

Moral Tales of the Teenage Parent: Narratives of Change, Personal Transformation and Growth*

1. *Introduction*

Successive UK governments have considered teenage motherhood an undesirable life pathway, with teenage fathers coming to public and policy attention only in recent years. Depending on the era and social context, anxieties about teenage pregnancy revolved around young people's perceived promiscuity, welfare dependency, increased competition for scarce resources such as social housing, changes in family structure, and presumed inadequate parenting abilities (LUKER, 1996). In the 1990s discourse about the threat of social decline and falling moral standards focused on the single mother, which MURRAY (1996) described as an emerging underclass. Young, single mothers epitomized social and moral deviance by upsetting the preferred normative order and not adhering to traditional family forms (ARAI, 2009a). From the late 1990s onwards, the public and policy discourse about teenage pregnancy was articulated in terms of cultural or psychosocial deficiencies, in particular, local cultures of deprivation and dysfunctional parenting behavior (MACVARISH, 2010a). In an analysis of New Labour initiatives CARABINE (2007) argued that teenage mothers were no longer seen as "outcasts", but as dependent, vulnerable individuals in need of assistance "to do the right thing". They were blamed for "their failure to take the opportunities offered to them and for their failure to make the right decisions" (971). Thus, teenage pregnancy came to be seen as a failure to exercise agency, with early childbearing leading to chronic disadvantage as pregnant young women typically

could not take advantage of many life opportunities (McROBBIE, 2007).

For those young people who appear unable to modify their own reproductive behavior, State agencies have increasingly intervened, ostensibly to improve the child's welfare. Family policies such as the Nurse-Family partnership for at risk families (DH, 2010) were piloted under New Labour, and embraced by key members of the new Parliamentary Coalition in 2010 (MACVARISH, 2010b.) Conceptualising maternal age as a risk factor amongst other risk factors justified the introduction of these early interventions prior to any evidence of actual neglect or harm (MACVARISH/BILLINGS, 2010). Whilst in the past a pregnancy out of wedlock could be resolved by a "shotgun" wedding, now a teenage pregnancy (intended or not) is seen as a problem to be rectified through professional guidance, even if the mother was married to the father. Moreover, another important factor is that it is primarily women from disadvantaged backgrounds who bear children in their teens (KOFFMAN, 2011). Teenage mothers have been described as a "demographic residuum" because as a group of women they are left behind in a new world order built on middle-class values of extended education, planned careers with good prospects and, most importantly, delayed child-bearing (McROBBIE, 2007; ARAI, 2009a).

Critics have disputed the ideas that teenage parenthood in and of itself causes or exacerbates disadvantage, that it is a public health problem, or that it produces poorer outcomes for children (LAWLOR/SHAW, 2002; DUNCAN, 2007; DUNCAN

ET AL., 2010). Qualitative research exploring any positive experiences of young parenthood found that many teenage parents reported motherhood to be a turning point for them (SEAMARK/LINGS, 2004; ARAI, 2009a; PHOENIX, 1991).

In this study we consider how participants' moral understanding was fundamentally shaped by problematizing discourses about teenage parenthood. We examine young parents' own understanding of themselves as moral agents, and give "voice" to an otherwise marginalized group of individuals. The participants are subjects and not objects to be examined, participating in the construction and representation of their own identity in the context of the interview; our method was designed to avoid the participants "being silenced". (LUGONES/SPELMAN, 1983).

We explore the young people's own interpretation of their choice of parenthood, the new meanings in their lives brought about by the responsibility of parenthood, and the transformative experience that this responsibility generated. The study subscribes to the idea of interviews as narrative, (RIESSMAN, 1990; COFFEY/ATKINSON, 1996) an approach which enabled us to draw attention to the nature of the interview material as a whole, rather than as a set of particular themes for dissection and classification (RIBBENS MCCARTHY ET AL., 2000). The young people's interview accounts established and defended morally acceptable identities which we have described as "moral stories". The issue is not whether or not they were telling us the "truth" or providing accurate descriptions of their choices and parental transformation. Rather, it is their interpretation of what constituted the "right" thing to do (GUBRIUM ET AL., 1994; SOMERS, 1994). This then sheds light on prevalent moral assumptions in contemporary society, and particularly the adult and child divide in relation to moral worthiness (RIBBENS MCCARTHY ET AL., 2000), and of what constitutes moral behaviour as a good mother/father.

Conflicting representations of child and adolescent exist (KITZINGER, 1990; HENDRICK, 1997; CAHILL, 1997), with some seeing childhood as a

distinct and separate phase of life characterised by dependency, vulnerability and incompetence (ARCHARD, 1993).

In order to understand the positioning of the young people interviewed, we drew on GOFFMAN's (1971) work, who saw social life as intrinsically moral in the sense that social actors feel obliged to follow the ground rules of any particular setting in order to preserve and maintain their sense of their social selves. We observed that the young people we interviewed sought to "sustain a viable image" of themselves' in the eyes of the interviewer around key valued qualities in the interview context (GOFFMAN, 1971, 185). We would argue that the young people positioned themselves so as to have moral agency and accountability.

In the following sections we review the literature on teenage mothers and fathers. This is followed by the methodology, which describes the methods used in the study alongside a description of the participants interviewed. The findings section reports on the narratives related to the transformative experience of becoming a father or mother, and the choices they made which led to them becoming a parent. The discussion shows how the narratives of the interviewed young parents differed from public and policy assumptions about their lack of reflexivity and moral understanding.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teenage Mothers and Fathers

Western societies have become more accepting of diverse experiences of motherhood and fatherhood including older mothers and lesbian mothers (GREGORY, 2007). Despite greater acceptance

* We would like to thank the young parents for their trust and participation. Also thanks to Dr Lisa Arai (Teesside University) for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales funded the study.

of these diverse forms of parenting, teenage pregnancy and parenting continue to be seen as a personal calamity in most of Western Europe and North America (ARAI, 2009a; DUNCAN ET AL., 2010; WINTERS/WINTERS, 2012; NEITERMAN, 2012).

