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Abstract School sex education in England has traditionally reflected wider cultural norms that position teenage sexuality as fraught with danger, and teenage pregnancy and motherhood as symbolic of its risky outcomes. This article draws on research exploring projects in which young mothers themselves act as school sex educators, recounting their experiences of early parenthood to assist pupils in making ‘informed choices’ regarding their own behaviour. Findings indicate that, rather than upholding this aim, many of the young mothers shaped their stories in order to collude with the dominant, negative messages surrounding teenage sexual behaviour, pregnancy and motherhood. In so doing, they were able to redeem themselves as good, moral citizens, but this was at the price of certain truths continuing to be concealed from the pupils to whom they spoke.

Keywords citizenship, sex education, social exclusion, teenage motherhood, youthful sexuality

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Stories of Redemption? Teenage Mothers as the New Sex Educators

In this article, I examine the stories told by young mothers about teenage parenthood in the context of the sex education classroom, and the extent to which these challenge (or not) the dominant messages relayed within more mainstream sex education. I begin by outlining the moralistic and harm reductionist discourses through which sex education policy and practice in English classrooms has been constituted, that together position youthful sexuality as dangerous and in need of control. I then consider the role of teenage pregnancy as the ultimate symbol of that danger, and the resultant positioning of teenage mothers as problematic citizens. I go on to outline a study of a particular sex education intervention, in which young mothers themselves are the sex educators of other young people, recounting their own experiences in order to assist others to make ‘informed choices’ with regard to sex, contraception and parenthood.

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Despite the potential of such interventions to challenge the well-rehearsed public accounts of teenage pregnancy, motherhood and sexuality through the telling of personal stories, I present data that suggest most of the young mothers in fact reproduce these dominant accounts in order to improve their own moral positioning. I conclude by considering these findings in relation to the contradictory and contextually contingent nature of teenage motherhood, and the role of the projects studied in perpetuating rather than challenging the notions of danger that dominate school sex education.

School sex education and teenage pregnancy

School sex education in England plays a key role in controlling youthful sexuality, and in transmitting dominant cultural messages based on gender and age appropriate norms that position all sexual activity outside the domain of adult, heterosexual marriage as dangerous (Griffin, 1993; Haywood, 1996; Thorogood, 1992). Discursive tensions exist as to the exact nature of that danger, but the most dominant voices in the debate are, on the one hand, those that emphasize the moral risk that youthful sexuality represents, and, on the other, those that are concerned with the public health implications of young people's sexual behaviour (Thomson, 1994). Those who consider youthful sexuality to be problematic on moral grounds, are concerned about the threat that it is seen to pose to traditional values such as chastity, parental authority, and the sanctity of marriage and the nuclear family (Kelly, 2000; Nathanson, 1991; Thomson, 1994). Advocates of this position are suspicious of sex education, fearing that it will encourage sexual activity, and they therefore consider the only appropriate curriculum to be one that focuses on traditionalist values and promotes abstinence outside of heterosexual marriage. Those approaching sex education from a public health perspective by contrast position teenage sexuality as risky due to the negative outcomes with which it is associated, specifically sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy (Ingham and Kirkland, 1997; Thomson, 1994). A harm reductionist approach is therefore taken, in which sex education is considered a necessary tool through which young people can be equipped with enough information and skills to avoid those undesirable consequences. Within both discourses, pupils are positioned as vulnerable and in need of protection from the adult world of sexuality, thus reflecting dominant cultural notions of children and childhood (Pilcher, 1997).

Both discourses are reproduced within current sex education legislation for England as set out in the Education Act 1996, and the more recently published guidance (Department for Education and Employment, 2000). For example although sex education is a compulsory part of the secondary

school curriculum, parents are given the right to withdraw their children from the classes, thus privileging notions of protection and parental authority. Further indications of a concern to reinforce a traditional, moral framework are in the high status placed on heterosexual marriage as the basis for family life. On the other hand, a public health discourse is reproduced through the positioning of HIV/AIDS as the only *compulsory* topic within the sex education curriculum. Further topics highlighted for inclusion in the guidance are contraception, abortion and HIV/AIDS and STIs, thereby suggesting that the importance of sex education lies in the prevention of pregnancy, childbearing and infection.

