therefore seen to be the provision of better knowledge and access to sexual health services so that young women can make the 'right' decision to delay motherhood.

While it is commonly claimed that teenage pregnancy is due to ignorance and embarrassment, some research studies demonstrate that young women are often knowledgeable about contraception, including emergency contraception (Sahili *et al.*, 2002) and are not necessarily hesitant about accessing sexual health services for contraception and advice (Churchill *et al.*, 2000). A meta-analysis carried out by DiCenso *et al.*, (2002) helps to accumulate and summarise research conducted in this area. The analysis revealed initiatives that focused on sex and relationships education and improved access to advice and contraception services did not reduce unintended pregnancies among young women aged eleven to eighteen years. It can therefore be suggested that attempts to reduce teenage pregnancy through increasing knowledge and providing more sexual health services has not

impacted the sexual behaviours of young people. Arai (2003a) argues the belief that providing young women with access to contraception and abortion services will automatically reduce teenage pregnancy rates illustrates an insufficient understanding about the behavioural mechanisms that facilitate early pregnancy and motherhood.

Hellerstedt *et al.*, (2001) explain despite the widespread availability of free sexual health services teenage pregnancy is still prevalent in some areas of the UK. Poor contraception use and uptake of abortion amongst young women in deprived areas has puzzled researchers and policy makers, who struggle to understand why, when the technical means are available to delay pregnancy, some young women become pregnant and decide to carry on with their pregnancy (Arai, 2003a). Bauder (2002) states this confusion is often the result of researchers and policy makers gauging the behaviours of young people in deprived areas from their own relatively privileged vantage point. This demonstrates the intricate relationship between values and moral judgements that underpin the discourse surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood. From a middle class perspective, teenage pregnancy is problematic and should be prevented. However, it will be illustrated later in this chapter and in other sections of this thesis that this middle class perspective of teenage motherhood is often not compatible with the views and experiences of young mothers themselves.

It is apparent there are disparities in the traditional view of teenage pregnancy and the findings of more recent academic research, as the primary focus on explanations surrounding ignorance and individual behaviour increasingly do not seem to be supported by research. To help explain this situation Selman (2003: 160) uses the concept of scapegoating, defined as a 'discrediting routine by which people move blame and responsibility away from themselves towards a target group'. Using Selman's concept, it

can be argued that blame and responsibility is placed on teenage mothers, as there is a primary focus on explanations surrounding ignorance and individual behaviour for teenage pregnancy rates and poor life outcomes. Selman argues that scapegoating results in attention being removed away from the root issue, which is the social inequality and disadvantage experienced by these young women. Due to a highly individualistic focus and explanation of the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy, young women are not seen as victims, but as failures in self-governance, unable or unwilling to appropriately capitalise on their lives (Gillies, 2005). Consequently, policies focusing on teenage pregnancy attempt to produce a self-governing, knowledgeable and rational individual, a young women who, equipped with effective sex education and access to sexual health services, can be held responsible for making the 'right' decision to delay motherhood.

The construction of teenage pregnancy as a negative, problematic and undesirable life choice is deeply engrained amongst constructions and understandings of teenage pregnancy. Teenage mothers are commonly depicted as 'welfare scroungers' and the representation of the 'chav mum/chav scum' has featured prominently in the popular culture landscape (Tyler, 2008). The term chav is derogatory and has become aligned with stereotypical notions of the working and lower classes (Hayward and Yar, 2006). It is commonly used to depict young mothers as unemployed, promiscuous and irresponsible (Tyler, 2008). Due to the pervasive construction of teenage motherhood as highly problematic, it is not surprising that young mothers themselves are acutely aware of their positioning as problematic and deviant individuals (Luttrell, 2003). Young mothers are overtly aware of the stereotypes that frame and shape their construction and how these constructions influence their experiences and encounters with others. This study explores how young women's experiences are shaped and influenced by these negative constructions

of teenage motherhood. It is the hope this study will go some way towards dispelling notions prevalent in popular culture and the media of the teenage mother as a deviant individual and that teenage pregnancy is either a uniformly negative experience or a potentially dramatic turning point capable of redeeming a problematic subject. Instead, the value judgements on which both discourses rely will be revealed and deconstructed.

### **Teenage pregnancy and social exclusion**

Teenage pregnancy is linked to the notion of teenage pregnancy equalling social exclusion. The term social exclusion is believed to originate from French policy, in which context it 'was used to refer to a disparate group of people living on the margins of society' (Percy-Smith, 2000: 1). The term social exclusion became increasingly used in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s (Levitas, 2004) and is defined as:

a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole (Levitas *et al.*, 2007: 9).

The policy discourse surrounding teenage pregnancy in Britain appears to assume that by becoming a young mother, young women are automatically at an increased risk of social exclusion. Productive economic activity is at the centre of these discussions, as research suggests teenage pregnancy leads to an increased risk of low educational attainment and a lack of engagement in the labour market (Aspinall and Hashem, 2010). This is seen to be highly problematic as there is a widespread perception that not being in education or

employment presents a major risk for young women becoming socially excluded (Yates and Payne, 2006).

Levitas (1998) suggests there are at least three differing discourses surrounding social exclusion, which can be seen to have shaped and impacted understandings and responses to teenage pregnancy and motherhood. Each discourse implies different definitions of the 'problem' and a different approach to minimising and preventing teenage pregnancy. Firstly, the moral underclass discourse (MUD) refers to cultural rather than material explanations of poverty. MUD emphasises a moral crisis in which young mothers can be blamed for the poverty and disadvantage they experience as they exhibit inappropriate behaviour and actions and do not appropriately capitalise on the opportunities made available to them. Secondly, the social integrationist discourse (SID) whereby inclusion is primarily viewed in terms of engagement in the labour market. SID highlights the importance of encouraging young mothers to engage in education and to achieve recognised qualifications in order that they can enter the labour market and become self-supporting individuals. Finally, the redistributionist discourse (RED) draws attention to the intertwining of social exclusion and poverty. RED envisages the roots of social exclusion as being structural, taking the view that high teenage pregnancy rates amongst working class young women are inevitable in a divided and unequal society (Hosie and Selman, 2006).

Levitas (1998) observed that over the course of its time in office, New Labour shifted from RED to a combination of SID and MUD when discussing social exclusion in government policy. The emphasis was placed on equality of opportunity, rather than equality of outcome, reflecting neoliberal values. Thus the concept of social exclusion can be seen as enabling a shift of responsibility for inequality from the state to the individual 'via the

diagnosis of pathological culture' (Skeggs, 2004: 79). The term social exclusion is now commonly used as an acceptable term for poverty, though a poverty that is self imposed (Hosie and Selman, 2006). Gillies (2005: 840) argues 'class is thus obscured by its re-framing in terms of an included majority of reasonable, rational, moral citizens who seek the best for their children, and an excluded minority who are disconnected from mainstream values and aspirations'. Consequently, social exclusion is a contested concept as it is seen to obscure social inequality as it effectively positions poverty and exclusion as a product of individual choices and lifestyles (Levitas, 2005). These individual choices are seen to be deviant and can and should be corrected. Young mothers experiences of poverty and disadvantage are therefore largely understood and explained at an individualistic, rather than structural level. Rose (1999: 264) speaks of an 'ethicalization of existence', which has:

intensified the demands that citizens do not devolve responsibilities for health, welfare, security and mutual care upon 'the state', but take responsibility for their own conduct and its consequences in the name of their own self-realization. The well-being of all, that is to say, has increasingly come to be seen as a consequence of the responsible self-government of each.

It is argued that there has been a shift of responsibility from the state to the individual with individuals not only being increasingly held accountable for their own life outcomes, but also for those of society more broadly. People are required to take control over their own lives and to make the 'correct' choices and decisions, not only for their own success, but for the success of all. Mainstream policy approaches to teenage pregnancy often have an individualistic and pathologising character. The problem of teenage pregnancy is often blamed either upon deficiencies in young women's cultural backgrounds or on their inadequate knowledge of contraception, rather than poverty and disadvantage (Phoenix,

1991). When poverty and disadvantage is recognised this is frequently in reference to the cycle of disadvantage, thereby cementing the blame once again with the individual or family in poverty. McMahon (1995: 128) argues:

collapsing the potential meanings of motherhood into the discourse of personal choice allows inequality in the conditions in which women have children to be seen as legitimate.

The discourse of personal choice legitimises the poverty and inequality some pregnant and mothering young women experience. Poor life outcomes are therefore framed as self-created and legitimate as the ways in which young women live their lives are seen to be created rather than determined. The perceived solution to young mothers' social exclusion and experiences of poverty and disadvantage is paid employment. Consequently, there is a strong emphasis placed on reducing the risk of long-term social exclusion through increasing young mothers' participation in the labour market (Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy, 2004). Young mothers are encouraged to participate in education and employment in order to meet their obligations as citizens and to provide financially for their children (Vincent, 2012). It can be argued the overarching message surrounding teenage pregnancy is that it is not acceptable for teenage mothers to stay at home in a full time caring capacity (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002) and that they should instead be making a purposeful effort to engage in education and employment.

There is a prevailing view that identity and belonging are secured through paid employment and that a person's relationship with the labour market determines whether they are socially included or socially excluded (Levitas, 1998; Fergusson, 2004). It is therefore those modes of participation that facilitate entry into the workforce that are validated and supported,

hence the emphasis on education and employment for pregnant and mothering young women. The European Commission (2002: 49) highlight how employment is intricately linked to social inclusion:

to have a job means adult status, self-respect, money, independence and the opportunity to broaden one's social contacts. Young people who are cut off from work are losing a vital chance to get new perspectives and to integrate into wider society.

Paid employment is viewed as a central means in which to achieve social inclusion, with work being understood as a 'source of meaning, purpose, structure, social ties and recognition' (Weeks, 2011: 37). Engagement in the labour market is therefore positioned as a defining feature of a person's biography and as central to their identity and status within society. Young (1999) notes that the discourse of social exclusion invokes the imperative of inclusion. Exclusion is positioned as unconscionable; the socially excluded must therefore be helped or compelled back into the way of life that is maintained by the socially included. Consequently, there is a strong emphasis on ensuring pregnant and mothering young women are engaged in some form of education and/or employment to reduce their risk of long-term social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999).

The assertion that a lack of involvement in education and employment leads to social exclusion has been criticised as it defines social inclusion in purely economic terms (Alexiadou, 2002; Kidger, 2004). Defining social inclusion in terms of paid employment devalues other forms of social participation that are outside formal education and employment, which includes those associated with motherhood itself (Kidger, 2004). The belief that paid employment equals social inclusion provides a limited and simplistic

understanding of inclusion and participation in society. It is a construction of inclusion that does not value or recognise the varying roles and responsibilities women occupy within society other than paid employment. Encouraging pregnant and mothering young women to engage in education and employment consequently devalues the unpaid caring role. This invokes key feminist dilemmas such as the conflicts between the public and private spheres, between paid work and unpaid care work and between women's reproductive rights and their rights to economic independence. Vincent and Thomson (2013: 7) argue:

in the developed world, 'rational economic man' assumptions prevail and both men and women are expected to be economically active. Childbearing becomes an inconvenience to be fitted around employment which is deemed to be more important. Productive labour is afforded high social status while reproductive labour is not.

Mothering is not perceived to be a form of valued work, rather, it is positioned as a hindrance and impediment to women's engagement in the labour market. The assertion that being a full time mother is not a sufficient or legitimate form of social inclusion seems to be highly engrained in discussions surrounding teenage motherhood and social inclusion. Women are expected to be mothers and to engage in paid employment in order to meet their obligations as citizens and to provide financially for their children (Gillies, 2007). Social policy in the UK is underpinned by rational economic man assumptions of an independent individual who is detached from any wider sense of family or community. Pregnant and mothering young women should act rationally, entirely out of self-interest and in the quest to maximise personal utility. However, Alldred and David (2010) argue that even if teenage mothers did prescribe to this view of the rational economic man it is highly optimistic that they would be able to achieve social inclusion via establishing a successful

career given the limited number of job opportunities in the neighbourhoods they are likely to occupy.

In addition, the heavy emphasis placed on employment as a route out of poverty and as a form of social inclusion largely ignores the issue of in-work poverty. Young people, especially working class young people, are increasingly facing unpredictable and insecure futures, as they are required to move from periods of training, to low-paid work, to unemployment, to further training (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). McKnight (2002) explains even when the no pay/low pay cycle is broken and longer-term employment is found, low paid work is rarely a stepping stone to better-work. Instead, low paid workers move to other low paid jobs. Due to this unpredictable and unsecure employment cycle it is claimed young women growing up in unskilled and semi-skilled households are more likely to forge their identities through early motherhood than their more advantaged peers who predominately choose worker identities (Botting *et al.*, 1998; Hobcraft and Kiernan, 2001).

Efforts to support and encourage mothers into employment highlights a major tension in a policy approach that purports to prioritise parenting responsibilities. Yates and Payne (2006) note it is surprising that the decision to be a full time mother is looked upon negatively by the government and society, as devoting oneself solely to parenting for a period of time can arguably be seen as a positive choice. Yet it seems the choice to stay at home in a full time caring capacity is only deemed positive for women who are in a stable relationship and are self supporting in terms of finance. The devaluing of motherhood and the unpaid carer role contributes to the positioning of pregnant and mothering young women as problematic as they are seen to be deviating from an expectation to engage with paid employment. Owen *et al.*, (2008) argue emphasising and encouraging pregnant and

mothering young women to engage in education reflects a homogenous focus on inclusion via education and/or employment and does not value diverse parental identities and models of the life course. This includes different cultural attitudes towards motherhood that have largely been unrecognised in government policy. For example, some women highly value the maternal and domestic role. Accordingly, obtaining further qualifications are sometimes not an aspiration for these young women (Mirande and Enriquez, 1979; Wildsmith, 2004). It is therefore questionable whether the focus placed on education and employment is appropriate given the different values women attach to mothering. Harris *et al.*, (2005: 31) explain:

social class shapes many young women's views of young motherhood as normal and respected, so strategies based on presumptions that teenage motherhood is a 'mistake', 'a problem' or 'abnormal' and that caring for children rather than paid working is a failure, are irrelevant to the lives and experiences of young mothers and are unlikely to succeed in encouraging young mothers into education, employment or training.

Positioning teenage pregnancy and motherhood as problematic and undesirable undermines and devalues motherhood and the caring role. The heavy emphasis placed on the importance of paid work dismisses motherhood as a valuable and respected form of social inclusion. This research study challenges the links made between teenage pregnancy and social exclusion. The construction of teenage pregnancy as a uniformly negative experience is solidly entrenched, a perspective which results in teenage pregnancy been seen as a mistake, and as resulting in a series of negative life outcomes. Constructing teenage pregnancy as a means of social exclusion masks the far more complicated reality of young women's experiences. The ways in which young women are positioned and position

themselves as socially excluded and socially included are explored in this thesis. In addition, questions are raised concerning the middle class value judgements that define and set the parameters of inclusion.

### **Teenage pregnancy and motherhood as a positive turning point**

The poor life outcomes associated with teenage pregnancy and motherhood have been well documented in previous research and disseminated in the popular media. However, Camarena *et al.*, (1998) warn that this has led to a stereotypical societal view of teenage motherhood and hence fails to recognise the diversity of teenage mothers' experiences. It is argued that social exclusion should not be presumed a consequence of teenage pregnancy, as this provides a highly negative and fatalistic perspective (Wiggins *et al.*, 2005, Cater and Coleman, 2006; Hosie, 2007). The assertion that teenage pregnancy is highly problematic and leads to poor outcomes and social exclusion has been challenged and criticised in recent years.

There is a growing recognition that there are a number of factors that distinguish teenage mothers from their peers who do not become pregnant, which may predispose them to poor outcomes (Abrahamse *et al.*, 1988). When examining which young women become pregnant and continue with their pregnancy, a clear social class divide emerges. Young women are more likely to become mothers in their teenage years if they live in a deprived area, attend a failing school, and their parents have low education and economic achievement (Aspinall and Hashem, 2010). It is therefore recognised that working class young women who already experience poverty and disadvantage are more likely to become a mother in their teenage years.

A key task for researchers became determining whether young women would experience the same poor life outcomes if they postponed motherhood (Geronimus, 2003). There have been a plethora of studies designed to approximate this counterfactual condition. Duncan *et al.*, (2010: 12) argue earlier studies exploring teenage pregnancy are flawed as they do not compare 'like with like' in reaching conclusions about the effects of teenage motherhood. They assert that ascribing causal effects to teenage motherhood is rather meaningless if all teenage mothers are compared with all mothers, rather than those of a similar background. Consequently, new methodologies have been devised that seek to avoid the simple comparisons that were traditionally made between teenage mothers and all mothers, which had few or no control variables (for example, Furstenberg *et al.*, 1987; Hardy *et al.*, 1978; Hayes, 1987). In order to better approximate the effects of teenage motherhood, natural experiments were developed in which selection effects were better controlled. For example, Geronimus and Korenman (1992) compared sisters who gave birth at different ages and Hotz *et al.*, (1997) and Ermisch and Pevalin (2003) compared outcomes between teenage mothers and teenagers who had conceived but subsequently miscarried.

The rationale behind natural experiments is to identify a group of women who are reasonably similar to teenage mothers in the most meaningful ways, so that it is possible to infer if the differences between the groups are largely the result of early motherhood (Hoffman, 1998). For example, comparing sisters helps to limit selection effects as they share a family and neighbourhood background, including many family characteristics that are hard to measure. Consequently, the differences in socioeconomic outcomes between them ought to represent primarily the effect of the difference in their age at the point of motherhood.

Studies that adopt natural experiments challenge the conventional view of teenage motherhood and its relationship to poor outcomes. For example, the sister study carried out by Geronimus and Korenman (1992) found that while teenage mothers were less likely than their sisters, who delayed motherhood, to have further education or to be married, they did no worse, on average, on most economic measures. Hence, the authors concluded that the true causal effects of a teenage birth were actually very small and often essentially zero. These findings are also reflected in Ermisch and Pevalin's (2003) study, as they too concluded that the age at which women become mothers has little impact on the qualifications, employment and earnings they achieve by the age of thirty. This research stands in stark contrast to the literature cited earlier in this chapter, which depicts teenage pregnancy as a highly negative and problematic experience.

While it is acknowledged that teenage mothers are at an increased risk of poverty and disadvantage it is now widely asserted that the poor outcomes experienced by young mothers are not caused by young motherhood itself, but by pre-existing social and economic circumstances (Chevalier and Viitanen, 2000; Swann *et al.*, 2003; Formby *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, it is argued that the key factor determining the life outcomes of young mothers is not their age at the point of becoming a mother, but pre-existing poverty (Luker, 1996).

Geronimus and Korenman (1992) assert that earlier cross-sectional studies overstated the effects of teenage motherhood as they inadequately accounted for marked differences in family background among women who have first births at different ages. Similarly, in Hoffman's (1998: 238) review of US research he concluded that research no longer supports the notion that teenage motherhood is a devastating event and that it 'cast[s]

considerable doubt on the received wisdom about the consequences of teenage childbearing'. Hotz *et al.*, (1996) state the key question for researchers is to ascertain whether the effects of teenage motherhood on educational and economic outcomes are 'slightly negative', 'negligible' or 'positive'. This research study was designed to explore young women's experiences of pregnancy and motherhood and the forthcoming data analysis chapters consider and analyse the young women's experiences of pregnancy and how it has shaped and influenced their education. This thesis aims to challenge the traditional view of teenage pregnancy and motherhood as a devastating event and the class based notions of success and participation in British society that construct teenage motherhood as problematic.

In recent years, there has been a surge in qualitative studies that focus on the views of young women in order to understand how they conceptualise their experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. Focusing on individual experience rather than statistical data is an approach based on a commitment to examining how people make sense of their own life experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Exploring and privileging individual experience has helped expose an alternative discourse of teenage motherhood, as the meanings young women give to pregnancy and motherhood are found to be different in key dimensions from traditional cultural narratives. Wilson and Huntington (2005: 59) argue that a critical examination of literature suggests:

teenage mothers are vilified, not because the evidence of poor outcomes for teen mothers and their children is particularly compelling, but because these young women resist the typical life trajectory of their middle-class peers which conforms to the current governmental objectives of economic growth through higher education and increased female workforce participation.

From this perspective it seems as though pregnant and mothering young women have been vilified because they are seen to be actively choosing an alternative path to their middle class peers, one that does not align with contemporary government objectives. This raises questions about whether the strong focus on education and employment for pregnant and mothering young women is appropriate. It also highlights and emphasises the values and moral judgements that underpin discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood. This justifies the need to explore how positive lives and choices are constructed for pregnant and mothering young women, and how these definitions compare to young women's own understandings.

Based on the findings of many qualitative studies it is now argued by a growing number of academics that teenage motherhood can actually help instigate positive change in young women's lives, rather than engendering a pathway to disadvantage and social exclusion. It is argued that instead of teenage motherhood resulting in social exclusion, it can in fact lead to social inclusion. Teenage pregnancy is now commonly conceptualised, in some research studies, as a positive influence as it has been found that becoming pregnant can cause young women to re-evaluate their life goals and become more responsible and mature (Clemmens, 2003; SmithBattle, 2007). These new life goals often include a renewed sense of motivation for education and employment (Pillow, 2004; Kendall *et al.*, 2005; SmithBattle, 2007). This change in aspiration and attitude towards education is seen as a significant change in behaviour as research demonstrates that young women who become mothers as teenagers tend to be disengaged from education prior to pregnancy, have a history of low attendance and low academic achievement (Dawson, 1997; Dawson and Meadows, 2001; Selman *et al.*, 2001; Arai, 2003a; Wiggins *et al.*, 2005; Cater and Coleman, 2006).

A strong statistical relationship independent from other education and social exclusionary risk factors has been found between a dislike of school and an increased risk of teenage pregnancy (Bonell *et al.*, 2003, Bonell *et al.*, 2005; Wiggins *et al.*, 2005). Research suggests young women who become pregnant as teenagers tend to dislike school and have a history of poor attendance and low academic achievement (Dawson, 1997; Dawson and Meadows, 2001; Selman *et al.*, 2001; Wiggins *et al.*, 2005; Arai, 2003a; Cater and Coleman, 2006). Previously it was assumed pregnancy was the reason why many young women left education and it was believed the disengagement and resulting low achievement was a direct result of becoming pregnant (Hosie and Selman, 2006). While teenage pregnancy is related to early school leaving, the process is more complex than previously understood. Since 2000, a growing body of research has suggested pregnancy may follow, rather than lead to, early school leaving (for example, Dawson, 2006; Hosie, 2007).

Conversely, while prior to pregnancy young women are typically disengaged from education, it appears the prospect of becoming a mother and being responsible for another person's life both financially and emotionally can cause young women to re-evaluate their life goals (Kendall *et al.*, 2005; SmithBattle, 2007). This commonly includes a heightened sense of importance for education as there is a realisation that their educational choices will not only affect their own future but also their child's (Luttrell, 2003; Rolfe, 2008).

This change in perspective towards education is claimed to stem from a strong determination to offer their child a better life than they themselves experienced and to act as a positive role model for their child (Bell *et al.*, 2004; Seamark and Lings, 2004). It has also been found that for some young women they feel a strong desire to prove they do not align with the popular media stereotype of young mothers as irresponsible 'welfare

scroungers' and that they can succeed and build a successful future for them and their child (Luttrell, 2003). Young women's experiences therefore need to be understood and analysed within the context of the stigma that is associated with teenage pregnancy and motherhood, as well as placed in a wider biographical context. This thesis explores the tensions and links between the stigma associated with teenage pregnancy and motherhood and the young women's experiences of education, as well as their motivations for change.

In order to build a positive and successful future for themselves and their child, Rolfe (2008) found the young women involved in her study saw the following criteria as central: gaining economic independence via paid work, owning their own home and settling down with a partner in order to attain a 'typical' family life. SmithBattle (2007) found completing their education and gaining recognised qualifications was seen as essential to achieve these goals as it was recognised education could offer a pathway to economic security. This suggests young mothers are aware of the traditional notions of the 'good life', and that they seek to align themselves with this vision.

Attaining employment is commonly seen as a key indicator of success with paid work being something to which most pregnant and mothering young women aspire to in order to gain economic independence (Durant *et al.*, 2005; Rolfe, 2008). This contradicts the popular media stereotype that young women become pregnant in order to receive state benefits. Indeed, the evidence that young women become pregnant to obtain state benefits or social housing is scarce and the link seems unfounded as countries with more generous welfare systems have significantly lower teenage pregnancy rates (Selman, 2001).

Conversely, it has been found many pregnant and mothering young women have career aspirations, the most commonly cited are gender-typical roles such as, nursery nursing,

midwifery, nursing, hairdressing, teaching and social work (Tinklin *et al.*, 2005; Rolfe, 2008; McNulty, 2010).

Clemmens (2003: 94) carried out a meta-synthesis of US qualitative studies during the 1990s and two of the recurrent themes identified were 'motherhood as positively transforming' and 'baby as a stabilizing influence'. Furthermore, this renewed sense of motivation and engagement in education has led some researchers to conclude that teenage motherhood represents a 'remarkable turning point' (Barn and Mantovani, 2007: 239) and that far from a catastrophe, teenage pregnancy is more 'the turning point to maturity and developing a career' where 'it was almost as if having a child had saved them from themselves' (Seamark and Lings, 2004: 817). These studies challenge the construction of teenage pregnancy as highly problematic and illustrate a more optimistic and positive account. Yet the evidence that suggests teenage pregnancy represents a positive turning point has largely been ignored and rejected in informing policy. The construction of teenage pregnancy as a highly negative experience for young women and their children continues to prevail in public, media and political discourses. Beverley Hughes, at the time Minister for Children, Young People and Families, commented on a study funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Cater and Coleman, 2006) into planned teenage pregnancy, she stated:

this is an unfortunate study, which on the basis of a very small and carefully selected sample, suggests that teenage pregnancy can be a positive option for some young people. We reject that view completely. There is overwhelming evidence that, overall, teenage parenthood leads to poorer outcomes both for teenage mothers and their children (BBC News, 2006: np).

This quote highlights the tension between the idea that early motherhood is problematic and early motherhood as beneficial and even a rational and positive choice for young women. The dominant policy and media discourses which construct teenage pregnancy and motherhood as problematic and a cause of social exclusion seem to be solidly entrenched, with policy makers remaining seemingly impervious to voices critical of this construction (Rudoe, 2014). Discussions surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood therefore appear to be highly dichotomous in nature. This thesis explores how discussions focusing on the effects and consequences of teenage pregnancy are inevitably linked with normative judgements surrounding what is deemed correct, positive and aspirational for young women.

The literature that constructs teenage pregnancy as highly problematic appears to be in conflict with young women's lived experiences and understandings of their own lives. This body of literature therefore needs to be challenged in order to value and respect young women's own accounts of pregnancy and motherhood. This research study has therefore focused on the views and experiences of fourteen young women in order to explore how they believe pregnancy has shaped and impacted their lives. Yet the positioning of teenage pregnancy as a positive and remarkable turning point also needs to be carefully considered. It can be argued that framing teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point is based on the premise that the lives of young mothers prior to pregnancy are in some way negative, problematic or deficient and that they are in need of redemption. This is particularly evident in Seamark and Lings's (2004: 817) reference to 'as if having a child had saved them from themselves'. This statement seems highly individualistic and while perhaps not the intended message, it acts to position young women who become pregnant as individuals who lead highly problematic and self-destructive lives who are in need of 'saving'. It is also evident

that the literature constructing teenage pregnancy as a positive and remarkable turning point places a heavy emphasis on education and employment. Thus, this body of literature continues to view and construct teenage pregnancy within traditional definitions of success and participation.

When discussing and applying the concept of teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point in this thesis attempts are made to avoid the positioning of young women as problems. Rather, their positioning as problems is critically considered and questioned. This study therefore aims to explore, through the young women's own accounts and in relation to wider debates surrounding social inclusion and participation, what is deemed positive and negative for young women in British society.

## **Summary**

This chapter has provided a detailed interpretation and synthesis of published research in order to illustrate the changing perspectives towards teenage pregnancy and motherhood in Britain. It has been illustrated how teenage pregnancy is conceptualised as inherently problematic in the media and government policy and how being a young mother is commonly associated with an array of negative outcomes for both mother and child. The construction of teenage pregnancy as a negative, problematic and undesirable life choice is deeply engrained amongst constructions and understandings of teenage pregnancy.

In recent years the belief that teenage pregnancy is highly problematic and a uniformly negative experience has been challenged and criticised. Academics have sought to interrogate and problematise the positioning of teenage pregnancy as a problem. It has been argued the perceived consequences and effects of teenage pregnancy have been

dramatically overstated. It is asserted the poor outcomes experienced by young mothers are not a direct result of teenage pregnancy itself but are the result of the poverty and disadvantage, typically experienced by teenage mothers prior to pregnancy. Rather than teenage pregnancy engendering a series of negative risks and orientations, it is claimed in some academic literature that teenage pregnancy can instigate positive change in young women's lives. Teenage pregnancy is therefore increasingly being viewed, in some academic literature, as a positive and transforming process. In synthesising the academic literature surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood it is apparent that constructions are often dichotomous in nature, with teenage pregnancy either being positioned as a deterministic and wholly negative or positive event. In this thesis I explore the ways in which positive and negative outcomes and choices for young women are defined and understood.

The next chapter details the processes and procedures involved in undertaking the empirical research for this study. The chapter outlines and justifies the epistemological perspective adopted and the process of data collection.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter makes transparent the processes and procedures involved in undertaking the empirical research for this study. The first section of this chapter justifies the epistemological perspective adopted, providing a rationale for the use of an interpretative phenomenological approach. This is followed by a focus on the data collection process, discussing ethical and practical considerations and the processes involved in gaining access, identifying participants and collecting data. Finally, it is illustrated how the data were analysed using interpretative phenomenology.

My personal reflections on the research process are entwined throughout this chapter in order to provide a self-reflective account. Reflexivity is frequently described as a 'slippery' term as it has a variety of meanings and can be applied in different contexts (Taylor and White, 2000). The term reflexivity is employed in this thesis to refer to the careful consideration of my role and influence as a researcher in the research process (Steier, 1991). This approach is informed by a feminist research ethic, which involves a self-reflexive commitment to revisiting epistemological choices, boundaries and relationships made throughout the research process (Ackerly and True, 2010). This chapter draws on the narratives of the young women and gatekeepers involved to help illustrate and justify some of the key methodological decisions made and issues that arose, as the research process was not without challenges. This allows the young women to share their opinions about the research process, allowing their voices to be heard. The concept of 'voice' is therefore employed twofold, by situating myself within the research process and allowing my voice

to be heard, and also by enabling the young women to share their voice in order to reflect on the research process (Lincoln and Guba, 2003).

## **Part I**

### **The Research Process**

#### **The construction of meaning**

As individuals we hold a set of beliefs that shape how we see the world and how we act within it (Creswell, 2009). It is asserted that our beliefs about the nature of reality and how knowledge is constructed will have a profound impact on the research process, as our values and beliefs influence the research strategy and methodological approach adopted (Creswell, 2009). Consequently, Turnbull (1973: 13) believes 'the reader is entitled to know something of the aims, expectations, hopes and attitudes that the writer brought to the field with him [sic], for these will surely influence not only how he sees things but even what he sees'.

It is therefore important to consider the positioning of the researcher in relation to the key ideas of epistemology, ontology and methodology. Together, these may be termed a paradigm, an interpretative framework, or a 'basic set of beliefs that guide action' (Guba, 1990: 17). Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge, focusing on the nature, sources, conditions and the possibilities of knowledge (Soldati, 2012). It attempts to provide answers to the question, 'How, and what, can we know?' and this involves thinking about the nature of knowledge itself, about its scope and the validity and reliability of claims to knowledge (Willig, 2008). Ontology raises basic

questions about the nature of reality, while methodology identifies a general approach to studying research topics (Silverman, 1993) and focuses on the best means for gaining knowledge about the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

As a researcher I align with social constructionism, which is defined as 'the view that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social construct' (Crotty, 1998: 42). Social constructionism draws attention to the fact that human experience, including perception, is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically (Willig, 2008). Social constructionism, therefore, claims that an understanding of reality is local, specific and constructed and that what is defined as reality and knowledge will vary depending on the researcher and the individual or group being researched (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). It can therefore be suggested that there are 'knowledges' rather than 'knowledge' (Willig, 2008). This can be witnessed through the varying knowledges surrounding teenage pregnancy, including the opposing constructions of teenage pregnancy as a 'positive' or 'negative' experience for young women, their children and society.

Social constructionism, as the name suggests, positions meaning not as inherent but as constructed by human beings through their interactions with the world (Crotty, 1998). This study adopts a social constructionism perspective, and in so doing, asserts that knowledge is produced, not simply found, and that the conditions of its production should be studied and critiqued. There is a general assumption within social constructionism that knowledge cannot be disinterested, apolitical or exclusive of affective and embodied aspects of human behaviour. Knowledge is in some sense, always ideological, political and permeated with

values (Rouse, 1996). Social constructionism therefore insists that a critical stance towards taken-for-granted ways of understanding must be adopted in order to challenge the idea that knowledge is based upon objective and unbiased observations of the world (Burr, 1995).

Critically examining the pre-existing ideas surrounding teenage pregnancy, motherhood and education was especially important to this research study. Adopting social constructionism allows for a critical approach to research, creating opportunities to interrogate the idea of value-free research and dominant assumptions about marginalised groups. This research study considers the ideological assumptions that are implicit and explicit within the concept of teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point as well as those that position teenage pregnancy as a devastating event for mother, child and society.

Central to this research study was a commitment to the in-depth exploration of the young women's personal experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and education. There was a desire to provide the young women with the opportunity to discuss their personal experiences and concerns at length. However, I did not simply wish to describe their experiences, I sought to situate their narratives within broader theoretical frameworks in order to challenge and critique dominant discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy.

The focus and emphasis placed on exploring the lives and experiences of young women situates this research study within a constructivist paradigm and also reflects a feminist research ethic. Feminist perspectives can therefore be seen to have entered into existing methodologies. Crotty (1998: 179) explains the pivotal focus of feminist research is to explore and challenge the 'inherited and prevailing perceptions of what it means to be a woman and how women ought to live and act'. This research study explores how women 'ought to live and act' by considering how positive and meaningful lives are constructed in

relation to pregnancy, motherhood and education. I have adopted a feminist research ethic due to my commitment to feminism and my personal beliefs about the importance of promoting equality and challenging and deconstructing dominant values and beliefs. I recognise the multiplicity of feminism and the diverse body of feminist theory and approaches to research this encompasses. In adopting a feminist research ethic, my research is self-reflective, critical and political. I have paid particular attention to my role and influence as a researcher and my relationships and interactions with the research participants. The implications of adopting a feminist research ethic are revisited at various points in this chapter in order to demonstrate its influence.

### **Interpretative phenomenological approach**

This study adopts the critical stance advocated by social constructionism and feminism, alongside an interpretative phenomenological approach to research. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an emerging and rapidly growing approach to qualitative research, which originated in psychology. However, it is increasingly being used in the social and health sciences (Kings and Horrocks, 2010). IPA was chosen for this study as it is orientated towards exploring and understanding how people make sense of their major life experiences. It involves the detailed examination of a person's experience of a particular phenomenon, how they make sense of those experiences and the meanings they attach to them. An interpretative phenomenological approach was therefore deemed suitable for this study in order to explore the experiences of individual young women and the meanings they attach to pregnancy, motherhood and education.

Interpretative phenomenology was chosen over other approaches, for example, discourse analysis and grounded theory. However, as Starks and Trinidad (2007) explain the

distinctions between phenomenology, discourse analysis and grounded theory are blurred, rather than distinct and discrete approaches. IPA is related to discourse analysis due to both approaches sharing a concern with how context is implicated in individual experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2009). IPA provides a detailed experiential account of the participants' involvement in the context, describing the meaning of the lived experience of a particular phenomenon (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). In contrast, discourse analysis offers an account of the structure of the context itself and is concerned with how people use language to create and enact identities and activities (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). Therefore, Smith *et al.*, (1999) argue the key distinction between IPA and discourse analysis is that discourse analysis examines the role of language in describing participants' experiences, while IPA explores how participants' ascribe meaning to their experiences.