Teenage pregnancy is often seen as a cause of poor social functioning and socio-economic outcomes. Britain and US longitudinal studies have provided evidence of the negative long-term consequences of early childbearing in terms of curtailed education and employment (AHN, 1994; CHEVALIER/VITANEN, 2003; ROBSON/BERTHOUD, 2003). Adverse outcomes have been attributed to the age of the mother (HOGGART, 2012), although recent statistical analysis controlling for selection effects have instead attributed such negative outcomes to prior disadvantage (ERMISH, 2003; HAWKES, 2010). Any independent effect of age on outcomes is difficult to isolate (ARAI, 2009a). Despite methodological innovations we still do not know to what extent early parenthood causes poor outcomes. Many studies have concluded that the effect may be minimal, certainly for older teenagers (CUNNINGTON, 2001; HARDEN ET AL., 2009).

Young women from socially deprived backgrounds are more likely to become pregnant, and less likely to terminate pregnancies than those who are more affluent (LUKER, 1996; LEE ET AL., 2004). Their trajectories have a less linear and ordered progression to adulthood than middle-class young women, who invest in education and defer motherhood to maintain their class position into adulthood (THOMSON, 2000). Those lacking cultural capital secured through an advantaged social background and high educational qualifications may see motherhood as more attractive than unemployment or unskilled work (MCLEOD, 2001; TABBERER, 2002; RUDOE/THOMSON, 2009). Pregnancy decision-making is underpinned by these differing contexts and values (JEWELL ET AL., 2000; HOGGART, 2012), with young people's values and intentions being better captured in qualitative studies (e.g. TABBERER, 2000; GRAHAM/MCDERMOTT, 2005; HOGGART,

2012; MANTOVANI/THOMAS, 2013). Research investigating the influence on teenage-pregnancy-decision-making found that young women are usually morally opposed to abortion (TABBERER ET AL., 2000; LEE ET AL., 2004). Pregnancies in young girls are often unplanned (HIRST ET AL., 2006) with recent research highlighting the "chaos and unpredictability of desire" arguing that this is ignored in many approaches to improving sex education (CARABINE, 2007, 960). Carabine contends that sex education typically focuses on producing self-governing, knowledgeable, and rational individuals who are expected to make the "right" choice and to delay motherhood.

The factors associated with teenage motherhood are also commonly associated with teenage fathers (DENNISON/COLEMAN, 2000; TYRER ET AL., 2005). They are more likely to have engaged in truancy and to have left school at 16, than young men who do not become fathers in their teenage years (DEARDEN ET AL., 1995). Also, more than a quarter of young men in youth offender institutions are already fathers or expectant fathers (DENNISON/LYON, 2003). Although, like teenage mothers, public discourses depict young fathers as socially rootless and irresponsible (DENNIS/ERODOS, 2000), evidence suggests they may be judged even more negatively than young mothers. While young mothers are depicted as "poor, lone, vulnerable and morally suspect", young fathers are portrayed as "absent, criminal, violent and socially excluded" (JOHANSSON/HAMMARÉN, 2014, 367). These authors quoted one young father who wrote in his blog: "You see some raised eyebrows, as a young single father I'm always questioned" (372).

Moreover, despite changing social norms, a man is still expected to assume a primary role as breadwinner, even though many young fathers are socio-economically disadvantaged (BERGER/LANGTON, 2011), and receive little support from health services to prepare them for fatherhood. Young fathers are mostly ignored, and describe being made uncomfortable by services, despite

their desire for inclusion (QUINTON ET AL., 2002; WIGGINS ET AL., 2005; DCSF, 2007). The role transition to parent may be perceived as more consistent with a young woman's developing identity than a young man's. Like young mothers, the negative stereotypes surrounding young fathers have been shaped by research that has tended to overlook their desire to be good parents and to be involved with their children (GLIKMAN, 2004). Despite the common acceptance of such stereotypes associated with teenage pregnancy and parenthood, recent evidence has suggested that many young parents adapt effectively to their early role transition (WEED ET AL., 2014).

3. Methodology

This study subscribes to the idea of interviews as narratives (RIESSMAN, 1990; COFFEY/ATKINSON, 1996). It is through narrative we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and construct social identities (SOMERS, 1994). Narratives are stories of experience and the performance of identity, which are embedded in the lives of the ordinary (LANGELLIER, 2001) and marginalized teenage parents. In this paper we use narrative analysis to aid us exploring self-interpretation and moral-sense-making. TAYLOR (1989) argues that the moral experience itself has a narrative structure and that moral sense making takes a narrative form. These arguments justify the use of biographical narratives for gaining access to the moral constitution of the parental self.

A purposive sampling method was employed and participants were selected according to: age (16–19) and parenthood status (a mother, a father, a pending pregnancy). Participants were recruited in a South West London locality selected for logistical reasons and high reported rates of teenage parenthood. It was anticipated that it might be difficult finding suitable respondents for inclusion in the study, on the basis of literature on sensitive research (LEE, 1993); research that has the potential to impact on the people who are

involved in it. Research on early childbearing and parenting can be seen as threatening in terms of both "intrusion" as it deals with areas that are "private, stressful or sacred" (LEE, 1993, 4), and in terms of "sanction" as it can involve the possibility young parents reveal information that is stigmatizing or incriminating in some way. As a result, negotiating access to the participants was expected to be challenging with "gate keepers" being protective towards teenage parents and concerned with safety. The strategy in place was to identify potential participants through a range of different local sources; we contacted six State schools, seven youth centres, four fathers' groups, six mothers' groups, the Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officer Support Service intended for young mothers, and the local family planning service. Only one school agreed to participate in the recruitment but subsequently withdrew its support because of time constraints. Consequently, participants were primarily recruited through fathers/mothers' groups and a local charity linked with family planning.

Key workers who knew the participants described the study to them and asked permission to pass their details to the researcher. The researcher received the participants' contact details only when they had given their consent. The researcher subsequently contacted the young people to further explain the project and implications of participation. Participants were informed that they could withdraw, if they wished to do so, at any time during the interview. At the outset participants were made aware that, as an acknowledgement of their help in the study (SIMMONS, 2008) they would receive a £20 voucher. The National Research Ethics Service (NRES) (N. 11/EE/0477) approved the study.

Fifteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2012 by two female researchers. During the interviews we aimed to adopt a non-hierarchical relationship with participants (OAKLEY, 1981) and took into consideration the researchers' subject positions in relation to the research topic and those involved in the study (ROULSTON, 2010).