Although the moralistic and harm reductionist discourses contain some incompatible concerns, making their alliance within such documentation uneasy if not contradictory, what advocates of both do have in common is a construction of youthful sexuality as dangerous, and a consequent emphasis on controlling it in order to avoid the risks with which it is associated. While these notions of risk and protection are highly visible in the latest sex education policy documents, other messages, in particular ones that emphasize positive and pleasurable aspects of sexuality are silenced. It is difficult to generalize about the impact that this political agenda has on classroom practice, as the quality and quantity of sex education provision varies widely from school to school (Ofsted, 2002). However, ethnographic studies, and interviews with young people have revealed accounts of restrictive, moralistic programmes, which concentrate on reproduction, contraception and STIs, while more controversial topics such as sexual pleasure and desire, homosexuality, abortion and emotional aspects of sexuality are avoided (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; West et al., 1995; Woodcock et al., 1992).

The exact nature of the danger that sex education is attempting to prevent has different manifestations, but one of the most prevalent images within both the moralistic and public health camps is that of the pregnant teenager. Anxieties over teenage pregnancy are not new, in fact it has been argued that they are the latest expression of much more long-standing attempts to control the sexuality of women, particularly poor, unmarried women, and of children, along with all other forms of sexual desire and behaviour that threaten patriarchal hegemony and traditional structures of authority (Hawkes, 1996; Luker, 1996; Nathanson, 1991). However the current UK government's decision to set up an entire strategy dedicated to this topic in England, overseen by a Teenage Pregnancy Unit, has ensured its continued high profile as a major danger of youthful sexuality.

The reason *why* teenage pregnancy is regarded as such a problem is constructed slightly differently depending on whether the moralistic discourse or the harm reductionist discourse is being drawn on. For those wishing to uphold a traditional value structure, teenage pregnancy is

associated with immoral, sexually promiscuous behaviour outside the confines of marriage, and concern is directed towards the fact that around 40 per cent of teenage pregnancies end in abortion (Statbase, 2004). Those pregnancies that end in a live birth are the subject of further concern due to the threat that teenage motherhood is seen to present to the nuclear family and traditional patriarchal structures of authority, leading to suggestions of an increasing underclass with questionable rules of morality (e.g. Murray, 1994). In this way, teenage motherhood is conflated with lone motherhood, with little attention paid to the actual marital status of teenage mothers, or indeed to the men who fathered their children.

For those taking up a harm reductionist view, the link between teenage pregnancy and abortion is also of concern, although this is for health rather than moralistic reasons. Where the pregnancy leads to motherhood, the risks this involves are represented as a combination of health, social and economic factors, often discussed under the politically popular but poorly defined term of social exclusion (e.g. Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Thus teenage childbearing has been linked to physical complications during pregnancy and birth, increased risk of physical, cognitive and emotional problems for the children, and for the mother, experiences of isolation and psychological distress, limited opportunities to enter education and employment, and a subsequent dependence on welfare for housing and financial means (e.g. Allen and Bourke Dowling, 1998; Botting et al., 1998; Kiernan, 1995; Phoenix, 1991).

In fact this second construction of teenage pregnancy and motherhood is connected to the first, in that the economic risk with which it is associated often leads to the *moral* character of the young women concerned being questioned. An example of this can be found in the persistent myth that young mothers deliberately plan to have children in order to obtain social housing for themselves, despite there being little evidence of this (Allen and Bourke Dowling, 1998). Thus, both discourses construct teenage pregnancy and motherhood as risky not only for the individuals involved, but for society in general, either due to the threat posed to traditional value structures regarding sexual behaviour and family life, or due to the individuals concerned failing to be economically independent. This results in the young mothers themselves being positioned as dangerous citizens.

In arguing that teenage pregnancy and motherhood are representations of the dangers of youthful sexuality, I do not wish to deny that those who give birth relatively early often do experience the sorts of difficulties just outlined. However, the extent to which teenage motherhood actually causes those difficulties, and indeed the extent to which it is problematic at all are matters of some debate, with much evidence suggesting

otherwise (e.g. Geronimus, 2003; Kiernan, 2002; Smith and Pell, 2001). Despite this, the dominant story that is told within political and media arenas is one of danger, with sex education the proposed method of controlling that danger. The remainder of this article focuses on a particular sex education intervention that has teenage pregnancy and parenthood as its subject, but is unique in that it involves young mothers themselves as the educators, recounting their own stories of parenthood. Previous research investigating the personal stories of young mothers has revealed a greater heterogeneity of experience than a single phrase implies, including examples of positive aspects and outcomes (Ball et al., 2000; Phoenix, 1991; Schultz, 2001). The projects therefore have the potential to challenge the dominant account of teenage parenthood as dangerous and something to be prevented, through the privileging of individual voices. How far this is achieved is explored in the following sections.