Smith *et al.*, (2009: 201) explain grounded theory 'is often seen as the main alternative method for someone considering IPA for a research study'. There is considerable overlap between IPA and grounded theory and both have a broadly inductivist approach to research. However, a grounded theory approach is likely to pursue 'a more conceptual explanatory level based on a larger sample and where the individual accounts can be drawn upon to illustrate the resultant theoretical claim' (Smith *et al.*, 2009: 202). In comparison, IPA is more likely 'to offer a more detailed and nuanced analysis of the lived experience of a small number of participants with an emphasis on the convergence and divergence between participants' (Smith *et al.*, 2009: 202). Consequently, discourse analysis and grounded theory were rejected in favour of interpretative phenomenology because exploring and understanding the lived experiences and meanings the young women attached to teenage pregnancy and motherhood aligned more closely with my beliefs as a researcher. The decision to adopt interpretative phenomenology, therefore closely reflects my values and

beliefs as a researcher and my feminist commitment to privilege participants' experiences and voices.

IPA is influenced by three key areas of philosophy; phenomenology, idiography and hermeneutics. It is not the intention of this chapter to provide an in-depth account of the history and background of these different philosophical approaches (this can be sought elsewhere, for example, Luft and Overgaard, 2012), rather, it will be illustrated how IPA and its influences have shaped the direction and focus of this research study.

IPA has two main aims, the phenomenological requirement to understand and give voice to the concerns of participants and the interpretative requirement to contextualise and interpret these claims and concerns (Larkin *et al.*, 2006). Interpretative phenomenology does not separate description and interpretation; rather, it draws on insights from the hermeneutic tradition and argues that all description constitutes a form of interpretation. In choosing IPA this study demonstrates a commitment to exploring, describing and interpreting the ways in which pregnant and mothering young women make sense of their experiences.

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience, with the aim of exploring and understanding human experience (Langdridge, 2007). Phenomenology can be defined as a science of the first person perspective and with a particular emphasis on lived experience (Luft and Overgaard, 2012). Phenomenology requires the researcher to 'return to the things themselves', in order to challenge the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and to revisit their immediate experience of them. Through returning to the things themselves, possibilities for new meaning can emerge which enable an enhancement of the former meaning and understanding of the phenomena (Crotty, 1996).

IPA is therefore connected to the core principles of phenomenology through paying respectful attention to a person's direct experience and by encouraging research participants to tell their own story in their own words (Smith *et al.*, 2009). This reflects the idiographic focus of IPA, which is a concern with the particular, the distinct experiences of particular people and the particular contexts in which those experiences occur (Eatough and Smith, 2008). IPA therefore involves a highly intensive and detailed analysis of the accounts produced by a relatively small number of participants (Larkin *et al.*, 2006). IPA aims to understand the life-world of participants and their experiences of a particular phenomenon to describe 'what it is like'. Typically this leads to a focus on experiences of a specific event, process or relationship. In this research study, the focus is placed on how the young women believed pregnancy had shaped and influenced their lives and their experiences of education.

Smith (1996) warns that researchers need to recognise that access to 'experience' is both partial and complex as the analytic process cannot ever achieve a genuinely first person account. Rather, the account is always constructed through a relationship and interaction between the researcher and participant. Consequently, IPA accepts the impossibility of gaining direct access to research participants' life worlds and that such an exploration of participants' experiences must necessarily implicate the researcher's own view of the world as well as the nature of the interaction between the researcher and participant. As a result, the phenomenological analysis produced by the researcher is always an interpretation of participants' experiences (Willig, 2008). The socially constructed nature of knowledge and understanding is therefore recognised and the significance of the relationship between the researcher, the research participant and the research topic. Consequently, knowledge always embodies a perspective and the researcher plays an active and interpretative role in

the construction of knowledge, rather than adopting a neutral and objective position, which arguably can never be achieved (Gillies and Alldred, 2012).

Interpretative phenomenology therefore requires subjective knowing, which involves drawing on personal experience or the personal experience of others in an effort to form an understanding and interpretation of a particular phenomenon. However, it is recognised that such experience is never directly accessible to the researcher; it can only be accessed through an interaction between the researcher and participant. Smith (1997: 189) characterises IPA as ‘an attempt to unravel the meanings contained in [...] accounts through a process of interpretative engagement with the texts and transcripts’. The researcher can therefore be seen to be engaged in a double hermeneutics as they are ‘trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them’ (Smith *et al.*, 2009: 3). Double hermeneutics is used to emphasise the two interpretations involved in the process; the first is the participant's meaning making, engaging in an interpretation of their own experience, the second is the researcher's sense making, interpreting the participant's account (Smith *et al.*, 2009). This demonstrates the circularity of the process, one which involves questioning, uncovering meaning and further questioning in order to interpret and understand a phenomenon.

An interpretative phenomenological approach has been adopted in this research study in order to capture the individuality of each participant's narrative and to understand and construct a meaningful account of their experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and education. This allows a focus on individual meaning making and the uniqueness of each participant's story to become apparent. Thus highlighting the range of experiences and thereby making similarities and differences manifest. In order to gain rich descriptions of

the participants' experiences semi-structured interviews were employed as they help facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts and feelings about the target phenomenon (Smith *et al.*, 2009). From a practical and ethical perspective, interviews are advocated to be best placed to explore the lives of marginalised groups in society (Corsaro, 1997). This is because interviews, if appropriately implemented, can help avoid the production of data that pathologises participants, as participants are able to take an active role in shaping the categories and topics that arise within the interview context (Edwards, 1993).

### **Ethical considerations**

Before the data collection began it was essential that ethical considerations were taken into account, as this study required the young women to engage emotionally, perhaps at a deep and significant level, with their experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and education. The ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) were used to create the ethical protocol employed in this study and ethical approval was gained from the Faculty of Education at the University of Hull (see Appendix One).

A key ethical consideration from the outset of this study was whether to gain parental consent as all the participants were under the age of eighteen, which under UK law legally defined them as children. Due to their child status it is traditionally advocated in ethical guidelines that it is necessary to gain parental consent before a child can become involved in a research study (Alderson, 1995). However, a limitation of this ethical guideline is that it views both children and those on the verge of adulthood in the same light. This is problematic as in reality there are variations in the levels of competency and understanding between, say, an eight and a sixteen year old. Consequently, there is a growing body of literature which challenges the need for parental consent, especially in the case of young

people, as they are likely to have the capacity to understand the requirements of the research process (for example, Alderson, 1995; Masson, 2000; Lindsay, 2000).

In relation to this research study, I believed the participants had the ability and capacity to make an informed decision regarding their involvement. I perceived that if parental consent was sought it could cause offence to the participants as they make complex decisions on a daily basis for both themselves and their child. Seeking parental consent could therefore imply that I did not believe they were competent and required parental consent for their actions. Consequently, I decided that while legally the participants were not classed as adults, it was in the best interests of the participants to treat them as competent and responsible adults. It was perceived that taking this approach would help increase participant acceptance and retention and most important of all, facilitate the building of trust between myself and the participants (Creswell, 2009). The decision not to gain parental consent was supported and approved by the University of Hull Ethics Committee.

Teenage mothers are often under intense surveillance and scrutiny due to their early motherhood status by a plethora of healthcare professionals, educationalists and in some cases social services, who examine and document their lives in terms of 'risk' and outcomes for mother and child (Lupton, 1999). It was therefore possible that the young women approached may have perceived this study as another form of public surveillance. To help minimise the risk of eliciting this reaction, it was emphasised to the young women that this study was not a means of evaluation or assessment, but an opportunity to discuss their experiences of education and to tell their own story of pregnancy, motherhood and education.

A central tenet of ethical practice is that participants voluntarily give informed consent to become involved in research. For consent to be considered truly informed, participants must understand the nature, purpose and likely consequences of the research (BERA, 2004). It was therefore imperative that the young women approached received a clear explanation about the aims and objectives of the research and how the information they shared would be used. It was also emphasised that they had the right not to answer any particular questions if they did not wish, to withdraw at any stage without penalty and the right to confidentiality and anonymity.

These ethical principles were explained verbally and also detailed in a participant information sheet (see Appendix Two). To avoid a didactic approach discussion was promoted by posing questions, such as: 'How do you think teenage mothers are perceived in the media?' and 'If you could tell people one thing about your experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and education what would it be?'. These questions stimulated discussion and provided a means in which to introduce and contextualise the study. This approach positioned the research in a more meaningful context and provided the young women with an opportunity to raise any concerns about the research and to make an informed decision about whether they wished to participate.

During discussions with the young women the term confidentiality was used loosely, as confidentiality suggests that no one else will know the outcome of their involvement in the research (Rose, 2013). However, in practice, anonymity is all that can be offered to participants, as the information provided will be disseminated in various forms beyond the interview (Smith *et al.*, 2009). This was explained to the young women and confidentiality was placed in the context that when their experiences and stories of pregnancy, motherhood

and education were shared with others, their identity would be protected. All names and identifiable information have therefore been changed and pseudonyms have been used throughout to ensure a personalised approach that recognises participants' individuality, which is central to idiography. The pseudonyms reflect the order in which the young women were interviewed, as they have been ascribed alphabetically, from Amber to Nikki.

It was also explained that this form of confidentiality was conditional and would be broken if they or someone else was believed to be at serious risk of harm. However, there is no consensus on what constitutes a harm that is serious enough to outweigh the obligation of confidentiality (Rose, 2013). This study regarded the following as circumstances in which confidentiality might be breached:

- If the researcher knows or suspects that the participant is harming themselves
- If the researcher knows or suspects that the participant might harm themselves in the future
- If the researcher knows or suspects that the participant is being exploited or abused by others
- If the researcher knows or suspects that the participant is harming others
- If the researcher knows or suspects that the participant might harm others in the future

Adapted from Rose (2013: 43)

This section has illustrated some of the key ethical considerations that were deliberated and acted upon prior to the data collection process. However, it is important to acknowledge that ethical considerations do not constitute a discrete stage that occurs at the beginning of a research study. Instead, ethics represents a continuous process as it is necessary to respond to situations that arise throughout the research process in order to respect and protect

participants from harm. Ethical issues will therefore be revisited at other points in this chapter to help illuminate my response to key events.

## **Part II**

### **The Research Participants**

#### **Situating the study – demographics**

The research study was conducted in a location in the east of England. The specific city will not be named for confidentiality reasons. It is a city with many different cultural influences and ethnic groups, with an expanding population of over 150,000. Statistics from the 2011 census illustrate that 20% of residents in the city identified their country of birth as outside the UK, with a sizable Polish and Pakistani population. The city is characterised by both prosperity and economic deprivation, varying between the different wards. Most of the young women involved in this study lived in deprived areas of the city that were experiencing economic decline, high unemployment levels, deteriorating housing conditions and concerns surrounding community safety and social support. The housing estates in which the young women lived were among the top twenty most deprived wards in the region.

The location was purposefully chosen due to the relatively high teenage pregnancy rate. In 2010, which marks the beginning of this study, the number of conceptions in the local authority to those under the age of eighteen was 161, making the teenage pregnancy rate 50.5 per 1,000 (DfE, 2012). To place these figures in context, the conception rate in the same time period for those under eighteen was 34.2 per 1,000 in England and 29.8 per

1,000 for the east of England (DfE, 2012). But more significantly, 41.6% of conceptions in the local authority resulted in an abortion, in comparison to 50.3% for England (DfE, 2012). These statistics illustrate that teenage conception rates in the local authority were above average both nationally and regionally and that the abortion rate was below average. The high teenage pregnancy rate and low take-up of abortion in the local authority meant that there should be a relatively large sample of pregnant and mothering young women to consult and involve in this study. It was considered important to select an area with a large potential sample, as this would increase the likelihood that enough willing participants would be identified. Recruitment difficulties were anticipated due to the sensitive nature of the research, as it involved the examination of issues that have been defined as controversial, such as teenage pregnancy, motherhood and participation in education and employment (Lee, 1993).

The strongest influencing factor for choosing the research location was a pre-existing contact that worked in the local authority. In 2010, just as this research study was beginning, the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy came to an end on a national scale. This created a highly problematic situation for this research study as many organisations approached were either unable or unwilling to assist in the research study due to uncertainties surrounding whether the services they provided would still exist in the future, and indeed whether they would still be in employment. This period of structural change created a difficult climate in which to conduct research, as most organisations were focusing on securing their services, and assisting in a research study was understandably a low priority due to a high level of uncertainty in the sector. The pre-existing contact therefore provided a highly important opening into the research community.

### **Gaining access and identifying participants**

Due to the phenomenological focus of this study a non-probabilistic purposive strategy was adopted, whereby participants were specifically selected because they could provide an insight into the phenomena under study (Plowright, 2011). The study therefore concentrated on meeting and involving pregnant and mothering young women as their experiences of education were central to this study in order to help answer the research questions. The participant inclusion criteria set for this research study related to age whereby participants were selected on the basis of having conceived their first child under the age of eighteen.

In order to identify potential participants in the local authority a networking strategy was adopted, whereby the pre-existing contact was approached and asked to help facilitate the research. The professional approached was a senior officer within the local authority and was responsible for managing the care and education service of young people in the area. Gaining official permission to undertake my research from this senior and prominent member of staff was integral to the success of this study. This professional acted as my sponsor and introduced me to other people in the local authority who provided services and support for pregnant and mothering young women. This approach helped me become accepted by this professional community, as my research and credentials were approved and supported by this senior professional.

Relationships were established with several professionals, providing a diverse network that could be drawn upon. The professionals most extensively drawn upon in terms of information and access to young women were the Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officer who worked to support pregnant and mothering young women under the age of 16 in

relation to their education, the Young Mums to Be Project Coordinator and a Housing Support Worker. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Creswell (2009) who explains researchers should seek a broad basis of support for their research to help ensure the study does not become associated with the interests and motivations of one particular person or group.

The main benefit of this diversification of professional contacts was being able to gain access to a wide range of young women, including those who were in education and those who were not. Young people who do not participate in education are less likely to be involved in research and have their voice heard (Curtis *et al.*, 2004). This is consistent with previous research conducted with teenage mothers, as studies have typically focused on the views and experiences of teenage mothers who access educational services (for example, Luttrell, 2003, Pillow, 2004). I felt this was a key limitation of previous research, as it is likely that there will be differences in experience between young women who are accessing education and those who are not. It can be argued that those attending education are more likely to have positive attitudes towards education and experience fewer barriers than those who are not enrolled or are truant. To overcome this limitation of previous research, including teenage mothers who were not participating in education was an important aim of this study.

Once relationships were established with key professionals they were consulted and asked to provide access to potential participants in the local authority. This is referred to as developing community authority contacts which is described to be a key strategy in obtaining high response rates (Weiss and Bailar, 2002). This is because young people are more likely to talk to researchers when they know of an affiliation between the researcher

and key professionals. Adopting this strategy made identifying potential participants and obtaining contact information less time consuming. However, there were issues associated with this approach as despite intentions to recruit young women not in education, professionals commonly recommended participants who were engaged in some form of education, or who were actively pursuing this route. For example, in email communications with a housing officer it was stated:

*I have a young person called [name] that may be interested, she shows a keen interest in doing something with her future.*

This illustrates that recommendations, while well intended, were often based on professional perceptions of who would actively engage with the research. Consequently, young women who did not express an interest in education, or who were seen as shy or withdrawn were frequently seen as unsuitable or undesirable participants by professionals. This represented a key challenge in the research as it would not provide a voice to those young women who were not engaged in forms of formal education. It was seen as imperative to this study to gain a range of experiences, including those who were participating in education and those who were not. To help overcome this issue, it was stressed to the professionals that I wanted to speak with young women regardless of their circumstances or personality. As a result of the relationships developed with the key professionals, four means of recruitment were established.

### **1. The Young Mums to Be Unit**

In the local authority there is a Young Mums to Be Unit that is run in the city centre and provides education for both those under the age of sixteen and those beyond the

compulsory school leaving age. The unit is designed for young women who are soon to become, or have recently become, mothers. The courses offered aim to equip them with the skills and support they need by offering a range of training and services. The courses tend to focus on the following key areas; antenatal education, preparation for motherhood, recognition of the responsibilities involved in caring for children, numeracy, literacy, job search skills, information on employment and training opportunities.

The Young Mums to Be Unit was an ideal setting to meet pregnant and mothering young women as it is designed exclusively for their use. During the early stages of the research process I spent a considerable amount of time at the setting trying to get to know the young women. I visited the Young Mums to Be Unit on several occasions, usually spending three consecutive days in the unit. This approach drew on the recommendations of Morris (1998) who suggests spending time with participants and joining in their activities in order to build rapport and trust. While this was a time consuming process, I feel it was invaluable to the research study as I was able to build relationships with the young women. It provided me with the opportunity to introduce my research, but also for the young women to get to know me over an extended period of time.

As a result of spending time at the Young Mums to Be Unit I met many young women and had the opportunity to listen to their stories and learn about their experiences. During my visits to the Young Mums to Be Unit I invited the young women to participate in the research. Those who were interested were asked to approach me during one of the sessions to inform me that they wished to take part or to write their name and contact details on a sheet of paper that was placed in the unit.

## **2. A college information day**

I attended a local college information day that was specifically aimed at young mothers considering enrolling in further education. The aim of the event was to provide information about the different courses available at the college and the forms of support available. Alongside the informative sessions there were several activities running throughout the day, for example, free manicures, cupcake making and card design. This event provided me with the opportunity to meet young mothers who were interested in further education. I was able to join in the activities, which helped create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. I was then able to talk to the young women about my research and gauge whether they would be interested in participating. I noted the names and contact information from those who expressed an interest in taking part in an interview.

## **3. A housing support scheme**

I made contact with a housing support scheme that was based in the local authority, which provided accommodation for pregnant and mothering young women. The housing scheme provided a setting in which to meet young women who were not necessarily engaged in education. This provided a contrast to the education focused Young Mums to Be Unit and college information day. I was able to negotiate access after several email communications and a formal meeting with the manager to discuss the requirements of my research.

After access was approved, in order to meet the young women who lived in the housing support scheme, in discussion with the manager, it was decided it would be best to organise a coffee meeting, so the young women could meet me in an informal space. I circulated a leaflet, which in effect, 'advertised' my research and invited the young women to attend the informal meeting (see Appendix Three). In total, five young women attended the meeting,

during which I introduced myself and explained the research study. This provided an opportunity to discuss the aims of the research and how the young women could become involved. At the end of the meeting I invited the young women to write their name and contact details on a sheet of paper provided if they were interested in taking part in the research.

#### **4. Peer referral**

To help further minimise professional control an additional phase of networking took place, whereby the young women were asked to suggest others who may be interested in participating in the research. This is commonly referred to as a snowballing strategy and it is perceived to help build in security and trust, as the young women recommended to the research already know someone who was a trusted member of the 'snowball' (Lee, 1993). Some of the young women involved in the study became advocates of the research, telling their friends what the interview was like. I took this to mean that they had, to some extent, enjoyed taking part in the research.

Due to the idiographic approach adopted in this study it was necessary to recruit a small sample to ensure in-depth personal accounts were achieved (Smith and Osborn, 2008). A critical review of interpretative phenomenology found that sample sizes ranged from one to thirty five, with most studies falling in the middle of this range (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). I therefore intended to involve between ten and fifteen participants. This was felt to be a feasible number as I was working independently on the research study. Consequently, I was limited to the amount of time I could dedicate to conducting the interviews and the subsequent transcription and analysis process.

The use of ‘few’ participants has had direct implications on methodological issues. For example, Grix (2004) points out that a small sample size will mean that it will not be possible to generalise the findings to the wider population. This statement is recognised and it is accepted that the sample ‘does not represent the wider population; it simply represents itself’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 102). However, due to the idiographic approach underpinning interpretative phenomenology, a small sample size was preferable to enable detailed accounts of the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Furthermore, it can be argued that it is not practical or useful to generalise research surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood as norms, expectations and understandings about fertility, timing of motherhood, education and risk differ across neighbourhoods and communities (Owen *et al.*, 2008). This reflects the socially constructed nature of teenage pregnancy and motherhood and provides a justification for the focus on individual experience and meaning making.

### **Responses to the research**

A total of forty-two young women were approached and invited to participate in the research, with fourteen subsequently agreeing to their involvement. Table 3.1 illustrates the settings in which I originally met the young women and their respective acceptance rates.

**Table 3.1** Means of Recruitment

Means of Recruitment	Total invited to take part	Agreed to take part	Agreed to take part
Young Mums to Be Unit	21	6	29%
College information open day	12	4	33%
Housing support scheme	5	2	40%
Peer referral	4	2	50%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>33%</b>

The Young Mums to Be Unit provided the largest number of potential participants, with a total of twenty-one young women, representing half of the approached sample. However, the Young Mums to Be Unit also proved to have the lowest acceptance rate at 29%. The most effective strategy in terms of recruiting participants was peer referral, with an acceptance rate of 50%. This demonstrates the effectiveness of a snowball strategy. Overall the acceptance rate was 33%, which demonstrates a high level of non-participation. This relates to the findings of Morrison (2006) who discusses the issue of finding enough willing participants when conducting sensitive research.

However, the existence of non-participation can be seen to be a positive feature of this research study, as it helps appease the concerns of Curtis *et al.*, (2004) who discuss issues surrounding the role and influence of gatekeepers in social research. They explain that professionals can often encourage young people to participate in research in ways that can make non-participation difficult. Young people can often feel pressurised to participate in research, believing that they cannot object to the request, or that they will be negatively

judged if they do not participate or decide to withdraw. Denscombe and Aubrook (1992) use the example of high pupil response rates that are commonly achieved in educational settings to illustrate this hidden pressure to comply with research. Ensuring consent was voluntary and without coercion was central to this study. The prevalence of non-participation suggests the young women recognised that they were being asked to 'opt in' to the research, rather than to 'opt out' (David *et al.*, 2001).

It is important to consider why young people choose to participate in research and why others decline in order to evaluate the effectiveness of a research study. Ribbens (1989) points out that while a researcher will often reflect on their own role in the research process, they know little about how their participants experience or feel about their involvement. Birch and Miller (2012) argue that it is good research practice to reflect on and acknowledge the differing perspectives of those involved in a research study and that it is important to explore to what extent those involved actually wanted to participate. The young women involved in this study were not directly asked what made them agree to take part in the research or what they thought of their research experience. This was avoided as I felt it might have been too intrusive. However, in hindsight, if this had been dealt with sensitively, questions surrounding these issues would have been useful to integrate into the interview process or in a follow up questionnaire. However, the young women often freely shared their opinions during our encounters. Attention will now be given to how the young women responded to the research and to me as a researcher.

Practical reasons were the most commonly stated for non-participation, with the young women explaining they did not have enough time to take part in an interview. Creswell (2009) explains this is a commonly cited reason for non-participation in social research. Six

young women agreed to participate in the study but then did not turn up to the interview. These interviews were arranged in locations chosen by the young woman, either coffee shops or their own homes. In subsequent communications with the young women they commonly stated that they had forgotten about the interview, that a prior appointment had overrun, or that they or their child was ill. This created a problematic situation as I was required to consider whether the young women genuinely wanted to participate in the research, or whether these excuses were to be understood as avoidance tactics. Consequently, a significant consideration in the study was to what extent these young women should be pursued to rearrange an interview. If these excuses were genuine the interviews should be rearranged, but if they were not, they should be respected as a sign of withdrawal from the study. Decisions were ultimately made on an individual basis, considering in what circumstances I had met the young women, what their reaction was to me, and how they responded to the research. Three out of six interviews were subsequently rearranged and successfully took place.

While the data collection process was often characterised by uncertainty, there were occasions when some of the young women discussed their feelings about participating in the research in more explicit ways, for example:

*You're not going to make us look like chavs are you?*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

In the conversations that followed it became apparent that Nikki was apprehensive about participating in the research as she was unsure how her experiences would be portrayed. Nikki appeared to perceive her involvement in the research study as a way of potentially

exposing herself to judgement and criticism. More specifically, Nikki was concerned how I would portray her and the other young women at the Young Mums to Be Unit. This is suggested in her use of the words "*us*", and "*chavs*". The term chav stands for Council Housed and Violent (Jones, 2012) and is a derogatory term that has become aligned with stereotypical notions of the working and lower classes (Hayward and Yar, 2006) and is commonly used to depict young mothers as unemployed, promiscuous and irresponsible 'pram-pushers' (Tyler, 2008). Nikki was perhaps reluctant to participate in the research, as she did not want to risk reinforcing this negative discourse of teenage motherhood.

Feminists draw attention to the hierarchical power relationships implicit in research (Oakley, 1981). Nikki's question suggests she recognised I had the power and control, as the researcher, to interpret the data and to represent, or indeed misrepresent the experiences of this group of young women. This research study attempted to challenge this hierarchical imbalance by openly discussing with the young women the aims and intentions of the research study, providing opportunities to raise concerns and questions and providing a forum for discussion.

These initial reactions to the research were perhaps understandable given the stereotypical representations of teenage mothers and the judgements they frequently experience in their lives. Some of the young women consequently felt a need to defend their mothering abilities in reaction to the research. To help appease these concerns and issues I discussed with the young women the ways in which they felt teenage mothers were commonly depicted in the media and society and how they would like to be represented. The suggestions of Cabrera *et al.*, (2006) were also implemented to help with recruitment issues, by emphasising that I wanted to hear their story and was genuinely interested in their experiences, that the information they provided would be anonymous as their name

and any identifiable information would be changed, and that the information they provided would be invaluable to the study. Many of the young women responded positively to being able to tell their version of events, appearing to want to challenge the stereotypical representations of teenage motherhood. However, after discussing key issues surrounding representation and anonymity, any objections to participating in the research were ultimately respected.

While the young women were not explicitly asked why they became involved in the research study, some commented that they became involved to "*help me out*" and because they thought "*I was nice*", for example:

*Some people I can just like click with like that, other people it is just like, don't talk to me! I just don't talk to anyone, it's just like... I don't know, like some people, like you, it's alright, I don't know, we just clicked, but other people I get like embarrassed and like shy.*

(Claire, 18 years old, mother)

Claire's expression "*we just clicked*" implies a degree of researcher symmetry. Some feminist researchers suggest that researchers who share the same identities as their participants, for example, women carrying out research with women, are positioned as 'insiders', and consequently have a closer and more direct connection with their participants (Valentine, 2002). I was similar to Claire, and the other young women involved in this study, in terms of our shared gender and comparatively young age. I was twenty-three years old when the interviews were conducted, making the biggest age gap between myself and the oldest participant eight years and the smallest gap five years. I was therefore

a young woman, interviewing other young women, which I feel helped forge relationships during the research process.

I feel the rapport I was able to build with Claire and the other young women involved in this study was based on something more than our shared characteristics, such as gender and age. I believe it was also influenced by my relaxed and friendly conversational style and taking an interest in their lives. De Laine (2000) explains the ability to get on with people and a willingness to share experience in on-going activities are important criteria for gaining access to participants. Claire's comment highlights the importance of building rapport, as it seems to be a key factor in determining whether participants decide to become involved in a research study. It also has implications for the depth and quality of information shared, as Claire stated, with "*other people it is just like, don't talk to me!*" if Claire had not felt comfortable in my company, this may have led to a stilted interview and limited responses. This aligns with the view of Glesne and Peshkin (2010) who explain that with deeper rapport, participants are more likely to explore their more intimate experiences and emotions.

However, many feminists are cautious about the over-attribution of gender in the building and formation of trust and rapport in the research process. Gillies and Alldred (2012) argue that it is just one of many social distinctions that may influence the relationship between the researcher and participant. I am therefore by no means positioning myself as an insider and am aware that structural and individual differences inevitably outweigh similarities. Hellowell (2006) refers to this as an insider-outsider continuum. While I can be classed as an insider in relation to our shared gender and youth I can be seen as an outsider in many more dimensions.

Perhaps the most prominent difference between the participants and myself is that I am not a mother. This fact often arose during discussions with the young women when they asked questions about my life. I was apprehensive about disclosing that I was not a mother, as I felt this could have a detrimental effect on the research. McRobbie (1991) warns that ‘non-mothers’ may find it difficult to establish rapport with those who have children as they are unable to create a bond based on a shared experience of pregnancy and motherhood.

Despite my concerns, I felt it was important to be honest with the young women and not to avoid their questions. If I expected the young women to share personal details about their lives, it was important that I was also willing to divulge information. Sharing information with participants is a central tenant of feminist research. Being prepared to answer questions posed by participants and engaging in dialogue is seen, to some degree, to help minimise hierarchical relationships and promote the building of rapport (Oakley, 1981).

After disclosing that I was not a mother, I felt that this did sometimes create an initial barrier between the young women and myself. I found myself drawing on my experiences of being an aunt and previously working in early years settings and primary schools to illustrate how children are central to my life experiences. On balance, I do not feel my ‘non-mothering’ status significantly hindered the research process or the data collected. I was often seen by the young women as ‘unknowing’, which meant they did not presume I understood or had experienced what they were discussing. I found this often led to more detailed descriptions of their experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and education, in order to ‘educate’ me as a non-mother. This helped provide an opportunity for power sharing, equalising the power differential, as the participants were reasserted as experts in their own lived experience.

### **Characteristics of the young women**

All of the young women who consented to their involvement in this study were interviewed. In total fourteen young women were involved in the research study, they were aged between fifteen and eighteen years old at the time of interview, with a mean age of seventeen. Seven of the participants were pregnant, and the other seven were mothers. Of those who were pregnant Holly was at the earliest stage of pregnancy at thirteen weeks, and at the other end of the scale, Fay was forty-one weeks pregnant, waiting to be induced. The majority of participants were in their third trimester of pregnancy, between twenty nine and forty weeks.

Of those who were young mothers, their children ranged in age from three months to one year ten months, with an average age of eleven months. Gemma was the youngest mother, who became pregnant just after her fifteenth birthday and Beth was the oldest mother, who conceived her child when she was eighteen. To my knowledge, all of the young women were first time mothers, with the exception of Fay, who disclosed that this was her fourth pregnancy. She had previously had an abortion at the late stages of pregnancy due to medical complications and subsequently having two miscarriages.

Twelve of the young women described themselves as White British and two described their ethnicity as Black British. Four of the fourteen young women were sixteen or under, two were attending a mainstream school, and the other two were attending the Young Mums to Be Unit on a full-time basis. The other ten young women were beyond the age of sixteen, four were classed as not in education, employment or training (NEET) at the time of interview, four were attending a local college, and two were attending the Young Mums to Be Unit. For a summary of this background information see Appendix Four.

## **Part III**

### **Managing the data generation and analysis**

#### **The interview method**

This research study was designed to explore the meanings young women give to pregnancy and motherhood and how they felt becoming pregnant had affected their lives, with a specific focus on education. This could have been achieved using a variety of qualitative methods, including the traditional ethnographic method of observation. An ethnographic approach seeks to 'uncover meanings and perceptions on the part of the people participating in the research, viewing these understandings against the backdrop of people's overall worldview or "culture". In line with this approach, the researcher strives to see things from the perspective of the participants' (Crotty, 1998: 7). The main strength of an ethnographic approach is the building of trust and rapport between the researcher and participant over time as the researcher is required to immerse themselves in the social setting (Bryman, 2012). Undertaking observations over an extended period of time can help legitimise that what is observed relates more directly to the lived experiences of the participants (Atkins and Hammersley, 2007). However, an ethnographic approach was dismissed in favour of interviewing.

Interviewing was seen to be the most appropriate method of data collection, as the focus of the research would make it difficult to access through observation. This research study is concerned with the young women's experiences prior to pregnancy and exploring how their lives have changed as a result of pregnancy. This reconstruction of events and personal reflections is something which can be accessed through an interview context, as interviews

help to elicit stories, thoughts and feelings in both the past, present and future context (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Interviewing is therefore ideally placed to help capture the complexity of individual lives and the relative impact and influence of key events (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997).

There are contrasting views about how interviews should be conducted, from those advocating a structured question and answer process to those arguing for open-ended dialogue (Grix, 2004). The style of interview adopted is dependent on what the research context requires. Given the aim of exploring and listening to the experiences of pregnant and mothering young women, the use of a structured interview design was rejected. Its high degree of structure would mean the participants would have a low level of control (Bryman, 2012). This would have been an undesirable characteristic, as the purpose of the interviews was to allow the participants to explore issues that were relevant to their own circumstances and a highly structured interview design would not provide this flexibility. In addition, a highly structured interview design further risks reflecting the researcher's personal beliefs and perceptions about what is important to ask and explore during the interview. This approach therefore limits the participants' level of involvement in determining the interview content. This approach was consequently rejected as it was seen to reflect a hierarchical relationship with the participants portrayed as a 'data-producing machine' (Oakley, 1981: 37).

In comparison, open-ended interviews contain less predetermined structure, and generally involve an initial question that then guides the rest of the interview. For example, 'Please tell me about your experiences of education'. However, open-ended interviewing was discounted as it runs the risk of digression, which could result in not enough data being

shared to help answer the research questions (Creswell, 2009). In addition, it was believed the young women may have felt anxious about unstructured conversations with a relatively unfamiliar adult on a one-to-one basis. This assumption proved to be correct, as when asking more open questions in the interviews, such as ‘Can you tell me a bit about yourself?’, the overwhelming response from the young women was ‘What do you want to know?’. This suggests an open-ended interview design may not have provided enough structure for the young women to create and share their narratives.

A compromise between these two contrasting interview methods is a semi-structured interview design. Semi-structured interviews contain predetermined questions that act as a conversation guide, which can be fully expanded by the researcher and participant and enhanced by probes (Schensul *et al.*, 1999). This seemed the most appropriate method for this study, as it would give the participants the opportunity to tell their story, to speak freely, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns in-depth (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The participants were therefore constructed as active agents in the research process, rather than ‘speaking questionnaires’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This was important to ensure flexibility, in order to allow the uniqueness of each participant’s story to become apparent. This approach corresponds with Dahlberg *et al.*, (2001: 97) concept of ‘openness’, which refers to ‘a true willingness to listen, see and understand’ in order to allow the phenomenon to present itself, rather than imposing preconceived ideas.

### **Conducting the interviews**

The interviews were conducted over a seven month period, from April 2012 to November 2012. They were conducted over an extended period of time as they were dependent on when I met the young women. Before the interviews began, confidentiality and anonymity

were reiterated and consent was sought for their participation and the use of a digital voice recorder. The use of a digital voice recorder helped to increase the reliability of the data as it ensured that none of the participants' responses were missed and that they were recorded and transcribed verbatim. This helped reduce the potential for researcher bias and interpretation (Patten, 2007). After reiterating the requirements of the study the young women were invited to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix Five).

An ethical issue associated with the interview method is that researchers commonly dictate the terms and conditions of research, allowing no space for the preferences of participants to be enacted. To help counteract researcher control, the young women were asked about their preferences for the research. For example, they decided when and where to conduct the interviews. This approach required more time and resources in order to travel to various locations within the city. However, this approach helped put the participants in control of their experience (Trinder, 1996) and went some way to help reduce the unequal power relationships typically experienced between the researcher and participants (Morrow, 1999). Consequently, the interviews took place in a variety of settings; including cafes, burger bars, in their own homes, in the Young Mums to Be Unit and local colleges. These settings reflect personal and familiar environments in which the young women felt comfortable meeting me and discussing their experiences. It is interesting to note that the interviews conducted outside formal settings were amongst the longest and richest, especially the four interviews conducted in the young women's own homes.

The interviews were mainly conducted on a one-to-one basis, but on a few occasions other people were present in the room. In the case of Amber and Claire, their child was present during the interview. This was not problematic in terms of the interview but caused a few

disturbances with crying, rattling toys and needing to take breaks to feed or change the baby. The most problematic situation was in the case of Beth, whose boyfriend was present for the duration of the interview. He dominated the discussions and often answered on behalf of Beth. This meant Beth had very little input in the interview and so the data gathered is limited. The information Beth shared during the interview has been included in the study, but it is acknowledge that the data does not provide an in-depth account of her experiences. Apprehensions were therefore raised in a subsequent interview when Laura stated that she wanted her mother to be present. However, in contrast to Beth and her boyfriend, this resulted in an interesting exchange between mother and daughter with them discussing and debating ideas, resulting in a rich source of data. Finally, in two interviews, a friend was present. This was largely due to their friend not wanting to be on their own during lunch time. A full description of where I original met the young women, where the interviews were conducted and the length of the interview are detailed in Appendix Six.