Interviews were carried out in the participants' own homes and were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Transcribing the interviews verbatim ensured an accurate account. To preserve anonymity the participants were each allocated a pseudonym. Whilst undertaking inductive analysis for this paper the moral content in participants' accounts became apparent. For instance, the personal narratives of change and the language used by participants when making sense of the birth of the child brought to light the actions participants took in relation to deciding about the pregnancy, or their education. Their decisions and actions resulted from their moral reasoning, and transformed their adult identities. Differences between their own motivations and behaviour, and that of others and/or their selves in the past were explored, together with the use of a confessional style of self-disclosure.

4. *The Participants*

We interviewed ten young women and five young men for this study. Of the ten young women, six were already mothers and four were currently pregnant. The age at which both men and women became parents ranged between 15 years of age and 19 years of age.

Table 1 illustrates the demographic background of participants by gender. It highlights that half of the women interviewed were amongst the youngest group (16 years of age), that the majority of participants were British born (N=13), and that many of the participants were from a black minority background (N=9 Mixed, Caribbean, African; N=6 White). The majority of participants were still in a relationship with their partners (N=8), however, two interviewed fathers had already ended their relationship with the mother of their child and two interviewed mothers had ended their relationship with the baby's father (N=4).

In terms of education and employment, table 2 illustrates that seven participants had

Table 1. Gender by Age, Ethnicity, Marital Status

	Male (N=5)	Female (N=10)
Age		
16	-	5
17	1	1
18	2	3
19	2	1
Ethnicity		
White British	2	4
Mixed-H. British	3	1
Caribbean British	-	3
African	-	2
Marital Status		
Single	-	3
In relationship	3	5
Ended relationship*	2	2

(*) Baby's father still visiting the child.

Table 2. Educational Attainments and Employment Status

	Male (N=5)	Female (N=10)
Qualifications		
GCSEs Level 2	1	6
NVQs	1	2
No qualifications	3	2
Employment		
F-T employment	0	0
P-T employment	1	1
Unemployed	4	6
In education	0	3

studied to GCSE level (Level 2: Lower secondary education or second stage of basic education), three had obtained National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs are work based awards), and five had left school with no qualifications. Most participants were unemployed, with three women being in the process of furthering their education to obtain higher level NVQs.

5. Findings

We explored the participants' desire to become parents. The emerging narratives provide a nuanced and complex picture of "early parenthood" in relation to the nature of the pregnancy, decision-making regarding pregnancy, and the personal transformative experience of parenthood.

5.1. *"My Daughter Wasn't Planned but I Wouldn't Say She Was a Mistake"*

Most young people interviewed did not intend to become parents at the time they did – only two young women said they chose to be mothers at the time they got pregnant. Five participants said they knew they wanted to be parents (three women and two men) but not as early as it happened. They had envisaged a more typical transition to parenthood for themselves such as completing their education, becoming economically independent and then becoming a parent, but parenthood had necessitated a change in the order of things. The remaining nine participants stated that the pregnancy had "just happened", or "was an accident" or that "it was not planned but wasn't prevented either". Nevertheless, while these participants had not planned their pregnancies the analysis revealed that many of them had discussed with their partners what they would do should a pregnancy occur:

I've never planned, I've always said, and obviously discussions with my girlfriend, I've always said certainly that I wanted to have children and stuff.

It was just a case of when it happens then just stand up to it and stick around and that. (Frank, father, 19)

Me and his dad have known each other for nearly three/four years now. So when we first got together and everything and decided we was going to have an intimate relationship and everything it was kind of like: "Well, if it happens we're not going to regret it and go back on it", and everything. If it happens, it happens, you can't really change it. We wasn't really bothered if we had a baby or not sort of thing. So it was kind of then a carefree if we did, if we didn't. (Dashay, mother, 19)

Although for most of the young people interviewed the pregnancy was not planned in an individualized, cost-benefit fashion for future education and employment, and occurred earlier than imagined, this did not mean that the pregnancy was unwanted. Participants provided their own moral understanding about the pregnancy, rejecting any idea that it was a mistake, but rather, the pregnancy was accepted and five described it as a God sent gift to be treasured rather than resisted:

It was a bit of a shock because I – well, I always wanted a child but not this early, but I just thought: "Well she's here and it was a gift from God." I believe it was a gift from God and I just work with it. (Alicia, currently pregnant, 16)

Two young women interviewed had positive images of motherhood, with motherhood providing an identity and a role that they had always wanted. Having children revolved around the question of how soon they could achieve their desired identity as a mother. They invested in their own set of gendered moral rationalities and felt socially mature and independent enough to undertake the role of mother. One of the mothers interviewed said:

Personally for me, I felt like I was ready. Because I'm quite independent and mature. It's just bringing a life into the world I think, it's pretty amazing... That's always been something I wanted to do and when I got together with my partner... we

sort of planned it. We didn't tell anyone we planned it because of how everyone would be, because no one would want it for us, but obviously it's what we wanted. No one would see why we wanted it. So we planned it. (Katherine, mother, 19)

5.2. *"My Only Choice Was to Keep it Because It's a Life"*

A central finding in this study was the concern of both the young men and women interviewed for the unborn child and the moral position they adopted on abortion. These participants did "not believe in abortion" because it was not "right to kill an unborn child" no matter whether it was "four weeks or just a little foetus". It was compared to taking a life without giving the unborn child "a choice". Eight participants described their own child-centred moral values including those prevalent in their own culture or religious community:

Well, from the beginning I always said that I wouldn't have a termination. So my only choice was to keep it because it's a life, it's a normal life. A baby isn't like just something you can throw away, it's you, it's part of you. And it's like a gift and you should always cherish that gift no matter what. When I first found out I was scared and I didn't know what I was going to do, but I've done the right thing, I reckon. (Charlene, currently pregnant, 16)

I just don't believe in abortion. It's killing. Yeah, when people say it's not taking a life because it's an embryo, an embryo automatically turns into a child so you take a life. (Josue, father, 17)

5.3. *"I've Got all my Family Support"*

Significant others were involved at some stage of the decision-making process about the pregnancy. Although most participants autonomously reached their decision to follow the pregnancy through, offers of unconditional support from family (or partner) also facilitated or

supported their decision to continue with the pregnancy:

I spoke to my mum mostly. At first obviously she was angry and disappointed, upset. But she calmed down and we spoke properly and she was there; she supported me in anything I wanted to do. And up to now I've still got her support. I feel privileged because not a lot of people get that support from their family. Some people might get kicked out. Some people might have to be in a mother and baby unit. But that's not happened to me. (Charlene, currently pregnant, 16)