Young mothers as sex educators

The study on which this article draws set out to examine the extent to which sex education programmes involving young mothers were useful for the pupils receiving the education, and for the young mothers who participated (Kidger, 2002). Four projects took part, three of which developed out of and recruited from support groups for young mothers. These three were funded by local youth and community services and were managed by youth workers. The fourth project was the only one to exist purely as a sex education project, and was funded by a combination of the Teenage Pregnancy Unit and charitable sources. Members were recruited from local antenatal and postnatal support groups, and a trained youth worker co-ordinated their activities. In each case, the idea for the projects arose out of discussions between youth or health staff and young mothers about the inadequate information regarding sex and parenthood the latter felt they had received prior to their pregnancies. Each year, the projects approached the secondary schools in their area and offered to deliver sex education sessions as part of the wider sex education curriculum, and it was then up to the schools' Personal Social and Health Education co-ordinators to organize this.

All the projects conceptualized their aims as being to educate pupils about the realities of teenage parenthood, in order to assist them in making 'informed choices' about their own sexual and contraceptive behaviour: 'Our aims have always been the same in terms of it's about young parents sharing their experiences, which will lead to better ability of young people to make informed choices' (Project Co-ordinator). This aim can be considered empowering in the sense that it is concerned with increasing young people's control over their own lives (Gore, 1993), and it therefore

stands in contrast to the harm reductionist and moralistic tone of most mainstream school sex education.

It was also anticipated by the projects that the young mothers themselves were likely to benefit from participation, although this was not seen as the principal aim: 'Who's getting more out of it really? It's difficult to tell isn't it, is it the people who do peer education or the people they're talking to?' (Project Co-ordinator).

Creating the potential for young mothers to be heard, and to challenge their problematic public status has been identified as an important first step in supporting them (Bullen et al., 2000; Schultz, 2001). Indeed Plummer (1995) argues for the key role that storytelling can play in empowering sexually deviant and/or victimized individuals and groups, through challenging the more dominant stories that exist. The benefits experienced by the young mothers through their participation in these projects are explored more fully elsewhere (Kidger, 2004). However, the key question in relation to this article is the extent to which the kinds of stories that benefited the young mothers were the same as or differed from the kinds of stories that provided the pupils with informed choice.

The research was conducted using a multi-method design, involving pre- and post-session pupil questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with a selection of pupils, teachers, young mothers and project co-ordinators, and observations of the sessions delivered by the young mothers. This article will draw specifically on the semi-structured interviews with the young mothers, and the session observations, in order to explore the extent to which the stories that were told challenged dominant accounts of teenage motherhood, and therefore broadened the sex education messages that the pupils heard.

The observations were conducted in 17 sex education sessions delivered in five schools, to pupils aged between 14 and 16 years. In each case, the stories told by the young mothers, and the messages that those stories appeared to convey regarding teenage sexual behaviour, pregnancy and parenthood were noted. The interviews were conducted with 14 young mothers, and focused on the interviewees' experiences as young mothers, how they felt participation in the projects had impacted on that, and what they felt was good about the projects for the pupils. The age of the mothers ranged from 17 to 25 years, which reflects the age range of the projects, and their ages at conception were between 15 and 21 years. Although not all the mothers were teenagers at the time of conception, it has been found that mothers in their early 20s encounter similar problems and have similar experiences to those in their teenage years (Hobcraft and Kiernan, 2001), so their stories were still considered relevant.

All interview and observation data were analysed qualitatively, following an abductive strategy (Blaikie, 1993). This involved a two-way analysis, in

which themes were identified from the data and used to build up theory, and theory was tested against the data in order to be refined and expanded in an ongoing cyclical process. The account of the stories that the young mothers told that emerged from this process is given in the next sections. Where interviewees are quoted, pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity.