An interview schedule was developed which was structured around five main questions, which were derived from the reading conducted for the literature review (see Appendix Seven). However, the interview schedule was often deviated from to allow the participants space to explore and reflect on other issues that were important to them. The young women were able to structure their own narratives, moving at their own pace and setting their own limits on what information they wanted or were willing to share.

The interviews typically began by asking the young women to discuss their experiences of education prior to pregnancy. In some cases this provided enough of a framework for the interview, triggering the telling of their story. In these interviews my questioning was led by the participant, I was following their lead, and I primarily focused on asking probing

questions in order to elicit a more detailed account. My overall impression was that the majority of young women enjoyed telling stories about different events and periods in their lives, often providing vivid and rich descriptions.

In contrast, some participants were either unwilling or unable to 'tell their story'. These interviews were characterised by short responses from the participants, a rapid pace and required an increased level of participation from myself. These participants were among the youngest involved in the research study and were all fifteen or sixteen years old. In these situations the interview schedule was more closely adhered to, providing more structure to the interview. Difficulties in eliciting the stories and experiences of young women have been found in previous research studies (for example, Crozier and Anstiss, 1995; Luttrell, 2003). Wise (2001) acknowledges that the interview method makes a basic assumption that participants want to and can articulate their thoughts and feelings. The quality of data produced is therefore based on a person's ability and willingness to tell a story and to be able to identify and reflect on key events, emotions and consequences. The young women's ability to narrate their lives in this way is reflected in the stark difference in interview length, with interviews lasting between twenty-seven minutes and two hours thirty-seven minutes, with an average length of one hour (see Appendix Six). The participants' varying willingness and ability to discuss their experiences of education are a recognised limitation of this research study.

### **Trustworthiness and authenticity**

When conducting qualitative research trustworthiness and authenticity are key considerations that must be addressed. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 290) explain a central role

of the researcher is to persuade their audiences that their research findings are 'worth paying attention to' and are 'worth taking account of'. Loh (2013: 2) asks:

how valid is the analysis of the data? How valid and reliable is the collection of these 'stories', and how can a story be valid as an analysis? If the data is collected through the participants' telling of their 'storied experiences', how do I know if they are being truthful? What if they made up a story or embellish the retelling? Will the research be valid then?

The questions posed by Loh (2013) highlight key issues surrounding the researcher and the research participants. In terms of the trustworthiness and authenticity of the participants' stories, Polkinghorne (2007: 479) explains 'storied evidence is gathered not to determine if events actually happened but about the meaning experienced by people [...] Storied texts serve as evidence for personal meaning, not for the factual occurrence of the events reported in the stories'. Consequently, in this research study I do not seek to verify facts. Rather, I am seeking to explore the meanings the young women give to their experiences. This stance is supported by the work of Riessman (2001: 704-705) who asserts the 'verification of the "facts" of lives is less salient than understanding the changing meaning of events for the individuals involved - and how these, in turn, are located in history and culture'. The historical reconstruction of events is therefore not my concern in this research study. Rather the focus is placed instead on how the young women viewed and constructed themselves at given points in their lives and how they wanted others to perceive them.

The Latin root of valid - validus - means strong, powerful and effective. Merrill and West (2009: 164) therefore argue:

strength could be defined by reference to narrative richness, to the quality of our knowing and its power to speak to others in new ways. Effectiveness might emanate from our capacity, as researchers, to create good transitional spaces in which people feel respected and encouraged to find and experiment with voice.

To ensure a strong, powerful and effective research account the advice of Lincoln and Guba (1985) was considered. Aligning with the notion of prolonged engagement, I spent time with the young women prior to the interviews. As discussed earlier in this chapter this was in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and to support the building of trust and rapport. The time spent with the young women prior to conducting the interviews was beneficial as it supported a deeper and richer account of their experiences, thus contributing to trustworthiness and credibility as well as the depth of narratives.

In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain peer debriefing is useful in establishing credibility. During the process of completing this PhD I have discussed and debated with other academics my research approach and my interpretation of the data. Through these discussions my 'biases [were] probed, meanings explored, the basis for interpretation clarified' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 308). Consequently, the data collection process, analysis and interpretation of data and subsequent write up can be seen as vigorous and robust.

Furthermore, Polit and Beck (2012) highlight the importance of the researcher's ability to demonstrate the data represents the participants' responses, feelings and emotions in a faithful manner. By including quotes from the young women in this thesis the reader should be able to grasp the essence of their experiences. In writing this thesis all of the young

women's voices have been represented and their stories have been treated fairly and with balance (Lincoln *et al.*, 2013).

### **Method of analysis**

This section describes the formal stages of data analysis and how the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework advocated by Smith *et al.*, (2009) was employed. IPA is concerned with the close line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns and understandings of participants (Larkin *et al.*, 2006). This involves the identification of emergent themes, emphasising convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance, first for individual transcripts and then across multiple transcripts (Eatough and Smith, 2008). This circularity of interpretation is effective in producing a non-linear and dynamic style of thinking which typifies IPA as an iterative and inductive style that utilises a method of 'moving from the particular to the shared and from the descriptive to the interpretive' (Smith *et al.*, 2009: 79). IPA can be seen to have five distinct stages:

- Stage One:** Transcription and initial coding
- Stage Two:** Developing emerging themes
- Stage Three:** Searching for connections across emergent themes
- Stage Four:** Moving to the next case
- Stage Five:** Looking for patterns across cases

Each stage is described sequentially below to help provide transparency in the data analysis process.

### **Stage One: Transcription and initial coding**

When transcribing interviews a key consideration is whether the transcription should faithfully replicate slang, jargon, obscenity, or incomplete or ungrammatical sentences (Ulin *et al.*, 2012). The interviews were transcribed verbatim, including any short pauses, laughter, and the participants' own grammar and dialect. It was considered important to retain such features as they can provide an insight into the way in which a story is told, with what force and what emotion. The interviews were transcribed sequentially throughout the data collection process. This provided an opportunity to reflect on the interview process and my interview technique. These reflections were then implemented in the subsequent interviews to help improve the quality of data produced (Creswell, 2009).

Once transcribed, the first stage of IPA is to read and re-read the transcript in order to become familiar with the content. The transcript is then subjected to close, line-by-line analysis, examining the content and use of language. The purpose of this stage is to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes about each transcript that reflects the researchers initial thoughts and observations. There is a focus on descriptive comments, identifying significant objects, events, experiences and people in the participant's narrative, taking things at 'face value' (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2** Stage one of data analysis: example of close line-by-line analysis from Jade's transcript

Original transcript	Exploratory comments
<p><b>Kay:</b> When you said before that they got fed up of you why do you think that was?</p> <p><b>Jade:</b> Because I just didn't care what they said, I just didn't, like normal kids get scared of a teacher shouting in their face, but I would stand there and laugh. Like say if I was in a maths lesson so that would be like on the top floor and our year group was on the top floor like for tutorials so our year office was right opposite the maths lesson that I was in and they would be constantly like be checking in and checking in and checking in because I was in there. So yeah I hated that as well. So they used to catch me out for anything. Just by the end of it they would be telling me off for the most stupidest of things because they were just fed up of me.</p> <p><b>Kay:</b> Do you think the way they reacted was fair?</p> <p><b>Jade:</b> I don't care... my life was... no I just think that... I would have had to have of gone out of school anyway because obviously I was heavily pregnant and there is only up to a certain amount of time how far you are allowed to be in school. I don't know what it is. But I would have got kicked... left for that</p>	<p><i>"I just didn't care what they said"</i> - did not respect their views or opinions. Suggests a difficult relationship with teachers.</p> <p>Interesting phrase <i>"normal kids"</i> - suggests normative behaviour and responses to events.</p> <p><i>"I would stand there and laugh"</i> - not afraid of authoritative figures, attempting to challenge and resist their forms of punishment.</p> <p>Repeated use of <i>"checking in"</i> - heavy emphasis placed on this, suggests a strong sense of surveillance.</p> <p><i>"Because I was in there"</i> - was she known as a 'problem' student? Why was this the case?</p> <p><i>"I hated"</i> - strongly disliked school - <i>"hated"</i> appears frequently in her narrative of school. What is it about school she <i>"hated"</i>?</p> <p><i>"Catch me out"</i> - as if it is a game.</p> <p><i>"Stupidest of things"</i> - unjust punishments, no leeway.</p> <p><i>"Fed up of me"</i> - appears frequently in her narrative of school. Does she not feel like they cared or valued her?</p> <p>A very hesitant start. <i>"My life was...."</i> What? Difficult or traumatic due to her parents divorce? I did not pursue this question as it was felt to be too intrusive.</p> <p><i>"Obviously"</i> - suggests that leaving school was inevitable due to her pregnancy.</p> <p>Changes the course of her discussion <i>"kicked"</i> out to <i>"left"</i>. Suggests feelings of exclusion, that pregnancy and school are not compatible.</p>

<p>anyway and erm... I just think I have done so much better with myself for having a kid. Like because before I had my son I was with someone and he was really really naughty and like going round town and just being really really bad. So I got out of that because he was doing cocaine and I said like "Look I am pregnant, I'm not going to be with someone who is doing cocaine" so I got rid of him.</p>	<p><i>"I have done so much better with myself"</i> - positions her pregnancy as a positive experience.</p> <p>Repeated use of <i>"really"</i> to describe her ex boyfriend's behaviour. Is she trying to emphasise the extent of his 'badness'?</p> <p>Is comparing and contrasting her life prior to pregnancy with post pregnancy - attempting to emphasise how she has changed.</p> <p>Pregnancy led to changes in relationships.</p> <p><i>"I said"</i> and <i>"I got rid"</i> suggests she asserted her sense of power and control.</p>
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The specific use of language was also explored. The focus here was on pronoun use, pauses, laughter, functional aspects of language, repetition, tone, and the use of metaphors. Key words and phrases were highlighted for deconstruction in order to identify the specific ways in which the participant discussed, understood and thought about their experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2009) (see Table 3.3). The meaning implied by these words and phrases was carefully considered and analysed.

**Table 3.3** Example of key words and phrases identified

<i>"She used to hate me"</i>	<i>"It has changed me obviously"</i>
<i>"They just said"</i>	<i>"I used to be really naughty"</i>
<i>"Having a baby will be a lot better than having a hangover"</i>	<i>"I can't do nothing"</i>
<i>"It is bad enough that I am sixteen and pregnant"</i>	<i>"It has ruined your life"</i>
<i>"I don't want to end up like her"</i>	<i>"I need a job, I need a job"</i>
<i>"They should just be good"</i>	<i>"I will be a bum"</i>
	<i>"I obviously want a good life for my child"</i>

## Stage Two: Developing emerging themes

The data created through initial coding in stage one was then synthesised to identify emerging themes. Whilst the initial coding was largely descriptive, open and contingent, the emergent themes attempted to capture and reflect an overall understanding of the data. This process involved breaking up the narrative flow into distinct sections of text, in order to perform a more detailed conceptual analysis and to ascribe the text to a theme (see Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4** Stage two of data analysis: example of developing emergent themes in Jade's transcript

Emergent themes	Original transcript	Exploratory comments
Problematic relationships with teachers	<b>Kay:</b> When you said before that they got fed up of you why do you think that was?	<i>"I just didn't care what they said"</i> - did not respect their views or opinions. Suggests a difficult relationship with teachers.
Challenging normative expectations	<b>Jade:</b> Because I just didn't care what they said, I just didn't, like normal kids get scared of a teacher shouting in their face, but I would stand there and laugh. Like say if I was in a maths lesson so that would be like on the top floor and our year group was on the top floor like for tutorials so our year office was right opposite the maths lesson that I was in and they would be constantly like be checking in and checking in and checking in because I was in there. So yeah I hated that as	Interesting phrase <i>"normal kids"</i> - suggests normative behaviour and responses to events.  <i>"I would stand their and laugh"</i> - not afraid of authoritative figures, attempting to challenge and resist their forms of punishment.  Repeated use of <i>"checking in"</i> - heavy emphasis placed on this, suggests a strong sense of surveillance.
Tainted reputations		<i>"Because I was in there"</i> - was she known as a 'problem' student? Why was this the case?
Strong dislike of school		

Discipline and control	well. So they used to catch me out for anything. Just by the end of it they would be telling me off for the most stupidest of things because they were just fed up of me.	<i>"I hated"</i> - strongly disliked school - <i>"hated"</i> appears frequently in her narrative of school. What is it about school she <i>"hated"</i> ?
Feelings of belonging - inclusion/exclusion	<b>Kay:</b> Do you think the way they reacted was fair?	<i>"Catch me out"</i> - as if it is a game.  <i>"Stupidest of things"</i> - unjust punishments, no leeway.  <i>"Fed up of me"</i> - appears frequently in her narrative of school. Does she not feel like they cared or valued her?
Processes of exclusion	<b>Jade:</b> I don't care... my life was... no I just think that... I would have had to have of gone out of school anyway because obviously I was heavily pregnant and there is only up to a certain amount of time how far you are allowed to be in school. I don't know what it is. But I would have got kicked... left for that anyway and erm... I just think I have done so much better with myself for having a kid. Like because before I had my son I was with someone and he was really really naughty and like going round town and just being really really bad.	A very hesitant start. <i>"My life was...."</i> What? Difficult or traumatic due to her parents divorce? I did not pursue this question as it was felt to be too intrusive.  <i>"Obviously"</i> - suggests that leaving school was inevitable due to her pregnancy.
Pregnancy as a positive turning point	So I got out of that because he was doing cocaine and I said like "Look I am pregnant, I'm not going to be with someone who is doing cocaine" so I got rid of him.	Changes the course of her discussion <i>"kicked"</i> out to <i>"left"</i> . Suggests feelings of exclusion, that pregnancy and school are not compatible.  <i>"I have done so much better with myself"</i> - positions her pregnancy as a positive experience.
Changing relationships and behaviours		Repeated use of <i>"really"</i> to describe her ex boyfriend's behaviour. Is she trying to emphasise the extent of his 'badness'?  Is comparing and contrasting her life prior to pregnancy with post pregnancy - attempting to emphasise how she has changed.  Pregnancy led to changes in relationships.  <i>"I said"</i> and <i>"I got rid"</i> suggests she asserted her sense of power and control.

### **Stage Three: Searching for connections across emergent themes**

A set of emergent themes was established for the transcript in stage two. This next stage of analysis refined the themes and considered how they fit together. I was looking for a means of drawing together the emergent themes and producing a structure that allowed me to identify all of the most interesting, unusual and important aspects of the participant's account. The emergent themes from stage two were listed and then reorganised to form clusters of related themes. This is referred to as abstraction, the process of identifying patterns between emergent themes (Smith *et al.*, 2009). It involves organising similar emerging themes together and developing a new name for that cluster (see Table 3.5).

**Table 3.5** Organising similar emerging themes together

<b>Emergent themes identified</b>	<b>Original transcript</b>
Processes of exclusion	Obviously I was heavily pregnant and there is only up to a certain amount of time how far you are allowed to be in school. I don't know what it is. But I would have got kicked... left for that anyway and erm...
Exclusion from secondary school	I got kicked out I can't remember... well it was at the beginning of Year 11.
Frequently in exclusion	I was in there [the seclusion unit] like nine times, I was the first person in there when it got built, I was actually the first person in there! I don't know they just put me in there all the time because they couldn't be bothered to deal with me.

The emergent themes illustrated in Table 3.5 were reorganised and were given a new name of 'Exclusion' for that cluster.

### **Stage Four: Moving to the next case**

The next stage involved moving to the next participant's transcript and repeating stages one to three for each of the fourteen transcripts. Smith *et al.*, (2009) stress that it is important to

view each transcript on its own merit, in order to allow new themes to emerge with each case. This means, as far as possible, bracketing the ideas generated from the previous transcripts while working on the new transcript. This is in keeping with the idiographic commitment in interpretative phenomenology. However, it is important to recognise that a complete tabula rasa approach to data analysis is unrealistic (Gibbs, 2007). It is impossible to start with absolutely no ideas when analysing data. Instead of attempting to view the transcript with a completely fresh perspective, as I would undoubtedly be influenced by the previous interviews, my aim was not to be preoccupied with fitting this new information into the themes already identified.

#### **Stage Five: Looking for patterns across cases**

The next stage involved looking for patterns across the transcripts. The transcripts were assessed, looking for connections and deciding which themes were most significant. Doucet and Mauthner (2012) explain deciding what data to incorporate or reject represents a key consideration in the data analysis process. It is often recommended to only include recurrent themes in research in order to increase validity (Creswell, 2009). While the aim of the analysis was to identify recurring themes, those appearing in at least half of the transcripts, themes with a lower occurrence have also been retained if they were unusual or unexpected and contributed to a deeper understanding of their experience. Consequently, the main criteria for selecting and including data were locating sameness and difference between the young women and conflict and contradictions within and across transcripts. This approach is justified as a recognised strength of IPA is being able to demonstrate unique idiosyncratic instances as well as commonalities between participants (Smith *et al.*, 2009). After analysing each individual transcript and reviewing the fourteen transcripts as a

whole, sixteen emergent themes were identified (see Table 3.6). These emergent themes are presented and explored in the data analysis chapters.

**Table 3.6** List of emergent themes from all transcripts

Appropriate femininity	Relationships with teachers
Change	Respectability
Choice	Sense of loss
Control	Social inclusion
Exclusion	Stigma
Expert advice	Success
Good mothers	Tainted reputations
Othering	Unreliable learners

As this thesis progresses to the data analysis chapters, it is important to remember that whilst the primary concern of IPA is the lived experiences of participants and the meanings they give to that lived experience, the following chapters are an interpretative account of their experiences. As Griffin (1996) points out, when we speak for others we cannot become them, we can only tell our story about their lives. Using the words of Griffin (1996), in order to tell my story about their lives rich thick description is provided in the data analysis chapters through including illustrative excerpts from the interviews and short case studies. This foregrounds the views and experiences of the young women involved, which is a central tenet of feminist research (Hammersley, 1995). This level of narrative detail is also defined as a marker of quality in a research study, with Richardson (1994) advocating for verisimilitude in order to make the work come 'alive'. Creswell (2013: 219) argues a good research study will include writing that 'becomes "real" and "alive", writing

that transports the reader directly into the world of the study'. However, he emphasises that 'we must recognize that the writing is only a representation of what we see or understand'. Vincent's (2012: 8) perspective is therefore useful: 'I viewed the stories of the young women I worked with and came to know as a window through which I might come to see and understand something of their lives, but a window that was opaque rather than transparent, affording only a glimpse'. Whilst this is a subjective account of the participants' experiences, it has been dialogical, systematic and rigorous in its application (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

The following series of chapters represent an analysis of the data and should be read as separate but overlapping accounts of the stories and experiences the young women shared. The data analysis chapters take a chronological journey through their experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and education. The first data analysis chapter explores the young women's experiences of education prior to pregnancy in order to help contextualise their accounts. This is followed by an analysis of how becoming pregnant shaped and impacted their lives, especially in relation to their education. Next, the young women's motivations for change are considered in order to analyse why they felt a need or requirement to change their lives. The final data analysis chapter examines to what extent the young women were able to enact these new aspirations for education now that they were pregnant or mothering.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **EDUCATION PRIOR TO PREGNANCY**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an insight into the educational experiences, prior to pregnancy, of the young women involved in this study. This chapter is of particular importance in order to contextualise the changes they perceive to have occurred in their lives as a result of becoming pregnant. It is therefore necessary to understand the social, historical and biographical contexts in their lives in order to give meaning to their transition to motherhood and the impact they believe it has had on them (Elder, 1991). This will enable an exploration of how the young women locate and understand their own histories in light of these changes.

This thesis has illustrated how teenage motherhood is increasingly being constructed in qualitative research as a ‘remarkable turning point’ (Barn and Mantovani, 2007: 239), as ‘positively transforming’ and that having a baby can be a ‘stabilizing influence’ (Clemmens, 2003: 93). However, a central argument underpinning this thesis is that through positioning teenage pregnancy and motherhood as a positive turning point it suggests that young women’s lives prior to pregnancy are in some way negative, problematic or deficient.

The aim of this chapter is to explore why pregnant and mothering young women are commonly portrayed to be problems or to be experiencing problems in the education system prior to pregnancy. This chapter does not seek to further pathologise the young

women involved in this study. My intention is not to simply accept the labelling of some young women as problems, but to examine and challenge these labels. Questioning what and whom is deemed problematic and by whose definition is important as conceptions of appropriate and positive behaviour are inevitably implicated in dominant values and beliefs. O'Neill (1996: xi) explains:

normativity pervades our lives. We do not merely have beliefs: we claim that we and others ought to hold certain beliefs. We do not merely have desires: we claim that we and others not only ought to act on some of them, but not others. We assume that what somebody believes or does may be judged as reasonable or unreasonable, right or wrong, good or bad, that it is answerable to standards of norms.

This chapter therefore explores the ways in which the young women involved in this study were constructed as problems prior to pregnancy. In order to think beyond these labels, categories and value judgements, it is necessary to ask how these young women constructed their own experiences of education. To avoid an exclusive focus on individual young women and their individual problems, their experiences are placed in a broader framework that critically examines the forms of behaviour, attitudes and demeanour that are deemed appropriate and positive for young women to occupy.

This chapter is divided into five sections in order to critically explore and analyse the construction of problem students. The first section explores how to varying degrees the young women disliked secondary school and voiced feelings of disengagement and disillusionment. There is an exploration of the reasons why the young women felt disengaged from school. Amber and Katie's experiences are outlined in order to

demonstrate the complexities of their stories and to draw attention to the variety of factors that shaped and influenced their views and experiences of school.

The key issues that emerge from Amber and Katie's accounts are then further explored in the remainder of the chapter. The second section emphasises the importance of teacher - student relationships and how they significantly shape and influence young women's views and attitudes towards school. It is illustrated how the young women commonly spoke of highly negative or problematic interactions with teachers which resulted in the positioning of the young women as problem students.

The next section explores how problematic relationships with teachers affected the young women's experiences of learning. The young women commonly perceived a lack of support and encouragement for their learning from teachers, due to their problem student status. It is argued definitions of positive and successful students are closely associated with academic performance and achievement, which effectively creates a narrow definition of success which marginalises those who do not achieve academically and positions them, in turn, as failures.

The fourth section explores feminine ideals and how the young women felt they were being assessed and judged both in terms of their academic ability, but also their personal appearance and behaviour. Definitions of positive and successful students were tightly constrained by notions of appropriate femininity, which dictated what behaviour, attitudes and demeanour were deemed appropriate for the young women to occupy by the school.

The final section explores the notion of tainted reputations and how the young women felt their teachers unfairly labelled them as problem students. The young women felt their reputations shaped and influenced their interactions with teachers and that they were often subjected to unfair punishment and surveillance. As a result of their problem status they were expected and required to change, to fit in and to assimilate to the rules and regulations of the school. However, it is demonstrated how the young women often resisted attempts to control and regulate their behaviour.

Overall, this chapter demonstrates that schools are social sites that are marked by both conflict and conformity. It is argued that all of the young women, to varying degrees, were recognised in the education system as problem students as they did not possess the correct knowledge, attitudes, interests and ways of being. This chapter explores key questions concerning how successful and unsuccessful students are defined, by whose definition and how young women perceive their positioning as problem students.

### **Disengagement from school**

There has been a growing focus in UK policy discourse on young people's levels of dissatisfaction and disengagement with education (Foliano *et al.*, 2010). Disengagement from education is seen to be an issue of central importance as it has been linked to low educational qualifications and poor labour market opportunities. Young women's disengagement from education is therefore positioned to be highly problematic as it is seen to have negative implications for both individuals and wider society (McIntosh and Houghton, 2005). However, Allard (2007) has criticised this body of literature arguing that research exploring the disengagement of young people primarily focuses on the *effects*, rather than the *process* of disengagement. Allard (2007) therefore argues that previous

research has provided little insight into how disengagement might be understood from young women's perspectives, or in relation to the critical moments in their lives.

The majority of young women involved in this study, with the exception of Holly and Imogen, stated that they enjoyed primary school and spoke of an enjoyment of school and learning. However, at some point, for some reason, they had become disengaged and disillusioned with secondary school. Consistent with the findings of Ross (2009) most of the young women were disengaged from school by the time they were in Year 9 (thirteen – fourteen years old) and largely remained so throughout the last years of compulsory schooling. All of the young women spoke negatively about their experiences of secondary school. Their attitudes ranged from an unwilling acceptance and tolerance to an extreme dislike and rejection of school. For example:

*I hated it, I really couldn't stand school.*

(Claire, 18 years old, mother)

*I just didn't like it [school] ... [laughs] I didn't want to go but I had no choice.*

(Imogen, 16 years old, mother)

These findings are consistent with previous research conducted with teenage mothers as a strong relationship has previously been found between a dislike of secondary school and teenage pregnancy (Bonell *et al.*, 2005; Wiggins *et al.*, 2005). However, it is important not to stigmatise pregnant and mothering young women for disliking secondary school. It can be argued that a dislike of schooling is not unique to pregnant and mothering young women. Rather, Brause (1992: 2) argues 'it is the unusual student who becomes intellectually challenged and nurtured in our schools. Educators - teachers and principals,

and society in general - want students to learn and to become excited about learning, but many practices limit the realization of our ideals'. Consequently, pregnant and mothering young women should not be positioned as different or abnormal for disliking secondary school. However, it is important to understand their experiences of schooling in order to understand why they disliked secondary school and the consequences this may have had for the individual young women.

What was striking about the young women's narratives is that Amber, Claire, Jade, Katie and Laura could identify a specific event during their education that led to their disengagement. When asked to reflect on their experiences and to think whether anything had caused a change in their behaviour or attitudes towards education they frequently spoke of a change in family circumstance, such as a bereavement, illness in the family or family breakdown. These significant life events can have a dramatic impact on the engagement levels of young women. While they may not be actively seeking to disengage from education, their priorities are likely to have altered and there is a need to focus more attention on the life event at hand, as opposed to education (DEECD, 2009).

These events can therefore be seen to represent critical moments in the young women's narratives. This concept derives from Giddens' (1991) work on the relationship between the self and social structure in late modern society in which individuals embark on a project of self within which they experience fateful moments. Giddens (1991: 113) defines fateful moments as 'times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands at a crossroads in their experience or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences'.

This chapter illustrates that the young women involved in this study believed their ability, or rather inability, to respond to these critical moments in an appropriate manner acted as a catalyst which either led to their self or formal exclusion from mainstream education. The accounts of Amber and Katie are presented below in order to explore the complexities of their experiences and how they believed these critical moments influenced their education and relationships with teachers. Their accounts suggest that these critical moments triggered a series of negative experiences and interactions with teachers that contributed to their disengagement and rejection of school.

### **Amber – “off the rails again”**

Amber explained that she did not experience any problems during primary school, but that she started going “downhill” in Year 8 at secondary school. The use of the term “downhill” is interesting here as it suggests Amber’s experience of education started to dramatically change and that she felt she was heading in a negative trajectory. When asked whether anything had changed in Year 8, Amber explained her father had developed dementia and had cancer on three separate occasions:

*My dad, I think it was in Year 8, he got dementia, so he forgets who I am, so I think that used to get me down [...] he’s had cancer like three times as well now, so I used to get down about things, thinking oh my god, like, he would ring me and he would forget who he was talking to and I would be like oh it’s your daughter and he would be like I haven’t got a daughter and proper. So it used to make me upset. I think that’s when I rebelled, why don’t you know. I don’t know everything just went through my mind and I started drinking, doing drugs and that’s it, I didn’t want to go to school anymore.*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

Amber was struggling to come to terms with her father's illness and this can be seen to represent a critical turning point in her life. Amber explained this was when she "*rebelled*" and started to drink and take drugs. This behaviour could be interpreted as a form of escapism due to everything "*going through [her] mind*". Amber explained that she no longer wanted to attend secondary school. Though she did maintain her attendance this can be seen as a turbulent time for Amber as she frequently experienced conflicts with teachers and other students:

*Well I went, but I just didn't, I didn't, everything just used to get me angry, everything people used to say to me used to get me angry, I was just really violent, but my dad was quite violent as well. I don't know everything just got to me and they just kicked me out in the end so... [tails off]*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

It appears Amber's response to her father's illness was that of anger and that this anger was expressed through frequent violent outbursts whilst at secondary school. In response to this aggressive behaviour Amber was offered anger management lessons which she did think were beneficial, but she felt that the effect was only ever temporary, as she explains:

*Well I did anger management and sometimes I would feel like it helped, they would put me on report to like assess how I am doing to see what classes I was struggling in and it would help for a bit and then I would just think fuck that I can't be bothered and I would just go off the rails again.*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

Osler and Vincent (2003: 67) explain aggressive behaviour in young women is not 'normally seen as "natural" and may be seen as representing a more deep-seated problem

for which she requires help'. The form of help Amber received was anger management classes, but similar to the findings of Barker *et al.*, (2010) attempts to reform students behaviour are often short term and partially successful at best. This aggressive behaviour eventually led to Amber's permanent exclusion from secondary school in Year 9, which was one year after she discovered her father had dementia. Amber was fourteen years old at the time of permanent exclusion which meant she was still of compulsory school age. Amber went on to attend three further mainstream educational settings, all of which she was excluded from due to her aggressive behaviour. Amber ended her compulsory education in a pupil referral unit. Being excluded in Year 9 at secondary school can have potentially devastating consequences for young people's futures, as this is a crucial time in their school careers as it is during this time when preparations for GCSE examinations begin (Osler and Vincent, 2003). The concerns voiced by Osler and Vincent (2003) are reflected in Amber's narrative as she left compulsory education with no GCSEs or recognised qualifications.

When asked to reflect on her experiences of exclusion and what support she received to help her come to terms with her father's illness and her aggressive behaviour, Amber defended the support she received for her education, explaining:

*No it was just me, I was too selfish, I just didn't want to care, they did so much to offer me, all the people that were bad.*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

It appears that Amber had internalised the difficulties she was experiencing and can be seen to position herself as a "*bad*" student due to the aggressive and challenging behaviour she

exhibited during school. Amber did not portray herself as a student requiring help, support, compassion and counselling, rather, she was “*too selfish*”. It was ultimately her fault for being too self-absorbed, thus she can be seen to take the responsibility and the blame for her permanent exclusion and positioning as a problem student.

**Katie – “*stuff school, stuff everything*”**

Katie explained her experiences of schooling started to change at the beginning of secondary school due to a critical event occurring at home, her parent’s separation:

*My mum and dad splitting up and stuff so obviously I was only like 10, 10 or 11 when it happened so it just made my brain go like stuff school, stuff everything. But I still went I just didn’t do anything.*

(Katie, 18 years old, mother)

The use of the phrase “*it just made my brain go ...*” suggests this was an involuntary process, that Katie’s changing attitudes towards school were out of her control. Consistent with Amber’s experience, despite changing family circumstances Katie continued to attend secondary school. However, a key difference in comparison to Amber is that Katie was not permanently excluded from school. Instead Katie was subjected to frequent internal exclusions in which she was removed from mainstream classes and was placed in the seclusion unit which was located on the school premises. In discussing her experiences of the seclusion unit, Katie stated:

*I was in seclusion like half of my child life [laughs]*

(Katie, 18 years old, mother)

Perhaps one of the reasons for a difference in disciplinary procedures is that while Amber's story seems to indicate a continual process of conflict and aggression, Katie's story indicates "*rough patch[es]*", as she explains:

*Sometimes I would go through a rough patch because obviously of home and stuff, like stuff going on at home so you would just go through like a rough bit, get in trouble, be out of lessons because of it... but yeah... I got through it.*

(Katie, 18 years old, mother)

Katie's use of the phrase "*I got through it*" indicates she perceived secondary school as an ordeal, as a battle which she must struggle though, but a battle which she eventually won as she completed secondary school and took her GCSEs. Katie can be seen to be demonstrating pragmatic acceptance, which is an attitude of generalised coping, taking each day as it comes with a focus on 'surviving' the school environment (Giddens, 1991).

When asked what she defined as getting "*in trouble*" Katie described engaging in oppositional behaviour in the classroom in which she would attempt to challenge the authority of her teachers:

*I don't know really [laughs] just like if someone told me... if a teacher told me to do something I would do totally the opposite thing and just like peeing them off really.*

(Katie, 18 years old, mother)

Katie explained she engaged in oppositional behaviour in order to draw attention to herself, as she wanted teachers to notice her. This suggests Katie needed and desired to talk to

others about her home circumstances and she seemed to think getting “*in trouble*” was the only way in which she could gain the attention she desired:

*Like just [laughs] just like... I don't know how to explain it... erm... being centre of attention sort of thing, you know like how people are always loud... yeah... just like because of what was going on at home I just wanted people to notice me, if you know what I mean? So I was being loud, which I am loud anyway, but I was being more loud and naughty so people... so teachers had to pull me out of lessons, then I would be able to explain why I was being naughty and then that's how they would understand.*

(Katie, 18 years old, mother)

However, when Katie had the opportunity to explain her home circumstances she stated that while the teachers acknowledged her home situation they did not feel it justified her behaviour:

*Yeah but obviously that didn't give me the reason to be naughty in class, so they were always trying to keep me under control [laughs] but it kind of worked, it kind of didn't, it depended on the mood I felt in the morning.*

(Katie, 18 years old, mother)

Amber and Katie's experiences demonstrate that while the educational settings often acknowledged their family situations, they did not believe that their circumstances justified their actions. This can be interpreted to mean that there are expected, normed and stereotyped ways in which teachers expect young women to react to key life events and to manage their behaviour and emotions (Lall, 2007). The young women can be seen to have

deviated from feminine ideals; women are typically expected to express their emotions through conversation, sadness or withdrawal, not aggressive and challenging behaviour.

de Pear and Garner (1996) assert that teachers often see young people who experience emotional and behavioural difficulties as 'bad' or 'naughty'. This can therefore lead them to respond to the challenging behaviour, rather than what underlies or causes the behaviour. This runs counter to the overall emphasis promoted in the Social Exclusion Unit (1998), which focuses on young people in difficulties, rather than on young people as the difficulty. Youdell (2006) discusses the importance of situating the individual learner in their social and biographical context in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of their experience and to challenge and critique deficient notions of students. An individualised perspective should be avoided, as it tends to view the individual out of context and tends to lead to a person blaming explanation of the problem. Therefore, not only does the problem reside within the individual, but the resolution is also seen to be located within the individual. The individual is constructed as the site of change and they are seen to be responsible for their own transformation and salvation.

Several key issues have emerged from Amber and Katie's narratives regarding their experiences of schooling. Most significantly, the influence of teacher-student relationships, attitudes towards learning, notions of appropriate femininity and teachers' attempts to control and regulate their behaviour. The positioning of young women as problems and to be experiencing problems will be further explored in the remainder of this chapter through drawing on all of the young women's narratives. Particular attention will be given to how some young women are positioned to be successful and others as unsuccessful students and what value judgements underlie these constructions.