The fathers we interviewed also spoke of how the support they received from their family helped them to make moral choices; to have an input in the child's future life:

My family talked to me about the whole pregnancy thing and encouraged me to do the right thing and helping me, telling me what I can do to make this work. And just helping me with everything and getting prepared for everything. (Frank, father, 19)

By contrast, some of the women interviewed experienced some form of pressure or influence from their partners with regards to decision-making. In the case below, although the baby's father seems to maintain a neutral position by encouraging his partner to make her own decision about the pregnancy, he questions her maturity to be a mother and withdraws his support:

And when he found out he was like "Oh", sort of thing. Obviously, all young dads are going to be (like this). But he said he would always be here for the decision I make: "If you want to keep it, get rid of it, whatever. It's down to you. I'm not pushing you into a decision." But he did come up with saying: "I think you are a bit too young to have the baby." So, I was like, fair enough, I'll go home and think about it. But he said: "I'll always be here for you in whatever decision you make." So, I had that support from him, which I was thinking: "Oh my God he's going to run, change his number. I'm not going to be able to contact him". (Barbara, currently pregnant, 18)

5.4. *“I Don’t Regret it because I Think my Life’s Turned out for the Better”*

Young people interviewed did not regret having children, and parenthood was not associated with not having a career, but rather it drove them to be determined to have the career they always wanted and achieve their aspirations. On becoming parents, young people said that their life had taken a better turn, and that they learned more from it than they would have had they decided to carry on their life as they did before they became parents.

I didn’t set out to become a young mum. I wouldn’t have children until I was at least 23, 24, but then I’ve had (names baby). I don’t regret nothing about her. She’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me. I don’t regret having her, not at all. But I would like to still have a career even though I am a mum. I’d still like to have a career and I’m determined I will have a career even if it kills me, I will have that career that I’ve always wanted. (Rachel, mother, 19)

5.5. *Personal Narratives Of Change – “Before my Girlfriend Got Pregnant I Was Actually a Bum, I Didn’t Do Nothing”*

On becoming parents, participants experienced some changes in their sense of self. These changes signalled a process of self-transformation, it marked their development of a critical perspective about their own actions. Rather than seeing parenthood as an unwanted interruption to their lives, during the interviews most participants reflected on the positive ways in which pregnancy (or the partner’s pregnancy) had changed them and their view of the world they live in. For participants – women and men alike – the child was a source of inspiration to achieve something in life for themselves and for their child:

She is my main – how would you explain it? – my main inspiration of getting to these achievements that I want to get to. And I want to do it for myself as well so that I can have everything to give

to her...So, I think my daughter helps me a lot. Just because I’m doing it all for her now, it’s not just me anymore. So, obviously she’s a big push because I want her to have everything. And times are getting hard now so you need to sort of get better qualifications to get more money to pay for things, because it’s only going up. (Katherine, mother, 19)

My daughter, she inspires me to want to do something. If she weren’t here there wouldn’t really be a point. (Kai, father, 18)

This “narrative of transformation” is related to the manner in which participants experienced being transformed by parenthood. Transformation of self was articulated in terms of personal growth and their ability to act responsibly.

I feel that I am responsible for them now so they influence me to do what I am doing, like, working and bettering my life so I can buy a house and maybe move out of London. Because I don’t really want her to have the life that I had, because it’s not a good life. And I want to be able to give her everything so that’s why I’m working. (Umar, father, 18)

It pushed me to achieve my goals even more now, because before I was just doing it for myself and I thought: “Well, if it doesn’t happen it doesn’t happen because it’s just myself.” But now I have a little baby to look after it’s pushed me to get further and to achieve my goals for her more than for myself now. (Alicia, currently pregnant, 16)

Some participants commented on perceiving themselves as having become more self-vigilant saying that they would think much harder before acting, while other participants described how they had become less self-centred.

Now, obviously, I think about my son in almost everything I do. But if it’s making a decision to do with him I sometimes think about his dad but not as often as other things. (Dashai, mother, 16)

The feelings and perceptions of adulthood were important to the young people interviewed, though young men and women articulated this differently. Young women articulated their own

perceptions of adulthood in terms of their increased personal maturity and of having achieved womanhood.

If I didn't have a baby I'd be a totally different person...Whereas before I'd do something and I probably wouldn't care about my actions, to be honest. But now I've got to care about what I do and how people see me. I don't really want to go out acting all childish and stuff because I've got a baby because...I'm going to look really childish and pathetic to other people (Katherine, mother, 19)

Adulthood for the young fathers interviewed was articulated in terms of a personal transformative change. The experiential realisation that they had become adults came about when young men acknowledged to themselves, and to the researcher, that they had become more mature and stopped fooling about or hanging out with friends.

If she weren't here (daughter) I'd still be chilling with my friend but obviously you've got to grow up. You've got to grow up and make them changes, so I'm glad. Although I had her when I was young I'm glad because she made me fix up. I think that's a key structure being able to provide...it's a good structure to a relationship. You're the man, that's what you're supposed to do. (Kai, father, 18)

5.6. Accountability and Morality – “You Have to Stop All that (Drugs) because You're a Mum”

The participants described how a change in their self-perception brought about a change in their personal code of behaviour, they adopted a new life-style and stopped drinking, taking drugs, partying and fighting. Parenthood required and enabled them to take on responsibility.

I'm more responsible since I've had her. She's made me grow up a lot. Things like, I used to smoke but I stopped. I actually at one point got into drugs but I stopped once I had her. Everything sort of just went out the window and she was my focus. So she's pulled me away, out of a lot as well. (Marisha, mother, 19)

Similarly, the young fathers' self-transformative experience of fatherhood entailed taking stock about where they were in their life, discontinuing a path of petty crime or dependency on benefits.

Because all my life all I've been doing is silly little things, man. And now it's time for me to improve my life, it's time for me to do something with my life instead of just getting nicked every day or something like that. I used to always get nick, man, for stupid little things I used to do when I was really young. And now I just can't be arsed with that stuff, I really can't. I'd rather just get on with my life, do something with it, man. I've had an opening, wakeup call. And his name's my son! He's given me my wakeup call to do something with my life. (David, father, 19)

Both mothers and fathers interviewed felt that they now had to set “a good example” and be role models to their children:

Now my daughter's here I know I have to as well, so (I'm doing it) for her. In order for her to have the best life and a good role model, I want her to be able to see, like, I don't just want to live on benefits. I want to work, I want her to see me as a good example for her. So she's sort of made me, like, knuckle down a bit more. (Marisha, mother, 19)

6. Discussion

The moral accounts we have reported in this paper concern participants' own interpretation of their choice of parenthood, the new meanings in their lives, brought about by the responsibility of parenthood, and the transformative experience that this responsibility generated.