'I'm going to tell you what it's really like'

When discussing the projects, the young mothers interviewed initially appeared supportive of the 'formal' aims of presenting an uncensored view of teenage parenthood, in order to increase the pupils' ability to base their own actions on informed choices:

I want to go in there and say look it's been really, really hard but there are good bits and bad bits, and to just give them an insight into something I never had when we were growing up. (Naomi)

I don't think it's to prevent them from having children, I think it's just to make them aware of the realities of life . . . it works well if you're honest with them, I would say I'm not going to lecture you, I'm going to tell you what it's really like. (Marcia)

Such comments do not reproduce either the harm reductionist or the moralistic discourses that position teenage motherhood as solely negative, and young people as children in need of protection from sexual activity and its dangerous outcomes. Rather, they emphasize the notion of empowering young people to make their own choices regarding sex and reproduction, through providing them with reliable, balanced information.

However, as the interviews progressed to a consideration of the young mothers' personal motives for taking part, several of them made comments that were more in keeping with a desire to prevent teenage pregnancy. Indeed 11 of the 14 interviewees made one comment or more indicating a personal aim to prevent other young people from becoming pregnant or parents:

We don't go out there and say don't get pregnant, but if you stop one girl from getting pregnant then you've achieved something. (Marcia)

We'd feel really happy if we stopped at least one teenage pregnancy in every school, you know that's it really, just to stop unwanted pregnancies. (Bev)

Such comments imply a greater affiliation with notions of protection, risk and danger, that is the dominant themes within mainstream sex education, than with the more radical ideals of 'informed choice' and empowered agency.

Of the remaining three interviewees, two appeared to hold personal aims for the sessions that matched the 'informed choice' ideal more closely,

although they shared the assumption just illustrated by Bev, that young people would not *want* to have a baby if given the facts:

It's not about telling people not to do it, it's not about not having sex, it's about being safe with yourself, able to stand up for yourself and say no and, you know be responsible for what you're doing, so if you don't want a baby you've got a responsibility to take actions not to become pregnant. (Sian)

Only one interviewee not only wholeheartedly supported the 'informed choice' ideal, but also did so without assuming that this would mean young people choosing to avoid parenthood. As a result, she provided the least contradictory account of the sessions' aim to equip young people to make their own decisions:

We're not there to put people off, but if it's made them think about being a parent at whatever age then that's good . . . they may even decide that after hearing all that they do want to have a baby at fifteen or sixteen and I think if they're going into it, eyes open, you know, thinking about the choices, then fair enough. (Rosie)

These tensions regarding the aims of the projects had a direct impact on the accounts of teenage motherhood that the interviewees gave within the classrooms. Thus, far from always 'telling pupils what it's really like', several of the young mothers provided examples of ways in which they shaped their stories, omitting certain aspects, or even changing them quite substantially in order to present a bleaker picture of teenage motherhood:

When I go into peer education I say that I don't go out at weekends but I do. My Mum has the baby every weekend so I can go out and just enjoy myself. (Ali)

I just say the complete truth about how Chloe throws paddies, all stuff like that, but I don't tell them the good bits as well, when she's laying in bed cuddling, and saying 'I love you'. (Kathy)

I think for some girls, and I would never say this in a talk, but for some people having a baby is the best thing that can happen, it gives them a reality check really. (Deborah)

The observations of the sessions revealed similar inconsistencies between the negative stories that were told in the classroom and the more balanced version of events told to me. So for example one young woman, Nicola, talked unprompted and at length when she first met me about what a life-changing and generally positive experience she had found motherhood. Despite this, each time I visited a session delivered by her, she framed teenage pregnancy and parenthood in a much more negative light, making comments such as:

My life went downhill from there.

We're not here to tell you not to have sex, but to do it safe 'cause it will mess your life up.

I wouldn't recommend young pregnancy, it's very difficult.

It must be acknowledged that every story is a reconstruction that is inevitably shaped by the context in which it is told (Cornwell, 1984; Plummer, 1995), therefore the stories that the young mothers told me are also just one particular version, rather than a representation of an unchanging truth. However, in all the examples where an individual gave different accounts of her experiences, the stories that were told in the classroom were shaped more negatively; there were no examples of a story being changed to be more positive. Indeed there was only one suggestion in all the interviews and observations of an individual attempting to tell things exactly as they were, regardless of how positive that made her story, and this again came from Rosie:

Some of them [teachers] have said afterwards, oh, but that was so positive, I was like, well, that's how I feel about my life, you know I can't come in here and lie.