## **Teacher – student relationships**

Lynch and Lodge (2002) explain relationships with teachers are crucial in terms of how students define their educational experiences. It was evident in the stories the young women shared about secondary school that their experiences were significantly influenced, both positively and negatively, by their interactions with teachers. All of the young women, to varying degrees, commented that they had encountered difficulties with teachers. However, these difficulties tended to be with some, rather than all teachers. The ways in which the young women described their relationships with teachers was especially powerful and emotive with "*hated*" being commonly used to describe their feelings, for example:

*Some [teachers] were alright, some I really hated and didn't get on with.*

(Claire, 18 years old, mother)

Similar to the findings of Dwyer and Wyn (2001) it appears that many of the young women found their relationships with teachers profoundly negative. A lack of respect featured strongly in their narratives and was seen to play a central role in hindering the formation of positive relationships with teachers, for example:

*If a teacher talks to you like shit, you talk to them like shit back because you don't have to have respect for teachers that don't have it for you. Like we are only there to learn we don't... were not there to give them respect if they don't give it to us.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

The role and importance of respect was a recurring theme in Fay's narrative. Fay believed teachers were not automatically deserving of respect by virtue of their position of authority within the school. Rather, she thought teachers needed to earn the respect of their students and that they should not view respect as an unquestionable right, it should be a reciprocal

process. Fay rejected the authority of some teachers believing that they had no respect for her as they would often talk to her “*like shit*”. The force and emotion Fay used when saying the word “*shit*” suggests she believed teachers spoke to her in a highly disrespectful manner. However, Fay did not simply accept the power exerted over her by teachers, rather she directly challenged their authority by talking to them “*like shit back*”.

Other young women, like Fay, reported being shouted at by teachers, which as Osler and Vincent (2003) explain can often result in them not only feeling personally disrespected by the teacher, but also disrespecting the teacher who shouted at them. As Jade explains:

*I just didn't care what they had to say. I just didn't... like normal kids get scared of a teacher shouting in their face, but I would just stand there and laugh.*

(Jade, 17 years old, mother)

The use of the phrase “*normal kids*” is interesting here as Jade is, in effect, positioning herself as abnormal and different to other students attending her school. “*Normal kids*” suggests there is an expectation that students will conform and comply with the standards and expectations set by the school, that they will respect and obey the authority of teachers. Jade positions herself as abnormal as she deviates from normative behaviour and gendered expectations in relation to interactions with teachers. Teachers usually deem direct confrontation problematic. However, Jade seems to take pride in her actions, positioning herself as brave and able to stand up to and challenge the authority of teachers.

There was an acknowledgement in their narratives that silence and obedience to authority was highly rewarded during their education. Young women who challenged the authority of

teachers by loud or aggressive behaviour were viewed as problem students. Consistent with the findings of Reay (2001) their assertive and loud presence in the classroom was viewed as inappropriate, as Fay highlights:

*I am very open minded and like outspoken person, so if I think something I will say it and if I think something about someone I will tell them, whereas I wouldn't be two faced about it. I think that was my problem, I just spoke too much.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

When asked to reflect on what she would do differently if she could go back to secondary school, Nikki stated:

*Just kind of keep my mouth shut and... I would still be friends with the people I was friends with and just kind of mellow it down in class and then I have got lunch time break between lessons to kind of mess around.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

Speaking your mind and standing up for your values and beliefs featured strongly in the young women's narratives. This was viewed as a highly positive and desirable characteristic by the young women as it meant they were honest, open and not "two faced". However, this can be seen to be in conflict with the school environment, which teaches students how to follow rules, not to ask questions or raise issues that challenge teacher-based assumptions or authority (Giroux, 2001). This illustrates how 'dominant educational discourses of the ideal female pupil may be experienced as narrow and constraining by young working class women, who find it difficult to reconcile a positive view of themselves as pupils with their own notions of an assertive, strong femininity' (Archer *et*

*al.*, 2007: 555). Consequently, being outspoken was often interpreted as confrontational and a challenge to teaching practice. As Archer *et al.*, (2007: 555) suggest:

girls' assertions of 'loud', active and visible femininities can be understood as challenging the forms of submissive, passive and quiet femininity that are usually rewarded within schools [...] [bringing them] into conflict with schools because they are interpreted as deviant and undesirable aspects of femininity.

Those students who were unwilling to accept without question the assumptions and values of the school were therefore quickly silenced or deemed troublemakers (hooks, 1994). Fay and Nikki identified with an active and assertive feminine identity but believed this was their main weakness as they “*spoke too much*” and should have “*just kind of keep my mouth shut*”. They recognised the importance of adopting a submissive attitude as their behaviour was often viewed as problematic. The hierarchical relations that exist within the education system between teacher and student demand submissiveness on the part of the student (Fagan, 1995). The young women acknowledged the importance of being quiet, which Stanley (1993) discusses as a deliberate tactic used by young women as it serves as a way of accommodating the demands of the school by adopting the role of 'quiet girl' in the classroom. This means they are able to conform to behavioural expectations, embodying a submissive and passive feminine identity. However, in other contexts they may behave quite differently, as Nikki suggests “*then I have got lunch time break between lessons to kind of mess around*”.

If the young women were not willing to submit, they explained they were commonly shouted at or were required to leave the classroom or indeed the school. Plummer (2000) argues this signifies how young women are unable to express their thoughts and feelings

regarding schooling and their teachers without risking putting their education in jeopardy and being positioned as a problem student. Their experiences suggest that such difficulties, even with a single teacher, can have a considerable impact on their learning and attitudes towards school. Significant difficulties with teachers invariably led to the young women missing specific classes or whole days of school, whether as a result of formal disciplinary procedures or self-exclusion, as Claire's narrative of school highlights:

*I ended up getting kicked out of his class, but I didn't like it anyway. So then I had to go in the end of maths classroom to do my maths. [...] there was people in there that I used to sit with at the back so we just used to chat. But I didn't like maths anyway, I was never good at maths.*

(Claire, 18 years old, mother)

As a result of the difficult relationship Claire experienced with her maths teacher she was eventually excluded from his class. Claire's experience demonstrates the complexities of exclusion, as while she was not officially excluded from the school she was subject to unofficial internal exclusion as she was prevented from participating in routine school activities. Claire explained the oppositional behaviour she exhibited was as a result of the difficulties she experienced with maths. Fagan (1995) would argue that the school's reaction suggests a focus more on containment, as opposed to learning, as an emphasis was placed on controlling Claire's behaviour, rather than addressing the difficulties she was experiencing with maths. The removal of Claire from the mainstream classroom can be seen to further compound her difficulties with maths as in her new classroom she "*just used to chat*" which does not indicate that any meaningful mathematical learning took place. Claire can also be seen to individualise the difficulties she was experiencing, when stating "*I didn't like maths*" and "*I was never good at maths*". Claire seems to be questioning her

ability to participate and succeed in maths, rather than perhaps the quality of teaching she experienced. Claire's experiences highlight how disruptive behaviour is often constructed as located within the student. However, Maguire (2009) argues that disruption in school may be as much, if not more, to do with aspects related to inadequacies associated with the curriculum, inappropriate pedagogy or the marginalisation of some young people within the school system.

These negative experiences and relationships with teachers led many of the young women interviewed to conclude that the school they attended and specific members of staff did not express an interest in them as individuals or in their education. This was particularly pertinent in Jade's narrative:

*I was in there [the seclusion unit] like nine times, I was the first person in there when it got built! I was actually the first person! I don't know they just put me in there all the time because they couldn't be bothered to deal with me.*

(Jade, 17 years old, mother)

Jade recounted her experiences of the seclusion unit in a humorous tone. She was keen to point out and emphasise that she was the first student to be placed in the unit when it first opened, a fact she seemed proud of. Jade explained she spent a substantial proportion of her time in the seclusion unit, which is similar to Katie's experience who stated "*I was in seclusion like half my child life*". Jade believed the school "*couldn't be bothered to deal with [her]*" which is why she was frequently placed in the seclusion unit. This suggests that seclusion was perceived to be a form of containment, a holding pen for problem students.

### **Can't learn, won't learn**

The problematic relationships the young women experienced with certain teachers can be seen to have adverse consequences for their learning. Due to their positioning as problem students the young women felt that they were often ignored within the classroom, as Gemma explained:

*Sometimes I just wouldn't understand it and the teacher wouldn't help me, so I just wouldn't do it [...] so I just used to sit there and not do anything. There was loads of us that wouldn't get it and the teachers wouldn't care.*

(Gemma, 15 years old, pregnant)

Teachers, according to Gemma, were unwilling to help and support her. Gemma thought this was because they viewed her as a problem student due to her challenging behaviour and sporadic attendance:

*I just kept having a go at the teachers and I wouldn't get on with my work and sometimes I wouldn't even turn up to the lessons.*

(Gemma, 15 years old, pregnant)

Due to her behaviour, Gemma believed teachers failed to take the time to explain what she needed to know when she did not understand the subject. Gemma's oppositional relationship with teachers can be seen to further perpetuate the difficulties she felt she was experiencing with the curriculum. Gemma explained that she often "*wouldn't get it*" and perceived a lack of support and assistance from teachers with her work. Consequently, out of frustration and boredom she would commonly 'act out' in class, which led to further conflicts with teachers. This can be seen as a circular issue, one which contributed to Gemma's dissatisfaction with education and her self and formal identification as a problem

student. Similar to the findings of Callanan *et al.*, (2009) negative and fraught relationships with teachers can contribute to students' feelings of disengagement. In addition, Osler and Vincent (2003) explain the quality of relationships between young women and professionals is critical as they are likely to have a direct impact on academic achievement as well as feelings of inclusion and belonging.

The young women were generally aware of where they stood in terms of their academic ability. Students' awareness of their academic ability is perhaps not surprising as they are labelled by teachers and other students from the beginning of their education. Educational practices, including the curriculum and assessment practices, interactions between teachers and students and relations among students, can be seen to rank and compare groups of students (Allard, 2007). These processes, in effect, position some students as successful and others as unsuccessful and can be seen to alienate groups of students who do not align with normative notions of success, as highlighted by Beth:

*She [a teacher] was a bit of a biased person, she would be like well you should be like one of those and you will like get good grades, and I am like thanks.*

(Beth, 18 years old, mother)

The use of the phrase "*one of those*" demonstrates this division between successful and unsuccessful students. Beth is alluding to notions of an ideal student, who it seems is primarily, but not exclusively, defined by the achievement of "*good grades*". Within Beth's account there is an awareness that some students '*do* know how to fit in and perform correctly' and that 'these girls *who do* are the positive image against which these marginalized young women are compared and compare themselves' (Allard, 2007: 154,

original emphasis). Becoming "*one of those*" can be seen to place considerable responsibility on Beth to align with and accomplish herself within these terms. It seems to suggest that this is a matter of choice, that if Beth desired, she could change and become a successful student through her own making. As Benjamin (2002: 136) remarks, 'the standards agenda positions students to whom normative versions of success are not accessible as marginal, thus producing the conditions of exclusion within a system that claims to be moving towards inclusion'.

Not being, as Beth puts it "*one of those*", positioned her as unsuccessful in the eyes of the teacher. Alexander *et al.*, (1997) argue failure, or perceived failure, can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, as students may avoid engaging in learning activities because they believe they will fail. The young women commonly discussed underachievement or failure in education in individualistic terms through positioning themselves as lacking academic ability. This individualistic account of underachievement appeared most strongly in Katie's narrative who spoke about herself in highly negative terms throughout her interview, not considering herself capable of academic success and expressing that this was in fact a nonsensical notion.

Katie: *I don't expect a lot out of me [laughs].*

Kay: *Why not?*

Katie: *Like because I just know when I can do something or when I can't do something and if I just look at something I will be like no I can't do that and I won't try.*

Kay: *Why do you think that is?*

Katie: *Because I just know that I won't be able to do it, so I won't waste my*

*time trying to do it and that's what made me frustrated with some teachers because they weren't listening when I knew.*

Katie's account suggests she was experiencing feelings of failure, of not being good enough, as suggested in *"I don't expect a lot out of me"*. Walkerdine *et al.*, (2001) discuss the difficulties young women experience with schooling in terms of an educational discourse that centrally retains the notion of a working class 'lack'. Adopting this perspective, Katie's difficulties with the curriculum can ultimately only be viewed as *her* problem, believing that she quite simply did not have the ability to do well at school and perceived that there was nothing that could be done to help or support her. Allard (2007) expands on this argument by stating that without having the means to understand how the education system acts to disadvantage some students and privilege others, young people must accept the view that they are not competent or able enough to succeed. Therefore Katie's reaction to the difficulties she experienced with school, *"I won't waste my time trying to do it"*, can be argued to be a rational and logical withdrawal strategy so as not to expose herself to further feelings of failure and inadequacy.

### **Performing femininity**

The young women's narratives indicate they felt they were being educated to assess their worth not just in terms of their academic ability, but also in terms of their appearance, self-presentation and levels of conformity to rules and regulations. Their accounts of schooling draw attention to the notion of an ideal student, a student who embodies the correct characteristics, behaviours and attitudes that are required to be defined as a positive and successful student within the education system.

Their accounts of education were significantly constructed and defined by discussions of what was defined as appropriate and positive by their teachers, especially in terms of appropriate displays of femininity. Lynch and Lodge (2002) explain the dominant definition of femininity in schools places a strong emphasis on diligence, deference and self-monitoring. Young women are commonly expected to defer to the systems of control exercised over them, especially in terms of their dress and demeanour. However, the young women commonly regarded attempts by the school to police their dress and their bodies as an invasion of their privacy and their right to control the appearance of their own body, as Jade explained:

*I just hated it [secondary school] they were so picky, like, I got my tongue pierced and that and they were always making me take my make-up off, taking my nail varnish off, having to wear a blazer, which I think is stupid because it don't affect your learning and that's what you're at school to do, so yeah I just didn't like it because of like petty things.*

(Jade, 17 years old, mother)

Jade expressed particular frustration about rules that attempted to control her physical appearance and personal demeanour at secondary school. Jade, along with other young women, felt it was unfair that there was little or no flexibility surrounding such rules and that they were being defined and judged by their physical appearance. Their physical appearance appeared to mark them out as different and problematic in the school as they were not embodying a positive and respectable student image in the eyes of the school.

While wearing the correct uniform, make-up and jewellery were often construed as “*petty things*” it can be argued that they significantly shaped and influenced their experiences and

attitudes towards education. Jade felt that the emphasis placed on her personal appearance was unjustified, as she did not see how it affected her education. Issues surrounding representation were described as a point of tension that often led to disputes and conflicts with teachers in a struggle over power and autonomy. It can be argued the young women did not perceive their personal appearance as problematic. Their personal appearance was therefore defined as problematic by external rather than internal definition. Jade and Claire's accounts of schooling demonstrate that not all young women accept normative definitions of femininity as they frequently challenged and subverted regulations relating to dress, manners and speech, as highlighted by Claire:

*In the end we kind of rebelled against him really [a maths teacher] because everyone could, so we were constantly sticking our tongue bars out and rubbing them against our lips and stuff.*

(Claire, 18 years old, mother)

This collective performance by Claire and her peers can be seen to be a form of resistance against the rules and regulations of the school. This suggests the young women did not passively accept the rules and regulations of the school or the teachers' attempts to shape their knowledge, identities and behaviour. Rather they can be seen as competent social actors who employed a variety of strategies to challenge the views, behaviours and practices of their teachers.

Further challenge to traditional notions of femininity can be seen in the ways the young women behaved and responded to events, especially in relation to disputes with teachers and other students. There was often a violent and aggressive reaction to what was considered the repressive culture of the school. The response, at both an individual and

group level, was towards what the young women perceived to be a "*boring*" learning environment, as highlighted by Gemma and Holly:

*Boring, I used to get in trouble a lot.*

(Gemma, 15 years old, pregnant)

*All my friends were really naughty as well. They used to, like, throw water at teachers and stuff, yeah like I wasn't the only one, I used to join in with them because I was bored and I used to fight in school as well.*

(Holly, 16 years old, pregnant)

The young women often reminisced on their experiences of being "*naughty*" and getting in "*trouble*", recounting adventures they had and pranks they enacted at school. Similar to the findings of Crozier and Anstiss (1995) the young women can be seen to be adopting strategies to get through the rigours of school life, with winding up teachers and 'having a laugh' as important aspects of the school day, for example:

*I used to fight at school and I used to be really rude to my teachers and I never used to do my work and just I was trying to be jack the lad basically, but obviously the girl version.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

At other times, the young women's behaviour was a reaction to bullying they experienced at school and feelings of unfair treatment or harassment, as in the case of Nikki, who experienced racist bullying at school:

*I used to get bullied because I have got big lips and that's literally what they used to say big lip bitch and all this and it used to really get to me, but now I don't even*

*care, but I think the way I handled that was anger, like just taking my anger out on most people and if someone said the slightest thing to me I would just go crazy kind of thing.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

Being a "jack the lad" and "going crazy" can be seen to be at odds with the usual behaviour expected of young women in a classroom environment. Aggressive and rude behaviour is in direct opposition to the construction of femininity as sensible and mature (Francis, 2000). Carlile (2009) found teachers' views of young women's 'bad' behaviour involved judgements based on gender normativity, and that this linked to instances of permanent exclusion. However, engaging in aggressive behaviour was seen as necessary by some young women in order to defend and uphold their reputation or to 'stand up' for a friend, as Holly and Nikki explained:

*I had a fight with this girl, like, she, like, called me a name apparently, but she didn't really call me a name, but I just didn't like her, so I had a fight with her anyway and I broke her nose... I'm not that horrible don't worry!*

(Holly, 16 years old, pregnant)

*Fighting with some girl because what it was... she had a problem with [her best friend] she punched her and got her to the floor and then her friends jumped in and then I thought well that's not fair, like three on one, so then I ended up smashing her and accidentally broke her tooth and then that just went on from like Year 8 to 10 all these fights.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

There is a widespread tendency to judge young women's behaviour more harshly when they are seen to move beyond what are regarded as acceptable feminine norms, such as physical

violence. Osler and Vincent (2003) explain violence in young women may be perceived to be extreme, whereas aggression in young men, while not necessarily tolerated, may be seen as inevitable or natural. However, the young women did not position physical violence as problematic or extreme. To the contrary, they spoke of the importance of standing up for themselves and their friends at school. Fay in particular spoke about the importance of the message her father had reinforced:

*My dad wanted me to get my grades, but my dad always told me that if anyone hit me, you hit them back twice as hard.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

Fay followed her father's advice, but was eventually permanently excluded from school due to aggressive and violent behaviour. This demonstrates a clear conflict between how the school and Fay and her father defined positive and desirable behaviour. Standing up for yourself through violent acts was in direct conflict with the school rules. Marshall (1996) argues defining young women who exhibit these behaviours as problem students evokes an expectation of young people as normally obedient to the natural authority of teachers and schools, which leads to a naturalised and institutionalised adult expectation of authority and student obedience.

### **Tainted reputations**

One of the most significant barriers the young women encountered in engaging in education was teachers' perceptions of their behaviour and their ability, or rather, inability, to behave and perform correctly. The young women felt they had been unfairly labelled as problem students during their education and how once tarnished with that reputation they found it difficult, if not impossible, to change people's perceptions. The theme of tainted

reputations emerged most prominently in the accounts of Amber, Claire, Fay, Holly and Jade, for example:

*Once I did a couple of things and that was it they saw me as the naughty child and just treated me different to everyone else.*

(Jade, 17 years old, mother)

*Some of them just hated you full stop and there was no way of getting around them, even if you was like bad or whatever then trying to get back in they still wouldn't [give you a chance].*

(Claire, 18 years old, mother)

Being viewed as a problem student by teachers often arose for many different reasons. Jade perceived she obtained her tainted reputation through a series of events at the beginning of secondary school in which she exhibited aggressive and challenging behaviour. This was an especially fateful time for Jade as she was experiencing difficulties at home due to her parents' divorce. For others, their tainted reputation developed through being perceived to be part of an undesirable friendship group and/or belonging to a particular family. For example, Holly believed the Head of Year at her secondary school took an active dislike to her due to her family history.

Holly: *The Head of Year she was horrible, she used to hate me, like, she wanted me excluded, like, so bad, like, she used to wind me up, like, really badly.*

Kay: *In what way?*

Holly: *She used to say like oh you're never gonna go anywhere with your life, you're just like your family, blah, blah, blah, she used to say bad stuff.*

Holly asserted her Head of Year believed she would not achieve academically and that she would follow the same negative and problematic trajectory through education and employment as her family. Holly believed her Head of Year had drawn a foregone conclusion about her behaviour and potential academic ability. Holly's experience echoes the work of Osler and Vincent (2003) as they found some service providers expressed concern that teachers' assumptions about family achievement and aspirations are likely to influence the school's expectations of particular students. Slee (1995: 3) asserts 'the attribution of cause for disruptive behaviour is reduced to the dysfunctionality of student pathologies, families, cultural or class backgrounds'. This reflects a highly deterministic view of student achievement and a focus on the problems experienced by young women in individualistic terms, at the personal and family level, rather than due to wider structural inequalities (Plummer, 2000).

Similar to Claire and Holly, Fay described how she was subject to automatic judgement by some teachers in relation to her ability to behave. Once labelled as a “*bad student*”, Fay explained she started to behave increasingly in the manner associated with her label:

Fay:       *Automatically thinking oh she's a bad student, I've got her in my class, oh great!*

Kay:       *What do you think people pre-judged you?*

Fay:       *Well some kids they would do something naughty and they would be given another chance, whereas if I was to do something naughty because I have done it so many times before I got kicked out which is why I acted up.*

Booth (1996) argues teachers often remember previous incidents which contribute towards shaping and maintaining students' tainted reputations. This can be seen to contribute not only towards the students' experiences of exclusion but also to the disaffection of students themselves. Coulby and Harper (2011: 3-4) highlight:

If we perceive a situation to be disruptive, then this is temporary state of affairs, and one which involves several participants [...] But if we perceive a pupil to be disruptive, this is somehow something to do with his/her personality or nature. This means that we are more likely to regard it as permanent and difficult to change. We will probably see any incident in which a 'disruptive pupil' is involved as caused by him/her rather than as a clash between various participations.

Problem behaviour is therefore viewed and positioned within the individual, rather than as a result of a complex interplay of factors. Fay believed she was given no allowances for her behaviour and that she purposefully “*acted up*” in order to be excluded from what she deemed an undesirable social and learning situation. Fay can therefore assert that she was excluded because she wanted to be excluded. This approach enabled Fay to claim more control over the school's decision to exclude her.

The young women who felt they had developed a tainted reputation commented that they were given no allowances for their behaviour and that even for the smallest mistake, for example chewing gum, they would be removed from the classroom. Consequently, the young women felt they were never given the opportunity to behave and became disheartened by their efforts to reintegrate. They felt this intense surveillance created an impossible situation in which they were given no leeway and were subject to unjust punishments. Consistent with the findings of Ross (2009) they were more likely to feel

unfairly treated and blamed for any trouble occurring in school and believed their teachers had lost interest in them. This finding was particularly evident in Jade's narrative:

*They would be constantly, like, be checking in and checking in and checking in because I was in there [in a classroom]. So yeah, I hated that as well. So they used to catch me out for anything. Just by the end of it they would be telling me off for the most stupidest of things because they were just fed up of me.*

(Jade, 17 years old, mother)

Jade's repeated use of the phrase "*checking in*" illustrates the intense surveillance she felt she was subjected to. While Catling (2005: 327) states 'in the classroom, children become used to being watched and noticed', Jade's comment suggests more intensive and overt forms of surveillance. "*Checking in*" on Jade can be seen as an attempt to enforce discipline and appropriate behaviour. In Foucauldian terms, all students are subjected to the hierarchical observation and normalising judgement of the disciplinary institution. However, Youdell (2006: 98) argues that it is the bad student that 'simultaneously provokes and is constituted through the citation and inscription of a multitude of discourses that identify and diagnose her/his deficits, and the deployment of disciplinary technologies of correction'. Philo and Parr (2000) explain there is a deliberate organisation of institutional spaces in order to produce more docile and proper subjects. However, Jade's account suggests she was not simply a passive individual subjected to discipline, regulation and control. Jade did not become docile; she "*hated*" the surveillance she was subjected to and resisted these practices.

The young women's narratives illustrate how they were commonly positioned as problem students. It can be seen that they were acutely aware of this labelling and were conscious

that they did not align with normative notions of success. Their recognition of difference, of not fitting in, implies a real or imagined Other who did fit in and who represented an ideal student (Plummer, 2000). They acknowledged that in order to align with these positive notions of success and participation they would have to be subject to change. Their knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and demeanour were not classed as positive or appropriate for school. There was a perception that their school attempted to shape and mould them into what the school defined as good and respectable students, for example:

Jade:        *I had a support worker at school and even he got fed up of me.*

Kay:        *Why do you think he got fed up of you?*

Jade:        *Because I never used to turn up half of the time to his things and erm the reason why he got fed up of me was because he couldn't change me, I think that's why.*

Jade's statement "*he couldn't change me*" suggests her behaviour was defined as unacceptable by the school and that she was in need of transformation. The assignment of a support worker can be seen as an attempt to shape, guide and influence Jade's behaviour and attitudes. This reflects a focus on directing the lives and conduct of young women, guiding them through their lives and attempting to govern their conduct to maintain good order (Schirato *et al.*, 2012). A focus on changing and shaping students reflects an on-going belief that schools have to 'work on' students to change them, rather than to 'work with' them as they are (Plummer, 2000: 196). This is supported by Brause (1992: 4) who states that 'student learning is assumed to be at the heart of schooling, but the implicit focus on learning is replaced by a concern for social conformity'. There is an expectation and requirement for young women to conform to the beliefs and behaviours advocated by the

school, otherwise they risk punitive measures that attempt to control and correct their behaviour. Supporting young people to behaviour in a positive and reflexive manner can arguable be seen as a central tenet of teaching and citizenship (Slee, 1995). However:

it could be argued that any reach towards 'control' through pre-determining what students' attitudes should be (assertive, resilient etc) also paves the way for identifying students as 'disaffected, disturbed' and the like, when they do not seem to internalise and produce these desired responses (Maguire *et al.*, 2010: 164).

Notions of the ideal student are tightly constrained and can be seen to influence which students are deemed successful and unsuccessful. However, Barker *et al.*, (2010: 379) explain young people 'do not passively accept adult regulation nor adult attempts to shape their knowledge, identities or behaviour. Rather children are competent social actors who employ a variety of strategies to contest, challenge or transgress adult spatial hegemony and boundaries'. Jade was not subject to change. She was unable, or indeed unwilling, to assimilate to the values and behaviours deemed positive and appropriate by the school. This highlights that it is:

important to remember that ideologies are also *imposed* on students who occasionally view them as contrary to their own interests and who either resist openly or conform only under pressure from school authorities. The point here is that dominant ideologies are not simply transmitted in schools, nor are they practiced in a void. On the contrary, they are often met with resistance (Giroux, 2001: 91, original emphasis).

Jade resisted the values and practices of the school and was eventually permanently excluded from mainstream education. This suggests schools both produce young women

who conform to rules and regulations and exclude those who resist being produced (Lloyd, 2005). Jade was consequently classed as an outsider, interloper and undesirable (hooks, 1994). To remain in school Jade had to try and 'fit in'. This would, Plummer (2000) argues, require an abandonment of a core aspect of her sense of self. At one level this may mean her appearance and demeanour, but on a deeper level it may mean the values and beliefs of her family and community. Those who are unable to internalise such expectations are more likely to be excluded or marginalised (Fielding, 2000). Fagan (1995) argues it would be in the best interests of young people not to practice their resistance and opposition to the educational system and to instead accept their subordination as otherwise it can have adverse effects on their learning. Fagan's (1995) positioning can be evidenced through the experiences of Amber, Fay and Holly as it appears their tainted reputations curtailed their educational options after being permanently excluded from secondary school, as they explained:

*Nobody would let me in because of my behaviour.*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

*They just wouldn't take me to any school in [local area], I was basically banned from what I've been kicked out for and my criminal convictions and all that.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

*They just said that they wouldn't let me in because I was excluded, so they wouldn't let me go there.*

(Holly, 16 years old, pregnant)

After being permanently excluded from secondary school they discussed the difficulties they experienced in gaining access to another educational setting. All three had been

permanently excluded due to, amongst other contributory factors, oppositional behaviour including physical aggression. They believed that other schools were unwilling to enrol them due to their tainted reputations. Since school enrolment is subject to market forces Osler and Vincent (2003) explain it is often difficult for an excluded student to find an appropriate place in another school. Research has shown many Head Teachers are increasingly reluctant to accept students who have been excluded from other schools due to concerns about their behaviour, attendance and academic ability (NUT, 1992; Stirling, 1992; Webb and Vulliamy, 2004). These factors may impact the school's measures of success. This can be seen to further reinforce the positioning of these young women as problem students rather than as students experiencing problems.

## **Summary**

This chapter has illustrated how the young women involved in this study were commonly positioned as problems prior to pregnancy. All of the young women to varying degrees explained that they disliked secondary school and had become disengaged and disillusioned by the time they were fourteen years old. The complexities associated with disengagement were explored and it was identified how for many young women a change in family circumstance, such as a bereavement, illness in the family or family breakdown had a dramatic impact on their experiences of schooling.

Many of the young women had profoundly negative relationships with some teachers that significantly shaped and influenced their experiences and views of school. Significant difficulties with teachers invariably led to the young women missing specific classes or sometimes whole days of school, whether as a result of formal disciplinary procedures or self exclusion.

The young women's accounts of schooling draw attention to the notion of an ideal student, a student who embodies the correct characteristics, behaviours and attitudes that are required to be defined a positive and successful student within the education system. The young women believed they were labelled, categorised and judged by their academic ability, physical appearance, behaviour and personal demeanour. There was an acknowledgement in their narratives that silence and obedience to authority, academic achievement and conformity to feminine ideals were central to definitions of positive students. They believed attempts were made by the school to monitor, control and change their behaviour in order to produce more docile and proper students.

All of the young women recognised their labelling and positioning as problem students and frequently explained the difficulties they experienced through their 'lack', usually in terms of academic ability. Through explaining their experiences of schooling in this manner it firmly positioned the problem within the individual, as opposed to problems with the education system, or an interplay of complex factors. However, while the young women recognised their labelling as problem students, many of them resisted and challenged this labelling and the schools attempts to change their behaviour. Thus their positioning as problem students can be interpreted as constituted through external, rather than internal, definitions.

Overall, this chapter has explored the educational experiences of the young women prior to pregnancy. The chapter raises key questions concerning how successful and unsuccessful students are defined as this dichotomy inevitably involves value judgements concerning what behaviours are deemed positive and appropriate for young women. This chapter has highlighted the issues and complexities associated with defining appropriate behaviour for

students and how there is commonly a conflict of definition between the school and students.

Prior to pregnancy, as a result of their school experiences, the young women already viewed themselves as problems that required change and transformation. Moreover, their educational experiences prior to pregnancy can be seen to situate both the problem and the resolution within the individual. Thus, their educational experiences prior to pregnancy can be seen to reinforce a discourse of individual responsibility and normative definitions of success. The young women are positioned as the ones who can, and need, to change. Ultimately, whether or not they ascribed to this viewpoint, they recognised that they were positioned within this discourse as educable subjects who needed to work on their 'projects of the self'.

The next chapter identifies the ways in which the young women believed their lives have changed as a result of becoming pregnant.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE INFLUENCE OF PREGNANCY

#### **Introduction**

Chapter Four illustrated how the young women involved in this study were commonly positioned to be problems in the education system prior to pregnancy. All of the young women, to varying degrees, stated they disliked secondary school and had profoundly negative relationships with teachers that significantly shaped and influenced their experiences and views of school. The difficulties they experienced with specific teachers commonly led to either self or formal exclusion.

In contrast to their previous experiences of secondary school this chapter illustrates how the young women believed becoming pregnant positively impacted their education and how pregnancy can be seen to represent a positive turning point in their lives. This chapter explores the ways in which pregnancy affected their lives and the extent and degree to which change occurred. However, the young women's accounts of pregnancy and motherhood represent a version of events from their age and perspective at the time of interview. Half of the young women involved in this study were pregnant, so to a certain extent, they were still coming to terms with the prospect of becoming a mother and were currently living through key changes, as Laura explained:

*Becoming a mum has made me grow up, I agree, well I'm not sure because it hasn't happened yet, but I am sure it will.*

(Laura, 18 years old, pregnant)

Changes were still ‘in motion’ for some of the young women as they were living through the transition from young woman to mother. The term transition is appropriate here, as it suggests a period of adjustment rather than a sudden shift from one socially constructed position (young woman) to another (mother) (Ball *et al.*, 2000). In order to provide an account of how they felt their pregnancy affected their education, the young women were asked to reflect on their experiences of education prior to pregnancy and to consider how their experiences had altered or changed since becoming pregnant. This required the young women to provide a retrospective account of pregnancy in order to identify these changes and to place them in context. It is therefore likely that the young women’s accounts of pregnancy will develop and evolve overtime as they discover the full impact and significance motherhood has had on their lives. Consequently, their accounts cannot be seen as final or fixed as their interpretations of what it means to be a mother do not exist in a static state.

This chapter is divided into four sections in order to explore the influence of pregnancy. The first section focuses on the experiences of Amber and Jade who believed becoming pregnant had a significant and profound impact on their lives. Their narratives are explored in relation to the recognition of an alternative trajectory as they believed becoming pregnant had significantly changed their experiences. The next section explores how all of the young women recognised that becoming pregnant had made them more mature and sensible. Pregnancy was seen as a key transition to adulthood, which required them to “grow up” and “step up” in order to effectively provide and care for their child. The third section explores how pregnancy influenced their educational experiences. The majority of young women spoke of a desire to engage or reengage with education in order to gain recognised qualifications and paid employment. Their experiences are explored and

contrasted to other young women in this research study who explained they had no desire to engage in education. The final section of this chapter explores how pregnancy can also create a sense of loss. The young women were going through a process of change, most of which the young women understood and positioned to be positive. However, this process of change also commonly required a rejection of their old sense of self, their leisure activities, friendship groups and their sense of freedom.

This chapter examines to what extent becoming pregnant in their teenage years shaped and influenced the young women's life plans and aspirations for education. This chapter identifies the ways in which the young women felt becoming pregnant affected their lives, with a particular focus on their education.

Overall, this chapter explores the extent to which pregnancy shaped and influenced the education of the young women involved in this study. In particular, this chapter highlights how this process of transition and transformation is one of hope and excitement, as well as one of loss and uncertainty. It is argued the ways in which the young women's lives have changed are normatively constrained. That is, subject to dichotomous judgement of positive/negative, appropriate/inappropriate in relation to their mothering abilities and contribution to society. This chapter explores the kinds of dispositions, actions and subjects the young women privileged and aspired to.

### **Recognition of an alternative trajectory**

It will be demonstrated in this section that all of the young women in this study acknowledged, to varying degrees, the impact pregnancy had on their lives. At one end of the spectrum they recognised that becoming pregnant had caused them to become more

mature and sensible, something which all of the young women expressed. At the other end of the continuum, some of the young women believed that if they had not become pregnant their life would have taken a completely different trajectory.

Some of the young women perceived their pregnancy to have had a profound impact on their lives, believing that becoming pregnant had significantly altered the future direction of their lives. Out of the fourteen young women involved in this study Amber, Claire and Jade can be interpreted as experiencing an alternative trajectory as a result of pregnancy. The term alternative trajectory is employed as their narratives described two parallel lives, one in which they did not become pregnant and one in which they did, comparing and contrasting the life they thought they would be living and the kinds of activities they would be engaged in. The term trajectory is commonly referred to as 'the continuation of a direction, it is the inertia in our lives that results from the sum of forces that propel us towards a destination' (Wheaton and Gotlib, 1997: 1). Pregnancy can therefore be seen as a turning point that 'is a disruption in a trajectory, a deflection in the path. Indeed, the essential characteristic of a turning point is that it changes the direction of a trajectory' (Wheaton and Gotlib, 1997: 1). Consequently, transitions often involve changes in status or identity, both personally and socially, and can be seen to open up opportunities for significant behavioural change (Elder *et al.*, 2006).

For this group of young women pregnancy represented a highly fateful moment in their lives. Using Giddens' (1991: 113) analogy, their pregnancy resulted in them standing 'at a crossroads in their existence'. This is a useful analogy to describe the young women's experiences as they discussed how becoming pregnant caused them to reflect on their experiences prior to pregnancy and how they wished to change their current and future

situation. The young women commonly adopted similar terminology in their own narratives, using phrases such as "*show you the paths*", "*what roads you can go down*", "*route*" and "*direction*" to describe their experiences and decisions. Giddens (1991) would claim that the young women embarked on a 'project of self', requiring them to consider the consequences of particular choices and actions and so engage in an assessment of risk during their transition from young woman to young mother. The accounts of Amber and Jade will now be drawn upon to illustrate how they experienced an alternative trajectory as a result of pregnancy. Their narratives have been chosen for comparison as they illuminate the perceived impact of pregnancy pre-16 (Jade) and post-16 (Amber).