Teenage parents occupy the awkward position of being both an adult and child. In neither life stage, does the current policy discourse consider them capable of exercising moral or rational autonomy (MACVARISH/BILLINGS, 2010). While motherhood is considered normal and natural for women, this does not apply to all women, rather social narratives often talk about the

immature psychological functioning of teen mothers (e.g. HUDSON ET AL., 2000; MACLEOD/DURRHEIM, 2003), their interpersonal relationships and parenting skills are questioned and put under surveillance (BURMAN, 1994). The incentive for young mothers is to subscribe to the professionalised images of the “good” mother (MACLEOD, 2001) an expectation that seems to be missing in relation to young fathers. Research found that young men are routinely “discouraged” by health and social care professionals from becoming involved with their children and often made to feel unimportant both during the pregnancy and after the birth (TYRER ET AL., 2005). The premature role transition experienced by young men is said to be causing stress in their lives (ELSTER/PANZARINE, 1983), causing them difficulties in mediating both the transition to parenthood and the task of adolescent development (ROZIE-BATTLE, 2003).

The narratives reported here, throw light on assumptions in contemporary society about participants’ reflexivity and moral understanding. In the particular life worlds inhabited by the participants in this study it made sense to them to become a teenage mother/father. Although the young fathers interviewed said they did not plan the pregnancy they rejected society’s idea that having a child at a young age was a mistake. With regards to the young women interviewed, some expressly said they positively planned for pregnancy; one described waiting to claim her identity of mother (MCMAHON, 1995). Having children appeared to be only a matter of time when she would or could claim the identity she longed for. Other young women implicitly felt “positively ambivalent” towards having children, but did not actually plan it; they quite liked the idea of having a baby and did not use contraception for that reason (CATER/COLEMAN, 2006).

The very idea of a planned pregnancy is something of a contentious issue (FISHER ET AL., 1999; BARRETT ET AL., 2004). To participants an “unplanned” pregnancy did not mean a “mistake” as they did not regret it, and/or did not

indicate they did not want it. The fact that participants did not regret having children can be understood in narrative theory as a consoling plot (KIRKMAN ET AL., 2001); the belief that young parenthood is beneficial facilitates an interpretation of life changes in a way that makes them bearable (287). In their study of teenage mothers KIRKMAN ET AL. stress that a consoling plot does not mean that respondents are deluding themselves, but rather, this device enables young mothers to emphasise the positive aspects of motherhood while acknowledging its drawbacks. A body of evidence from the UK and the US recognises that teenage fertility does not always have disastrous consequences (MURCOTT, 1980; PHOENIX, 1991; MACINTYRE AND CUNNINGHAM-BURLEY, 1993; GERONIMUS, 1997; SMITHBATTLE, 2000, 2003; ARAI, 2009b).

Becoming a young mother or father was rational and moral in terms of their everyday worlds of family and community (DUNCAN, 2007). Parenting did not seem to be competing in value with the idea of employment. Those who had pre-pregnancy plans for education and employment found that their plans were disrupted, though they felt strengthened by the experience and strove to create a future for themselves and their children. By contrast, those young men and women interviewed with an empty and uncertain pre-pregnancy future, had it transformed by becoming a father/mother, which provided a corrective experience as they reported getting off drugs, looking for a job, and re-evaluating earlier destructive and violent behaviour. Although most of the participants were not working, they strove to create a future for themselves and their children, which, as Duncan argues, reflects socially negotiated judgments about what is morally right. In their words participants wanted “to do the right thing” and become role models to their children to show them they had done something with their lives.

In this respect, they are no different to older parents (ARAI, 2009b). The use of a moral framework within which they make their decisions runs counter to mainstream depictions of young

parents as being amoral (or immoral) and not planning in any way. They may not plan in the same way that middle class young people do (MCMMAHON, 1995; JEWELL ET AL., 2000), but data presented here suggests that there is a degree of thoughtful planning; about how the baby will influence the future and what impact it might have on relationships. Current stereotypical views of teenage parents emphasise their risk-taking and deficits (SMITHBATTLE, 2013) and are fuelled by sensationalised media reports focusing on atypical cases (BRACCHI, 2009) sparking furious discussion linking teenage pregnancy to family breakdown, welfare dependency, promiscuity and poor parenting.¹

In a context that constrains young parents both materially and discursively, participants in this study constructed their moral worth as “good parents”. The narratives reported here suggest parenthood as a way of reclaiming their moral selves. These participants felt they had to explain that becoming parents meant giving up their old ways of engaging in fights, crime or taking drugs. The significance of being a “good parent” was an image that featured strongly in the participants’ accounts of their newly acquired moral sensibility. Their narratives about responsibility respond to, and intersect with, their experiences and realizations of society’s stereotypical depiction of them. In other words, their stories are also about negotiating and reducing the negative reactions of people, of the society around them (BEGGS WEBER, 2012).

As in other studies, we found parenthood gave new meanings to the young people’s lives and an impetus to change direction, or build on existing resources, so as to take up or finish their interrupted education or look for an occupation (see GRAHAM/MCDERMOTT, 2005). As in TABBERER ET AL.’s (2000) study young people saw parenthood as potentially rewarding and valuable, as an experience that gave them strength and competence (GRAHAM/MCDERMOTT, 2005) and for some, it was an important part of their sense of self as morally valid and responsible individuals (ALLDRED /DAVID, 2010).

7. Conclusion

The use of narrative approaches enabled us to formulate sociological accounts of the moral actions of these young people who “deviated” from universalist ideas of the teenage mother/father. The young people interviewed showed their awareness of the usual narrative, in which they are judged alongside their contrasting autobiographical narratives, in which they characterise themselves as “good mothers” who are capable of learning the skills of motherhood. We found that young people did not emphasise the disadvantages of early parenthood, despite acknowledging the difficulties. This paper depicts relatively marginalised young people as having a strong sense of moral agency, which draws on normative ideas about parenting, conferring responsibility and a sense of purpose.