In other words, far from using their personal stories to create new discourses regarding teenage motherhood that might provide young people with fresh insights into their own sexual behaviour and choices, most of the interviewees reproduced the public, negative accounts that pupils are likely to have heard before. This often meant colluding with rather than challenging the negative stereotypes of young mothers that abound in much political, media and academic writing, as exemplified by Bev earlier, who equated teenage pregnancies with unwanted pregnancies, or Christine who associated teenage mothers with single mothers, and with 'improper' behaviour:

I sort of said to them well I'd do it properly if I were you, I'd try and get yourself sorted, you know settled, get yourself married and be in a position to do it.

A key question is why most of those interviewed retold these public stories, and it is here that I return to the issue of how far the young mothers themselves benefited from their participation in the sessions.

'I like to know I've done something good'

I have already discussed the way that the dominant accounts of teenage motherhood position teenage mothers themselves as problematic citizens, a danger to society in terms of the moral, health, social and economic risks that they represent. One might therefore have expected more of the

project members to take up the strategy that Rosie did, and to challenge those accounts, creating more desirable identities for themselves through telling more positive stories. However, the young mothers who colluded with these dominant accounts appeared to have come up with an equally effective, albeit more complex way in which to create these more favourable self-identities. For these young women, the belief that the projects were beneficial for the pupils was key, as it enabled them to feel they were doing something 'good':

It's good for us as well because we can sort of go and feel like we're doing our bit for the community. (Christine)

It gives me a bit of self-respect, you know that you're not all bad, you know when someone's putting all single mums down, I like to know I've done something good, I've done something that benefits someone else, that makes me feel happy. (Naomi)

I thought it would be a really good thing to do, because I find it frustrating the way the government and society classes people if they have a baby young, so I was thinking just the general idea of doing something good, doing something better. (Sian)

As these quotations illustrate, this belief in the value of what they were doing enabled these young mothers to challenge their problematic identities, and create new identities for themselves, not only as 'good' individuals, but also as 'good' citizens. They did not need to challenge the existing negative stories surrounding teenage parenthood to do this, in fact the process of colluding with those stories is likely to have made it easier for them to take up the role of 'good citizen', as they ensured that the dominant value system remained in place. Although these individuals were treading a fine line between the contradictory positions of teenage mother and therefore bad girl, and sex educator and therefore responsible citizen, this strategy is likely to be less risky than Rosie's attempts to rewrite those dominant, negative stories of teenage motherhood, as she could perpetuate her own problematic status as a 'bad influence' by doing so.

'They're still babies themselves'

A second reason for many of the young mothers reproducing the dominant accounts of teenage motherhood, also emerged from the data, and that was in relation to their perceptions regarding what was in the best interests of the pupils. Given that young motherhood is associated with a range of socio-economic difficulties, and that those difficulties may be compounded by the status young mothers face as morally questionable and a risk to society, it is perhaps not surprising that most of the interviewees felt that other young people would be better off avoiding teenage

pregnancy and parenthood. However, what was interesting was the way they framed this in terms of needing to protect the pupils because they were still children. Despite the projects being labelled as peer education, nine of the interviewees referred to the pupils as 'kids' or 'children', or described them in ways that suggested a perceived age gap:

Thirty fifteen year olds can be scary . . . you know they've got their own ways, their own thoughts and it's just that age. (Sian)

As a result, several interviewees suggested that their role was to protect the pupils from certain truths and experiences, thereby positioning them as children, while taking on an adult role themselves:

Sometimes I think 13-year-old girls and that, they're not ready to be responsible you know, they're just little girls, they're still babies themselves . . . if my son was sitting here I wouldn't want her [another project member] saying that to my son. (Naomi)

Mainly I want to get across to them to be sensible, and you don't have to have a sexual relationship in the first place because you're quite young and you need to think about it and stuff. (Leanne)

I don't want to put them off forever just put them off until they're old enough to sort of [*pause*] appreciate it really . . . I sometimes feel that we should be deterring them from having sex. (Deborah)

The above quotations once again illustrate an undermining of the ideal of empowering pupils with informed choices. Further, they reveal the speakers' desire to protect the pupils not only from pregnancy and parenthood, but also from the experience of sex more generally, thereby reproducing the discourse that positions teenage sexuality itself as dangerous. The justification for this comes from the perceived youthfulness of the pupils – indeed Naomi likens the pupils to her own child rather than to herself – which reproduces this discourse's construction of teenagers as innocent children who need to be shielded from sexual matters. As a result, the kinds of messages commonly omitted from mainstream sex education that I identified in the introduction, such as sexuality as pleasurable, and abortion as a possible alternative to parenthood, as well as more positive stories of teenage parenthood itself, remain invisible in these lessons.