**Amber - "*god forbid what would have happened*"**

As illustrated in Chapter Four, when Amber's father was diagnosed with dementia she explained she turned to alcohol and drugs as a form of escapism. During her interview Amber reflected on this point in her life:

*I was really bad, I was doing crime and hanging around with the wrong people. My mum used to tell me, but I didn't realise and when I had a baby it just made me think bloody hell, I was going down the wrong path. God forbid what would have happened now if I didn't have a baby.*

(Amber, 17 years old, mother)

Becoming pregnant was a critical turning point for Amber as it provided an opportunity to reevaluate her life and consider the consequences of her behaviour, as illustrated by her statement "*it just made me think bloody hell*". Pregnancy is often referred to in the literature as a 'wake-up call' for young women – as a time to reassess their lives and priorities for the sake of their child (Bell *et al.*, 2004; Seamark and Lings, 2004; Hosie, 2007). The

discovery of pregnancy can be seen to interrupt the normal flow of life as ‘things are wrenched out of joint’ (Giddens, 1991: 113). Pregnancy provided Amber with an opportunity to consider and reflect on her life and on her priorities.

Amber made frequent reference to her young age, using the popular phrase “*children having children*” to describe her mothering status. Amber was 17 years old when she gave birth. While to a certain extent, she wished she had waited until she was no longer a ‘child’ to have her daughter, on reflection, she recognised the advantages of having her daughter during her teenage years, as she explained:

*If I just put my mind to it and get through it, do my exams and get somewhere it would have been fine. But then I think if I was to do that I wouldn't have my daughter now because I wouldn't have met [the baby's father], do you know what I mean? So I'm glad I didn't change, but then I wish I did at the same time, so you can't really win.*

(Amber, 17 years old, mother)

Questions concerning when and whether to have a child are often complex, acknowledging both the advantages and disadvantages of having a baby (Luttrell, 2003). Amber's narrative exemplifies this complexity. On the one hand, Amber was “*glad*” she had her daughter. On the other hand, while not wishing to change her current circumstances, if her life had been different, if she had found herself in different circumstances, she would not have wished to have a baby during her teenage years, as she explained further:

*If I weren't like that and I knew I was going somewhere in life, then, erm, I probably would change, but because I was going down such a bad path I'm glad I*

*did get pregnant, because I would probably be in prison now if not. I was really bad, my mum couldn't handle me, social services got involved and it changed my life for the better when I found out I was pregnant.*

(Amber, 17 years old, mother)

Amber was pessimistic about her future and did not believe she was “*going somewhere in life*”. This illustrates the low expectations explanation for teenage motherhood, which has been noted by many British researchers (for example, Arai, 2003a; Garlick *et al.*, 1993). This also suggests that prior to pregnancy things were starting to escalate in Amber’s life and that the consequences of her actions were becoming more serious. Amber believed her relationship with alcohol, drugs and the police would eventually result in her committing a crime that was serious enough to be sent to prison. The involvement of social services demonstrates this was a critical period in Amber’s life. Giddens (1991) suggests experts tend to be brought in as fateful moments approach or when a fateful decision has to be taken. However, despite advice from her mother and social services about her behaviour, Amber did not change. Giddens (1991: 114) states that ‘there are relatively few situations where a decision as to what to do becomes clear-cut as a result of experts’ advice’. Amber did not perceive her behaviour prior to pregnancy as ultimately problematic and did not think she required change, as illustrated in “*my mum used to tell me, but I didn't realise*”.

Miller and Rollnick (2002) argue that in order to make significant changes to a person’s behaviour and lifestyle they must want, desire or will the change to occur. For Amber, it can be argued the most effective intervention was becoming pregnant, as this provided her with the impetus for change. Becoming pregnant caused Amber to reevaluate her life.

Amber subsequently stopped drinking alcohol and using drugs and she eventually moved

into her own flat and was proud to be living independently. At the time of interview Amber had enrolled on a college course to start that following September. However, Amber explained that despite the changes she had made to her life, she would still be viewed negatively by society:

*If you see someone come out of something, from like having a baby, that can change her life and do better in life, like get an education, I think most people would look at me and be like it's not good having a baby and you shouldn't think oh having a baby has changed my life, but then I see it in a way that because she has had a baby she is not in prison, do you know what I mean? She didn't go down that path, she changed her life and she wants to do something with herself, that's the way they have to see things, if they knew from my perspective, but obviously they are always going to judge you for it because you are a young mum at the end of the day. Anyone can be a mum, you've just, anyone can be a mum, just because you're young doesn't mean you're going to be a bad parent or you're not going to be able to cope, anyone can suffer from postnatal depression, anyone could be a bad mother, anyone can be a good mum, do you know what I mean?*  
(Amber, 17 years old, mother)

Phoenix (1991) explains constructions of 'young mother' and 'good mother' exist in public consciousness as mutually exclusive categories. Amber's narrative suggests the assumption that teenagers are too young to be good or capable mothers still prevails. There is an interesting shift from the first to the third person that perhaps illustrates how Amber wants to be perceived by others. Amber acknowledged the profound impact she believed pregnancy had on her life. This is how she wanted to be understood by others, not as an irresponsible teenage mother, but as a success story and a survivor, who managed to forge a new life for her and her child. However, Amber felt she would never be deemed a capable

or a good mother, as suggested in *"obviously they are always going to judge you for it because you are a young mum at the end of the day"*.

Amber was conscious of her social positioning as a young mother and how her early motherhood status would be negatively viewed and judged by others. Speaking of the experiences of working class women involved in her study, Skeggs (1997: 4) explains 'this constantly informs her responses. She operates with a dialogic form of recognition; she recognises the recognition of others. Recognitions do not occur without value judgements and the women are constantly aware of the judgements of real or imaginary others'. Amber needed her status and identity as a good and successful mother to be acknowledged and recognised by others in order to confirm and cement her understanding of self. Youdell (2006) explains subjects need meaning to be attached to them in order to make them accessible and intelligible. Consequently, 'the subject is understood as the person made in relations of productive power. Subjectivity, then, is taken as this subjectivated subject's particular subject position; her/his sense and experience of her/himself; as well as her/his audiences' understanding of "who" s/he is and can be' (Youdell, 2006: 48). These recognitions enable young women to navigate themselves through classificatory systems and measure and evaluate themselves accordingly. This illustrates the difficulties young women encounter in developing positive and respected identities as mothers.

Mirza (2006: 144) outlines how the young women involved in her study were driven by a 'desire to succeed against the odds'. This alludes to female exemplary heroines who have battled and won, who are deemed worthy of respect and recognition. This heroine construction was evident in Amber's narrative:

*I just hope she [her daughter] does well for herself. I want to sit here and tell her look what I have been through, I've struggled, and if she was to come and tell me at 16 that she was pregnant I wouldn't, I wouldn't stop her. By then I would hopefully be financially stable and I will be able to support her in a lot of other ways, but then in some ways I obviously hope that she doesn't come back and tell me she's pregnant and that she learns from my mistakes and that well think I'm going to do better for myself and that I'm going to have a child when I'm financially stable and I have got a nice house.*

(Amber, 17 years old, mother)

Amber can be seen to be constructing herself as a survivor, someone who has "*struggled*" but in the process has been able to create a successful and financially stable life for her and her daughter. Amber's desire for her daughter to learn from her mistakes and to "*do better*" suggests Amber recognised the stigma surrounding teenage pregnancy and did not consider her situation to be desirable or preferable. Amber's narrative is permeated with neoliberal discourse and firmly situates her as a project to be worked upon, to be improved and transformed. Amber can be seen to position herself as a site of change. Furthermore, she seems to believe that it is her responsibility to ensure this process of change and transformation is successful.

**Jade - "*when you have a baby like you completely change*"**

Jade, like Amber, described a very turbulent time at secondary school and found her parents divorce difficult to deal with, also turning to alcohol and drugs as a form of escapism. However, a key difference between Amber and Jade was that Jade became pregnant when she was fifteen and hence still of compulsory school age. Prior to pregnancy Jade had been excluded from mainstream education and was being home schooled. When Jade became pregnant she explained she "*had to be in education*" so was referred to the Young Mums to

Be Unit. This suggests Jade did not perceive home schooling to be ‘real’ education and that it was not until she became pregnant that professionals started to become more closely involved in her education, as she explained:

*I actually legally had to still be in education because of my age so [the Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officer], she was the one that had to sort all of that out for me, so I had to go there like school and erm, but it wasn't like maths and literacy and stuff like that, I enjoyed my time there [...] I liked going to [Young Mums to Be Unit] because, I think what I didn't like [about secondary school] and I know I was a kid at the time, but they treat you like a kid, but I didn't see myself as a kid.*

(Jade, 17 years old, mother)

Jade did not have the option to reengage with mainstream secondary school and was enrolled at the Young Mums to Be Unit on a full time basis. The local authority designated key resources to support Jade and she was assigned to a Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officer to help her reengage in education and to ensure she maintained her attendance. For Jade, becoming pregnant can be seen to have created an extra network of professional support.

Significant changes also occurred outside of education for Jade, as prior to pregnancy she was in a relationship that she classed as problematic. She explained:

*I just think I have done so much better with myself for having a kid, like, because before I had my son I was with someone and he was really really naughty and like going round town and just being really really bad. So I got out of that because he was doing cocaine and I said look I am pregnant, I'm not going to be with someone who is doing cocaine, so I got rid of him.*

(Jade, 17 years old, mother)

For Jade, becoming pregnant encouraged her to end the relationship with her boyfriend. The repeated use of the word "*really*" to describe his behaviour was felt to emphasise the extent and severity of his "*bad*" behaviour. Jade can be seen to highlight her ability to take control and assert her desires and wishes in order to do what she perceived was best for her and her child. Jade perceived that if she had not become pregnant she would still be with this person. Ending the relationship with her boyfriend can be seen as a significant change for Jade as she did not perceive positive consequences for her and her child if the relationship continued. The end of this relationship was a significant turning point for Jade as it resulted in a change in her social activities, which opened up opportunities for personal and behavioural change (Elder *et al.*, 2006). Jade went on to further emphasise the degree and extent to which her life had changed as a result of pregnancy:

*Well when you have a baby like you completely change, it just happens, you just don't even have to try, it just happens and if I hadn't of been pregnant with my son I would still be with that person now and I would still be the way I was. I was running away from home, not eating, I was just really really bad, I really was. I suppose that's basically the only reason why I was smoking weed, I was really bad when I was with him. My mum hated me and now we are really close so yeah he [her child] has made me a better person and like I almost think he has put my life on the straight and narrow and I don't think I would have come to college, I really don't.*  
(Jade, 17 years old, mother)

For Jade, the transition to motherhood reflected a dramatic change in her life, as suggested by, "*you completely change*". SmithBattle (2000: 35) explains mothering often 'anchors the self, fosters a sense of purpose and meaning, reweaves connections, and provides a new sense of future'. Jade's narrative suggests social relationships especially with her mother became prioritised and were invested in. Graham and McDermott (2005) explain through

these strong family orientations, teenage motherhood becomes a mode of social participation, not exclusion.

Jade perceived the changes that occurred in her life as natural and effortless, as indicated in the use of the phrase *“it just happens, you don’t even have to try”*. This suggests a strong maternal bond and thinking about the needs and interests of her child before he was even born. Similarly to Amber, Jade described her experiences prior to pregnancy as an inevitable escalation of events but that having a child helped put her *“life on the straight and narrow”*.

The narratives of Amber and Jade illustrate a striking contrast between their previous 'problem' identities, associated with secondary school, and their 'good' maternal identities. Hoggart (2012) explains that one aspect of young mothers claiming a 'good mother' identity involves distancing themselves from the 'wildness' of their past in taking on the responsibility of motherhood. Through their narratives, Amber and Jade seem to be responding to dominant discourses about teenage pregnancy, or as Luttrell (2003: 123) explains, 'turning what is framed as a problem into an opportunity'. Consistent with the findings of SmithBattle (2000) Amber and Jade's narratives illustrate their lives were transformed by becoming a mother. Pregnancy provided a 'corrective' experience, in which they no longer smoked, drank alcohol or took drugs. There was also a renewed desire to reengage in education, to distance themselves from what they deemed problematic friendships or relationships and a revaluation of their previous experiences. It can be argued that in Amber and Jade's accounts their own desire to make changes to their lives was more important, significant and effective than any externally imposed sanction or intervention

prior to pregnancy. They emphasised that for change to occur in their lives the desire and motivation for change had to come from within in.

### **More mature and sensible**

For Amber and Jade pregnancy had a profound impact on their lives. They perceived that it had brought about significant and dramatic change. However, for the majority of young women involved in this study pregnancy had a less significant impact. The extent to which becoming pregnant shaped the young women's lives seems to be dependent on the circumstances of their lives prior to pregnancy and the extent to which the young women understood and interpreted their lives in positive or negative ways.

While pregnant and mothering young women are commonly depicted as experiencing a multitude of 'risks' prior to pregnancy (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999), the majority of young women involved in this study spoke about their lives prior to pregnancy as normal and unproblematic. In comparison to Amber and Jade, this group of young women did not recognise any profound changes in their lives. Instead, their narratives were characterised by a commitment to doing "*what's right*" to ensure they became a responsible and dependable mother for their child. For example, Laura explained:

*I know that I have got to step up and be an adult now, whereas before I was pregnant I could act silly when I wanted to, I could do what I wanted to and no one would be bothered. But now I can't act silly, I can't go clubbing, I have got to do what's right for me and my baby and that's what I will do. So it's not going clubbing every weekend and wasting my money on McDonalds and stuff like that. My baby comes first so whatever my baby needs, my baby will have and I will get what I need after if I can.*

(Laura, 18 years old, pregnant)

Pregnancy provided a rite of passage to adulthood and the impetus to become more responsible and mature, as illustrated when Laura stated: *"I have got to step up and be an adult now"*. In contrast with stereotypical representations of teenage pregnancy, rather than a loss that jeopardised their future, the young women often described pregnancy and mothering as a gain that contributed to their maturity. Laura's statement: *"my baby comes first so whatever my baby needs, my baby will have"* draws on the wider public discourse which emphasises that a child's needs are paramount and that it is a woman's primary role to look after and nurture their child (Graham and McDermott, 2005). Being able to provide for their child, especially financially, was equated with good mothering. Laura can therefore be seen to be drawing attention to and highlighting that she is a caring and responsible mother who gives primacy to her relationship with her child.

Becoming a young mother can help provide a strong sense of identity, belonging and purpose as the mother is now responsible for another person's life (Rolfe, 2008). This can arouse feelings of maturity, responsibility, self-worth and a new focus for their lives (Hendessi and Dodwell, 2002; Clemmens, 2003). The young women can be seen to be rejecting the teenage mother as an unfit mother identity by investing in what they perceived to be a good mother identity (McDermott and Graham, 2005). Rolfe (2008) explains this commonly includes projecting a self-sufficient and autonomous image, a young woman who is mature, sensible, responsible and financially independent. Emphasising their maturity and responsibility can be interpreted as an attempt to challenge and contradict dominant representations of teenage mothers as too immature to be good mothers. Their narratives provide an alternative view of young women who are often represented as irresponsible, irrational or feckless. Rather, Ellison (2003) argues deciding to continue with pregnancy can be seen to represent active agency, self-determination and responsibility.

In becoming a mother the young women can be seen to be in the process of adopting their new roles and responsibilities, though which they envisaged a particular set of norms and expectations associated with their new motherhood status. The young women had strong views about what constituted good, responsible and appropriate behaviours and actions during pregnancy. For example, Fay explained:

*Everything, absolutely everything, I couldn't even describe it in words ... it's unbelievable, like, before I got pregnant I'd drink and, well I wouldn't like drink excessively like there are a lot of people my age that go out and drink on the streets and I was never like that, but I would drink till I got drunk and yeah like I smoked and I took drugs on the odd occasion, I'm not going to lie and I used to smoke weed, but for my daughter, it's not like I'm not proud of saying oh I've stopped everything for her because I am proud, but I did stop everything for my daughter and so you should, do you know what I mean? And so I should stop all of that, I've stopped everything for my daughter.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

Consistent with the findings of Gilchrist *et al.*, (1996) the young women explained they had stopped smoking, drinking alcohol and illicit drug use during pregnancy. For Fay, this change in behaviour was not necessarily something to be proud of, rather it was seen as a moral responsibility.

## **Education**

This section focuses specifically on how the young women felt becoming pregnant affected their education. As illustrated in Chapter Four all of the young women, to varying degrees, explained they disliked secondary school and felt disengaged. Regardless of their school status prior to pregnancy, almost all of the young women described the emergence of new

educational priorities and concerns for their future once they became pregnant. For some of the young women, it was not so much a case of continuing their education, but rather of reengaging in education after either being self or formally excluded from the education system.

Following the advice of Hosie (2007) it is important to place the young women's experiences within an achievement context, with successful educational outcomes being defined by increased attendance rates and academic results, but also by changed opinions about the value of education and longer term planning for education and employment. Deyhle and Margonis (1995) argue a broader definition of educational success is vital as traditional theories of analysis tend to consider and judge educational results and practices only through the lens of the ideal middle class student and worker.

Out of the fourteen young women involved in this study, ten were engaged in some form of education at the time of interview (see Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1** Educational location at the time of interview

<b>Educational setting attended</b>	<b>Under 16</b>	<b>Post 16</b>
Mainstream secondary school	2	0
Young Mums to Be Unit	2	2
College	0	4

The majority of young women were involved in education at the time of interview. Some young women spoke about how becoming pregnant had given them a new sense of

direction in their life and how they felt more mature and responsible. For example, Danielle and Katie thought that becoming pregnant gave them a sense of purpose and meaning that they felt they lacked prior to pregnancy:

*I would have probably been kicked out of school, then I just wouldn't have cared and I would have carried on the way I was being. But when I found out I was pregnant I just stopped going out and stuff, I went to school every day and stuff.*  
(Danielle, 16 years old, pregnant)

*I just decided one day that I wanted to make something out of my life [laughs] so I came here [college].*  
(Katie, 18 years old, mother)

For Danielle, school success had been a low priority before pregnancy, but she explained the responsibility of caring for a child provided a compelling reason for her to reinvest in education, a finding that is consistent with previous research (Pillow, 2004; Kendall *et al.*, 2005). The young women, especially those who were disengaged from education prior to pregnancy, commonly saw their pregnancy as a wake-up call, a time to reassess their lives and their priorities for the sake of their child. Similar to the findings of Hoggart (2012) one aspect of young women claiming a 'good mother' identity involves the assertion that becoming a mother had improved their engagement with education. Their changing attitudes towards education was part of their good student and mother identity, engaging in education and achieving good GCSE grades had therefore become increasingly important to some of the young women. For example:

*To sit all my GCSE's and try and get the best grades I can [...] to try and get a future for me and my baby.*  
(Gemma, 16 years old, pregnant)

*Hopefully I will go to college and get a job and get my own place.*

(Ellie, 16 years old, pregnant)

Consistent with the findings of Camarena *et al.*, (1998: 132), for some of the young women, 'new life goals and a seriousness of purpose were developed "because of" the parent role and realization that the best way to ensure "a better life for my child" is to plan and work now to achieve future happiness and security'. There was a clear sense of a revaluing of education that was seen to be central to being a responsible mother, as Danielle explained:

Danielle: *I had never really considered college or anything but I seem to be doing like that and wanting a job and everything, whereas I didn't before.*

Kay: *So why do you want to do that now then?*

Danielle: *For his sake.*

Vincent (2010) asserts achieving educational qualifications and securing a financially stable future for one's child is increasingly central to the definition of good mothering in the twenty-first century. The young women's often negative accounts of secondary school contrasted with their positive constructions of education. The importance of gaining qualifications and having a job featured strongly in their transitions to motherhood. Pregnancy was equated with a revaluing of and reengagement with education.

The young women's narratives illustrate changing attitudes towards education and a heightened sense of motivation to engage in education and to achieve recognised qualifications. Their accounts emphasised how their child provided a strong incentive to

engage in education. However, this is not to suggest that all that was required was a change in attitude from the young women. This would suggest negative attitudes towards education were merely the result of the young women's outlook and that it is a choice, something that is within their control. This would be a very simplistic explanation that fails to take into account factors such as teaching. Rather their accounts of education illustrate how becoming pregnant influenced the support and educational provision made available to them. The Department for Education and Schools (2001: 5) state 'the school should ensure that the young woman continues learning as long as possible until the birth by exploring all opportunities for curriculum support available'. For example, Gemma who was in mainstream education explained:

*I get more support now [...] sometimes I don't really go into the classroom, I just go and sit somewhere else and do my work because I find it easier.*  
(Gemma, 15 years old, pregnant)

Kelly (2000) describes this as the 'safe haven' approach in which pregnant and mothering young women are placed in separate classes. This approach is seen to protect them, but also support and encourage their learning and independence. Gemma believed having a separate learning space had been highly beneficial for her learning, as she stated:

*I just think I have settled down more and I have put my head down and I get on with what I wanna do.*  
(Gemma, 15 years old, pregnant)

An alternative setting with different relationship dynamics can create a much needed and valued second chance at education (Crozier and Tracey, 1999; Pomeroy, 2000). Similarly,

extra support and intervention was offered to Danielle in the form of a part-time timetable, which she thought was a desirable option:

*They said that I was going to be away from my friends, that I was going to be doing more, you're going to achieve more. So I thought I would give it a chance, it was just to see how it went. But then I liked it so I carried on with it.*

(Danielle, 16 years old, pregnant)

Within their narratives the young women highlighted how their student identities had been transformed. Pregnancy, alongside effective support interventions commonly provided a fresh start for the young women in which their attendance and engagement with academic learning increased. The young women also commonly reported changes in their behaviour and demeanour. Consistent with the findings of Archer *et al.*, (2010: 560) this process of change was linked to 'a notion of changing identity and the taking up of different forms of femininity'. For example, Holly explained:

*It has changed me obviously for the better because I used to be really naughty and I used to fight and now I won't even argue with people and it has made me more quiet as well.*

(Holly, 16 years old, pregnant)

Holly emphasised how becoming pregnant had influenced her behaviour and had changed her for the "better". Prior to pregnancy Holly described herself as a "brat" and spoke about how she was "really naughty" at school, by which she meant arguing with teachers and physically fighting with other students. As a result of pregnancy Holly can be seen to adopt the 'quiet girl' identity, embodying a passive and submissive attitude. Archer *et al.*, (2007: 565) argues:

this process required girls to become reflexive guardians of the self, transforming transgressive aspects of their femininities into more 'acceptable' (middle class) forms in order to achieve the promise of educational success and moral worth (to be 'good'). The young women's accounts of 'change' highlighted how there are only narrow discursive spaces available for working class girls to be 'good' within the contemporary UK education system.

The young women's narratives suggest that they desired to be 'good' through engaging in education, achieving recognised qualifications and conforming to the rules and regulations of the school and notions of femininity. A detailed explanation of why the young women desired to change once they became pregnant is presented in Chapter Six.

Consistent with the findings of Vincent (2012: 113, original emphasis) there was an 'idea that they could be mothers *and* do other things too'. Melissa spoke of an expectation for the young women at the Young Mums to Be Unit to engage in education and to go on to further study and/or employment and that this was desirable and possible:

*She [Young Mums to Be worker] does always ask what we are going to do after so we do talk about it, but I just haven't really researched into it a lot at the moment.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

However, some of the young women had a pessimistic attitude about their education now they were pregnant. Holly can be seen to be the most ambivalent about her future:

*I think you should just like talk to them about what will happen, but they don't do that. So they should sit them down and say like what it is going to do to like their future and they should like meet people like me now, like about erm... like you get*

*kicked out school, you get pregnant and that's it really you can't go back to school, you can't do your GCSEs. They should just be good.*

(Holly, 16 years old, pregnant)

Holly believed she should be used as an example to other students to encourage them to behave at school and as a deterrent not to become pregnant. Holly believed her educational options were limited due to her pregnancy and that she could not return to mainstream education and sit her GCSEs. It can be argued that Holly positioned her pregnancy as a deviant act, as suggested in *"they should just be good"*. In Kelly's (2000) research she observed schools commonly use teenage mothers as role models for other students, both as 'shining stars' and as 'reality communicators'. Holly believed she should be used as a 'reality communicator' for other students, to share her experiences in order to encourage them to *"be good"*.

While the majority of young women voiced a desire to remain in or to engage in education, there were three young women who explained they did not wish to participate in education, Beth, Imogen and Laura. These young women described negative experiences of school due to a variety of factors, but most significantly severe bullying, for example:

*I actually got so bullied that I got threatened to have my house burnt down with my mum and my nan in it and my nan was ill at the time. And saying horrible things about my nan when they knew that would hurt me and basically I didn't go into [school] for 6 weeks. I just had those 6 weeks off because I was too scared to go in because they told me that if I stepped foot in [school] I was going to get my face kicked in and stuff like that.*

(Laura, 18 years old, pregnant)

Laura's narrative was strongly influenced by her experiences of bullying and these experiences appear to have had a profound impact on her attitudes towards education, as she explained:

*I will be glad when I am out of education all together, even though I have done alright at [local college], I will just be glad to get it over with.*

(Laura, 18 years old, pregnant)

In the words of Brause (1992) Laura 'endured' her education, she saw it as a necessary phase of her life which she had to pass through and leaving education was seen to represent a key transition, as she stated:

*That's a part of my life that I don't have to go back on and relive and I can focus on my new life.*

(Laura, 18 years old, pregnant)

Leaving education represented a passing of the old and into the new for Laura. She envisaged leaving her past behind and starting afresh in her new life as a mother. Later in the interview, Laura explained in more detail what it was about education she disliked:

*The people that I met, the people that knew me, judged me, criticised and was just horrible. I am just glad that I can say that after this couple of weeks I can kiss it all goodbye because that's in the past now and I don't have to relive going to college or anything.*

(Laura, 18 years old, pregnant)

It seems it was the emotional and social aspects of school that Laura expressed the most dislike for, not learning itself. This suggests Laura was not disengaged from learning *per*

se, but the relationships that college represented. It can be argued a stronger sense of achievement and identity could be found through motherhood for Laura than she experienced in school. Graham and McDermott (2005) explain the unpaid carer identity and the mother-child relationship becomes more critical to these young women's sense of self than the paid worker identity. Laura was looking forward to her future, stating "*I can focus on my new life*" – this new life was motherhood.

### **A sense of loss**

It has been illustrated how pregnancy was often depicted as a catalyst for change, a time to reevaluate and change their lives. However, processes of change inevitably involve a sense of loss, an abandonment of the old self. While this process of change was often discussed in highly positive terms, some of the young women reflected on the negative aspects of change. The process of becoming a mother, regardless of age, is rarely unproblematic and it is commonly characterised by ambivalence and disruption, as well as happiness and fulfilment (Miller, 2005; Shelton and Johnson, 2006).

The young women's accounts of motherhood were often mixed and contradictory, while they often highlighted the rewards and pleasures of pregnancy and motherhood, they also recognised key challenges. Vincent (2012) explains becoming pregnant and being the primary caregiver of a newborn baby will inevitably impact on young women's daily routines and restrict their freedom. Similarly to the findings of Moloney *et al.*, (2010), for many young women, one of the most significant transitions to motherhood involved the realisation of a loss of adolescent freedom. Vincent (2012: 28) explains:

the internal conflicts and external pressures that the young women had to resolve included how to balance personal needs and desires to lead a normal adolescent life with those of the desires of motherhood and those of an unborn child and how to take an independent stance within the constraints of dependence.

Holly's narrative reflects this dilemma of wishing to lead a normal adolescent life with motherhood:

*Well basically my aunty she said you should you should [have an abortion] and I was like no it's a baby and she was like yeah but you are only sixteen and all this and I thought about it and sometimes I think I should have done that because I see girls my age out drinking, partying and all that and I am sat there and I am like I'm pregnant, I can't do nothing. I sometimes think about it, but then again I think the outcome of having a baby will be a lot better than having a hangover. So I am glad I didn't, I don't think I could have done it.*

(Holly, 16 years old, pregnant)

There appears to be a perception that Holly was too young to have a baby, as her aunty stressed the fact that she was "*only sixteen*". Holly's narrative highlights and emphasises the loss of adolescent freedom. Holly believed becoming pregnant had prevented her from engaging in the leisure activities her friends were engaging in and that she effectively could do "*nothing*" as a pregnant teenager. The young women's narratives indicated a change in interests, responsibilities and commitments in comparison to their friends, as Danielle explained:

*It has stopped me from doing things that I used to, like I was drinking a lot and smoking and stuff, that was part of the reason I was misbehaving because I was drinking and stuff, but like I completely stopped all that.*

(Danielle, 16 years old, pregnant)

Pregnancy often led to a sense of separation as their friends continued to socialise primarily through drinking alcohol and smoking. The young women explained these were activities they did not partake in once they became pregnant. Consequently, this often led to a loss of friendship, as Amber and Danielle explained:

*You realise when you have children you don't really have friends, because people have their own life and want to go out and have fun, so you don't, they don't really bother with you anymore.*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

*I don't really talk to the same people as I was talking to before, it kind of drifted away once I like fell pregnant because I didn't drink or go out as much. I wasn't doing the same stuff. I don't really go out a lot [laughs] I just stay in, go to school, come back, have a bath, go to bed [laughs].*

(Danielle, 16 years old, pregnant)

## **Summary**

This chapter has critically considered the influence of pregnancy and motherhood. A narrative of change and reform was highly recurrent in the young women's accounts. They positioned themselves as having undergone a transformation during pregnancy in terms of their behaviour, attitudes and educational engagement. A common theme running through the young women's narratives was that teenage pregnancy was seen as an opportunity for change, whether that was in relation to education, restoring relationships or ending what they deemed problematic relationships, to stopping smoking, drinking alcohol and taking drugs.

Their accounts of pregnancy reveal both their vulnerability and their resilience, dependence and independence, and the need to make life altering decisions and to take responsibility for them. The ways in which the young women negotiated the boundaries of appropriate maternal behaviour was complex and they can be seen to be drawing on notions of good and respectable mothering practices. Some of the young women can be seen to be resisting the stereotypical view of teenage pregnancy, acting outside of the terms of this discourse, challenging the construction of teenage pregnancy as abnormal, undesirable and problematic. Through discussing the influence of pregnancy the young women commonly constructed teenage pregnancy not as a source of shame, or exclusion, but something to be enjoyed, celebrated and to be viewed positively. Yet the young women recognised the difficulties surrounding challenging negative perceptions and understandings of teenage pregnancy and motherhood. Thus this suggests asserting a new or altered sense of identity is difficult and complex for young women to establish. The young women's transformations might be simultaneously read on various levels, as 'success stories' of young women who are making changes to their lives, and as examples of how society regulates the working class female subject and produces normative femininities. In order to distance themselves from the negative discourses around teenage pregnancy they sought to align with dominant constructions of the good citizen and good mother. The young women were aware of the stigma associated with teenage pregnancy and expressed a desire to change. However, it can be argued that the opportunities for change available to them are constrained by limited and limiting notions of what constitutes a successful subject.

The analysis presented thus far has explored the lives and experiences of the young women prior to pregnancy and how pregnancy has shaped and impacted their lives. The next

chapter critically considers the young women's motivations for change, examining why they desired to change and alter their lives.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MOTIVATIONS FOR CHANGE

#### Introduction

It was argued in Chapter Five that all of the young women involved in this study, to varying degrees, believed that becoming pregnant had led to positive changes in their attitudes, behaviour and lifestyle. Eleven out of fourteen young women explained that their pregnancy had impacted their attitudes towards education and that they had an increased desire to engage in education and achieve recognised qualifications. They also commented that their pregnancy encouraged them to think and reflect upon their lives, often leading to behavioural and lifestyle changes in relation to friendships and relationships, and alcohol and drug use.

Whilst it is important to understand the perceived changes that have taken place in the young women's lives, it is also important to understand their motivations for change.

Understanding why these young women felt a need or desire to change their lives will help provide a more comprehensive understanding of their experience. This chapter builds on the previous analysis presented thus far by considering, not *how* their lives have changed, but *why* they desired to change their lives. Sayer (2011: 140) explains that 'on its own, the concept of human agency implies the ability to choose to do things, but gives no indication of why we would want to'. Simply acknowledging how the lives of pregnant and mothering young women have changed does not take into account the factors that shape and influence their thoughts, decisions and actions. Exploring and analysing people's motivations for

change is therefore imperative in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of their experience.

In using the title 'motivations for change' there is a danger of positioning agency as voluntarist, viewing the individual as able to act and think independently of social structures and their ideologies (Jones, 1997). This chapter does not intend to suggest that the young women's desires or actions necessarily represent choices that are rational, deliberate and in the pursuit of narrow self-interest. It is recognised that agency and choice do not convey the complexity of causes of action. Hindess (2015: 112) explains that 'what could be employed by an actor at any given time is never entirely a matter of choice, and where there is an element of choice that will be structured by the forms of thought available to that actor'.

Furthermore, Rose (1999: 1) asserts 'thoughts, feelings and actions may appear as the very fabric and constitution of the intimate self, but they are socially organized and managed in minute particulars'. Consequently, this chapter seeks to identify in the young women's narratives why they desired to change their lives, but rather than positioning their choices as entirely free, the factors that shaped and influenced their choices are also considered.

Previous research exploring teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point has tended to celebrate teenage mothers' renewed sense of motivation for education, with Barn and Mantovani (2007: 239) calling it 'remarkable'. However, it can be argued there tends to be a lack of exploration, or indeed problematisation, of the reasons why there is a renewed sense of motivation for education. Madhok *et al.*, (2013) argue that the term agency is now widely celebrated and evoked in ways that sometimes make it synonymous with individual

choice and as a consequence the existence and significance of external forces and coercion are rarely addressed. Giddens (1993) argues that exploring the significance and influence of agency without due consideration of structural factors provides an unhelpful and false dualism which polarises research into proponents of two opposing approaches. Rather than focusing on structure *or* agency, Giddens favours the idea of a duality of structure and agency, as he asserts they are not separate domains, but are 'two sides of the same coin'. Beck and Beck-Gernshiem (1995: 40) draw attention to the ways in which individual choice is tightly constrained by structural factors:

coupled with this interest in 'the individual solution' there is however considerable pressure to conform and behave in a standardized way; the means which encourage individualism also induce sameness ... The situations which arise are contradictory because double-faced: individual decisions are heavily dependent on outside influences.

Consequently, this chapter situates the young women's motivations for change within wider social structures that shape and influence their decisions to engage in education. Their narratives are analysed and interpreted as to some extent consequential of societal demands, pressures and expectations to become respectable and productive citizens.

This chapter is divided into five sections in order to explore the motivations of the young women to engage in education and to help contextualise these motivations. The first section explores dominant discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood and how these stereotypical representations were employed in the young women's narratives to shape, construct and justify their experiences, views and opinions.

The second section illustrates how the young women aligned with traditional definitions of inclusion, positioning themselves as either socially included or socially excluded on the premise of whether they obtained paid employment.

The subsequent section provides a critique of normative modes of success and participation and questions to what extent economic security and independence can be achieved through education and employment. This section draws attention to the illusion of social mobility through education which is implicit in discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood.

The fourth section explores the young women's desire for respectability and how their motivations for engaging in education were heavily influenced by a wish to be seen as a good mother, a successful student and an effective employee. The final section illustrates the complexities between these different identities, mother-student-worker, and how their motivations to engage in education and employment were often filled with ambiguity as they attempted to find the right balance between being what they understood as a good mother and a good citizen.

Overall, this chapter aims to problematise the celebration of individual choice and agency amongst pregnant and mothering young women. This chapter explores the factors that shape and influence young women's desires for change and critically considers to what extent they are entirely free to choose.