The authors, however, are aware that having recruited young people who are already engaged with young parents’ services may present a limitation to the study. This group of young people may be more likely to present the positive perspectives evident in the findings, than young people who are disengaged from support or not known to services.

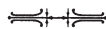
Bibliography:

- AHN, G. (1994): “Teenage Childbearing and High School Completion: Accounting for Individual Heterogeneity”, in: *Family Planning Perspectives* 26, 17-21.
- ALLDRED, P./DAVID, M. (2010): “What’s Important at the End of the Day? Young Mothers’ Values and Policy Presumptions”, in: S. DUNCAN/R. EDWARDS/C. ALEXANDER (eds.): *Teenage Parenthood: What’s the Problem?*, London: The Tufnell Press, 24-46.
- ARAI, L. (2009a): *Teenage Pregnancy: The Making and Unmaking of a Problem*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- ARAI, L. (2009b): “What a Difference a Decade Makes: Rethinking Teenage Pregnancy as a Problem”, in: *Social Policy and Society* 8, 171-183.
- ARCHARD, D. (1993): *Children: Rights and Childhood*, London: Routledge.
- BARRETT, G./SMITH, S./WELLINGS, K. (2004): “What Is a Planned Pregnancy? Empirical Data from a British Study”, in: *Social Science Medicine* 55, 545-57.

- BEGGS WEBER, J. (2012): "Becoming Teen Fathers: Stories of Teen Pregnancy, Responsibility, and Masculinity", in: *Gender & Society* 26, 900-921.
- BERGER, L.M./LANGTON, C. (2011): "Young Disadvantaged Men as Fathers", in: *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 635, 56-75.
- BRACCHI, P. (2009): "Special Investigation: The Streets where Alfie, 13, Grew up Offer a Disturbing Glimpse of the Moral Anarchy Engulfing Britain", available online at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1186764/Special-investigation-The-streets-Alfie-13-grew-offer-disturbing-glimpse-moral-anarchy-engulfing-Britain.html>; retrieved 08.11.2013.
- BURMAN, E. (2001): *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*, London: Routledge. Cited in MACLEOD, 2001.
- CAHILL, S. (1997): "Toward a Sociology of the Person", in: *Sociological Theory* 16, 131-148.
- CARABINE, J. (2007): "New Labour's Teenage Pregnancy Policy: Constituting Knowing Responsible Citizens?", in: *Cultural Studies* 21, 952-973.
- CATER, S./COLEMAN, L. (2006): *Planned Teenage Pregnancy: Perspectives of Young Parents From Disadvantaged Backgrounds*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- CHEVALIER, A./VIITANEN, T. (2003): "The Long-Run Labour Market Consequences of Teenage Motherhood in Britain", in: *Journal of Population Economics* 16, 323-343.
- COFFEY, A./ATKINSON, P. (1996): *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Strategies*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- CUNNINGTON, A. (2001): "What's so Bad about Teenage Pregnancy?" in: *Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care* 27, 36-41.
- DEARDEN, K.A./HALE, C.B./WOOLLEY, T. (1995): "The Antecedents of Teen Fatherhood: A Retrospective Case-Control Study of Great Britain Youth", in: *American Journal of Public Health* 85, 551-554.
- DENNIS, N./ERODOS, G. (2000): *Families without Fatherhood*, Trowbridge: The Cromwell Press.
- DENNISON, C./LYON, J. (2003): *Young Offenders, Fatherhood and the Impact of Parenting Training*, London: HM Prison Service.
- DENNISON, C./COLEMAN, J. (2000): *Young People and Gender: A Review of Research*, London: Women's Unit, Cabinet Office.
- DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN, SCHOOL AND FAMILIES (DCSF) (2007): *Teenage Parents Next Steps: Guidance for Las and Primary Care Trusts*, Nottingham: DCSF, 2007 [Ref number: 00597-2007BKT-EN].
- DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (DH) (2010): *The Family Nurse Partnership Programme*, available online at www.dh.gov.uk/publications.
- DUNCAN, S. (2007): "What's the Problem with Teenage Parents? And What's the Problem with Policy?", in: *Critical Social Policy* 27, 307-334.
- DUNCAN, S./EDWARDS, R./ALEXANDER, C. (eds.) (2010): *Teenage Parenthood: What's the Problem?*, London: The Tufnell Press.
- ELSTER, A./PANZARINE, S. (1983): "Adolescent Fathers: Stresses during Gestation and Early Parenthood", in: *Clinical Pediatrics* 10, 700-703.
- ERMISH, J. (2003): *Does a "Teen-Birth" Have Longer-term Impact on the Mother? Suggestive Evidence from the British Household Panel Study*, Institute for Economic and Social Research, Colchester: University of Essex (Working Papers 2003-32).
- FISHER, R./STANFORD, J./JAMESON, P./EWITT, J. (1999): "Exploring the Concepts of Intended, Planned and Wanted Pregnancy", in: *Journal of Family Practice* 48, 117-123.
- GERONIMUS, A.T. (1997): "Teenage Childbearing and Personal Responsibility: An Alternative View", in: *Political Science Quarterly* 112, 405-430.
- GLIKMAN, H. (2004): "Low-Income Young Fathers: Contexts, Connections, and Self", in: *Social Work* 49, 195-206.
- GOFFMAN, E. (1971): *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*, London: Allen Lane.
- GRAHAM, H./MCDERMOTT, E. (2005): "Resilient Young Mothering: Social Inequalities, Late Modernity and the Problem of Teenage Motherhood", in: *Journal of Youth Studies* 8, 59-79.
- GREGORY, E. (2007): *Ready: Why Women are Embracing the New Later Motherhood*, New York: Basic Books.
- GUBRIUM, F./HOLSTEIN, J.A./BUCKHOLDT, D.R. (1994): *Constructing the Life Course*, Dix Hills, NY: General Hall.
- HARDEN, A./BRUNTON, G./FLETCHER, A./OAKLEY, A. (2009): "Teenage Pregnancy and Social Disadvantage: Systematic Review Integrating Controlled Trials and Qualitative Studies", in: *British Medical Journal* 339, b4254.
- HAWKES, D. (2010): "Just what Difference Does Young Motherhood Make: Evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study", in: S. DUNCAN/R. EDWARDS/C. ALEXANDER (eds.): *Teenage Parenting - What's the Problem?*, London: Tufnell Press, 69-84.
- HENDRICK, H. (1997): "Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretive Survey, 1800 to
- 1 In 2009 a fifteen years-old girl became front page news following the birth of her daughter, allegedly fathered by her thirteen year old boyfriend, Alfie Patten, who was found not to be the father. The moralising language utilised by some papers demonstrates the continuing negative stereotypes of teenage pregnancy. The Daily Mail argued: "Chantelle's experience provides yet more evidence that the values of a welfare-state spawned underclass are being passed from generation to generation, from father to son, mother to daughter" (BRACCHI, 2009).