Stories untold

This article began by setting out the dominant messages reproduced within school sex education in England, that is that teenage sexuality is dangerous, and that pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers personify the disastrous outcomes that might occur if that sexuality is not controlled. The sex education interventions on which the article focused potentially

provided a unique opportunity for different, more positive messages to be created regarding teenage sexuality and teenage parenthood, as they were based on the personal stories and experiences of young mothers themselves. However, the data collected through interviews and observations indicated that, more often than not, the young mothers involved reproduced the dominant accounts, in order to distance themselves from the morally problematic identities given to young mothers, and to create good citizen identities for themselves instead. As a result, the pupils were continuing to hear the same moralistic and harm reductionist messages regarding sexuality, while alternative, more positive messages that challenge dominant norms remained silenced in the classroom.

The interviewees' reasons for shaping their stories in this way stemmed from two apparently contradictory, yet, in the end, mutually reinforcing ways in which they are discursively positioned as young mothers. On the one hand as young women, they are subject to the surveillance to which all adolescent girls are subject, and the expectation that they will be chaste and therefore good (Holland et al., 1998). Although the fact of their motherhood shows them to have previously failed in this regard, these sex education projects provide them with a chance to redeem themselves, through warning other young people of the dangers of sex. On the other hand, as mothers, they are positioned in a role that is socially constructed as having the nurture and guidance of innocent children at its heart (Phoenix and Woollett, 1991), a discourse that many of them reproduced through the notion of protecting the 'children' to whom they spoke. Telling their stories in the way that they did, therefore enabled the interviewees to reinvent themselves as both good girls and good mothers at one and the same time.

Yet while these young mothers gave negative accounts of their experiences in the public, child-centred context of the classroom, the same individuals did tell more positive stories, in the private, adult-to-adult context of the research interview. It has long been noted that becoming a mother at a young age may hold value and status as a route to female adulthood, in the local contexts in which it takes place (e.g. McRobbie, 1991; Thomson, 2002). Similarly, it was clear during my interviews that these young women had experienced a large amount of pleasure and fulfilment through being a mother to their children. However, what they had to try and do was make sense of these personal stories in the public context of the sex education classroom, where there is only one morally approved story of teenage motherhood, and that is one of danger. Thus, just as the experience and consequences of teenage motherhood are context dependent, so are the stories that young mothers tell, as they seek to forge a path through these contradictory positions, towards a morally worthy adult female identity (Walkerdine et al., 2001). The projects therefore enabled

the young mothers who participated to 'become somebody', but for most of them this was not, as originally expected, because they were empowered to tell their own stories and be accepted on these terms. Rather, it was because they chose to re-create their identities to better fit dominant expectations, a process of negotiation and collusion on the route to female adulthood described elsewhere (Thomson et al., 2001).

The young mothers that took part in this study genuinely appeared to believe that it was in the best interests of the pupils to tell the stories that they did, and I do not wish to argue that they were necessarily wrong, at least in their assumptions that many young people might be better off delaying pregnancy and parenthood in today's socio-economic and moral climate. However, the process of reproducing only the negative messages that surround teenage pregnancy and motherhood created a tension between what the projects said they aimed to do – empower pupils through telling them new, 'real life' stories – and what they actually did – present mainstream preventative messages about teenage parenthood. This meant that the pupils were potentially being misled about the nature of the stories they were hearing, and were being denied the chance to make their own minds up regarding their sexual and contracepting behaviour on the basis of uncensored information. Further, there were likely to be negative repercussions for other young women having children, in that the negative discourses that surround teenage pregnancy and motherhood, and that position young mothers themselves as problematic citizens remained unchallenged.

One lone voice, that of Rosie, did appear committed to telling the pupils a new story, despite the personal risks involved in this strategy. This highlights the potential of the projects to challenge and disrupt dominant accounts of youthful sexuality and parenthood, and introduce elements of pleasure. However, given the power and tenacity of such accounts, and the low moral, social and economic status faced by young mothers, it is perhaps too difficult a task to expect them to perform, without more support from those policy-makers, researchers and practitioners whose stories about the dangers of teenage sexuality, pregnancy and parenthood are more commonly heard.

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