## **Dominant discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood**

Allard (2007) argues that in the twenty-first century the surveillance of working class women and the choices they make regarding education, employment and family has intensified. Young (1999: vii) explains that 'at no other time have so many people gazed at so many others and has every normative nuance been so measuredly scrutinized'. This growing contemporary emphasis on the freely choosing individual asserts that individuals are capable of freely forming and changing their lives (Mulhall and Swift, 1996). "Choice" here is understood as a rational decision arising from consideration of a wide range of options, with many alternatives available to all individuals' (Allard, 2007: 146). This has led to moral judgments about young women's lives and pregnant and mothering young women can find themselves defined from the outside, positioned, placed and judged in relation to dominant expectations and norms. Vincent and Thomson (2013: 7) explain 'in not conforming to current norms about the appropriate age to begin childbearing, they have become moral scapegoats who are seen as having the "wrong" values, the "wrong" aspirations and making "wrong" choices'. This chapter therefore explores the ways in which normative expectations influence the young women's desires for change, what they considered possible, appropriate and positive.

There are powerful discourses that shape and construct the lives of pregnant and mothering young women. It was demonstrated in Chapter Four that the young women were often aware of their labelling as problem students prior to pregnancy. They were commonly perceived and positioned as lacking aspiration, troublemakers and from problem families. It can be seen that these labels and value judgements about their lives, choices and aspirations intensified as a result of becoming pregnant in their teenage years. All of the young

women's narratives illustrated an acute awareness of the stereotypical representations of young mothers in British society, for example:

*I think some people, like, they don't say it, but like, oh she's pregnant, she is so young, she is never going to do anything, she's not going to get an education, she's not going to get a job.*

(Danielle, 16 years old, pregnant)

*Just a lot of people think that young mums can't do it and that you don't have a paying job, blah, blah, blah, but it doesn't mean anything.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

*Some friends who have been like, oh I would never get pregnant and saying like, oh your life it's ruined.*

(Holly, 16 years old, pregnant)

*When you are a pregnant teenager everybody looks at you and thinks you know you haven't got a job and all this.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

The dominant discourse ascribed to young mothers is centred on deviance. The young women acknowledged the construction of teenage motherhood as a uniformly negative experience for both themselves, their children and for society as a whole. Childbirth is typically positioned as a positive event, one to be celebrated, but in the case of teenage mothers it is invariably positioned as a social or public health issue (Wilson and Huntington, 2005). There is a perception that becoming pregnant “ruins” the lives of teenage mothers, foreclosing their opportunities to be carefree teenagers, free from the burden of adult roles, responsibilities and expectations. However, the emphasis on the perceived loss of childhood and childhood experiences tends to be fleeting and minimal.

The predominant focus is placed on economic matters and the importance of family stability and traditional family values.

A central theme in the young women's accounts was the importance of financial security and the supposed benefits culture that exists amongst young mothers. There is a heavy emphasis on the curtailment of pregnant and mothering young women's current or future meaningful involvement in education and employment. There is an acknowledgement of the popular construct of teenage mothers as lacking aspiration, not engaging in any meaningful participation and as irresponsible welfare dependents (Lesko, 1990). In this way, the young women recognised that they were positioned in some assumed 'underclass', a culture characterised by low achievement, long term unemployment and unstable family structures (Young, 1999). However, Fay's use of "*blah, blah, blah*" suggests that while she commonly encountered this negative perception of teenage pregnancy and motherhood, she did not agree with this viewpoint and she implies a boredom and rejection of these dominant messages.

The stigma associated with teenage pregnancy and motherhood illustrates how an expectation for middle class women to achieve highly in education, to establish a professional career and then perhaps start a family has become the normative and expected trajectory for all women. Women in the Western world are judged and assessed by this standard. When they do not follow this trajectory, or do so in a different order, as is the case for pregnant and mothering young women, they become targets of marginalisation and stigmatisation (Wilson and Huntington, 2005). Normative and expected trajectories are therefore entwined with beliefs about how people should lead their lives and what makes a

life worthwhile. Mulhall and Swift (1996: 5) explain that inevitably this means that 'some ways of life are [viewed as] better, worthier or more valuable, than others'.

The recognition and marking of difference, in this case the trajectory women 'choose' to take, always implies a good/bad opposition, or in other words the existence of a positive and negative choice. In the process there is a 'devaluation, the naming of an inferiority in relation to a superior standard of humanity' (Young, 1990: 170). Women are therefore judged and assessed by the choices they make, which suggests they engage in a rational and deliberate process of decision-making. However, as Young (1990) insinuates this process of 'choosing' does not reflect choice *per se*, rather women's choices can be understood as more akin to limited or constrained choices based on their positioning within society.

This negative discourse of teenage pregnancy and motherhood was entwined throughout the young women's narratives and was frequently used as a basis to explain, justify and defend their decisions and actions. It is demonstrated in the proceeding sections of this chapter that there was a strong rejection and challenge to the stigma associated with teenage pregnancy and motherhood. Actively resisting and challenging this negative discourse of teenage pregnancy suggests how the young women felt compelled to prove they were not what they may be assumed to be by others. The young women no longer wanted to be seen as problems or to be experiencing problems, it was a subordinate identity they were seeking to distance themselves from. Their narratives suggest a recognition that they needed to conform to societal expectations and policy preferences otherwise they would be pathologised as unfit mothers and bad citizens. Drawing on the work of Bradford and Hey (2007: 596) the young women can be seen to be engaged in a struggle for a 'positive identification', which is referred to as 'the project of "successification" whose appeal lies in

its promise to offer pathways from recognisably disadvantaged spaces to more desirable ones'. In the following sections some of the young women can be seen to be constructing themselves as active agents, survivors and success stories rather than passive victims or failures.

### **Inclusion through education and paid employment**

Participation in education was commonly depicted in the young women's narratives as being central to the construction of a good and respectable mother. One of the most commonly cited reasons for wanting to engage in education and to obtain recognised qualifications was to increase their likelihood of securing paid employment in the future. Most of the young women had career aspirations in mind, though admittedly sometimes vague and ambivalent, they commonly cited gender-typical roles, such as nursery nursing, hairdressing, catering, midwifery and youth work. In order to achieve these aspirations they recognised the value and importance of education. Obtaining recognised qualifications was especially important for those who had no or few GCSEs at A\* - C grade, for example:

*I have no GCSEs, I have no qualifications, I have little bits, but not major bits that could of got me somewhere. So I have to start right from the beginning.*  
(Amber, 17 years old, mother)

*I think it's just because I didn't get any of my qualifications at school.*  
(Ellie, 16 years old, mother)

*Well I got through school obviously, but my qualifications were not very quite high [laughs] so that's why I have come to college to make them higher.*  
(Katie, 18 years old, mother)

There was a perception that low educational achievement and a lack of recognised qualifications was problematic as this could severely restrict their educational and career choices in the future. There was often a reflection on their previous educational experiences, voicing a desire to have achieved more highly during secondary school and a regret that they did not fully engage with their learning. Melissa explained:

*I think everyone comes out of school thinking they could have done a little better and you look back now and think oh if I had just listened then.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

Implicit in their accounts is the representation of the responsible citizen, in which they are required to maximise their own human capital in constructing a viable and rational identity that incorporates ambition and aspiration as principle elements of self (Bradford and Hey, 2007). There is a portrayal of the subject as one with individual rights, responsibilities and obligations. Responsibility to oneself, their child and society was central in their narratives, as highlighted by Gemma:

*To try and get a future for me and my baby, to give him what I didn't have and to have like a job and not be like some teenage mums where they are on benefits.*

(Gemma, 15 years old, pregnant)

Gemma's motivation to succeed in education suggests a yearning for an idealised future in which she is financially stable and able to support herself and her child. Holly defined a successful future as:

*A proper successful life would be like a nice car, nice house and you can pay all your bills and not worrying and stuff like that. I need a job. I need a job.*  
(Holly, 16 years old, pregnant)

Dominant negative discourses surrounding teenage motherhood can be seen, to a certain extent, to have provoked a sense of motivation and determination to engage in education and to achieve recognised qualifications. It was perceived that remaining or reengaging in education would help challenge the dominant stereotypical representations of teenage mothers as welfare dependent and unproductive citizens. The young women can be seen to be drawing upon and attempting to adopt the 'image of the man', which privileges self-consciousness, responsible action, intention and the ability to participate in society according to its prescribed rules (Henriques *et al.*, 1998).

Many of the young women saw engaging in education as a way of distancing themselves from the negative discourses surrounding teenage motherhood. It provided an opportunity to prove that they were “*not like some teenage mums*” who were living in poverty and dependent on state assistance. Engaging in education was seen as a means to counteract the dominant negative discourse surrounding teenage motherhood, as they could demonstrate that while they had become pregnant during their teenage years, they had gone on to achieve.

The young women can be seen to identify with traditional notions of success, in which identity and belonging are secured through paid employment and that a person's relationship with the labour market determines whether they are socially included or socially excluded (Levitas, 1998; Fergusson, 2004). Paid work itself was constructed as

almost a condition of citizenship (Levitas, 1998) and as the backbone of the standard biography (Beck, 1992). The young women can be seen to accept this dominant discourse, as they commonly perceived paid employment as a key indicator of success and they wished to conform to those behaviours they believed conferred success. Holly, in particular, aligned very closely with this dominant discourse:

*I think, like, I have to go to college really because if I don't get like the qualifications and that then I will be a bum. Like it is bad enough that I am sixteen and pregnant and obviously I haven't got any GCSEs and that and I obviously want a good life for my child, so yeah I have to do it because if I don't I won't get a good job and I will be a bum!*

(Holly, 16 years old, pregnant)

Implicit in Holly's narrative is an acute awareness of her age and lack of recognised qualifications at the time of pregnancy, describing her situation as problematic "*it is bad enough*". Holly appeared to be the most ambivalent about her pregnancy and her description can be seen to closely align with the negative discourse surrounding teenage pregnancy. Similar to the findings of Lesko (1990) it can be seen that Holly believed engaging in education would, to a certain extent, help remedy her 'problematic' status as a young, uneducated and unemployed mother. This suggests a strong emphasis on the need for change in order to take up morally defensible positions and to redeem herself from previous mistakes in order to take up the position of a 'good mother' (Lesko, 1990; Lesko, 1995).

Pregnant and mothering young women can be seen to deviate from an allegedly neutral standard of citizenship which results in an internalised devaluation of their bodies,

achievements and aspirations. The aim of assimilating with normative notions of success and participation demands ‘that they “fit”, to be like the mainstream, in behaviour, values, and goals’ (Young, 1990: 165). Holly’s narrative suggests she was concerned about failing to meet the standards of self-transformation demanded of her and transgressing prevailing social norms surrounding definitions of success and participation.

Engaging in education was therefore commonly envisaged as the road to redemption and as the process of delivering themselves from their ‘fallen’ status as teenage mothers (Luttrell, 2003). There was a perception that if they assimilated to normative notions of success and participation they would be rewarded with a “*good life*” which contained material goods, security and a home to call their own. If they did not align with normative definitions of participation they believed they would be devalued and defined as deviant in relation to the norm. Difference was identified as dichotomous hierarchical oppositions, good/bad, normal/deviant and productive/unproductive. As illustrated in Holly’s narrative above she frequently referred to herself as a “*bum*”, this word appeared in other young women’s narratives, for example:

*I would have probably still being bumming it at my mum’s now if I didn’t get pregnant.*

(Claire, 18 years old, mother)

The term “*bum*” is frequently used in British society to refer to a shiftless person who is dependent on financial support from the government. This can be seen as a problematic term to define oneself as it suggests a sense of worthlessness and a lack of belonging within society, relegating non-participation to the status of ‘Other’, who does not form part of

society as a whole (Mann, 1994; Levitas, 1996). Williamson (1997: 78) uses the powerful, yet contentious metaphor of 'Status ZerO', to refer to young people who are not in education, employment or training, as they appear to 'count for nothing and appear to be going nowhere'. Young people defined as NEET have become youth's new 'underclass' (Ainley, 2013). Within this discourse those who 'fail' are branded, and to some degree, come to see themselves as valueless or 'nothings' (Reay and William, 1999).

Social inclusion is increasingly defined in British society in terms of engagement and achievement in education and employment, regardless of family responsibilities. Young (1990: 166) argues that 'the standpoint of the privileged, their particular experiences and standards, is constructed as normal and neutral. If some groups' experience differs from this neutral experience, or they do not measure up to those standards, their difference is constructed as deviance and inferiority'. The privileging of Western values such as economic success and social status has therefore positioned teenage mothers' perceived dependency on state benefits and their lack of involvement in education and the labour market as highly problematic. Obtaining recognised qualifications and paid employment was therefore seen as vital by the young women in order to escape the stereotypical representations of young mothers as irresponsible welfare dependants. They can be seen to be engaged in a process of comparison, comparing their experiences, achievements and lives in relation to the rules, standards and expectations that are defined and set by the privileged group, the middle and upper classes.

The narratives of those who wished to engage in education suggest they perceived education as a means of social mobility and self-transformation. This aligns with government policy which advocates participating in education will open up more

opportunities for paid employment which will subsequently lead to economic security (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007). Dependency on the state for direct financial or material support is regarded as problematic and the government sees itself as responsible for generating opportunities and resources that enable pregnant and mothering young women to contribute to society (Dwyer, 2002).

Providing support for young mothers to engage in education can be seen to be based on this economic principle, whereby ‘the aim of improving support for teenage mothers is that they will not need to claim means tested benefits in the long term as they will have the means to support themselves’ (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007: 56). This pro-work agenda can be seen to place considerable pressure and expectation on pregnant and mothering young women to engage with education and employment.

Gouldner (1971: 76-77) points out that ‘increasingly the Welfare State’s strategy is to transform the sick, deviant, and the unskilled into “useful citizens”, and to return them to “society” only after periods of hospitalization, treatment, counselling, training or retraining’. From this perspective, young mothers must be supported through education and training in order to meet their obligations as citizens and to achieve economic independence. This suggests that young mothers’ participation in education is no longer perceived by society as a right, but as something they owe to their children and to society (Luttrell, 2003). This is based on the premise that education is seen to lead to paid employment, which prevents them from becoming welfare dependent and a burden to the taxpayer (Pillow, 2004).

Conceptualising education for young mothers in this way suggests that engaging in education and obtaining recognised qualifications is a necessity for pregnant and mothering young women, a responsibility that has to be fulfilled, which can be seen in the repeated use of the phrases “*I have to*” or “*I need to*” in their narratives of education. This “*need*” for academic success can be interpreted as not only a longing for a financially stable future, but also to feel confident and proud in themselves, a desire to prove themselves capable and competent. However, it also positions young women as individually responsible for their own salvation and that with hard work, discipline and a constantly inward looking concern with improving their own circumstances they can be redeemed. Beck (1992: 135) asserts ‘individualization in this sense means that each person’s biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her own hands, open and dependent on decisions’. The conditions of pregnant and mothering young women's lives are therefore seen to be open and contingent on the choices they make and that anything is possible, with the right amount of effort and determination, within an individualised and supposedly egalitarian society. This positions young women as independent and agentic subjects who are able to take control of their lives.

The positioning and construction of education as a responsibility rather than a right reflects Luttrell’s (2003) analysis of schooling for pregnant young women. Luttrell (2003: 21) identified implicit messages that were embedded in the curriculum and teaching practices, for example, ‘your child needs you to be educated’ and ‘you got yourself into this mess and now you’re going to get yourself out of it by getting an education’. These messages were apparent in the young women’s narratives in this research study, as there was an acknowledgement of their social obligation to engage in education.

The expectation for pregnant and mothering young women to engage in education and employment is influenced by changing social and political imperatives surrounding the role of women in the labour market in the West. The Western world now ‘increasingly demands an extended education, and in which delayed childbearing, smaller families, two income households, and careers for women are increasingly becoming the norm’ (UNICEF, 2001: 6). Teenage motherhood is therefore seen as a distinct disadvantage and Griffin (1993: 38) argues that teenage mothers are stigmatised and condemned by a system in which ‘normality is defined in terms of white middle-class linguistic and cultural practices and family forms’. Lister (2007) argues that placing a heavy emphasis and value on paid forms of employment in comparison to unpaid care work, including mothering, risks perpetuating and undermining different forms of participation that exist within society.

### **Illusion of social mobility through education**

The young women’s desires to obtain recognised qualifications in order to secure paid employment and to achieve financial stability can be seen to be fraught with difficulties and contradictions. Walkerdine *et al.*, (2001: 25) caution against the generalising tendency of discourses surrounding social mobility and draw attention to the ‘illusion of social mobility through education’ which is implicit in these discourses. Successive governments have presented obtaining paid employment as a significant factor in the alleviation of poverty. The importance of achieving recognised qualifications in order to secure paid employment is explicit in government rhetoric and the young women’s own narratives. However, Devins *et al.*, (2014) argue that entering employment does not always prove to be a sustainable route out of poverty as there are substantial issues in the twenty-first century surrounding job security, wages and career progression.

While the young women involved in this study often subscribed to the notion that engaging in education and employment would result in a "*better*" life for themselves and their child, Nikki and Katie can be seen to have recognised this 'illusion of social mobility through education'. Their narratives suggest they were 'ceasing to believe in education as an agent for moving their lives forward into a meaningful and productive adult world' (Ainley, 2013: 54). In particular, Nikki highlighted a distinction between the type of education she was engaged in and the value and prestige her educational qualifications were attributed by the labour market. She explained:

Nikki: *If I continue in education it's not really going to get me a job, well not this education anyway [Young Mums to Be course], but then again, whatever we get from being here then gets put into account when you go for a job and you can be like you have got this NVQ or whatever so....*

Kay: *Why don't you think this kind of qualification won't help you get a job?*

Nikki: *I don't know, I think it might do put together with your English, but then I think if that's your only grade, that one thing it is not really going to help you, is it? Like, whereas, if you have done English you have got more of a chance of getting a better job than you would do with this course.*

Nikki's account illustrates her scepticism about whether she will be able to gain any form of employment in the future with "*this course*". Wolf (2011) states that many vocational qualifications are effectively 'worthless' in terms of individual labour-market returns and that consequently many young people will not benefit from the education system. This highlights the uncertainties facing young women with few or no recognised qualifications or if their qualifications are not A\* - C grade or equivalent. Nikki recognised that employers in the current labour market are increasingly demanding an educated and well

trained workforce. The strong emphasis on educational qualifications has created a highly competitive employment market which has resulted in a drive towards the achievement of more and higher qualifications (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001).

The privileging of recognised qualifications made Nikki question the value and worth of the Young Mums to Be course she was attending at the time of interview. While Nikki and other young women involved in this study often explained the benefits of attending the course, such as making friends with other young mothers, increased confidence and something to help occupy their time, they often saw no employability value. This raises questions about the purpose and role of education. The young women in this study can be seen to align with what Ball (2013) terms 'education as outcomes', which reflects an approach to the purpose and role of education as the acquisition of qualifications in order to meet the needs of the economy. Broader definitions of education would also recognise improved self-confidence and social skills as central to the purpose of education.

Nikki believed the likelihood of her gaining paid employment in the future would increase if she achieved her GCSE English, which is now commonly a basic requirement for most forms of employment. This signifies a hierarchy of education in which certain qualifications are privileged and recognised which results in a clear distinction between those who have and do not have the required qualifications to be deemed employable. Failure to gain recognised qualifications is currently used as a major indicator and predictor of long-term individual social and economic problems (Bessant *et al.*, 2003).

In addition to the recognised hierarchical nature of education, there was also a perception that if they were employed it was likely that they would be engaged in labour that

incorporated little or no training and few, if any, possibilities for advancement or salary enhancement. For example, Katie explained:

*No matter how long I am in college for it's not really going to affect how much I get paid [...] I could start work at sixteen and work till I am eighteen and I could start work now and I would still be paid the same, so it doesn't really matter.*

(Katie, 18 years old, mother)

Katie was studying at college for her NVQ Level 1 in Childcare and aspired to become a nursery nurse. The early years sector is widely acknowledged to be highly gendered and commonly characterised by low pay, low status and poor career progression (Devins *et al.*, 2014). It could be argued that Katie demonstrated a short sightedness in relation to her education as she did not seem to acknowledge the long-term benefits of education, but rather focused on short-term economic factors. However, Cooke and Lawton (2008) argue that higher qualifications often do not equate to extra pay, responsibility or professional development, especially in the early years sector. Katie's remark suggests the increasing cynicism about the inability of educational qualifications to provide increased employment opportunities.

It can be argued that the promise of social mobility through education is unrealistic in areas of multiple deprivation and social exclusion where job opportunities tend to be characterised by low pay and job insecurity. The idea that the working classes have working lives, not professional careers, is particularly evident in Nikki and Katie's understandings of their employment prospects.

### **A desire for respectability**

Skeggs (1997) argues that when women are conscious of their classifications, their devaluing within society and their inability to perform correctly and to be without shame and judgement they commonly turn to respectability and responsibility as a means of establishing a valued and legitimate way of being and way of being seen. Skeggs (1997) argues that respectability would not be something desired by women, to prove and achieve, if it had not been seen to be the property of ‘Others’, those who were valued and legitimated. A desire to become successful and respectable, to achieve in education and obtain recognised qualifications, to be able to provide financially for their child, inevitably includes elements of self rejection, a recognition as Reay (1998: 14) asserts that what you are is ‘not good enough’.

A key feature in the young women’s narratives was a desire to be deemed respectable, to be viewed as a good and caring mother, a successful student and an effective employee. There was a common perception that if they were not able to gain recognised qualifications and paid employment they would be perceived as unsuccessful subjects both through self and external definition. As previously demonstrated in this chapter, there was a concern about aligning with stereotypical representations of teenage motherhood and becoming a “*bum*”. An unsuccessful future was commonly characterised by a dependency on state benefits, which was something many of young women held in contempt, for example:

*She [her mother] is on the dole [laughs] and I don’t want to end up like her [laughs].*

(Holly, 16 years old, mother)

*I couldn't imagine, like, how I would support myself if I was on benefits. But I don't want to do it, I don't think it is right.*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

There was a belief that a dependency on state benefits would position them within the stereotypical representations of teenage motherhood, which was a positioning they were seeking to escape. The young women's antagonism towards state benefits is indicative of the association between dependency on welfare and individual failure.

Evident in their narratives was a family and societal pressure to engage in education. Fay insinuated that she needed to participate in education in order to make her father proud, it seems there was an underlying expectation for her to achieve academically as her brother was going to university. As she explained:

*I am going to finish off my course because I don't want to be just doing nothing, because my brother is doing something, I just want to make, but obviously my parents, my mum's really proud of me because I am having a baby and she can't be any more proud than that. But I still need, as much as I will still have a life, like my baby is going to be in my life, but I need something to show for my life. I need to still make something to show for my life, apart from a family.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

As Pilling (1992) suggests it seems working class parents' desires and dreams for a better life for their child can act as a powerful force that drives their child's motivation to succeed in education. The fact that Fay felt she had let her father down suggests he expected her to achieve more with her life, that he had high hopes of her following in her brother's footsteps and proceeding to higher education. In comparison to the other young women

involved in this study, Fay and her mother seemed to attribute more value and worth to motherhood, stating her mother “*couldn’t be any more proud than that*”. But yet, there is still a suggestion that personal value and inclusion cannot be achieved solely through motherhood and that Fay needed to achieve academically and professionally in order to have something to “*show*” for her life.

Motivations to engage in education can be closely connected to wider pressures and expectations from society. Amber frequently made comparisons between herself and other young mothers to situate her narrative and to explain and justify her own actions, for example:

*You see these mums that are like, no disrespect to them, but they have a baby at seventeen and their like, nineteen now and their child is two and they just don’t do anything for themselves, they just sit there, and I’m like why would you want a life like that? I couldn’t imagine, like, my daughter’s not even one yet and I can’t wait to go back to college and have a better social life and know that I am going to get somewhere in life. I couldn’t sit on benefits, I struggle now, I couldn’t imagine in ten year’s time still doing it, because the benefits are getting cut less and less, I couldn’t imagine, like, how I would support myself if I was on benefits. But I don’t want to do it, I don’t think it is right.*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

This can be seen as an example of ‘Othering’, which is defined by Weis (1995: 18) as ‘that process which serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself’. Amber can be seen to be attempting to separate and distance herself from other young mothers, by describing the ways in which she is not like “*these mums*”. Amber positioned herself and her values in opposition to those of other young mothers, weighing up and judging them

against her own personal aspirations and beliefs in order to confirm and validate her own choices.

Amber demonstrates a need to maintain her visibility against which success can be affirmed by comparing and contrasting herself to what she perceived as a 'bad' mother. Through this she was able to confirm and cement her positioning as a 'good' mother who embodied the correct characteristics and attitudes towards education, participation and motherhood. 'Good' mothers in this context were seen to be proactive, independent and self-supporting, whereas 'bad' mothers were characterised as welfare dependent, lacking in meaningful activity and lazy. Amber desired to prove she did not align with stereotypical notions of teenage motherhood through demonstrating, acknowledging and emphasising her difference.

Skeggs (1997) draws attention to how working class women's lives have typically been scrutinised by people in positions of power and authority with regard to respectability and decisions about how they choose to live their lives which have been used to classify them into categories of the deserving and undeserving poor. This recognition and labelling of difference consequently positions working class women as 'Other' to the middle class norm. Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1996: 13) explain that 'Others, by definition, are oppressed and marginalised by the dominant culture: consequently, their cultures and traditions are typically represented as inferior or pathological'. The negative positioning of working class young women generates dilemmas for those caught within it, producing 'acute inner turmoil as a result of the opposing pulls of both wanting to refuse the perceived external judgements and their criteria and wanting to measure up to them - both to reject respectability and to be respectable' (Sayer, 2002, 4.15).

However, rather than working class women being judged solely by a middle class gaze, Amber's narrative suggests working class women can themselves be seen to engage in this form of surveillance and regulation by both policing their own and others actions. It is a normalising gaze, which assesses the 'Other' according to some hierarchical standard. This demonstrates divisions within the working class itself, between its respectable and upward-striving representatives and the poor. However, constructions of respectful and successful lives are almost inevitably classist as the dominant group, the middle and upper classes, control how they are defined, achieved and embodied.

According to Skeggs (1997) to not be respectable is to have little social value or legitimacy. Amber made frequent reference to the benefit dependency culture as suggested in her use of language such as "*sit there*" and "*sit on*", illustrating a perception that other young mothers' lack meaningful activity and participation. This suggests that to succeed is to have made good choices and acted independently in order to achieve their goals and aspirations; to fail is to have made worse choices, not to have chosen at all, or acted counter to their own interests (Hemmings and Kabesh, 2013). Yet absent is an insight into why such choices are made by "*these mums*", a sense of kinship with the young women, or indeed a reflection as to why some young mothers may not have the option or indeed wish to engage in 'meaningful' activity. Yet perhaps to acknowledge or support the idea of pregnant and mothering young women to stay at home on a full time basis to look after their children and depend on state benefits would risk Amber being perceived to be in support of that lifestyle.

### **Conflicting motivations: mother-student-worker**

While eleven out of fourteen young women explained that becoming pregnant had encouraged them to engage in education, or had promoted a desire to engage in the future,

their narratives contained contradictions, ambivalence and uncertainty over these decisions and actions. This chapter has suggested the young women often sought responsibility and respectability through gaining recognised qualifications and paid employment. However, their definitions of responsibility and respectability also extended to include being there for their child and witnessing key milestones in their development, for example:

*To stay at home with my daughter [...] just to be there for her so I don't miss anything.*

(Imogen, 16 years old, mother)

*I wouldn't want to miss any of the six months because, well 0-1 is first giggles, first clap, first feeding, picking up a fork, its first steps and its first words and all of the things that are important. I wouldn't want to miss out on that and if I did I would be gutted. I'm telling you if its first word isn't mummy I am giving it away!*

(Laura, 18 years old, mother)

The ideal of full-time motherhood during their child's formative years dominated their narratives. The first year in particular was seen as especially important, something to be cherished and valued. However, it was acknowledged that combining education and employment whilst raising a child would place considerable strain on their lives and would risk them not being present to witness these 'firsts'.

There is a key contradiction at play here in relation to the stigma associated with teenage pregnancy and motherhood. On the one hand, there is an expectation to engage with education and employment in order to demonstrate they are good mothers who are able to financially provide for their child, to be a good role model and to contribute to society. On the other hand, participating in education and employment would mean spending less time

with their child and risk being perceived as a bad mother who is not there for their child in these formative years, or one who cannot handle the responsibility of caring for their child and who instead hands this responsibility to others, whether a family member or childcare provider. The young women can in effect be seen to be engaged in a complex negotiation of identities: mother-student-worker. Fay in particular, recognised this complexity:

*I probably won't want to leave her. It's like my mum used to say oh when I have a baby I'll get a job, but it's not that simple, it's not that straight forward, you want to be there for your children, you want to see them walk, then you want to see them say their first word, then you want to see them have their first day at nursery and if you're not there to see that it sort of feels like, not that your being a bad parent, because even a parent that doesn't see their child a lot as long as they are working for their child that's a good parent, but everyone looks at things differently anyway. But I personally want to be there for every step of my daughter's life. But I also want her to be, have something that I have made for her, I want to be able to have my own home one day and my own car and that will be hers, do you know what I mean, like it will be mine, she won't be driving a car, but that house will get left to her when she is older.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

There is a conflict between their roles, expectations and obligations both to their self, their child and society. Being a full time mother is portrayed as not providing the sense of inclusion and citizenship that is desired by the young women, or at least expected by society. Yet in the search for the ideal mother-student-worker construction key contradictions and ambiguities arise:

*Individual competition and mobility*, which are required for the realm of production, run up against the contrary demand in the family: *sacrifice* for the other and

absorption in the collective communal project of the family. In the shape of familial reproduction and market-dependent production, then, two epochs with contrary organizational principles and value systems [...] are welded together in the industrial society, two epochs that complement, condition and contradict each other (Beck, 1992: 107, original emphasis).

Pregnant and mothering young women are therefore faced with judgement and criticism no matter their choices and actions. They are always deemed to be failing or unsuccessful in one or more of their constructions, mother-student-worker. Kidger (2004: 296) explains young mothers are:

excluded from the possibility of being both full-time carers of their children and socially included citizens, instead finding themselves faced with an irresolvable dilemma, in which they face judgement either as 'bad' mothers who are not there for their children, or as 'bad' citizens who have not earned inclusion.

Consequently, while many of the young women spoke about the importance of engaging with education and employment they went on to voice doubts and apprehensions about pursuing these options, as Fay and Melissa highlighted:

*I can't put a time on it, I don't know what it's going to be like when I have got her here, like I could say I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that but I might not go back. I might go back, I might not go back. I would love to go back but I don't know whether I will ever feel ready to go. Things completely change when you have a child, you feel completely different.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

*He will only be nine months then so I don't know if maybe it will be too soon [to go to college]. I am going to apply because like my midwife says you can always turn it*

*down. So if I feel ready I will go, but if I don't then I might leave it, but I don't know how it is going to be.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

There was a real sense of uncertainty and ambivalence surrounding engaging with education and employment as can be seen in the use of the phrase “*I don't know*”. It was often difficult to specify when, or if, they would ever feel “*ready*” to engage in education and employment. While the young women often identified and emphasised the importance, value and necessity of education and paid employment this was seen to be in conflict with their motherhood status. Vincent and Thomson (2013: 9) found that an acute awareness of their 'problem' status as young mothers and a desire to 'prove everybody wrong' in order to challenge negative discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood can have a detrimental impact on young women as it can lead to feelings of shame and inadequacy.

Spending time with their child was the preferred option with a common desire to delay engagement with education and employment until their child was older, normally once they had started primary school. Their decisions about combining motherhood with education and/or employment have to be understood in the context of gendered and class-based community norms and expectations. While there was a desire and motivation to engage and succeed in education and employment, full time motherhood was often seen as a more important and meaningful form of participation.

In comparing and contrasting their success and participation in relation to the ‘male model of normality’ pregnant and mothering young women are seen to be different, lacking or indeed disadvantaged in relation to this norm (Mendus, 1992). The ideals and aspirations

surrounding the self supporting and striving individual who succeeds academically and in the employment market can be seen to be incompatible or in conflict with the responsibilities of motherhood. Women are expected to conform to this ideal and if they are unable or unwilling to align with these dominant definitions of success and participation they are classed as different and excluded members of society. However, Young (1990: 166) argues ‘the rejection and devaluation of one’s culture and perspective should not be a condition of full participation in social life’. In order for young women to be deemed socially included and positive mothers and citizens they acknowledge that there is a need and pressure to confirm and align with traditional notions of success and citizenship.

### **Summary**

This chapter has critically analysed the young women's motivations for change, exploring and contextualising their desires and wishes to engage in education. Their narratives illustrate an acute awareness of the stereotypical representations surrounding teenage motherhood in British society. There was a strong desire to distance themselves from this dominant negative discourse, through highlighting and emphasising their difference.

Dominant negative discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood can therefore be seen, to a certain extent, to have provoked a sense of motivation and determination to engage in education and to achieve recognised qualifications.

The young women aligned with traditional definitions of success and participation, emphasising the importance of gaining recognised qualifications and paid employment.

Education and employment was almost seen as a condition of citizenship and as a route to achieve respectability and to, in effect, redeem themselves from their perceived problematic status as young mothers.

However, it was argued that if young women feel as though they "*need*" and "*have*" to change their lives it demonstrates that there is a certain ideal they feel they are meant to live up to. Their narratives illustrate that they felt measured, judged and assessed in relation to normative expectations and understandings of what and who is defined as a successful, respectable and positive subject. This chapter has critiqued this notion of the successful subject, arguing that what is deemed positive is inevitably influenced by moral judgements surrounding how people should live their lives, what they should aspire to and what is classed as a life worth living. Questions have also been raised surrounding how it is becoming increasingly difficult in a precarious labour market to achieve 'the good life'.

The dominant and negative discourse surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood reflects how middle class values and expectations relating to education, employment and when to start a family have become the normative and expected trajectory for all women. The young women can be seen to be engaged in a process of comparison, comparing their experiences, achievements and lives in relation to the rules, standards and expectations that are defined and set by the privileged group, the middle and upper classes.

The young women recognised these normative expectations and illustrated a need and a desire to conform to societal expectations. Being a full time mother was portrayed as not providing the sense of inclusion and citizenship that was required by society. However, it was argued that pregnant and mothering young women face judgement and criticism no matter their choices and actions, they are always deemed to be failing or unsuccessful in one or more of their constructions: mother-student-worker. They are excluded from the possibility of being both full-time carers for their children and socially included citizens.

Consequently, they face judgement either as 'bad' mothers who are not there for their children, or as 'bad' citizens who have not earned inclusion.

Overall, this chapter has problematised the viewpoint that can be located in academic literature which celebrates and embraces the notion of individual choice and agency amongst pregnant and mothering young women. Thus highlighting a key tension between the individual as an active agent, who is free to steer the course of their life, and the social factors that shape, influence and constrain their choices and actions. The extent to which pregnant and mothering young women's motivations for engaging in education can be positioned as positive is questionable. Stigmatisation and shame often shaped and influenced their accounts of change. Feelings of intense surveillance and judgement, that what you are is not good enough, should not be positioned and celebrated as 'positive' and 'remarkable'.

The analysis presented thus far has explored how and why the young women desired to change their lives. The next chapter further explores the structural factors that shape and influence the educational experiences of pregnant and mothering young women. While the young women often stated they wished or desired to engage or reengage in education, the next chapter explores to what extent this was possible.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **EXCLUSION FROM FURTHER EDUCATION**

#### **Introduction**

It was argued in Chapter Six that the young women aligned with traditional definitions of success and participation. There was a strong emphasis placed on the importance of gaining recognised qualifications and paid employment. This desire was based on a commitment to counteract negative discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and to prove they were responsible mothers and productive citizens.

The young women commonly situated their discussions of education and employment in highly individualistic terms, asserting that with individual effort and motivation they could achieve their goals and aspirations. This implies it was possible for the young women to be free from social constraints, to be no longer socially prescribed by class or prior family attainment. Beck (1992: 135) asserts that ‘in the individualized society the individual must therefore learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action, as the planning officer with respect to his/her own biography’. Madhok (2013) argues that this identification of agency with free action, or the ability to act upon one's freely chosen beliefs is widely prevalent in conceptual accounts of agency and autonomy. Consequently, Youdell (2006) explains there is commonly an assertion that it is possible for individuals to shape and influence their lives and experiences, and that who they are and what they become is simply a matter of choice.