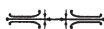
- the Present”, in: A. JAMES/A. PROUT (eds.): *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, London: Routledge Falmer, 34-62.
- HIRST, J./FORMBY, E./OWEN, J. (2006): *Pathways into Parenthood: Reflections from Three Generations of Teenage Mothers and Fathers*, Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Social Inclusion.
- HOGGART, L. (2012): “I’m Pregnant ... What Am I Going to Do?” An Examination of Value Judgments and Moral Frameworks in Teenage Pregnancy Decision Making”, in: *Health Risk Society* 14, 533-549.
- HUDSON, D.B./ELEK, S.M./CAMPEBELL-GROSSMAN, C. (2000): “Depression, Self-Esteem, Loneliness, and Social Support among Adolescent Mothers Participating in the New Parents Project”, in: *Adolescence* 35, 445-453.
- KIRKMAN, M./HARRISON, L./HILLER, L./PYETT, P. (2001): “I Know I’m Doing a Good Job’: Canonical and Autobiographical Narratives of Teenage Mothers”, in: *Culture, Health and Sexuality* 3, 79-94.
- KITZINGER, J. (1990): “Who Are You Kidding? Children, Power, and the Struggle against Sexual Abuse”, in: A. JAMES/A. PROUT (eds.): *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, London: Falmer Press, 157-183.
- KOFFMAN, O. (2011): “Children Having Children? Religion, Psychology and the Birth of the Teenage Pregnancy Problem”, in: *History of the Human Sciences* 12, 1-16.
- JEWELL, D./TACCHI, J./DONOVAN, J. (2000): “Teenage Pregnancy: Whose Problem Is it?”, in: *Family Practice* 17, 522-528.
- JOHANSSON, T./HAMMARÉN, N. (2014): “Imagine, just 16 Years Old and already a Dad!: The Construction of Young Fatherhood on the Internet”, in: *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 19, 366-381.
- LANGELLIER, K.M. (2001): “Personal Narrative”, in: M. JOLLY (ed.): *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, London - Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 699-701.
- LAWLOR, D.A./SHAW, M. (2002): “Too Much too Young? Teenage Pregnancy Is not a Public Health Problem”, in: *International Journal of Epidemiology* 31, 552-3.
- LEE, E./CLEMENTS, S./INGHAM, R./STONE, N. (2004): *A Matter of Choice? Explaining National Variation in Teenage Abortion and Motherhood*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- LEE, R.M. (1993): *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*, London: Sage.
- LUGONES, M./SPELMAN, E. (1983): “Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for ‘The Woman’s Voice’”, in: *Women’s Studies International Forum* 6, 573-581.
- LUKER, K. (1996): *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- MACINTYRE, S./CUNNINGHAM-BURLEY, S. (1993): “Teenage Pregnancy as a Social Problem: A Perspective from the United Kingdom”, in: A. LAWSON/D.L. RHODE (eds.): *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 59-73.
- MACLEOD, C. (2001): “Teenage Motherhood and the Regulation of Mothering in the Scientific Literature: The South African Example”, in: *Feminism and Psychology* 11, 493-511.
- MACLEOD, C./DURRHEIM, K. (2003): “Psycho-Medical Discourse in South African Research on Teenage Pregnancy”, in: *Transformation* 51, 74-100.
- MACVARISH, J. (2010a): “Understanding the Significance of the Teenage Mother in Contemporary Parenting Culture”, in: *Sociological Research Online* 15, 3, available at <<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/15/4/3.html>>10.5153/sro.2238; retrieved 21.09.2015.
- MACVARISH, J. (2010b): “How Teenage Pregnancy Became Redefined as a Social Problem”, in: *Battle of Ideas*, available online at <http://www.battleofideas.org.uk/2011/battles/5380>; retrieved 21.09.2015.
- MACVARISH, J./BILLINGS, J. (2010): “Challenging the Irrational, Amoral and Anti-Social Construction of the ‘Teenage Mother’”, in: S. DUNCAN/R. EDWARDS/C. ALEXANDER (eds.): *Teenage Parenting – What’s the Problem?*, London: Tufnell Press, 47-68.
- MANTOVANI, N./THOMAS, H. (2013): “Choosing Motherhood: The Complexities Of Pregnancy Decision-Making among Young Black Women ‘Looked After’ by the State”, in: *Midwifery* 30, e72-e78.
- MCLEOD, A. (2001): “Changing Patterns of Teenage Pregnancy: Population Based Study of Small Areas”, in: *British Medical Journal* 323, 199-203.
- MCMAHON, M. (1995): *Engendering Motherhood: Identity and Self-transformation in Women’s Lives*, New York: The Guilford Press.
- MCRobbie, A. (2007): “Top Girls? Young Women and the Post-Feminist Sexual Contract”, in: *Cultural Studies* [special issue: *Liberalism, Government, Culture*], 21, 718-737.
- MURCOTT, A. (1980): “The Social Construction of Teenage Pregnancy: A Problem in the Ideologies of Childhood and Reproduction”, in: *Sociology of Health and Illness* 2, 1-23.
- MURRAY, C. (1996): *Charles Murray and the Underclass: The Developing Debate*, London: The IEA Health and Welfare Unit (Choice in Welfare: 33).
- NEITERMAN, E. (2012): “Constructing and Deconstructing Teen Pregnancy as a Social Problem”, in: *Qualitative Sociology Review* 8, 24-47.
- OKLEY, A. (1981): “Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms”, in: H. ROBERTS (ed.): *Doing Feminist Research*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 30-61.
- PHOENIX, A. (1991): *Young Mothers*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- QUINTON, D./POLLOCK, S./GOLDING, J. (2002): *The Transition to Fatherhood in Young Men: Influences on Commit-*

- ment, Bristol: ESRC [Economic Social Research Council reference number: L134251018].
- RIBBENS MCCARTHY, J./EDWARDS, R./GILL, V. (2000): "Moral Tales of the Child and the Adult: Narratives of Contemporary Family Lives Under Changing Circumstances", in: *Sociology* 34, 785–803.
- RIESSMAN, C.K. (1990): "Strategic Uses of Narrative in the Presentation of Self and Illness", in: *Social Science & Medicine* 30, 1195–1200.
- ROBSON, K./BEROUD, R. (2003): *Early Motherhood and Disadvantage: A Comparison between Ethnic Groups*, Colchester: University of Essex (Institute for Economic and Social Research Working Papers; 2003-29).
- ROULSTON, K. (2010): *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, London: Sage.
- ROZIE-BATTLE, J. (2003): "Economic Support and the Dilemma of Teen Fathers", in: *Journal of Health and Social Policy* 17, 73–86.
- RUDOE, N./THOMSON, R. (2009): "Class Cultures and the Meaning of Young Motherhood", in: H. GRAHAM (ed.): *Understanding Health Inequalities*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, 162–178.
- SEAMARK, C./LINGS, P. (2004): "Positive Experiences of Teenage Motherhood: A Qualitative Study", in: *British Journal of General Practice* 54, 813–818.
- SIMMONS, R. (2008): "Questionnaires", in N. GILBERT (ed.): *Researching Social Life*, London: Sage, 182–205.
- SMITHBATTLE, L. (2013): "Reducing the Stigmatization of Teen Mothers", in: *The American Journal of Maternal Nursing* 38, 235–241.
- SMITHBATTLE, L. (2003): "Displacing the Rule Book in Caring for Teen Mothers", in: *Public Health Nursing* 20, 369–376.
- SMITHBATTLE, L. (2000): "The Vulnerabilities of Teenage Mothering: Challenging Prevailing Assumptions", in: *Advanced Nursing Science* 23, 29–40.
- SOMERS, M. (1994): "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach", in: *Theory and Society* 23, 605–649.
- TABBERER, S. (2002): "Teenage Pregnancy and Teenage Motherhood", in: J. BRADSHAW (ed.): *The Wellbeing of Children*, London: University of York, 66–89.
- TABBERER, S./HALL, C./PRENDERGAST, S./WEBSTER, A. (2000): *Teenage Pregnancy and Choice: Abortion or Motherhood: Influences on the Decision*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- TAYLOR, C. (1989): *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- THOMSON, R. (2000): "Dream on: The Logic of Sexual Practice", in: *Journal of Youth Studies* 3, 407–427.
- TYRER, P./CHASE, E./WARWICK, I./AGGLETON, P. (2005): "Dealing with it': Experiences of Young Fathers in and Leaving Care", in: *British Journal of Social Work* 1, 1107–1121.
- WEED, K./NICHOLSON, J.S./FARRIS, J.R. (2014): *Teen Pregnancy and Parenting: Rethinking the Myths and Misperceptions*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- WIGGINS, M./ROSATO, M./AUSTERBERRY, H. et al. (2005): *Sure Start Plus National Evaluation: Final report*, London: Social Science Research Unit Report, Institute of Education.
- WINTERS, L.I./WINTERS, P.C. (2012): "African American Pregnancy: A Dynamic Social Problem", available online from <http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/2/1/2158244012436563>; retrieved 21.09.2015.



Dr. Nadia Mantovani read Social Policy and Administration at London School of Economics. She then undertook a Masters in Social Research Methods at the University of Surrey, and obtained her Doctorate in the Sociology of Health and Illness from Royal Holloway University of London. Currently, Nadia is a Research Fellow at the Population Health Research Institute at St George's University of London. Her research interests focus is on marginalized groups and within this she has covered topics such as health related stigma, the sociology of early reproduc-

tion, the experience of care and after care of minority young people, and drug misuse. She has an interest on the social aspect of mental health and particularly the impact of migration on the mental health of minority groups. Methodologically, Nadia adopts interpretative research paradigms and particularly the use of narrative analysis as a condition for self-interpretation and moral-sense-making. Her recent work proposes peer-mentoring-based interventions to promote positive outcomes in mental health settings among victims of domestic violence.



Dr. Sandra Dowling studied Social Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She later obtained a Masters in Refugee Studies from the University of East London and a PhD from the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland. Sandra has been engaged in research for the past fifteen years both at the University of London and King's College London and latterly in her native Northern Ireland. Her research has had a particular focus on social exclusion and marginalisation, as well as pathways to inclusion and social change. She has a particular interest in the emotional health and well-being of those with intellectual disability and in action research which engages with challenging received thinking and negative attitudes towards marginalised individuals. Sandra is also interested in inclusive methodologies which enable the opinion of those who are often silenced to be heard. She is currently engaged as a Research Fellow at Queen's University Belfast and holds an Honorary Fellowship at the University of Ulster, NI.

Professor Sheila the Baroness Hollins is an independent Member of the House of Lords where she speaks on mental health, disability and moral issues. After qualifying at St Thomas's in London, she was a GP before training in psychiatry. She is Emeritus Professor in Psychiatry of Disability, St George's, University of London, Honorary Professor in the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Durham and has recently been appointed to the Papal Commission on the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults. Her main research and her publications have primarily concerned the mental and physical health of people with intellectual disabilities. A recent project explored the life choices of young people. She currently chairs the BMA Board of Science and is Executive Chair of Beyond Words, which publishes picture books with an international reach to help children and adults with communication disabilities to communicate better about life experiences, relationships and wellbeing.

• Summary

This paper seeks to explore the moral accounts of young people's own interpretation of their choice of parenthood, the new meanings in their lives brought about by the responsibility of parenthood, and the transformative experience that this responsibility generated. Drawing on a study of young parents in South West London this paper considers how the participants' moral understanding is fundamentally shaped by the social construction of the "good" parent. This study

Moral Tales of the Teenage Parent: Narratives of Change, Personal Transformation and Growth

employs an interpretative methodology with in-depth interviews and focused on their choice to become a parent at a young age. Fifteen young people were interviewed aged 16-19; of these six were young mothers, five young fathers, and four currently pregnant. A narrative method to analyse the data was employed because moral sense-making and self-interpretation take a narrative form. In the worlds in which these young parents live they negotiated their own narratives

of the child and adult divide; and they positioned themselves as moral agents by accounting for their parenthood choices and through the exercise of moral autonomy. They affirmed their moral adult identity through making themselves accountable for the imperative of becoming responsible adults. The empirical findings in this study may be corrective to public discourses about teenaged parents.