This chapter draws on the young women's accounts of education to illustrate the ways in which there is a 'tension between the individual as an active social agent, the product of a given "life history" capable of making positive decisions and choices and the individual as influenced by specific social structures and ideologies' (Griffin, 1987: 216). This chapter highlights that while the young women showed signs of agency, through wishing to pursue their educational choices, it can be seen that they often lacked the power to make these 'accounts count' (Giddens, 1979: 83). While the young women were able to voice their educational choices and aspirations, they were commonly not fully enacted or achieved. Consequently, it can be argued that their educational choices and options were constrained. This is consistent with the work of Friedman (2003) who asserts the ability to act entirely freely in accordance with one's desires is rarely (if ever) possible. In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the young women's experiences of education this chapter considers to what extent it was possible for these young women to achieve their educational aspirations.

This chapter focuses on the accounts of four young women who believed they experienced exclusionary practices as a result of pregnancy that led to their exclusion from further education. This chapter illustrates how for these four young women, Amber, Nikki, Melissa and Fay, aspirations of remaining in or reengaging in education once pregnant were hindered by exclusionary educational practices.

Issues of exclusion need to be understood within the framework of human rights. Osler and Vincent (2003: 44) argue that 'education needs to be recognised as a basic right which should not be withdrawn' and that young people have 'the right to be protected against discrimination and to be consulted in matters or procedures which may affect them'.

Furthermore, being deprived of education is regarded as an injustice (Lynch and Lodge, 2002) and any form of educational exclusion is inconsistent with the principles of a democratic society (Ballard, 1999). The young women's narratives suggest they were excluded from education and believed they were treated unfairly due to their pregnancy. Their experiences suggest inclusive principles of education were not adhered to, as it is clearly asserted that pregnancy 'is not in itself a sufficient reason for exclusion' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998: 9).

Exclusion from further education on the grounds of pregnancy was an unexpected theme emerging from the data. The academic literature, as outlined in Chapter Two, illustrated that pregnant and mothering young women may experience barriers to participation, for example, conflicting mother-student-worker identities. Yet in discussions with the young women they explained the most significant barrier to engaging in further education was the views and attitudes of educational professionals. This chapter argues that while pregnancy and motherhood commonly fosters a renewed sense of motivation for learning, the politics and policies surrounding the education system can be seen, in some circumstances, to undermine and hinder pregnant and mothering young women's engagement in education.

The accounts that follow are based on the young women's personal experiences, reflections and interpretations of exclusion from further education on the grounds of pregnancy. This chapter details the individual narratives of Amber, Nikki, Melissa and Fay in an attempt to retain the complexity of their experiences and to allow the idiosyncratic features of their narratives to manifest. There is an exploration of how the young women made sense of their educational experiences once they became pregnant and to what extent they constructed themselves as able to shape and influence their educational experiences. Allard

(2007: 147) explains 'contexts matter in setting the parameters of "choice" and in constituting the subject and the degree to which they are seen and see themselves as "free to choose"'. Consequently, the young women's narratives are placed in the wider educational and political context in order to analyse and interpret their experiences and to explore how these factors may influence their ability to choose and enact their educational preferences.

After exploring the young women's individual narratives three key themes are addressed. Firstly, it is argued the young women experienced exclusionary practices as they were constructed as 'unreliable learners' due to their status as pregnant students and their impending motherhood status. The ways in which the young women were deemed to be risky, unpredictable and unreliable due to pregnancy are explored. Secondly, there is a discussion of the role and influence of expert advice. The young women's interactions with professionals regarding their engagement in education are discussed. The expert knowledge that was drawn upon in terms of the process of defining and constituting a good and ideal student is critically explored. Finally, there is an exploration of how being excluded from further education led to the young women feeling uncertain about their future, especially in relation to their educational prospects.

### **Amber – *“they couldn’t handle my hormones”***

Amber became pregnant when she was sixteen years old and was studying at a local college for a NVQ Level 1 in Childcare. However, once Amber became pregnant she explained she did not continue her studies:

*They kicked me out because they couldn't handle my hormones, because I was really moody all the time and they said just to come back after I have the baby.*  
(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

Amber believed the college decided to exclude her on the grounds of her “moody” behaviour. This is expressed in the term “kicked out” which indicates she felt forced to leave. Amber felt the college was unable, or indeed, unwilling to accommodate her needs as a pregnant student. Amber can be seen to be positioning her exclusion in terms of deficits within the college – “they couldn't handle” – which indicates an acknowledgement and recognition of structural factors shaping her educational experiences. However, later in the interview Amber reverted to language which can be seen to position herself as the issue and she appeared to internalise the difficulties she was experiencing.

*I just couldn't handle it. I was being sick all the time and I was missing sessions and it was making me get behind on my work, so they just said it would be easier if I just left now and come back after I have had the baby.*  
(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

Amber's change in language from “they couldn't handle” to “I just couldn't handle” situates Amber as the central problem and inevitably leads to her positioning as deficient, or lacking in capacity in some way (Harrison and Shacklock, 2007). Central to Amber's account of pregnancy was experiences of morning sickness, which is a common feature of pregnancy and something that was out of her control. Nevertheless, this impacted her education as she explained her attendance became irregular and she subsequently fell behind with her work. When asked whether she was given any support to remain on her college course Amber replied:

*Not really, no not really...*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

Amber felt that she received no or minimal support to remain in education. What is striking about Amber's narrative is the sense of resignation about her predicament. Amber did not seem angry or upset that she had been asked to leave her college course, she did not appear to challenge these views or her right to continue in education. When asked if she would have liked to finish her college course she replied:

*Yeah because I only had like two months left to do. By the time I had finished that I would be like four months pregnant so I would have been able to go straight to [Young Mums to Be Unit] but I didn't have a choice.*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

Amber would have liked to remain on her college course, especially since she only had two months left until she completed. This suggests a passive process in which Amber's opinions were either not sought or enacted upon by the college and other educational professionals, this is encapsulated in the phrase "*but I didn't have a choice*".

### **Nikki – "*they just refused me*"**

Nikki was attending the Young Mums to Be Unit at the time of interview but it quickly transpired that this was not her first educational preference. Nikki originally wished to study for a NVQ Level 1 in Health and Social Care at a local college. However, when she applied she explained:

*I got refused from [local college] because I was pregnant.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

Nikki stated the reason for refusal was due to her pregnancy and being perceived as an ‘unreliable learner’:

*They just said that because I would be having to take time off and I would be missing so much they refused me.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

This suggests it was anticipated by the college that Nikki’s pregnancy would result in her falling behind on her work and subsequently risking not successfully completing the course. Nikki believed a critical factor influencing the college’s decision was that her baby was due at a crucial time in the academic year, the exam period. During this time Nikki would be required to take end of year exams in order to assess her learning to date and to decide whether she was able to pass and proceed with her course, as she explained:

*Yeah because my baby is due in March, which is when they kind of do all the exams, so they just refused me.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

McGivney (2003) explains that since most students register at the start of the standard academic year, the definition of non-completion tends to be tied to the end-of-year-assessment. Nikki believed she was denied a place at college because she was perceived to be an ‘unreliable learner’ and ‘high risk’. When asked whether she was offered any support to help her complete the course Nikki replied:

*It was just a no. I was like charming!*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

This suggests there was no room for discussion and that the college had made a foregone conclusion about Nikki's involvement. It was felt Nikki was trying to use humour here to lighten the mood as it was apparent by her tone and behaviour that being denied a place at college was a sensitive topic that she was still coming to terms with. On reflecting how this experience made her feel Nikki stated:

*Like crap [laughs]. It's like that one thing, because my partner he could even of looked after the baby whilst I was, because it is only three days at college and that's it.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

The phrase “*like crap*” indicates Nikki felt upset about the college's decision. Her use of laughter was again felt to try and disguise her feelings of hurt and to lighten the mood. Yet this also demonstrates Nikki was a strategic thinker and had considered how she could combine her studies with motherhood. Nikki had purposefully selected a part-time course “*only three days*” and had thought about childcare options, in the form of her partner. This illustrates Nikki's initiative and ability to devise appropriate strategies to help fulfil her ambitions of returning to education.

Later in the interview, Nikki explained that once she had her baby she intended to reapply for the NVQ Level 1 in Health and Social Care for the following academic year. When asked whether she thought the college would accept her she explained:

*She [a professional at the college] said if you want to come back next year we will happily accept you with open arms and I was thinking well you say that now, but I will come back and you will be like oh well you have got a kid, you will be off all day and like if he is ill.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

Nikki was sceptical about her interactions with the college as she could not see the difference between whether she was pregnant or a mother as she would always have competing demands. Nikki recognised she was always going to be perceived as different from other students due to her mothering responsibilities. Nikki's scepticism lies in the college's ability and willingness to accommodate this difference. There is a degree of sarcasm here and she highlighted what she perceived to be hypocrisy. When asked how she felt her pregnancy had affected her life Nikki replied:

*I don't know, kind of like it's stopped me from doing what I wanted to do, but I wouldn't change it now, but back then if I knew, then I would of, kind of, I don't know.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

There seems to be a sense of resignation and acceptance, the initial outrage indicated in "*I was like charming!*" has disappeared and the repeated use of the phrase "*I don't know*" indicates Nikki was experiencing a real sense of uncertainty. Hoggett (2001) might explain this range of emotions to be due to Nikki's acute awareness of her lack of power in controlling her educational experiences and opportunities.

**Melissa – “*you are putting your baby under a lot of stress*”**

Melissa was also attending the Young Mums to Be Unit at the time of interview but similar to Nikki, this was not her first educational preference. After finishing secondary school Melissa went to a local college to do an Apprenticeship in Hairdressing:

*I went straight into a job, straight into an Apprenticeship and then I got pregnant half way through that, so obviously everything changed a lot.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

The repeated use of the phrase “*straight into*” implies a linear transition from secondary school to the Apprenticeship, a fact Melissa was proud of as she made frequent reference to the importance of earning her own money, being independent and having a sense of purpose throughout her interview. However, it also suggests Melissa’s life started to dramatically change when she became pregnant, as indicated in “*obviously everything changed a lot*”. This alludes to a set of predetermined actions and consequences as a result of pregnancy and links to ideological assumptions about pregnancy and motherhood as abnormal and deviant, which often manifest themselves as ‘common sense’, ‘natural’, or ‘obvious’ – that is, as beyond question (Thompson, 2003). This is consistent with the findings of Alldred (2011: 145) who found teenage mothers often spoke in a tone that was ‘matter-of-fact [and] values were asserted as givens’. Melissa had started the second and final year of her Apprenticeship when she found out she was pregnant, stating:

*I found out I was pregnant just after completing my first year. They [the college] did offer to fast track me, but you know obviously it would have been literally working up until having the baby.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

Despite this initial recognition of difference and offer of support, problems started to arise with Melissa's Apprenticeship placement, as Melissa explained:

*It got so stressful that I ended up having to leave my job and everything because well my boss didn't take it very well when she found out. I think most employers nowadays just think about money and to her I couldn't really do my job properly because I couldn't do any lifting, be around any chemicals or anything. So she found it really hard, so I only ended up working till I was about 20 weeks pregnant and then I ended up leaving.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

Disclosure of pregnancy was highly consequential for Melissa and it can be seen to represent a fateful moment in her narrative. It is evident that it was not Melissa's preferred option to leave her Apprenticeship as shown in "*I only ended up working till I was about 20 weeks*", which suggests she recognised she could have stayed till later in her pregnancy. Melissa recognised that it was ultimately her choice to leave her Apprenticeship, but noted her decision was heavily influenced by her employer, stating:

*Well it was but, she kind of rang me [employer at the hairdressers] and kind of offered it to me on a plate and said well you can leave if you want to, I understand that it must be really hard for you. But then after that I kind of thought well you've just made it feel like to me that you wanted me to.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

The use of the phrase "*kind of*" indicates that her employer was not explicit in asking her to leave, but suggested it would be advisable if she left. This is reaffirmed by the analogy of "*offered it to me on a plate*" which implies her employer depicted a situation in which it would be easy for Melissa to leave and that the offer was too good to be refused. While

these ideas about leaving her Apprenticeship were initially suggested by her employer, Melissa did not simply accept these views as her own. This contradicts the opinion of Honneth (1995) who explains that when a person's confidence, respect or self esteem is attacked, they may not necessarily resist, but see it as their fate or desert. However, Melissa was not passive in this process, as later in the interview, she discussed her Apprenticeship and the support she received in a more critical and reflective manner:

*I don't really think they [the local college] did enough, you know, to say you know we can get you qualified. It was basically just me saying you know would we be able to get it done in this amount of time, whereas they just kind of left it. I did have a lot of trouble with work and when I went to my Apprenticeship Advisor and told her you know it didn't really get sorted it just kind of carried on.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

Melissa was proactive in seeking advice about how issues could be resolved with her Apprenticeship employer and managing her college workload. However, while her concerns were heard, Melissa believed they were not effectively addressed, as suggested by “it didn't really get sorted it just kind of carried on”. While Melissa was able to voice her concerns, it can be argued that she lacked the power and authority to enact any real change in order to improve her circumstances. This can be seen to reinforce power relations. It undermined Melissa's self-esteem and discouraged acts of personal initiative, so as such can be seen as a form of disempowerment (Thompson, 2003). When asked whether she felt the college wanted her on the course, Melissa replied:

*I'm not sure there was quite a lot of people doing it anyway, but you know when I kind of said to them you know I'm pregnant, it was do the risk assessment and then when I tried to you know how long is it going to take me, well you have got this*

*assignment to do and they didn't really help me do them. It was kind of it is down to you now, you have got to do it on your own. I didn't really get any help with it, so I don't know, I think they just thought, they just dismissed it and thought you are going to leave when you are going to leave so...*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

Melissa felt as though she was superfluous to the college's requirements, that she was regarded as a statistic and that no personal relationship existed. It also indicates Melissa was classed as risky straight away, as the college's first response was to do a risk assessment. This resonates with previous studies that illustrate health and safety is often a primary concern of educational settings (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999; Lall, 2007). It also suggests that while the college initially recognised Melissa's difference as a learner through conducting a risk assessment, they subsequently failed to put effective support measures in place to address this difference. Melissa therefore felt she lacked the educational support she desired and was left to navigate the difficulties she was experiencing on her own "*it is down to you now, you have got to do it on your own*".

Ultimately Melissa recognised that remaining on her Apprenticeship and successful completion was seen as solely her responsibility. However, it can be argued this set up conditions for failure, and inevitably led Melissa to position herself as deficient, or lacking capacity in some way. The college also appeared to be demonstrating a fatalistic outlook that is a 'resigned acceptance that events should be allowed to take their course' (Giddens, 1991: 112), as Melissa was insinuating the college believed she was destined to leave her Apprenticeship, "*they just dismissed it and thought you are going to leave when you are going to leave*".

The continuing difficulties Melissa experienced with her Apprenticeship employer and a lack of support from the college created a stressful situation, a situation where Melissa did not feel in control of events. During this time Melissa sought advice from her midwife, which proved to be extremely fateful for her education, as she explained:

*For my midwife to turn around and say to me you are putting your baby under a lot of stress made me realise that I am going to have to get out of here because everything kind of changed when I got pregnant.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

This created a difficult dilemma for Melissa, as while she desired to continue with, and complete her Apprenticeship, she now had medical advice that suggested she was putting her “baby under a lot of stress”. Melissa therefore followed the course of action deemed ‘right’ by her midwife:

*So yeah I ended up leaving, but it was the best thing I did because I was so stressed to the point where my midwife was saying to me that it isn’t very good for you and after I left I was really relaxed.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

This illustrates a capitulation that other people really knew what was best for Melissa after all. It positioned her as unable to cope with the stress and pressures of her Apprenticeship and pregnancy.

### **Fay – “I wouldn’t be able to catch up”**

When Fay became pregnant she was at college studying for her NVQ Level 2 in Hairdressing. Fay explained that she thoroughly enjoyed her course up until the point of

pregnancy, but she started to have doubts about continuing with her course as she was concerned she would not be able to successfully complete, stating:

*I was doing my hairdressing, my 2<sup>nd</sup> level hairdressing and like I was really enjoying it and then like I fell pregnant and I kept on getting morning sickness, so I thought, well I don't want to keep going in and out and not making the qualification and waste my time. I would rather just go back once I have had her, so I can study all the time instead of being there one day and not being there the next.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

Fay's account is similar to that of the other young women discussed in this chapter.

Pregnancy, but more specifically morning sickness, was seen as a barrier to learning as it resulted in irregular attendance. However, Fay's account illustrates a different tone to the other young women. It suggests the decision to leave her course was of her own choosing. She presents herself as instrumental to the decision making process. This can be seen with the frequent use of "I" and "I would rather" in Fay's narrative. This indicates Fay's wishes and her sense of agency. However, when asked directly whether it was her decision to leave the course, a different story emerged:

*Well yeah and like the teachers and the way the teachers like mentioned it to me because I would be so far behind on my work that I wouldn't be able to catch up with it because I was feeling so ill.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

Ultimately it was Fay's decision to leave her course but she believed the college heavily influenced her decision "the way the teachers mentioned it to me". Professional direction and assertion of power is a recurring theme amongst the young women's narratives. For

Fay, the college described a situation in which she would fall behind on her work and would be unable to catch up. However, Fay did not view this advice negatively, quite the opposite, she felt the college was looking out for her best interests, explaining:

*My tutor really liked me, I got on really well with the tutor, but she thought it was for the best as well that I come back after I had had the baby.*

(Fay, 17 years old, pregnant)

Fay had doubts about continuing with her course while she was pregnant and during discussions with the college these doubts appeared to have been supported and reinforced. Unlike the other young women in this chapter, Fay felt she had a close and mutual bond with her college tutor. This friendship meant Fay accepted and respected her tutor's views and perceived that she was helping her make the "best" decision.

The experiences of Amber, Nikki, Melissa and Fay draw attention to three key themes, the construction of unreliable learners due to pregnancy and impending motherhood status, the role and influence of expert knowledge and how exclusion from further education can create uncertain futures. These themes will now be explored.

### **Unreliable learners**

A central theme to emerge from the young women's accounts is the construction of an 'unreliable learner'. Weaved throughout their accounts of exclusion was their positioning of unreliability. It can be argued that this was due to the uncertainty and high risk associated with their pregnant bodies and their perceived inability to engage and succeed in education.

Pregnancy appears to have been positioned as a hindrance, as a barrier to effective engagement and progression in education.

Amber, Nikki, Melissa and Fay all left further education during the early stages of their pregnancy. Central to their accounts of exclusion was morning sickness and how this affected their behaviour and ability to attend sessions. Within their accounts there seemed to be a lack of recognition that fluctuating hormone levels and tiredness are common realities for pregnant women of all ages and that this may, understandably, affect their attendance, concentration levels and behaviour (Luttrell, 2003; Alldred and David, 2007). It appears as though there was an expectation that the young women should engage in learning as if they were not pregnant. They were required to minimise and conceal their difference as pregnant students. The requirement and expectation to conceal their difference is exemplified in Amber's narrative, *"they kicked me out because they couldn't handle my hormones"*. This suggests Amber was perceived as an unreliable and unpredictable student due to her *"moody"* behaviour. Amber believed she was excluded as she was not able to hide, conceal or control this *"moody"* behaviour.

The young women explained that due to morning sickness and tiredness their attendance at college was often irregular and that they either were, or believed, they would fall behind on their assessments. Osler and Vincent (2003) highlight that absence, even for a relatively short period of time, can increase the likelihood of future non-attendance. They explain re-establishing a regular routine of attendance after an extended absence can pose a major challenge for students, which must be faced alongside other challenges such as catching up on missed content and assessments. The young women's narratives suggested an acute awareness of this challenge. Fay imagined a situation in which *"I would be so far behind on*

*my work that I wouldn't be able to catch up with it"* and Amber stated *"I was missing sessions and it was making me get behind on my work"*. It was asserted that continuing to attend college and completing the required work whilst pregnant would be a difficult and challenging experience for the young women. Their pregnancy can be seen to position them as unreliable learners, as it appears both the young women and the college providers' raised concerns regarding whether the young women could successfully complete their course. Success in this context can be seen to be defined in terms of regular attendance and achieving the aimed for qualification. This is perhaps understandable as they are two of the key ways in which colleges are judged and assessed in terms of their quality and effectiveness (Skills Funding Agency, 2015).

Concerns regarding their attendance and submission of work, either envisaged, as in the case of Fay, or experienced, as in the case of Amber, led the young women to believe that it would be *"easier"* to leave education and return at a later date. A perceived lack of support and flexibility over their attendance and workload commonly led to the young women 'choosing' to leave education. However, as Allard (2007) explains in many instances leaving education is not a matter of choice *per se*, or at least of choice as the term is typically employed. While Amber, Melissa and Fay recognised that it was ultimately their decision to leave education, Osler and Vincent (2003: 145) express a concern surrounding 'the ease with which some pupils can "opt out" or be "nudged out" out of the system'. The young women can be seen to highlight the ways in which they believed the further education providers were unable, or indeed unwilling, to accommodate them as pregnant students.

Disclosure of pregnancy proved highly consequential for the young women, as they were not able to pursue or continue their preferred educational choices. It can be argued that their experiences of exclusion conveyed a message that pregnancy and mainstream education were mutually exclusive. The construction of pregnant young women as unreliable learners is highly problematic as it can be seen to curtail their engagement in education. Pillow (2006: 79) calls for a 'repoliticization that shifts the lens of analysis from the teen mother to the arena of educational policy and practice'. This shift is important in order to question educational policies and practices that may create barriers to educational access and equity for pregnant and mothering young women. Osler and Vincent (2003) argue it is important not to place blame on educational professionals, or to believe that all is required is simply a change in perspective. Rather, they argue that issues concerning the education of young women and their experiences of exclusion are systemic.

The young women's experiences raise issues surrounding educational performance. Colley and Hodgkinson (2001) explain the UK education system rewards colleges and training providers for high retention rates and penalises them if some of their students fail to complete their course or do not achieve the aimed-for qualification. It can be argued this has created a system in which pregnant and mothering young women are assessed for their appropriateness for a course and the likelihood of whether they will successfully complete. This culture of accountability means learners who are perceived to have little chance of completing their studies to a satisfactory standard are regarded as risky, unreliable and undesirable. Youdell (2004) argues in the context of marketisation and the benchmarking of high stakes testing, learners are therefore constituted through discourses of ability and even educability. Consequently, students are assessed for their appropriateness and positioned within the binary of good/bad, acceptable/unacceptable, reliable/unreliable student.

It can be argued the young women were 'diagnosed' in terms of their academic achievements and a 'prognosis' was given for their likely performance in examinations and general success on the course. On assessment there was a perception that the young women were deemed high risk as there was a perception that they would not stay the duration of the course due to their pregnancy and impending motherhood status. This construction of high risk learners can be interpreted through Nikki's experience when she applied for a college course whilst pregnant, stating the college response *"was just a no"*. Nikki therefore felt the college viewed her as an undesirable and high risk student from the outset.

Osler and Vincent (2003) found students who appear likely to do well in examinations are consequently favoured over others who may require more support and resources to engage and succeed. Youdell (2006) refers to these practices as examples of educational triage. Students expected to achieve the aimed for qualifications are diagnosed as 'safe' and left to succeed. Students expected to perform below the target are diagnosed as 'hopeless' and left to fail. Finally, students, expected to perform just below the target but believed to have the 'ability' to make the improvements necessary to push them over the benchmark are diagnosed as 'suitable for treatment' and targeted for intervention. Drawing on Youdell's analogy, it can be argued the young women's narratives illustrate they believed they were diagnosed as 'hopeless' students. They spoke of a belief that they would be unable to successfully complete the work and meet the stated requirements. Their positioning as unreliable and 'hopeless' students is encapsulated in Melissa's remark about her college: *"they just dismissed it and thought you are going to leave when you are going to leave"*. The notion of educational triage and the definition and construction of reliable and unreliable students raises significant questions regarding widening participation and social justice. McGivney (2003: x-xi) explains:

the widening participation and quality agendas are pulling against each other and the latter is to a certain extent militating against the achievement of higher retention rates. Unless they have the resources to provide high staff: student ratios and good support procedures, institutions with a commitment to widening access among socio-economically disadvantaged groups are at higher risk of having higher non-completion rates than those institutions which still recruit traditional young, middle-class, academically qualified students.

Consequently, there can be a temptation to recruit 'successful' students as institutions can be penalised financially if students withdraw from courses before completion or do not achieve the aimed for qualification. The Kennedy Report raised concerns regarding this model of further education:

the new ethos has encouraged colleges not just to be businesslike but to perform as if they were businesses. Since funding has been related to successful outcomes, namely qualifications attained by students, there has been a tendency for too many colleges to go in pursuit of the students who are most likely to succeed (FEFC, 1997: 3).

The accountability culture within education can therefore be seen to contribute to the construction of reliable and unreliable learners. The policies and procedures surrounding recruitment and retention may help to explain, to a certain extent, why Nikki was perceived to be an unreliable learner and refused a place at college when she initially applied. The Skills Funding Agency (2015: 19) state 'any learner, of any age, must be able to achieve the learning aim or programme of study within the time that they have available. If you know a learner is unable to complete a learning aim in the time they have available, they cannot be funded'. This highlights the intricate relationship between recruitment, retention and

funding and why it is sometimes in college providers best interests to refuse entry to students who are deemed at high risk of not completing the learning aim.

However, judging the appropriateness and suitability of students prior to acceptance does not explain the experiences of Amber, Melissa and Fay who were already enrolled on a college course and left mid way through their studies. The Education Funding Agency (2015: 13) explain 'for funding purposes, we count a student as having started a study programme once they have remained on that programme within the current funding year for a defined period of time'. For a full time college course this defined period of time is 42 days. Consequently all three young women were officially registered for their programme of study and would contribute towards the course statistics. Their experiences of exclusion therefore seem to run counter to the emphasis placed on retention and success rates in funding policies.

It is recognised that support and encouragement are fundamental during pregnancy to ensure successful educational outcomes (Dawson and Hosie, 2005). Yet the young women involved in this study perceived they received little or no support to help them engage with or complete their course. Kelly (2000) explains if educational settings simply ignore the difference of teenage mothers from other students; a situation is created where the student is at an increased risk of failing or leaving their course, as due consideration is not given to their personal circumstances. In addition, Harrison and Shacklock (2007) argue that not only does this allow pregnant young women to accept missing out on educational opportunities, but that it also repeatedly positions the demands that they cannot meet as reasonable and so their incapacity to cope is entirely of their own creation. Ainley (2013: 52) argues that:

through becoming increasingly high stakes and competitive 'learning' has also been reinvented as a personalised affair. The implication of being asked to take responsibility for their own learning is that students are also expected to regard their own failure as the consequence of individual inadequacies.

Within their accounts of education the young women commonly expressed a belief and expectation that their ability to succeed was solely their responsibility. This individualised discourse is visible in Melissa's narrative, *"it is down to you now, you have got to do it on your own. I didn't really get any help with it"*. It appears independence, self-determination, self-reliance and personal accountability were endorsed values (Allard, 2007).

The young women's accounts of exclusionary practices suggest pregnancy and mainstream education were not viewed as compatible. All four young women subsequently enrolled at the Young Mums to Be Unit. This raises questions regarding what forms of education are perceived to be suitable, acceptable and desirable for pregnant young women. The education and support provided at the Young Mums to Be Unit centred on basic life skills and preparation for how to be a 'good' mother. Alldred and David (2007) debate whether separate educational provision supports or hinders young women's social inclusion. They advocate for alternative ways of viewing pregnant and mothering young women than as 'problems' for education. Research into educational provision for pregnant and mothering young women has emphasised its frequent inadequacy, with pregnant young women being forced to leave because of the educational providers inflexibility, or a perception that specialist units are more suitable to meet their needs as pregnant students (Osler and Vincent, 2003; Lall, 2007; Vincent and Thomson, 2010). This literature seems to be consistent with the findings of this research study.

## Expert advice

Young (1990: 157) asserts that 'all persons should have the liberty to be and do anything they want, to choose their own lives and not be hampered by traditional expectations and stereotypes'. This exemplifies an ideal agentic subject, one who is free to choose, and who is no longer restricted by traditional ties. Young's (1990) utopian vision of the subject privileges individual agency and ignores structural factors. It can be argued this vision is illusionary as there will always be, to varying degrees, an intricate interplay between structure and agency.

The notion of the freely choosing individual is not apparent in the young women's narratives as their experiences of further education and the options available to them can be seen to be heavily dependent on professional judgement and expert knowledge. There was a perception that educational providers had the power to decide whether the young women were accepted or denied, included or excluded from further education. The phrase "*they just said...*" was commonly used in the young women's accounts of exclusion, for example:

*They just said it would be easier if I just left now and come back after I have had the baby.*

(Amber, 18 years old, mother)

*They just said that because I would be having to take time off and I would be missing so much they refused me.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

Geronimus (2003) argues that professionals can be seen to participate in and help maintain cultural systems that outline ideals for behaviour. The expert knowledge drawn on by the

professionals can be seen to shape the decisions that are made available to the young women and the realm of possibilities they consider open to them. Wynne (1996: 75) explains that 'expert knowledge itself embodies a particular culture – that is, it disseminates and imposes particular and problematic normative versions of the human and social'. Specific discourses surrounding the construction of the student can be seen to be at play here, with dichotomous hierarchical oppositions between the successful/unsuccessful, good/bad and appropriate/inappropriate student. It appears as though in the case of Amber, Nikki, Melissa and Fay pregnancy was not seen to be compatible with education. In this context, the exercise of choice is constrained by a structure of taken-for-granted presuppositions with respect to what constitutes a good and ideal student. It can be argued that pregnancy was not seen to fit with the construction of a good and ideal student.

While the young women commonly disagreed with, or challenged, their experiences of further education and their 'choice' to leave, they believed their objections were not heard, valued or acted upon, indicating constrained agency. The young women appeared to be aware of their lack of agency and opportunity, as 'non-experts', to challenge expert knowledge. Constrained agency is exemplified in Amber's narrative when she stated, "*but I didn't have a choice*". It can therefore be argued that the young women were excluded from the decision-making processes relating to their own education. Bordonaro and Payne (2012) argue that excluding young people from participation and decision-making denies them an active role and obscures their capacity for action, resulting in a sense of powerlessness.

While Melissa felt able, to a certain extent, to challenge the support she received from the college and her Apprenticeship placement, it can be argued that the other young women were unable, or unwilling, to challenge or question their treatment as pregnant women.

Thompson (2003) explains that an important part of our socialisation is an acceptance of a culture that teaches us to value and respect people in authority. Yet as Beck (1992: 6) argues, perhaps 'they may simply have been resigned to dependency on that institutional or political nexus, with no perceived power to influence it or make it more accountable'. It appears the young women lacked the power to negotiate with and to influence their own educational experiences. They lacked the 'ability to make decisions and affect outcomes of importance to themselves and their families, or, put another way, as women's control over their own lives and over resources' (Santillán *et al.*, 2004: 535). In order to respect and uphold the wishes and rights of pregnant and mothering young women they would need to be more actively involved in decisions regarding their education. Their narratives suggest they felt that their own contribution to decision-making was devalued, undermined or ignored. Lane and Green (1990) have also found that young people commonly reported a lack of involvement in decision-making processes.

However, this is not to suggest that the professionals involved in the young women's experiences of further education were necessarily acting against what they perceived to be the women's best interests. As Fay explained her college tutor *"thought it was for the best as well that I come back after I had had the baby"*. The young women's experiences can be related to the findings of Levy (1999) and her concept of 'protective steering'. Levy found that professionals can often hold strong views about what is safe or desirable for pregnant women and that these views can affect the direction in which they steer women when helping them make choices. By approving or disapproving of a course of action, or a lifestyle they can legitimise, or otherwise, the proposed or continuing actions of women. In Fay's case her college tutor thought it was for the *"best"* that she left her course to focus on her pregnancy and to spend time with her newborn baby and to return to education at a later

date. For Melissa, her midwife appeared to raise concerns regarding her continuing the Apprenticeship as she perceived it to have negative consequences for Melissa's health and that of her baby.

In the young women's narratives there seems to be an underlying assumption that it is a women's role and responsibility to be with and to look after their child. This is so they can devote their time and energy to raising their child in these formative years. This commitment to their maternal identity illustrates conformity to the contemporary Western patriarchal view of motherhood. It is believed the biological mother can only properly care for children, that mothering should be provided 24/7 and a mother must always put their child's needs before her own (O'Reilly, 2010). It can be argued this patriarchal view of motherhood is supported and reinforced by the young women's experiences of exclusionary practices, which seem to position education and motherhood as incompatible.

### **Uncertain futures**

Higginbottom *et al.*, (2006: 861) ask 'how do specific experiences of exclusion and/or discrimination influence young parents' ability to look ahead to a positive future?'. In the case of Amber, Nikki, Melissa and Fay there was a perception that their pregnancy had limited their educational opportunities and had, at least temporarily, put their plans on hold. Such uncertainty about their future caused them to reflect upon their life and opportunities in light of the response and subsequent rejection from further education, for example:

*But now it is hard thinking about what I am going to do after I have had the baby because obviously I completed one year so I could go back and do the second year.*  
(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

*I don't know, kind of like, it's stopped me from doing what I wanted to do, but I wouldn't change it now, but back then if I knew then I would of, kind of, I don't know.*

(Nikki, 17 years old, pregnant)

There was an acknowledgement in their narratives that now they had left education their futures were uncertain. Melissa was unsure whether to return at a later date to complete the second year of her Apprenticeship. While Nikki can be seen to be reflecting on the overall impact of her pregnancy and how she believed it had significantly limited and curtailed her experiences and opportunities. The young women commonly believed it would be difficult to return to education in the future as they would have competing mothering demands and responsibilities. This led onto wider concerns that they may not be accepted onto a course in the future due to their motherhood status. The young women were concerned that their construction and positioning as unreliable learners would shape and influence their future experiences of education. For example, Nikki envisaged a conversation with the college if she decided to return to further education after she had her baby: *"I will come back and you will be like oh well you have got a kid, you will be off all day and like if he is ill"*. Nikki could not see the difference between whether she was pregnant or a mother, as she would always have competing demands. Nikki believed she was always going to be positioned as different to other students due to her mothering responsibilities. The construction of an educational 'Other' appears central in ways of thinking and responding to perceived risk (Lupton, 1999). When individuals or groups are marked out as different, Vincent (2012) explains that such differences nearly always carry a stigma. This recognition of risk and educational 'Other' are woven throughout the young women's accounts of exclusion and can be seen to contribute to their sense of uncertainty regarding their educational futures.

There was a perception that pregnancy had negatively impacted their education. Similar to the findings of Schoon and Polek (2011) pregnancy was viewed as a disruption and hindrance to their educational experiences. The young women recognised that instead of embarking on a linear educational process, their engagement in education would be fragmented and complex. There was an acknowledgement that their own desire and motivation to engage in education was not sufficient, as their access to education was highly dependent and constrained by further education providers and current educational policies and practices.

The perceived incompatibility between pregnancy, motherhood and education may risk reinforcing the young women's own understandings and perceptions of their lack of fit and appropriateness for education. A study conducted by Harris *et al.*, (2005: 25) states that 'once they were pregnant they were often rejected and stigmatised, reinforcing messages that they were not welcome in the education system [...] a feeling that appears to have remained with them over time'. Consistent with the findings of Colley and Hodkinson (2001) the young women's experiences of exclusion seem to have caused a sense of alienation, lack of self-confidence and a general distrust in the education system. Barbour *et al.*, (1993) found that the aspirations and goals of young women often go unfulfilled after having a baby. Brosh *et al.*, (2007) explain that this is because aspirations alone are not protective for young mothers and that relevant supports and resources are needed to support and enable young women to reach their goals. Consequently, SmithBattle (2007) speculates that many more pregnant and mothering young women may attempt to reenrol in education during pregnancy or after giving birth, but fail to do so.

As highlighted in Chapter Six the young women attempted to create clear moral boundaries between themselves and what Amber referred to as "*these mums*" who embodied stereotypical representations of teenage motherhood. The young women believed through engaging in education they would be able to challenge these dominant stereotypical representations of teenage mothers as welfare dependent and unproductive citizens. Engaging in education was therefore commonly envisaged as the road to redemption and as the process of delivering themselves from their 'fallen' status as teenage mothers. However, the uncertainty surrounding when and if they could or would reengage in education meant that the moral boundaries they had worked hard to create were starting to dissolve due to leaving education. Melissa stated:

*When you are a pregnant teenager everybody looks at you and thinks you know you haven't got a job and all this, but for me it was really hard because I went straight into working and I absolutely loved it and then when I got pregnant it started to get really stressful, obviously it wasn't planned and I have gone from working and earning my own money and loving it, to you know living on nothing and it's really hard. I miss going to work but I just don't miss the stress of going to work.*

(Melissa, 17 years old, pregnant)

This new NEET status had clear ramifications for Melissa's identity as she had lost the income and status she clearly prized through her Apprenticeship and had become what she classed as a stereotypical teenage mother, which she found difficult to accept. This transition from effective personhood to being depicted as unreliable and risky was difficult for Melissa to come to terms with. Melissa felt she was being watched, and effectively, judged and criticised by "*everyone*" because she was a pregnant teenager. These feelings were intensified as she was no longer "*working and earning [her] own money*" and was

therefore no longer perceived as a productive and independent citizen. The young women can be seen to be conscious of their classifications, their devaluing within society and their inability to perform correctly, and to be without shame and judgement. Sayer (2005: 953) explains the need to draw clear moral boundaries 'is particularly strong in groups that are anxious about their position in terms of both how they are regarded from above and the risk of falling into the groups they despise and fear below'. Consequently, leaving education had caused uncertainty for the young women not just in terms of their future educational opportunities, but also how they would be viewed, perceived and judged by others.

### **Summary**

This chapter has critically analysed the young women's experiences of exclusionary practices in further education. While the young women often spoke of a strong desire and motivation to engage or reengage in education, it has been illustrated how the young women were commonly unable to enact and realise their educational preferences.

Disclosure of pregnancy proved to be highly consequential as the young women explained how they felt pressured either overtly or covertly to leave education.

Contexts matter in exploring educational 'choices' and the young women's narratives highlight the power and influence of educational policy in shaping and constrained their educational experiences. This chapter has drawn attention to tensions surrounding the notion of the freely choosing individual and how the lives and opportunities of young women are highly dependent on structural factors. Weaved throughout their accounts of exclusion was the construction of an unreliable learner. Their unreliability was associated with their pregnant bodies and their perceived inability to engage and succeed in education.

Pregnancy appears to have been positioned as a hindrance, as a barrier to effective engagement and progression in education.

This chapter has explored and raised concerns regarding which students are defined and constructed as positive and desirable. The young women's narratives suggest they felt judged and assessed for their appropriateness and suitability in terms of the good and ideal student. Their experiences of further education and the options available to them can be seen to be heavily dependent on professional judgement and expert knowledge. Through analysing their narratives, their accounts demonstrate the systemic nature of exclusion and how their experiences seem to be related to the intricate relationship between recruitment, retention and funding in further education.

Overall, this chapter has critically explored the complexities associated with structure and agency, exploring the ways in which the young women's lives are shaped and influenced by structural factors. The policies and procedures surrounding recruitment, retention and funding have contributed to definitions and constructions of the good and ideal student, in which pregnancy does not seem to feature. The next and final chapter will provide a conclusion for this thesis. The conclusion will summarise the key points made throughout this thesis and reassert the central argument and contribution to knowledge.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a conclusion for the research study and begins by revisiting the research context. The key arguments underpinning this thesis are outlined, rearticulating the significance of this research study, along with its aims and contribution to knowledge. This is followed by a consideration of the research questions that were designed to guide this study. The research questions are explored in turn in order to state what conclusions can be drawn in relation to each. Next there is a consideration of the limitations associated with this research study. These limitations are discussed and debated, and where appropriate, recommendations are given as to how these limitations could be overcome or minimised. Finally, the chapter ends with recommendations for future research highlighting key areas for further investigation in light of the findings and conclusions drawn from this research study.

#### **The research context**

Teenage motherhood is depicted in the media and government policy as a highly negative, problematic and undesirable life choice for young women and is associated with a raft of risks, problems and negative orientations. Becoming a teenage mother is seen to cause poor life outcomes for both mother and child and lead to their social exclusion from society. This view of teenage pregnancy is deeply engrained in constructions and understandings of teenage motherhood and positions teenage motherhood as an irrational choice, and as something that should be prevented and minimised.

This negative, and often fatalistic perspective and understanding of teenage motherhood has increasingly been challenged and criticised in recent years. It is argued by a growing number of academics that teenage pregnancy can help instigate positive change in young women's lives, especially in relation to their education. Some researchers have thus concluded that teenage motherhood represents a 'remarkable turning point' (Barn and Mantovani, 2007: 239), is 'positively transforming' and that having a baby can be a 'stabilizing influence' (Clemmens, 2003: 93). Furthermore, it was proposed by Seamark and Lings (2004: 817) that far from a catastrophe, teenage pregnancy was more 'the turning point to maturity and developing a career' where 'it was almost as if having a child had saved them from themselves'.

Teenage pregnancy is thus constructed in dichotomous terms, as either highly negative and problematic or as a positive turning point and influence on young women's lives. This research study was designed to explore this dichotomous construction, in particular the concept of teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point, in order to provide a more nuanced understanding. The central argument underpinning this thesis is that through positioning teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point it implies the lives of young women are in some way negative, problematic or deficient prior to pregnancy and that it is through education, demonstrated in this study to be structurally off limits in a variety of ways, that they might realise their desired transformation. Focusing on the transformation of pregnant and mothering young women is inevitably linked with normative judgements surrounding what is deemed correct, positive and aspirational for young women. However, it also suggests that pregnant and mothering young women are wilful, agentic subjects and neglects structural factors that shape their lives. Furthermore, this celebratory discourse of

transformation can be seen to echo the construction of a neoliberal subject who is able to solve the problem they themselves represent, reinforcing the idea of a project of the self.

A qualitative interpretative phenomenological research design was adopted, with the aim of exploring how the young women believed becoming pregnant in their teenage years shaped and influenced their lives. The dichotomous constructions of teenage motherhood as either highly problematic or as a positive turning point have been critically considered. Particular attention has been paid to the value judgements that underlie these constructions of teenage motherhood. The kinds of agency that are deemed appropriate for this group of young women to occupy have been examined in order to explore which forms of behaviour and participation are deemed positive and appropriate for pregnant and mothering young women. I have argued that both constructions position certain young women as subjects that require improvement and transformation, the former construction positions them as a problem to be solved (through invention) and the latter as agentic subjects who can solve the problems they themselves represent.

### **Research aims and objectives**

In order to develop a nuanced understanding of the positioning of teenage motherhood as a positive turning point a series of research questions were used to underpin and direct this thesis. These research questions will now be explored in turn in order to highlight the key conclusions that can be drawn.

### **What are the meanings young women give to their experiences of education?**

This thesis has provided an insight into the educational experiences of the young women involved in this research study. The research was designed to support and enable the young

women to tell their story of education and for them to share their experiences and understandings. The young women were asked to discuss their experiences of education prior to pregnancy, their current education (if applicable) and their future plans and aspirations. Focusing on the past, present and future in the interviews enabled an exploration and understanding of how the young women located and understood their own educational experiences in light of becoming pregnant.

Prior to pregnancy, all of the young women, to varying degrees, spoke negatively about their experiences of secondary school. Their attitudes ranged from an unwilling acceptance and tolerance, to an extreme dislike and rejection of school. The young women believed they were positioned as problem students in the education system prior to pregnancy. Their accounts of schooling draw attention to the notion of an ideal student, one who embodies the correct characteristics, behaviours and attitudes that are required to be defined and constructed as a positive and successful student within the education system.

The young women described how they felt labelled, categorised and judged by their academic ability, physical appearance, behaviour and personal demeanour. There was an acknowledgement that silence and obedience to authority, academic achievement and conformity to feminine ideals were central to definitions of positive students. The young women recognised there was a requirement to change and adapt to the values and principles of the education system in order to avoid conflict with teachers and exclusion from mainstream education. However, their labelling and positioning as problem students was typically through external rather than internal definition. The young women commonly challenged and questioned their construction as problem students and did not think they required change.

Due to the young women's resistance to change and conformity to rules and expectations they highlighted how they were excluded from school in a myriad of ways. Some of the young women experienced self exclusion, through sporadic attendance or not engaging with the work set. Others experienced formal exclusion, for example, being asked to leave a specific class temporarily or permanently, being placed in the seclusion unit, or receiving a fixed term or permanent exclusion from the school. The young women's experiences of education draw attention to the complexities associated with exclusion and the consequences of not aligning with the culture of the school.

Viewing young women as problem students is a highly individualistic construction and understanding of the lives and experiences of young women. I do not wish to condone violent, aggressive or challenging behaviour. However, the actions and behaviours of young women need to be understood from a holistic perspective and within broader gendered discourses. The young women commonly spoke of difficulties they were experiencing at home, either parental separation or an illness or death within the family. These home circumstances will, understandably shape and impact young women's experiences and this is likely to be witnessed and played out within the school environment. Other young women explained they engaged in violent, aggressive or challenging behaviour in an attempt to question or undermine the practices of the school.

The young women's experiences draw attention to issues surrounding the hierarchical power relations that exist within school, the appropriateness and accessibility of the curriculum, pedagogic approaches and the role of assessment and labelling. In an education system that compares, ranks, and judges young people through various methods the young women often saw themselves as 'lacking' whether in terms of academic ability, or the 'right'

values, beliefs and demeanour. Consequently, when young women exhibit challenging behaviour this should not be simply read as a problem *within* the student, rather it should be seen as systemic, relating to the conditions and circumstances of young women lives, and also as a challenge to the education system itself.

**To what extent does becoming a mother shape young women's life plans and aspirations for education?**

All of the young women in this study highlighted, to varying degrees, how becoming pregnant had affected their lives. In their narratives of pregnancy there was an acknowledgement that becoming pregnant had caused them to become more 'mature' and 'sensible', something which all of the young women resonated with. There was a heavy emphasis placed on the importance of stepping up and taking responsibility for their baby and their future. Their narratives were characterised by a commitment to doing "*what's right*" to ensure they became a responsible and dependable mother for their child.

A narrative of change and reform was recurrent in the young women's accounts. They positioned themselves as having undergone a transformation during pregnancy in terms of their behaviour, attitudes and educational engagement. A common theme running through the young women's narratives was that teenage pregnancy was seen as an opportunity for change, whether that was in relation to education, restoring relationships or ending what they deemed problematic relationships, to stopping smoking, drinking alcohol and taking drugs.

While all of the young women spoke negatively about secondary school prior to pregnancy, eleven out of fourteen young women highlighted how becoming pregnant had affected their

attitudes towards education. The young women explained how becoming pregnant had increased their desire to engage in education and to achieve recognised qualifications. A narrative of change and reform was pervasive in their accounts of education. The young women positioned themselves as having undergone a transformation during pregnancy in terms of their educational engagement and desire and motivation to achieve. Pregnancy was therefore commonly positioned as an opportunity for change, as a wake up call and a time to reassess their lives and priorities.

In contrast to their views of schooling prior to pregnancy, the young women viewed education as an important aspect of their lives and future circumstances. Pregnancy appears to have provided a strong incentive and motivator to engage in education and gain recognised qualifications. Gaining their GCSEs and continuing on to further education was seen as imperative in order to increase the likelihood of gaining paid employment in the future. Many of the young women explained they had not previously considered attending further education and that pregnancy had increased their aspirations for education. In contrast with stereotypical representations of teenage pregnancy, the young women described pregnancy and motherhood as a gain that contributed to and enhanced their lives, rather than a loss that jeopardised their future.

In comparison, three out of fourteen young women explained that becoming pregnant did not increase their desire or motivation to engage in education. For these young women becoming pregnant seemed to confirm and reinforce their dislike of schooling and they spoke of an excitement of not having to endure any more education. These three young women described highly negative experiences of schooling in which they experienced severe bullying.

Processes of change inevitably involve a sense of loss, an abandonment of the old self.

While this process of change was often discussed in highly positive terms, some of the young women reflected on the negative aspects of change. The young women's accounts of motherhood were often mixed and contradictory, while they often highlighted the rewards and pleasures of pregnancy and motherhood, they also recognised key challenges. This primarily revolved around the realisation of a loss of adolescent freedom.

**If change does occur, what are the young women's motivations for change?**

Simply acknowledging how young women believe their lives have changed as a result of pregnancy does not take into account the factors that shape and influence their thoughts, decisions and actions. This research study therefore sought to explore and analyse the young women's motivations for change in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of their experience. In the interviews the young women were encouraged to reflect on why they felt a desire or need to change their lives. In exploring their motivations for change I sought to avoid positioning the young women's choices as entirely free. Consequently, the factors that shaped and influenced their choices have also been critically considered.

In previous research studies there has tended to be a lack of exploration, or indeed problematisation, of the reasons why there is a renewed sense of motivation for education. I have argued that the term agency is now widely celebrated and evoked in ways that sometimes make it synonymous with individual choice and that the existence and significance of external forces and coercion are rarely addressed. Due to this recognised limitation of previous research, this research study sought to address the existence and significance of external forces in the young women's narratives. The young women's

motivations for change have been located within wider structural factors that shape and influence their decision to engage in education as a result of becoming pregnant.

The young women's narratives highlighted the role and influence of societal demands, pressures and expectations. The research findings suggest the young women desired to become respectable and productive citizens through assimilating to mainstream definitions of participation and success in British society. The young women's narratives indicate they aligned with traditional definitions of social inclusion, as there was an emphasis on the importance of gaining recognised qualifications and paid employment. Education and employment was almost seen as a condition of citizenship and as a route to achieve respectability and to, in effect, redeem themselves from their perceived problematic status as young mothers. Engaging in the labour market was thus positioned as a defining feature of their biography and as central to their identity and status within society.

Engaging in education and subsequently gaining paid employment was positioned as imperative in order to become socially included and respectable members of society. The young women's narratives suggest one of the primary reasons they wished to change their lives was in an attempt to distance themselves from dominant negative discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood. Their narratives suggest an acute awareness of the stereotypical representations surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood in British society. Dominant negative discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and motherhood can therefore be seen, to a certain extent, to have provoked a sense of motivation and determination to engage in education and to achieve recognised qualifications. These stereotypical representations were employed in the young women's narratives to shape, construct and justify their experiences, views and opinions.

The young women's narratives of reform and transformation attempted to challenge the construction of teenage motherhood as highly negative and problematic and they rejected their positioning as bad mothers and unproductive citizens. Through engaging with and challenging the negative discourses of teenage motherhood their narratives were imbued with stigma and shame. Due to the stigma and shame associated with teenage motherhood the young women felt compelled to change and transform their lives in an attempt to distance themselves from negative discourses. This was to be achieved through aligning with normative notions of good mothering and citizenship - education and employment.

The young women were conscious of their social positioning within society and how their early motherhood status would be negatively viewed and judged by others. The young women's attempts to demonstrate and align with the good mothering identity and good citizen identity illustrates how they wanted to be understood by others, they wanted to be seen not as irresponsible teenage mothers, but as success stories, who had gone on to forge a new life for them and their child. A future in which they were financially stable and could provide a safe and secure environment for their child. Young women's experiences therefore need to be understood and analysed within the context of the stigma that is associated with teenage pregnancy and motherhood, as well as placed in a wider biographical context.

The young women's narratives illustrate a striking contrast between their previous constructions as problem students during secondary school, and their good maternal identities. It seems one aspect of the young women claiming a good mother identity is distancing themselves from their past and in taking on the responsibility of motherhood. Claiming a good mother identity also involved the assertion that becoming a mother had

improved their engagement with education. Through their narratives the young seem to be responding to dominant discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and turning what is typically framed as a problem into an opportunity for change and transformation.

The main research question that guided this thesis was:

**To what extent does teenage pregnancy represent a positive turning point for young women's lives?**

Determining whether teenage pregnancy represents a positive turning point for young women's lives is highly dependent on how positive lives are defined and understood. It has been demonstrated in this thesis how teenage pregnancy is constructed in dichotomous terms, as either highly problematic or as a positive turning point. These constructions are entangled in moral values and beliefs regarding how positive and successful lives are defined and understood for pregnant and mothering young women.

Positioning teenage pregnancy as a positive and remarkable turning point needs to be carefully considered. I have argued that positioning teenage pregnancy as a positive and remarkable turning point is based on the premise that the lives of young mothers prior to pregnancy are in some way negative, problematic or deficient and that they are in need of redemption. Focusing on the transformation of pregnant and mothering young women is therefore inevitably linked with normative judgements surrounding what is deemed correct, positive and aspirational.

Traditional definitions of educational success and positive educational outcomes have been challenged in this thesis. It has been argued the positioning of success in terms of valuing

education, gaining recognised qualifications, securing a job and establishing a career reflects middle class values and expectations relating to education, employment and when to start a family. It has been asserted that these middle class values have become the normative and expected trajectory for all women and is the standard by which they are judged and assessed. The research findings suggest the young women recognised these normative expectations and illustrated a need and a desire to conform to societal expectations in order to minimise the stigma and shame associated with teenage motherhood.

The assertion that a lack of involvement in education and employment leads to social exclusion has been criticised as it illustrates social inclusion in purely economic terms. The belief that paid employment equals social inclusion provides a limited and simplistic understanding of inclusion and participation in society. Being a full time mother is portrayed as not providing a sense of inclusion and citizenship. It can therefore be argued that pregnant and mothering young women face judgement and criticism no matter their choices and actions, they are always deemed to be failing or unsuccessful in one or more of their constructions: mother-student-worker. They are excluded from the possibility of being both full-time carers of their children and socially included citizens. Consequently, they face judgement either as ‘bad’ mothers who are not there for their children, or as ‘bad’ citizens who have not earned inclusion. The devaluing of motherhood and the unpaid carer role contributes to the positioning of pregnant and mothering young women as problematic as they are seen to be deviating from an expectation to engage with paid employment and to be self-supporting.

The extent to which pregnant and mothering young women's motivations for engaging in education can be positioned as positive is questionable. It can be argued that stigmatisation and shame shaped and influenced their accounts of change. Their narratives suggest they felt under intense surveillance and judgement, whether real or imagined, and a recognition that they were required to change. Broader conceptualisations of social inclusion are therefore required so that young women who are not economically active, but who contribute to society through their mothering, caring and domestic work are recognised and valued. I have argued for a more careful consideration of how positive and negative lives are constructed, accompanied by an examination of their underlying assumptions. Positive choices and lives are not observations, but represent a valuation. They contain a judgement about what is positive and desirable for young women's lives, what is classified as a life worth living.

I have argued the notion of agency has become inherently linked with individual responsibility both to oneself and wider society, and reflects, perhaps despite previous researchers' best intentions, neo-liberal values. Agency is commonly ascribed towards what researchers consider to be positive moral goals, in which individuals strive towards self-empowerment, responsibility and constructive action. These positive moral goals are usually linked to the autonomous and responsible individual, who strives to improve their life chances through engaging in education, employment and training. The transformational discourse is one that celebrates and reinforces this notion of individual agency and neglects the significant role of structural factors. It also fails to challenge dominant neoliberal ideologies about 'the good life' and the individual's capacity to bring about change.

Rather than focusing on the positive or negative choices pregnant and mothering young women make, attention needs to be given to the social inequalities that shape the range, quality, meaning of and conditions under which choices are made. In addition, the narrow definition of positive choices and lives needs to be critically examined. I have argued definitions of success reflect middle class life trajectories and the image of the rational economic man. The expectation for all young women to comply with these expectations is highly problematic as it does not value or respect the mothering role, and only privileges education and employment as meaningful modes of social inclusion.

The overarching message surrounding teenage motherhood is that it is not acceptable for teenage mothers to stay at home in a full time caring capacity and that they should be making a purposeful effort to engage in education and employment. The young women compared, contrasted and judged their own lives and the lives of other pregnant and mothering young women based on a 'male model of normality' which privileges engagement in education, full time paid employment and the self sustaining and supporting individual.

For the majority of young women involved in this research study becoming pregnant did influence their attitudes toward education, with a heightened sense of motivation for achievement. Yet the findings from this research study draw attention to the fact that aspirations for education are not sufficient on their own. Focusing on the decisions, choices and actions of individual young women can lead to an individualised understanding of their educational experiences. This research study has highlighted the importance of effective support and the need to reconsider educational policy and practice as some of the young women reported discriminatory educational practices as a result of their pregnancy. This

meant that for some of the young women involved in this research study they were not able to fully achieve their desired educational goals and aspirations. Consequently, it has been argued that there is an overemphasis of the role of agency in some previous academic literature exploring the influence of pregnancy on young women's experiences of education. This has led to a failure to fully account for the powerful role of social structure in shaping, enabling and constraining the actions and opportunities of pregnant and mothering young women.

While pregnancy and motherhood seemed to foster a renewed sense of motivation for learning, the politics and policies surrounding the education system can be seen, in some circumstances, to have undermined and hindered the young women's engagement in education. This research study has highlighted a key tension between the individual as an active agent, who is free to steer the course of their life, and the social factors that shape, influence and constrain their choices and actions. This study has highlighted that while the young women showed signs of agency, through wishing to pursue their educational choices, it can be seen that they often lacked the power to make these 'accounts count'.

Furthermore, it is questionable whether young mothers' engagement in education and employment will lead to social inclusion in a deeply unequal society. Working class young women continue to face significant structural inequalities, in terms of the quality of education they receive and the availability of meaningful employment that pays a living wage. I have thus highlighted the tensions that exist within a discourse that purports that education will inevitably lead to employment and social inclusion when it evidently fails to do so for so many. The illusion of social mobility through education can be seen to be a particularly prominent theme in this thesis.

The lives and experiences of young mothers continue to be viewed, judged and assessed through their engagement with education and employment. The traditional discourse surrounding teenage pregnancy as a negative life choice emphasises how their lack of involvement in education and employment creates their experiences of social exclusion and poor life outcomes. While the literature presenting teenage pregnancy as a positive turning point tends to emphasise how pregnancy is remarkable as it fosters a new sense of motivation for education and employment. This demonstrates how the views and experiences of young mothers continue to be constructed and judged within the limited confines of education and paid employment. Therefore, I wish to argue that where it was problematic to position teenage motherhood as a problem, it is also problematic to position teenage motherhood as a positive turning point. Both perspectives suggest that young mothers were deficient prior to pregnancy and that becoming pregnant represents an opportunity to change and transform their lives by engaging in education and employment, an opportunity fraught with challenges and one hinged on particular notions of the agentic subject and 'the good life'. Hence, the new discourse of teenage motherhood as a positive and remarkable turning point is no less problematic than the previous discourses. Both discourses continue to emphasise and privilege education and employment as legitimate forms of social inclusion and thus, perhaps, inadvertently, devalue the role of mothering. Broader conceptualisations of success and participation within society are therefore required.

### **Limitations of the research**

This research study sought to explore the views and experiences of fourteen young women in order to help provide a more nuanced understanding of pregnancy, motherhood and education and the dichotomous constructions of teenage motherhood. Semi-structured

interviews were conducted to enable the young women to share their stories, thoughts and feelings in both the past, present and future context (Smith *et al.*, 2009). It was perceived interviews were ideally placed to help capture the complexity of the young women's individual lives and to identify points of similarity and difference between their narratives (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997).

The interview method proved to be an effective form of data collection as the young women were able to talk at length about their experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and education. Rich data was therefore gathered from the participants enabling insightful interpretations to be made. However, as detailed in Chapter Four, some of the interviews were shorter in length, this was particularly evident in interviews with the youngest participants. Difficulties in conducting interviews with young women and exploring their stories and experiences has been found in previous research studies (for example, Luttrell, 2003; Crozier and Anstiss, 1995). On reflection, it may have been beneficial to think more creatively about the methods of data collection employed in this research study. Prosser (2007) explains the traditional interview method leads to an overt privileging of verbal interaction. Similarly, Wise (2001) acknowledges the interview method makes a basic assumption that participants want to and can articulate their thoughts and feelings. While the young women were asked a series of questions to promote discussion it may have been beneficial to use supplementary activities. For example, vignettes could have been incorporated into the interview design to help further promote discussion (Barter and Renold, 1999). Considering more creative ways in which to approach research is a key consideration that I intend to implement in future research.

This research study focused on the views and experiences of pregnant and mothering young women and their involvement has enabled a deep and insightful account of their experiences. To further contextualise their experiences, especially in relation to policy and legislation, the involvement of professionals that work with pregnant and mothering young women would have been beneficial. However, due to the time constraints associated with conducting a PhD and the time consuming nature of arranging, conducting and analysing interviews a decision was made to not include professionals. This was a legitimate decision as Hammersley (1995) explains one of the key aims of research that is influenced by feminism is to explore the experiences of women and that their experiences should be treated as valid in their own terms.

Allred and David (2007) recognised when critically appraising their own feminist research that perhaps an inevitable, if unintended, consequence of researching the experiences of young mothers is reiterating dominant discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy and the importance, or indeed requirement, that they should be engaged in education and employment. They explain:

our discussions provided an opportunity for them – in fact, *required* them – to give an account of themselves as lacking in education and with future plans to make educational self-improvements. This meant taking up a subject position within this *educable subject* discourse, and for those who had hated school, potentially a narration of salvation, reform or determination. Merely asking about any plans for returning to education plays into the expectation, reinforces it as a possibility and therefore increases its probability by being productive of this particular sense of self (Allred and David, 2007: 143-144, original emphasis).

In order to minimise this limitation, I avoided asking questions directly about the young women's plans for education in the interviews. For example, instead of asking 'What are your plans for education?', I asked 'What are your plans for the future?'. This rephrasing of the question was an attempt to open up alternative avenues for discussion and narrating their experiences outside the confines of educational discourses. It is interesting that despite my attempts to avoid leading their response, the young women then went on to talk about their lives and futures in terms of education and employment. Thus the young women did inevitably construct themselves within this 'educable subject' discourse.

### **Future research**

This research study has highlighted several areas where further research would be of value. Firstly, at the time of writing this thesis the participation age in England was raised from 16 to 18 years of age. Consequently, from 2015 young people will be required to continue in education or training until they turn 18. They will either have to be involved in full-time education, an apprenticeship, or part-time education or training if employed, self-employed or volunteering full-time (Mirza-Davies, 2014). This raises significant questions regarding how pregnant and mothering young women will be effectively involved in this agenda. Research exploring young women's opinions on raising the participation age and how education providers will effectively support young women and ensure their participation is meaningful are of theoretical, practical and professional importance. Furthermore, moral debates surrounding how meaningful participation and citizenship are defined could be further explored and problematised in relation to raising the participation age.

Further research exploring pregnant and mothering young women's experiences of exclusion from education, in particular further education, is also required. Osler and

Vincent (2003: 145) express a concern surrounding 'the ease with which some pupils can "opt out" or be "nudged out" out of the system'. The explicit and implicit forms of exclusion need to be further explored in relation to pregnancy and motherhood in order to further highlight and understand the nuances and complexities associated with educational exclusion. A closer examination of exclusion from education is of particular importance in order to ensure educational equity and to promote social justice for pregnant and mothering young women.

Further research also needs to be conducted and disseminated in order to challenge how positive and successful lives are defined and constructed for pregnant and mothering young women. This thesis has drawn attention to the ways in which definitions and understandings of success are narrow and constrained. Further research needs to be conducted in order to critically consider and challenge the privileging of education and employment and how this is constructed as being central to constructions of the self and citizenship. Moving beyond this thesis, it is my intention to further consider the overt privileging of certain forms of participation in Western society.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix One	Ethical approval
Appendix Two	Participant information sheet
Appendix Three	Leaflet
Appendix Four	Where I originally met the young women
Appendix Five	Consent form
Appendix Six	Where I originally met the young women, interview length and location
Appendix Seven	Interview schedule

## Appendix One: Ethical Approval



Centre for Educational  
Studies  
T 01482 465988  
E j.lison@hull.ac.uk

### ETHICAL PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

#### PERMISSION TO PROCEED WITH RESEARCH: ETHICAL APPROVAL

<b>Reference Number:</b>	11/028
<b>Name:</b>	Kay Brown
<b>Programme of Study:</b>	PhD
<b>Research Area/Title:</b>	Teenage pregnancy and motherhood: obstacles to empowerment on the journey through education, employment and training
<b>Image Permission Form</b>	Received (or N/A if no images)
<b>Name of Supervisor:</b>	Dr David Plowright
<b>Date Approved by Supervisor:</b>	17 November 2011
<b>Date Approved by Ethics Committee:</b>	23 November 2011

University of Hull  
Hull, HU6 7RX  
United Kingdom  
+44 (0) 1482 346311  
www.hull.ac.uk

## **Appendix Two: Participant Information Sheet**



### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Why have I been asked to take part in the study?**

You have been asked to take part in the study as you are either a young mother or are about to become a young mother. This means you have direct experience of the issues that the study wishes to explore, so I would like to hear your views and experiences.

#### **Who is doing the research?**

My name is Kay Brown, I am a student at Hull University and this study is part of my course.

#### **What will it involve?**

If you agree to take part in the study, you will take part in an interview.

#### **What if I do not want to take part?**

Your involvement in the study is totally voluntary which means that if you decide not to take part that is fine.

#### **What if I change my mind during the study?**

You are able to stop taking part in the study at any time without giving a reason. You can do this by contacting me (contact details at the bottom) or telling a professional you see who will let me know. You also have the right to choose not to answer a particular question or to stop or pause a discussion at any time.

#### **What will happen to the information from the study?**

All the information you provide will be kept in a locked cupboard. Recordings from the interview will be transcribed and all personal details will be destroyed once the study is complete. The information you provide will be written up, but any names or identifiable information will be changed or removed. The final results

will appear in a report and papers may be submitted for publication. But no information included in any report or publication will identify you in any way.

**What if I need support or someone to talk to during the study?**

If your involvement in the study brings up issues or concerns that you would like to talk about, I will be available to offer support, or to help you access other specific support services.

**Can I find out about the results of the study?**

If you would like to find out about the results of the study, please contact me and I will discuss them with you.

**What if I have further questions?**

You can ring, text, email or write to me.

Text or call me: 077\*\*\*\*\*

Email me: [K.Brown@2007.hull.ac.uk](mailto:K.Brown@2007.hull.ac.uk)

Write to me: Kay Brown, Room 347, 3rd Floor, Wilberforce, Centre for Education Studies, University of Hull, Hull, HU6 7RX

**Appendix Three:** Advert for informal meeting at supported housing unit

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Calling all young mums!</h2>	
<p>My name is Kay Brown I am doing a project about teenage pregnancy and motherhood.</p> <p>Young mothers often get a lot of bad press in the media but I want to hear the real story – your story.</p> <p>This would involve chatting and sharing your experiences of education and motherhood.</p> <p>Your involvement will help get young mother's views heard and will help challenge the negative attention young mothers commonly receive.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Got any questions?</b></p> <p><b>Text or call me:</b> 077*****</p> <p><b>Email me:</b> <a href="mailto:K.Brown@2007.hull.ac.uk">K.Brown@2007.hull.ac.uk</a></p> <p><b>Write to me:</b> Kay Brown, Room 347, 3rd Floor, Wilberforce, Centre for Education Studies, University of Hull, Hull, HU6 7RX</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Interested in sharing your experiences of education and motherhood?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>16<sup>th</sup> April 2012</b> <b>12pm onwards</b> <b>Drinks and biscuits will be provided</b></p>	

#### Appendix Four: Characteristics of the Young Women

	Age at the time of interview	Pregnant or a mother at the time of interview	Current education status	Ethnicity
<b>Amber</b>	18 years old	Mother, her daughter is 10 months old.	NEET	Black British
<b>Beth</b>	18 years old	Mother, her daughter is 11 months old.	NEET	White British
<b>Claire</b>	18 years old	Mother, her daughter is 8 months old.	Currently studying at a local college for an NVQ Level 1 in Childcare.	White British
<b>Danielle</b>	16 years old	29 weeks pregnant.	Currently at secondary school studying for her GCSEs.	White British
<b>Ellie</b>	16 years old	Mother, daughter is 9 months old.	NEET	White British
<b>Fay</b>	17 years old	Fay is pregnant, she is 41 weeks pregnant, and is waiting to be induced.	Fay recently left a college course, studying for an NVQ Level 2 Hairdressing	White British
<b>Gemma</b>	15 years old	7 months pregnant.	Currently attending secondary school part-time studying for her GCSEs.  Gemma also spends two days a	White British

			week at the Young Mums to Be Unit.	
<b>Holly</b>	16 years old	13 weeks pregnant.	Currently attending the Young Mums to Be Unit.	White British
<b>Imogen</b>	16 years old	Mother, her daughter is 3 months old.	Currently attending the Young Mums to Be Unit.	White British
<b>Jade</b>	17 years old	Mother, her son is 1 year 10 months	Currently studying at a local college for an NVQ Level 1 in Childcare.	White British
<b>Katie</b>	18 years old	Katie is a mother, her daughter was 1 year 4 months old at the time of interview.	Currently studying at a local college for an NVQ Level 1 in Childcare.	White British
<b>Laura</b>	18 years old	21 weeks pregnant	Currently studying at a local college for an NVQ Level 1 in Childcare.	White British
<b>Melissa</b>	17 years old	7 months pregnant	Currently attending the Young Mum's to Be Unit.	White British
<b>Nikki</b>	17 years old	21 weeks pregnant	Currently attending the Young Mum's to Be Unit.	Black British

## Appendix Five: Participant Consent Form



### Consent Form

The aim of the study is to explore your experiences and views of motherhood and education.

The study is being carried out by Kay Brown who is a student at Hull University. If you have any questions about the research please contact me:

Text or call: 077\*\*\*\*\*

Or email me: [K.Brown@2007.hull.ac.uk](mailto:K.Brown@2007.hull.ac.uk)

**PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING CAREFULLY AND THEN  
ADD YOUR SIGNATURE IF YOU AGREE TO TAKE PART  
IN THE STUDY**

- I understand the purpose of the study and why I have been asked to take part.
- I agree to take part in the study and I understand that I will not be identified personally in any report that is written as a result of what I say or write.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study and that if I choose to do this any information I have provided will not be used.

Signature:

Date:

**Appendix Six:** Where I originally met the young women, interview length and location

<b>Interview Participant</b>	<b>Where we met</b>	<b>Interview length</b>	<b>Interview location</b>
1. Amber	Supportive Housing Unit	1 hour 27 minutes	Participants home
2. Beth	Supportive Housing Unit	2 hours 36 minutes	Participants home
3. Claire	College information day	1 hour 22 minutes	Participants home
4. Danielle	College information day	43 minutes	Cafe
5. Ellie	College information day	31 minutes	Cafe
6. Fay	Young Mums to be Unit	1 hour 10 minutes	Burger Bar
7. Gemma	Young Mums to Be Unit	38 minutes	Young Mums to Be Unit
8. Holly	Young Mums to Be Unit	41 minutes	Young Mums to Be Unit
9. Imogen	Young Mums to Be Unit	27 minutes	Young Mums to Be Unit
10. Jade	College information day	42 minutes	Local college
11. Katie	Peer referral	37 minutes	Local college
12. Laura	Peer referral	1 hour 30	Participants home
13. Melissa	Young Mums to Be Unit	40 minutes	Young Mums to Be Unit
14. Nikki	Young Mums to Be Unit	55 minutes	Young Mums to Be Unit

Average  
interview  
length: 1 hour

## **Appendix Seven: Interview Schedule**

1. Please can you tell me a bit about yourself?
2. How would you describe your experiences of secondary school?
3. To what extent do you think becoming a mother has affected your life?
4. What are your plans for the future?
5. How would you sum up your experience of pregnancy/motherhood?